

USA: New Jersey

Cape May in Spring

Sat 14th – Sun 22nd May 2016



Trip photos (clockwise, from top left): One of many fine Red Knots seen at Reed's Beach • A tiny Ruby-throated Hummingbird seen in the State Park • Deep blue male Indigo Bunting at the arboretum • Ouch! One of several male Baltimore Orioles at Higbees • Dicing with danger was this Killdeer by the edge of the road at Heislerville • Right by the hawkwatch, one of a group of Cedar Waxwings © all photos from the tour by tour participant Rupert Pye

**report compiled by tour leader:
Brian Small**



Trip photos (clockwise, from top left): Get your sunglasses ready for a warbler gallery: first up is that Blackburnian Warbler at the State Park • Often skulking, we had super views of this singing Common Yellowthroat at Brigantine • Timed to disrupt breakfast, a male Blackpoll Warbler at the lighthouse car park • Very much appreciated, a female Cape May Warbler near Lily Lake • One of two male Blue-winged Warblers seen in Belleplain Woods • Finally, one of many stunning Black-and-white Warblers defying gravity © all photos from the tour by tour participant Rupert Pye

New Jersey | Cape May in Spring

Tour Leader: Brian Small

with Ken Barnard, Debbie Burkett, Brigid Campbell, Martin Phillips, Mandy & Rupert Pye, Rob Williams and David Wimpres

Cape May in spring is a lovely and fascinating place to be. Though it lies at a latitude equal to that of Madrid, the trees are still just coming in to leaf and birds are continuing to move north. We enjoyed a variety of weather, with winds initially stuck in the north, keeping temperatures down, they turned full circle – round to the south then back to the north and east. By and large we enjoyed sunshine with the odd cloudy spell, apart from our last day, which wasn't so nice (to say the least), and as ever made full use of our time. Staying at the Sea Crest, with capacious rooms to spread out in, ideally situated so that most drives were short, and being on the seafront we could walk out onto the beach if we wanted. For meals we tried a variety of very nice restaurants and diners in the town and were never disappointed.

Even on cloudy days, most of the warblers brought sunshine into our lives: we found 25 species (3 up on last time) and would be hard pressed to name one that outshone the others. Though monochromatic, the avian humbug Black-and-white Warbler is always a star; Magnolia Warblers were seen on several dates as were American Redstarts and Northern Parula. However, who will ever forget that first golden-orange male Blackburnian Warbler that performed just above our heads (a thigh-rubbingly good moment!); or indeed that magical spell on our last morning at Belleplain, when the rain briefly stopped and the sun seeped through just long enough for us to see Yellow-throated, Prothonotary and Hooded Warblers superbly close? The Bay-breasted and two Canada Warblers we worked hard at near the bird observatory - eventually seeing the male superbly, were great too. It was close-by that we had seen Myrtle and Cape May Warblers, too.

However, and I think without exception we all agreed, the true highlight of the trip were the stunningly close shorebirds seen at Reed's Beach. It was spine-tingling to get so close to these birds frantically feeding on the eggs of the Horseshoe Crabs spawning on the beaches, desperately fattening up for the rest of their journey north. To think that the Red Knot had already flown many 1000s of miles to reach here, and against the pressures placed upon them by human activities continue to do so. We watched like excited children as Red Knot, Ruddy Turnstones and Semipalmated Sandpipers fed at a range of just two metres on the shoreline. The noise from them and the Laughing Gulls was cacophonous at times. Of course, we saw many other shorebirds at Heislerville, too: 100s of Dunlin, Short-billed Dowitchers, Semipalmated Plovers and even a fine summer-plumaged Wilson's Phalarope.

Cape May truly is a brilliant place to visit for a relaxed introduction into the world of North American warblers and shorebirds and raptors. At any time of year, from staying in one hotel, you have the chance to see a wealth of birds in a very friendly town, where all seem genuinely interested in what you are doing.

Daily Diary

Sat 14th May

After our long, and slightly delayed, flight to Philadelphia, it was pleasing to eventually come into land albeit in bumpy conditions as a band of heavy rain passed through. Eventually (!) we cleared customs (oranges are not the only fruit as we discovered) and, with the vehicle collected, made our way down to Cape May. As most were tired and it was quite dark by this time - we did manage to see eight Wild turkeys on the verge - we stopped at a local store for refreshments and once checked in at the hotel and plans made for the next day, we retired to our rooms at the Sea Crest for some sleep...

Sun 15th May

...As ever, most body clocks had 'kicked in' at c. 5am, so we were up early and out. A familiar pattern was to be established: having collected a picnic breakfast at Wawas, we then set off to one of a number of sites for our morning's birding. Our first day was to be the State Park, near the hawkwatch platform – quiet in spring compared with the hectic activity of autumn. As we approached, right by the side of the road was a group of Turkeys, the male pumped up and in active display fanning his tail to

five females. Parking up, the actual process of eating was hindered somewhat by the grassy areas scattered with American Robins, gathering food for their young, and the Purple Martins that hawked about in the windy car park. A Chipping Sparrow sang from the nearby pines, and a small group of warblers held fine male Blackpoll Warbler, Common Yellowthroat and Northern Parula – all three probably the warbler species most frequently seen on the tour.

