



Fall Migration at Cape May

September 20-26, 2020



Ruddy Turnstone

Cape May has long been considered one of eastern North America's premier fall migration destinations. Situated at the southern tip of a peninsula extending into Delaware Bay, Cape May is a funneling point for migrants traveling south, and though the migration is to a degree weather dependent, it is almost always interesting and at times can be spectacular. Unlike many migration hotspots where only passerines or raptors abound, Cape May offers a bit of everything. The woodlots and hedgerows at the peninsula's tip can be teeming with passerines that include warblers, sparrows, cuckoos, jays and buntings, but Cape May's migration is not limited to songbirds. An abundance of raptors also follow the peninsula's coastlines until they reach the tip at Cape May. Here their journey is abruptly halted by the open waters of Delaware Bay and the result is a veritable traffic jam of tired birds facing the dilemma of whether to cross or not to cross. In addition to the passerine and raptor extravaganza, Cape May boasts miles of coastal shoreline and interior salt marshes where excellent numbers of gulls, terns, shorebirds and herons can be seen. The large offshore congregations of terns and gulls often attracts a passing Parasitic Jaeger and mid-September also brings early winter visitors like scoters and gannets. This tour will be conducted at a leisurely pace with most of the birding sites in Cape May within 20 minutes of our hotel. Rather than race about frenetically trying to accumulate a lengthy list, we will take time to delve more deeply into some of the more complicated identification issues such as non-breeding plumaged warblers and shorebirds and the various gull age groups. Besides the regular migrants that pass through, Cape May also annually attracts a fair share of rare fall vagrants. In recent years these have included Eurasian Wigeon, Swainson's Hawk, Western Kingbird, Dickcissel, Say's Phoebe and Clay-colored and Lark sparrows, and the possibility of something unusual will add a bit of spice to our daily forays.



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Birding Sites

Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area: An extensive area of fields and hedgerows on the Delaware Bay shore, Higbee Beach offers some of Cape May's best migration birding. Composed of several large fields crisscrossed by woodlots and thickets, and offering plenty of resting and feeding places for birds and easy viewing opportunities for birders, it is easy to spend an entire morning here. On a good day, when large numbers of migrants are moving, it can provide a memorable birding experience that might include 20+ species of warblers and a dozen raptors.

Cape May Point State Park: This area, at the tip of the New Jersey peninsula, features coastal thickets, marshes, and small ponds, that are often filled with a variety of herons and shorebirds. Migrating raptors, especially accipiters and falcons, are almost always visible here and the Cape May Bird Observatory's hawk watch platform provides a great spot from which to observe them as they approach the point. From the park's beaches, birders have an excellent view of the offshore waters where Forster's and Royal terns are usually abundant and are sometimes joined by more unusual terns and gulls. These larid congregations also provide great chances to see jaegers marauding the feeding flocks.





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Cox Hall Creek WMA: is a 253-acre former golf course that has been converted into a wildlife management reserve. Birding here is easy with paved paths winding through the old fairways providing easy access to the park's grasslands, savannah's and woodlots. There is also a nice wetland forest along Cox Hall Creek and like all of Cape May's sites, anything is possible here during the fall.

The South Cape May Meadows Nature Preserve: known locally simply as "The Meadows," this area is just north of Cape May Point and can be good for shorebirds and waterfowl depending upon current water levels. This is a Nature Conservancy property and in addition to the wetland complex has an extensive beachfront that is an excellent site for scanning for terns, skimmers, and early scoters. Inside the marsh, Virginia Rails and Soras are both possible and this is also the best place in Cape May for the Lesser Black-backed Gull.

Stone Harbor: located a few miles north of Cape May, this area includes extensive salt marshes and tidal flats and good views of the ocean. Along with nearby Nummy Island, a visit here usually produces good numbers of egrets and herons including the possibility of Yellow-crowned Night-Heron and Glossy Ibis. Also possible here are Boat-tailed Grackle, Seaside and Saltmarsh sparrows and Clapper Rail.