Having finally completed breakfast, even with the sun shining the northerly wind kept temperatures down, we checked the trees near the hawkwatch – seeing House Finch and Cedar Waxwings, then took a walk in a clockwise direction round the State Park. Slowly strolling along the boardwalk, we picked up more Yellowthroats, Northern Rough-winged Swallows joined the Barn and Tree Swallows over the lakes, and a Carolina Wren or two sang – one was watched visiting its nest down a plastic tree protector. As we entered the arboretum, a fine male Indigo Bunting was spotted in the low vegetation and eventually settled on the path for us to enjoy 'scope views – the brilliant colours and subtle blues glowing in the sun. A Red-bellied Woodpecker flicked by and landed in the trees, its barred back oddly giving it good camouflage, then movement on the ground focused into a fine Veery – the only one we saw during the week, and a very showy one too as it hopped onto a log and posed for the whole group!

In a sheltered patch of trees we stood for quite a while, as it held good numbers of warblers: Black-and-whites were particularly pleasing, as were the quite similar male Blackpolls; several American Redstarts – one a fine black-and-orange male; also spectacular Magnolias and a singing Yellow were joined by two Blue-grey Gnatcatchers! A male Rose-breasted Grosbeak added to the colour all-too-briefly and behind us at the beginning of the trail to the beach two male Orchard Orioles fed in a bush that had a Ruby-throated Hummingbird zapping about it. Several Glossy Ibis winged about the pools as we headed to the beach and the return leg of our walk.

As we headed along the seaward edge of Bunker Pond, which was relatively quiet apart from a few duck species and Great and Snowy Egrets, many noisy Red-winged Blackbirds and Northern Mockingbirds were noted. Heading west we followed the beach, finding more Yellowthroats and Yellow Warblers in the Beach Plum bushes, and looked out onto the dunes that held Least Terns settling to breed and several pairs of American Oystercatchers. Lunch was collected from the Italian deli in town and eaten back at the State Park; thick sandwiches or bagels were very much enjoyed.

The afternoon was taken up with a walk at the local Meadows, where a complete circuit was made of the trail. Shorebirds were the name of the game; with water levels being perfect on the eastern pool they had gathered in good numbers. Most numerous were Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers, Dunlin and Short-billed Dowitchers – all feeding close to the path; it was good to go through the features and behaviour of the different sandpipers. Both Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs were seen well, sometimes side-by-side allowing comparison; Semipalmated Plovers also showed nicely and it was great to see spotty Spotted Sandpipers as they energetically ran around the edges of the water. Perhaps most exciting were four Stilt Sandpipers, beautifully barred and frosty with rufous ear coverts, and three Solitary Sandpipers. Also present, a pair of Blue-winged Teal, Killdeers and a couple of Cliff Swallows. We ended our day with c. 85 species – not a bad start – and a lovely meal at the Merion.

Mon 16th May

Our day dawned sunny, but still cool with winds veering slightly to the north or northwest. Our traditional start began with breakfast at the State Park – though today we ate it in a different spot! Following a little stroll about the perimeter of the lighthouse car park, and concentrated on the area near the hawkwatch platform and eventually Ken found the Least Flycatcher we had been tipped off about. Fairly quickly we headed for Higbees, where we had a good two-hour walk, picking up several new species. Warblers again were high on the hit list, and we were lucky to see several Black-and-whites, Common Yellowthroats low in the bushes or fields, more American Redstarts, Blackpoll Warblers and Northern Parulas. New were a fine, bright-yellow, male Prairie Warbler along the first bank of trees; in a sheltered area of fields, where a couple of Eastern Kingbirds flew across the grasses catching flies, we saw a female Black-throated Blue Warbler; finally as we left a young male Wilson's Warbler was near the parked vehicle.

However, it was not just warblers: we saw White-eyed Vireos singing, more Orchard Orioles, but even better was a male Baltimore Oriole and a female Rose-breasted Grosbeak "spik"ing in the trees. Indigo Buntings sang from the trees, as did Field Sparrows, and finally whilst checking the crop fields,

we picked out two male and a female Bobolink – one male perched out with a male Orchard Oriole on a dead twig – superb. Finally a Black-throated Green Warbler performed nicely adding to our burgeoning tally of these spectacular birds.

Once again we collected our lunch from a local deli, then headed north, following roughly the eastern edge of Delaware Bay, round to the lagoons at Heislerville. As the tide comes in, these act as roosting areas for migrant waders and the numbers can be spectacular. We made a quick stop en route to see the Eastern Bluebirds near the Mosquito Programme compound – they performed very nicely, as did a Pine Warbler over our heads. On arrival at Heislerville, we spent the next couple of hours looking carefully through the shorebirds – and having lunch.

Orange-backed American Dunlins, with their long bills and white faces, plus Short-billed Dowitchers largely dominated the scene – though perhaps in numbers the much smaller Semipalmated Sandpipers ruled. All three species produced quite a bit of noise as they argued; at one stage a Peregrine swept through the flock causing total panic – nothing causes chaos in a small bird flock like a Peregrine. Once settled again, some birds had departed as the tide began to fall, we started all over again to check through them. One lovely little scene was a female Killdeer sat on eggs right by the very edge of the tarmacked road – had a vehicle to move out of the way of another it would have been curtains as she resolutely refused to budge. Amongst the shorebirds, we picked out many Least Sandpipers and Semi-palmated Plovers, one close sandpiper was studied very carefully as its structure – notably long Dunlin-like bill – and plumage all looked good for Western Sandpiper; after careful consideration that was the only identification left. Also out on the mud, feeding with Lesser Yellowlegs was a fine summer-plumaged Wilson's Phalarope feeding in its characteristic hunch-backed style its head and bill pushed well forward.

Two Bald Eagles perched in a lone tree near to the heron and cormorant colony – we enjoyed both. Again, we went through how to tell Least and Semi-p Sandpipers apart – I think we were there – then moved round the pool to where the nets were being set up to catch birds as part of the long-term study of the shorebird population. We had previously seen a number of birds with leg tags on and resightings give an indication of how long species like Red Knot and Semipalmated Sandpipers live plus long term population trends, which sadly seem to be on their way down. More shorebirds fed at close range, Glossy Ibis fed out on the mud and Clapper Rails noisily squabbled in the creeks. A Northern Harrier drifted across the saltmarsh – we would hope for better views later, but our eyes were taken by the close views of tiny Killdeer chicks on the pools just below us – sweet!

It had been a long day, so we headed back leisurely to the hotel, some for a promenade others just to relax, take stock and recharge for the evening meal and next day.

Tue 17th May

Our hopes for better weather were dashed as we awoke to cloud and light rain, which lingered all day. Still never mind, we had birds to see and new sites to visit! After our breakfast at the state park (and even more American Robins!) we had a quick walk to see what might be new, but soon decided to head off north to Belleplain Wood.

It took about 45 minutes before we turned off the main highway onto the small roads through the woods and we were soon parked up near to the triangle and Sunset Bridge. The first birds out of the vehicle were Blue-grey Gnatcatchers zipping in the trees above, but it was not long before our ears were distracted by singing Hooded and Yellow-throated Warblers. The latter species was the first to be seen, with one found typically high in the trees before it dropped down towards a pine tree right above the road, where it was visiting a nest with the female was sat on it. Also typically, the Hooded Warbler remained elusive, sitting way in the woods and not coming out; luckily one singing bird attracted another and we turned round and looked hard and looked hard and looked hard some more. Then sharp-eyed Martin found it (again) and we got it in the 'scope to enjoy great looks at this very smart warbler and understand why it is call "Hooded". Our first Red-eyed Vireos were found and a couple of Yellow-billed Cuckoos called and one was tracked down to the canopy of a nearby tree – though elusive we all saw it well.

On Sunset Bridge we waited hoping a Louisiana Waterthrush might arrive – it was probably glimpsed as it flew down the stream, but we made do with close views of our first Eastern Phoebe and then the calling Acadian Flycatcher arrived giving us good, albeit brief, views at eye level. A little way away we

could hear a song like a Prothonotary Warbler – but not quite right – and after a little walk along a trail into the woods where we could not find the Ovenbird we eventually tracked it down for cracking 'scope views. Back on the road and a movement in the trees above proved to be a Worm-eating Warbler, which was strange as we did not hear any song at all. Still we did not worry as it picked at leaves for quite some time, giving good views of its bold head pattern, before zipping off. A stunning eye-poppingly bright male Scarlet Tanager was found, but as the rain fell again, we decided to leave and get some lunch – we were in danger of wasting away here (not!).

Having picked up Debbie, taking a rest this morning, we finally made our choices at the Italian deli in Cape May, we headed down to the lighthouse to eat it. Refreshed and the facilities used, we popped round to the bird observatory for a little stroll. This turned out to be a great decision as Tom Johnson pointed us in the direction of a small group of warblers along Lily Lake. Near the observatory and along the lake we were treated to some great warblers: usual Northern Parulas, Yellowthroats and up to 10 Black-and-white Warblers were joined by American Redstarts, two Cape May Warblers – one of which pleased the photographers, Magnolia, an elusive male Bay-breasted, Myrtle and finally a couple of Black-throated Greens and Black-throated Blues!

We had not yet finished, and with a few spots of rain falling dropped in at the Meadows on the way back to the hotel. The usual culprits were about, with many Dunlin, Least and Semi-p Sandpipers, Semi-p Plovers and Killdeer, four Stilt and three Solitary Sandpipers still about, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, both Green- and Blue-winged Teals and very nicely found by Debbie a young, first-summer, Bonaparte's Gull. Amazingly, seemingly without any effort at all we had seen over 100 species during the day, such is the birdlife at Cape May – never a dull moment!

Wed 18th May

Another 'big day' and we had tried to time it so that the weather might be better and so it proved as early cloud dissipated and it was sunny and warm for most of the day – though the nagging breeze lingered. A quick early breakfast was followed by an hour's drive north along the Atlantic coast heading towards Brigantine; a quick stop near exit 10 produced a large flock of Glossy Ibis, but no sign of the reported White-faced. It was a nice surprise to find that charges for the reserve had been waived, but when we tried to go round the trails we found out why – they were closed!! Not good.

We lingered near the main track round the pools, and found some good birds. Close singing Common Yellowthroats perched high in the vegetation and at the opposite end of the scale two huge immature Bald Eagles lingered out over the marshes. An *Empidonax* flycatcher was found low down in the bushes and initially identified as a Least, but on reflection the wings were too long and the eye ring not quite right and was re-identified as an Alder – a really good record in spring. In getting views a sparrow was flushed and proved to be a rather skulking Swamp Sparrow – the only one we saw; in contrast Savannah Sparrows were more showy.