Edwin Forsyth NWR: Located about an hour and twenty minutes north of Cape May, this 47,000 acre national wildlife refuge has an excellent wildlife drive that provides access to ponds, marshes and mudflats. If conditions are right it can be teeming with shorebirds and will provide our best opportunities to find some of the more unusual shorebirds including Red-necked Phalarope and White-rumped and Baird's sandpipers.

Prime Hook NWR: Prime Hook is a 10,000 acre migratory bird sanctuary located on Delaware's east coast. We will begin our tour here on the first morning. The sanctuary includes a variety of habitats including tidal marsh, barrier beach and maritime forest.





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Daily Itinerary

September 20, Day 1: Arrival in Rehoboth Beach

The tour will begin today with arrivals in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware where we will spend the night. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 health situation we will not use a group van for transportation during this tour. Instead, participants will either drive separately during the tour or car pool depending upon their comfort level. Night in Rehoboth Beach.

September 21, Day 2: Prime Hook and travel to Cape May

We will spend much of today birding at several coastal sites in Delaware including Prime Hook NWR and Bombay Hook NWR. When will plan to arrive in Cape May by late afternoon. After checking in to our hotel, if time allows, we will make an initial visit to one of the area's birding sites. Night in Cape May.

September 22-25, Day 3-6: Cape May area

Our schdule in Cape May will be flexible as the migration is heavily dependent upon tidal and weather conditions which will vary day to day and sometimes hour to hour. We will plan our daily activities based on the conditions in order to maximize our enjoyment and viewing opportunities. With four full days we will be able to visit all of Cape May's best sites at least once, and in some cases more than once. Nights in Cape May

September 26, Day 7: Departures from Cape May

The tour concludes this morning with departures from Cape May. Participants can begin their return trips either via the ferry to Lewes or by driving around Delaware Bay.





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Tour Information

The tour will be limited to four participants.

Tour Cost

The cost of the tour will be \$1425 per person from Rehoboth Beach. The price includes 6 nights lodging in single rooms and a prorated share of the guide's hotel costs. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 health situation, the price does not include meals, transportation during the tour or to and from Rehoboth Beach/Cape May.

Registration & Deposit

In order to reserve a space on the tour, a completed and signed registration form is required along with a full payment of \$1425. Registration forms are available on the website www.otusasiotours.com

Payments should be mailed to:

Otus asio Tours

900 Hillsborough Road

Chapel Hill NC, 27516

Cancellation Policy

The hotel in Cape May requires a payment for one night of room and tax at the time of booking. 25% of this amount is non-refundable after it has been paid if the room is cancelled more than 14 days prior to arrival. If cancellations are made within 14 days of arrival the entire deposit of one night's room and tax is non-refundable. This is the cancellation policy that will be followed for the tour. If a cancellation is made after booking, but more than 14 days from arrival date in Cape May (September 7) the entire tour payment less 25% of one night of room and tax will be refunded. If cancellation is made less than 14 days from the arrival date in Cape May the entire tour payment less 100% of the cost of one night's room and tax will be refunded.

Transportation

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 health crisis we will not be using a van for transport during this tour. Participants will be responsible for arranging their own transportation via private vehicle during the tour. While we are birding in Cape May we may car pool depending upon the comfort level of the participants.



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Tour Information (cont)

Weather

The weather in southern New Jersey in mid-September is generally pleasant and comfortable although the passage of cold fronts can make it feel chilly especially in the early morning. In general one should prepare for the possibility of cool early mornings and comfortable afternoons. Since this is a temperate area the possibility of rain exists and a rain coat should be included in your trip luggage.

Covid Policies

Masks will be required throughout the tour and we will try as best as we can to maintain social distancing while birding. If participants are comfortable we may do some car pooling for short drives in and around Cape May, but this will be determined during the tour and will always be at the discretion of the group. If car pooling is used masks will be required in the vehicle and we will drive with the windows down. Hand sanitizer will be available at all times, but participants should also plan to bring their own supply.

Information

For further information, contact Jan Hansen at 919-259-9423 or otusasiotours@gmail.com.