Out across Brigantine a couple of Northern Harriers worried the flocks of ducks and close by the flocks of Glossy Ibis grew, until we must have seen almost 100. Many shorebirds fed on the mud and in the trees were Yellow Warblers, Chipping Sparrows and a couple of Downy Woodpeckers and Eastern Kingbirds; we moved along a track to get a better view of more pools and found a fine Wood Duck, a juvenile Great Blue Heron on its nest, a young Little Blue Heron and yet more waders. Back at the reserve centre we found a nice Ruby-throated Hummingbird nest, our first Great Crested Flycatcher (obviously just arriving as we found many more after this day), Tufted Titmouse and two American Redstarts. As ever, many Chimney Swifts swept above us, alongside a few Northern Rough-winged Swallows in with the Sand Martins and Tree Swallows. As we left we found a pair of Wood Duck on a roadside lake.

With extra time on our hands, we returned to Cape May via Nummy's Island, Stone Harbor Point and the Wetland Institute. En route we passed several Red-tailed Hawks and arriving at Nummy's Island it was interesting, even though the tide was high: a fine breeding-plumaged Great Northern Diver (Common Loon) and a winter-plumaged Red-throated Diver for good measure showed well by the road bridge. Many shorebirds on the island and mud included up to 100 Grey Plover, Short-billed Dowitcher, American Oystercatcher, but it was one special wader that we had really come to see. With this in mind we made the mile drive to the car park at Stone Harbor Point, had lunch, then prepared ourselves for the long slog down the point...

The first patch of bushes was fun as they held many Song Sparrows and a fine (and our only) Brown Thrasher; typically elusive, we were lucky to get good views as it tried to hide behind bushes. Upon reaching the beach we had the good fortune of meeting the ranger, who informed us that there were two pairs of Piping Plovers and that one bird was just down on the beach – plus she had seen Purple Sandpiper on the groyne. At the beach the plover was nowhere to be seen, though we delighted in the many Semi-p Plovers and Sanderling in summer plumage: eventually checking down the shoreline found the Piping Plover about half a mile to the south. As we started the walk it did the right thing and flew straight towards us and landed c. 30 metres away – just as I had planned it!

We had stunning views as it chased about after small flies and other prey, its pallid and chunky appearance much admired alongside the other waders. Eventually we tore our eyes off it and got some equally fine looks at the 11 Purple Sandpipers (also in summer plumage) and a group of three Red Knot that flew along the beach. Out to sea a dark smudge transformed into a flock of 50 or so Black Scoter, then as we walked back to the bus, well pleased, the same or another Piping Plover was found on the inshore pool along with a fine adult Little Blue Heron. At the Wetland Institute we had good numbers of Willets and other waders, but no Yellow-crowned Night Herons, plus our only Tricoloured Heron of the week.

It had already been a long day, so while some of the group asked to be dropped off at the hotel, the rest continued on, firstly (and briefly) to the bird observatory, but (on news) then to the Beanery. Two fine male Magnolia Warblers were seen at the CMBO and a female Black-throated Blue and then a Blue-headed Vireo briefly. However, a kind gentleman told us that he had just seen two Prothonotary Warblers at the Beanery so we left at the double. The first patch of flooded woodland produced good views of other warblers, but not the target, however the second patch was much more successful – though it was only when we were about to leave, having seen a splendid breeding-plumaged Green Heron, that the singing male actually came close and then fed about us close to the water. What a star and a fine end to another day when 100+ species were seen during the day!

Thu 19th May

A generally nice day, with a few spots of rain in early cloud, and quite warm too. After picking up breakfast our first spot was something of a mystery to the group and not really quite knowing what to expect, so it was a moment of great excitement when we drew up at Reed's Beach and saw the large flocks of Red Knot, Semipalmated Sandpipers and Ruddy Turnstones all at arms' length. The colour and movement was great as the frenzied groups fed on the Horseshoe Crabs eggs, occasionally disturbed by the cacophonous Laughing Gulls but then running back to concentration of food. For virtually the whole of the group the hour we spent here was the highlight of the whole tour, certainly a moment we would all remember for a long time. On the other side of the road, the reedy fringes to the saltmarsh held a couple of vocal Marsh Wrens that also performed well at close range – one was chased persistently; out on the marsh itself a number of chunky Seaside Sparrows sang. Whilst in the bay a lone female Black Scoter swam and then 10 Pale-bellied Brent Geese flew past. Reed's Beach is a lovely area, but we had to tear ourselves away.

Moving on to Belleplain, we first stopped for lunch at the picnic spot near the campsite, used the facilities, watched a fine male Pine Warbler, then had a chat with Tom Johnson on our way to a Blue-winged Warbler spot. Tom gave us directions to another site and so off we went to Weatherby Road. Our first stop yielded Eastern Wood Pewee calling from a bare tree, the next seemed more productive so we walked along the relatively quiet road. Ovenbirds sang incessantly and a number of them showed well as did Pine Warblers, but the hoped-for target kept quiet. Then a faint snippet of song came from well in the forest and slowly came closer until there it was - a male Blue-winged Warbler; bright yellow with a band of smoky cobalt blue and dark lores it was very much admired. The group stayed put while the leader went for the 'bus, only for him to find another male right by it and then a singing Yellow-throated Vireo appeared too. Quickly fetching the group, we arrived back at the spot and the vireo was still present – phew!

Back at Sunset Bridge it was rather quiet – middle of the day often is, so we ate our lunch while Hooded Warbler and Acadian Flycatcher sang distantly and a Yellow-billed Cuckoo called. It seemed that things were not going to happen, so we trundled west to Heislerville and a second helping of the waders there. The Killdeer still sat patiently on its nest by the road and the numerous waders fed on the pool, but we simply could not find the Curlew Sandpiper reported that morning. It did not matter as we were enjoying everything else present. Our final throw of the dice was a visit to the Cape May

Airfield, where we hoped to see Horned Lark; the haze was against us and though we could hear them singing they did not show. A distant blob on a runway sign was obviously one, but you needed imagination to pick anything out, then one appeared closer, then closer still, and eventually we left having had good views. Only 95 species seen today...

Fri 20th May

Sunny and warm right from the start today, with high cloud developing late afternoon, having done a lot of driving yesterday, we stayed in the environs of Cape May all day, visiting the State Park, Lily Lake and the CMBO. Following breakfast we had an anticlockwise circuit round Bunker Pond and the marsh. Along the beach we found numerous Black Skimmers plus Least Terns settling to nest – one or two even on eggs – and American Oystercatchers. Once again, large numbers of Bottlenose Dolphins were seen close inshore. The bushes were quiet besides Yellowthroats and Yellow Warblers and we saw a number of Cliff Swallows.

Further round at the arboretum, another Eastern Wood Pewee showed well, and as we left the woods a number of small 'kettles' of raptors were picked out. The first held Cooper's Hawks and Broad-winged Hawks, the next a single Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks, then more Broad-winged – totalling 18 in all. However, the highlight of the morning was at one of the small copses in the marsh, when movement in a small oak above was described as being orange! An amazing male Blackburnian Warbler was there above us and we enjoyed it all by ourselves for at least 30 minutes – Rupert who had walked back to the car with Mandy was even fetched by Ken to come and watch this little beauty!

With lunch picked up from the Italian deli, we relaxed at the State Park then had a bit of retail therapy at the CMBO. The trees were again good for various species and we refound the male Bay-breasted Warbler; a male Scarlet Tanager showed well in the trees above us – just for Debbie, and in front of the observatory itself yet more Magnolia, Yellow and Black-throated Blue Warblers picked at insects. Just along the road, a small garden held more warblers – a bright male Black-throated Green just above the gate positively glowed; even better but frustratingly brief was a male Canada Warbler with a neat necklace of spots. Not all had seen it, so we hung about and found a female in the bushes beside the lake – persistence had paid off; later we were to see the same or another male, after a bit of a cat-and-mouse chase seeing it down to a few metres. A fine end to the day.

Sat 21st May

With a deep low positioned offshore the forecast was for very heavy rain to arrive mid morning and indeed it did. Our last day found strong easterly winds beating the shore and we did the best we could before the rains arrived. After breakfast we went to the Meadows for another check of the waders – a Pectoral Sandpiper had been reported, but we were unable to find it, but actually it was the sea that caught our attention. Gannets were seen far out yet even better were small numbers of Sooty Shearwaters cruising out of Delaware Bay at varying distances – a more distant white-bellied shearwater looked very interesting, but was lost. Some were close in and we very much appreciated them for that! A storm petrel was also found a long way – almost certainly a Wilson's, but it was too far out to get anyone on it.

Having gone back to the hotel to finish packing, as the rain arrived we got lunch and then mooched at the shelter by the lighthouse watching the comings and goings and waiting for spells when the rain stopped. During a couple of spells, we picked out several storm petrels again and this time they were close in and clearly Wilson's. Debbie found one just off the beach and we were able to see the well-defined rump wrapping round the side of the bird, the upperwing – and in this instance quite active moult in the primaries. For some this was their first storm petrel so it was good to see. The rain had certainly set in, so after a quick visit to Sunset Point, we left Cape May on our way to Philadelphia and our flight home.

We were not done yet however, as when we passed the Jake's Landing turning the rain had eased, so we pulled in and had a good 30 minutes getting great views of numerous Marsh Wrens and Seaside Sparrows. Two Northern Harriers quartered the saltmarsh and we also found Bald Eagle and Ospreys in nests – in 2015 there were 530+ active Osprey nests in New Jersey. Clapper Rails squabbled and one or two chased each other in flight – they are not great fliers it has to be said, but eventually we left. Still we were not done, as we diverted again to Sunset Bridge, where once again brief bright spells brought out superb views of three warbler species.

First, as soon as we had parked was a Yellow-throated Warbler appeared low down and right by the road; then one of the several Hooded Warblers we could hear decided to do the same – right by the road and at about two metres range – amazing, and just for Debbie! Finally, a glowing yellow blob appeared by the stream – Prothonotary Warbler – again especially for Debbie and a fitting way to end the week's birding.

We could not have asked for anything more, so we got into the van and in heavy driving rain returned to Philadelphia. What a week! The group got on brilliantly and had lots of laughs and many fine birds – we will not forget the Red Knots or the Blackburnian Warbler in a hurry. Thank you so much for coming along and being such a great group and I sincerely hope you enjoyed it as much as I did. See you soon...

Brian Small

ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED (n=159)

Wild Turkey *Meleagris gallopavo*

Noted on five dates as numbers seemed to increase: first eight on drive south to Cape May on 14/5, then along Sea Grove Ave on 15/5 with a male displaying and others at Belleplaine and near Higbees.

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

Seen daily

[Pale-bellied] Brent Goose *Branta bernicla bernicla*

One flock of 10 flew past Reed's Beach, 19/5

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Regular on Bunker Pond and other lakes; seen daily

Wood Duck *Aix sponsa*

Five flew about the Beanery on 17/5, then five the next day at Brigantine in the morning and Beanery in the afternoon

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Common on Bunker Pond and the Meadows

American Black Duck *Anas rubripes*

As access to Brigantine was restricted, we had to make do with small numbers at Heislerville and (mixed birds) at the Meadows

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Noted on eight dates

Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors*

Just two pairs plus one at the Meadows on 15/5 and 17/5

Green-winged Teal *Anas carolinensis*

Three at pools just west of the hotel, 16/5, then two males at the Meadows next day

Black Scoter *Melanitta americana*

50 in flock off Stone Harbor Pt, 18/5; a female off Reed's Beach and eight at Cape May, 19/5

Great Northern Diver (Common Loon) *Gavia immer*

Noted on six dates, most often birds offshore from the beach at the hotel or flying over into Delaware Bay; the best views was at Nummy's Island, with a bird just below the bridge, 18/5

Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*

One at Nummy's Island, 18/5, one off Cape May the next day; two from beach, 21/5

Wilson's Storm Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*

After one distant storm petrel from the beach, several were seen from the platform by the lighthouse, 21/5, with one very close inshore found by Debbie

Sooty Shearwater *Ardenna grisea*

Over 20 passed the beach at the Meadows on our last morning, pushed in by the depression offshore

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*

Good numbers seen at various sites, feeding or flying over: Bunker Pond, Heislerville, Jake's Landing, but the largest numbers were at or on our way to Brigantine, 18/5, when over 100 were seen

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Large numbers in the rookery at Heislerville, with over 30 nests counted on 16/5 and 60+ birds, 19/5; one at Cape May 18/5

Green Heron *Butorides virescens*

Just three sightings in total: first at the State Park, 15/5, then two in full breeding finery at Beanery, 18/5 and one at State Park, 20/5

Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias*

A huge heron seen on seven dates in low numbers, with the large young sat on the nest at Brigantine the best

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

Noted daily, on Bunker Pond and most numerous at Heislerville, Brigantine and Jake's Landing

Tricoloured Heron *Egretta tricolor*

Just a single on pools at the Wetland Institute on 18/5

Snowy Egret *Egretta thula*

Seen on freshwater pools, but not in large numbers

Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*

Several seen on 21/5 from Stone Harbor and Cape May beach

Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus*

Seen daily sometimes in huge numbers roosting or flying past

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura*

Seen daily with many (e.g., 30 at Cape May, 15/5) on the first two days

American Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus*

Likewise, but in lower numbers (e.g., 10+ on 18/5)

Western Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

Nests in amazing numbers in Delaware Bay (300+) and the marshes up the coast; noted daily

Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*

Noted on six dates, with the highest number on 19/5 with up to 10

Northern Harrier *Circus hudsonius*

A distant immature at Heislerville, 16/5, then two at Jake's Landing, 21/5, with one an adult male

Sharp-shinned Hawk *Accipiter striatus*

Very few, with a grand total of two: singles at Higbees, 16/5, and the lighthouse, 20/5

Cooper's Hawk *Accipiter cooperii*

Just two in a small 'kettle' of raptors at the State Park, 20/5

Red-shouldered Hawk *Buteo lineatus*

Two in the same small raptor group, 20/5

Broad-winged Hawk *Buteo platypterus*

Noted on two dates: two at Belleplain, 17/5, and then a really good total of 18 at the State Park, 20/5

Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis*

Seen on four dates, the first en route to Cape May, 14/5, but better views as we headed north on 18/5, and the next two days

Clapper Rail *Rallus longirostris*

Four on 16/5 at Heislerville and others at Brigantine and Jake's Landing

American Oystercatcher *Haematopus palliatus*

Good numbers seen at the beach at Cape May, the State Park, Nummy's Island, Heislerville and Brigantine – the voice and plumage (especially leg colour) is distinct

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Very smart in breeding plumage and seen on five days: good numbers seen at Heislerville and over 100 at Nummy's Island, 18/5, but other flocks were seen flying over calling at various places

Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*

We saw many of these Ringed Plover look-a-likes, on six dates in small numbers. Really good views obtained at the Meadows and Heislerville – to hyphenate or not to hyphenate that is the question!

Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus*

Seen on seven days, with lovely views at Heislerville where a bird was nesting right next to the road and others had very small young

Piping Plover *Charadrius melodus*

Faced with a long walk down Stone Harbor Point on 18/5, we were lucky when one flew towards us and landed at the groyne right by us! A very smart pale male and enjoyed for quite some time – a threatened species through the US

Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus*

2000+ at Heislerville, 16/5, was clearly the largest total; many others seen at Nummy's Island, Bunker Pond and even flying over

Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*

Noted on six dates from good views at the Meadows, to 20+ at Heislerville

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*

Larger numbers than Greater, but at the same sites, but 100+ at Heislerville, 16/5

Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria*

Three on two dates at the Meadows and others at Higbees and Bunker Pond

[Eastern] Willet *Catoptrophorus semipalmata semipalmata*

Low numbers on seven dates with some displaying birds seen at Nummy's Island, Heislerville and Brigantine

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularia*

Lovely spotty breeding birds on six dates, with six at the Meadows being the largest number

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres morinella*

Many smart adults seen at various spots - Heislerville (100s), Nummy's and the Meadows, but like the next species by far the best numbers were at Reed's Beach, 19/5

Red Knot *Calidris canutus rufa*

Four at Cape May, 15/5, and other small numbers at Stone Harbor, were the *hors d'oeuvres* for over 4000 at Reed's Beach on 19/5. Quite simply stunning and at such close range the whole experience was quite moving

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

Many at Stone Harbor Point, 18/5, and on the next three dates

Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*

Great numbers seen at Heislerville - in the 1000s and often very tame; other great views at the Meadows and Reed's Beach

Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri*

Careful searching of the 1000s of Semipalmateds produced one at Heislerville, 16/5

Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla*

Common at all wetland sites, with 100s at Heislerville, but the best views were at the Meadows

Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*

It was great to see 11 at Stone Harbor Point, 18/5, all in warm-brown and spotted breeding plumage; two were on the concrete ship at Sunset Point 20/5

Dunlin *Calidris alpina hudsonia*

Excellent numbers in breeding plumage of the orange-backed and long-billed North American race, with 100s at Heislerville, but also at the Meadows and Stone Harbor. Genetic studies have shown that the form *hudsonia* is isolated from other Dunlin forms

Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus*

Four showed well on the Meadows through the week

Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor*

One male at Heislerville on 16/5 sadly stayed out in the lagoon with a Lesser Yellowlegs, but was enjoyed very much all the same

Bonaparte's Gull *Chroicocephalus philadelphia*

Two second-years at the Meadows, the first found by Debbie on 17/5 and then two on 21/5

Laughing Gull *Leucophaeus atricilla*

Seen daily; noisy breeding adults everywhere, but largest numbers at Reed's Beach as they joined the shorebirds feeding on crabs' eggs; a huge breeding colony at Nummy's Island

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*

11 at Heislerville, 16/5 was the highest total, with low numbers elsewhere; best views at Reed's Beach

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

Seen daily

American Herring Gull *Larus smithsonianus*

Common and seen daily, with many very worn and 'ugly' brutes at Reed's Beach, 19/5

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Now a regular feature on the beach at Cape May though singles seen on just four dates

Least Tern *Sternula antillarum*

A real star of the week. It was lovely to see so many noisy birds at they started to breed on the beaches around Cape May. Ace views had on seven dates

Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri*

Very common and seen daily, with a fair number of young non-breeding birds about

Black Skimmer *Rynchops niger*

Noted on five dates at various coastal sites: the numbers seemed to build up during the week with our highest total being on the beach at Cape May - 20 on 21/5

Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Seen daily

Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura*

Seen daily in good numbers

Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus*

Up to two birds showed well above us at Sunset Bridge, Belleplain, where they fed noisily about the trees, on three dates

Chimney Swift *Chaetura pelagica*

Seen daily, with birds entering or leaving chimneys at Cape May or in high feeding flocks over the State Park or Belleplain

Ruby-throated Hummingbird *Archilochus colubris*

With over 20 in total, we had some really good views of these, with two nests found. The first and maybe best were at the State Park on 15/5, when two fed about a flowering bush and allowed close approach and photos; nests were found at Belleplain and Brigantine

Red-bellied Woodpecker *Melanerpes carolinus*

Seen on six dates in small numbers, but still a very smart woodpecker

Downy Woodpecker *Picoides pubescens*

Several views of single birds on three dates – one at Brigantine perched in the Reed's was the best

Hairy Woodpecker *Picoides villosus*

Just one seen at Belleplain on 17/5

Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus*

Singles noted on three dates in or around the State Park; one entered a nest hole in the small copse, 20/5

Merlin *Falco columbarius*

One was seen hunting dragonflies at the State Park on 17/5

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

One swept through the shorebirds at Heislerville on 16/5

Eastern Phoebe *Sayornis phoebe*

A pair at Sunset Bridge at Belleplain on our three visits

Eastern Wood Pewee *Contopus virens*

Seen and heard on three dates, from 17/5 onwards

Acadian Flycatcher *Empidonax virescens*

At least two birds seen and heard calling at Belleplain, but only one showed well by the bridge on 17/5

Alder Flycatcher *Empidonax alnorum*

One found at Brigantine on 18/5 was first thought to be another Little before better views of the wing was gained from photographs

Least Flycatcher *Empidonax minimus*

Just the one at the Hawkwatch platform on 16/5

Eastern Kingbird *Tyrannus tyrannus*

Small lively groups seen on six dates, mostly in the cultivated fields at Higbees but also at Belleplain

Great Crested Flycatcher *Myiarchus crinitus*

A really smart flycatcher that seemed to arrive whilst we were there: from none on the first four dates we then had them daily, with four on 18/5 – three noisy birds at CMBO

White-eyed Vireo *Vireo griseus*

One of the sounds of the week, the distinctive song was heard at several sites on four days, but seen well only at Belleplain and CMBO

Yellow-throated Vireo *Vireo flavifrons*

Just the one, singing above the vehicle at Belleplian, 19/5, as we looked for Blue-winged Warbler

Blue-headed Vireo *Vireo solitarius*

Two singles noted at CMBO, 18/5 and 20/5

Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus*

Noted on the last five dates, mostly at Belleplain

Blue Jay *Cyanocitta cristata*

Low numbers on six dates

American Crow *Corvus brachyrhynchos*

Seen daily in low numbers

Fish Crow *Corvus ossifragus*

Seen daily along the coast

Cedar Waxwing *Bombycilla cedrorum*

Small parties of up to 50 (16/5) seen at Higbees or Cape May

Carolina Chickadee *Poecile carolinensis*

Seen daily in small numbers, quite often in the reedbeds picking at seeds

Tufted Titmouse *Baeolophus bicolor*

Noted on six dates in low numbers, with nice views had of many

American Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*

A handful seen on two days at the State Park, 15/5 and 17/5

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

Small numbers on four dates

Tree Swallow *Tachycineta bicolor*

Seen daily and in good numbers: it was nice to watch them as they sat on the nestboxes at various sites

Purple Martin *Progne subis*

Seen daily in increasingly large numbers: the winds of the first few days led a number to sit on the roof of the museum at the lighthouse and giving great views

Northern Rough-winged Swallow *Stelgidopteryx serripennis*

Only seen on three dates in fair numbers

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica erythrogaster*

Noted daily in good numbers; the N. American races is distinct in the lack of dark breast band

Shore (Horned) Lark *Eremophila alpestris*

Up to 10 seen at Cape May airfield, 19/5

Marsh Wren *Cistothorus palustris*

Two at Reed's Beach showed nicely, with one chased off by a Song Sparrow; up to 10 singing loudly at Jake's Landing on 21/5

Carolina Wren *Thryothorus ludovicianus*

Noted regularly through the week, with one pair nesting in a plastic tree tube at the arboretum

House Wren *Troglodytes aedon*

Seen or heard on five days, but hard to get great views this year

Blue-grey Gnatcatcher *Polioptila caerulea*

Always a delight to see, we had really good views, notably at the arboretum and Belleplain

White-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta carolinensis*

One appeared briefly then flew off over the group never to be seen again at Belleplain, 19/5

Grey Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis*

Recorded daily in fair numbers

Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos*

As above, this was seen and heard commonly with good views at the lighthouse car park

Brown Thrasher *Toxostoma rufum*

A nice surprise was a singing bird as we walked through the bushy track towards Stone Harbor Point, 18/5

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Everywhere

Eastern Bluebird *Sialia sialis*

Two males and a female at the Cooks Beach turning, 16/5; one there as we passed it on 19/5

Veery *Catharus fuscescens*

A super shy species, so it was nice to get cracking views at the arboretum of one perched on a log, 15/5

Wood Thrush *Hylocichla mustelina*

Heard only at Belleplain, 17/5

American Robin *Turdus migratorius*

Abundant. Every lawn or patch of grass seemed to have four or five robins on them, with several fledglings about

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Recorded daily

American Goldfinch *Carduelis tristis*

Seen on five dates in small groups; the bright sulphurous males were much enjoyed

House Finch *Carpodacus mexicanus*

Seen daily with best views being of at the hotel and hawkwatch platform

Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapilla*

Seen and heard well and in very good number, Belleplain, 17/5 and 19/5

Worm-eating Warbler *Helmitheros vermivorum*

One found by Martin at Belleplain, 17/5, was the only one seen or heard!

Blue-winged Warbler *Vermivora cyanoptera*

Thanks to local gen from Tom Johnsons we saw two males at Belleplain, 19/5

Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia*

Up to 10 noted on six dates and every one was very much enjoyed – what a star!

Prothonotary Warbler *Protonotaria citrea*

One was seen and heard at the Baenery, 18/5, and then one more showed brilliantly (could they show any other way?) at Belleplain by Sunset Bridge, 21/5

Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*

Recorded frequently along the low bushes bordering fields or really territorial males in the Reed's at the State Park – the smart males look a little sad for themselves, but they made us happy to see them so well. The best views had at Brigantine on 18/5 when one sang at close range from the tops of bushes

Hooded Warbler *Setophaga citrina*

Heard and eventually seen (thanks again Martin) at Belleplain on 17/5, but then at point blank range on 21/5

American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla*

Males, smart in black-and-orange, were seen at Higbees and the arboretum; females noted at many locations

Cape May Warbler *Setophaga tigrina*

Two females along the edge of Lily Lake, 17/5, showed better than the fly over male the previous day

Northern Parula *Setophaga americana*

Seen on six dates, with up to ten on a couple of days

Magnolia Warbler *Setophaga magnolia*

Another super smart bird, the males were especially evident and we several on five days

Bay-breasted Warbler *Setophaga castanea*

A young male at CMBO on 17/5 and 20/5

Blackburnian Warbler *Setophaga fusca*

What a bird! Few can match Blackburnian for sheer brilliance and so the finding of one at the State Park on 20/5 was a signal for a thigh-rubbing celebration - we then went on to see four more at the CMBO the same day

Yellow Warbler *Setophaga petechia*

Seen on six days in low numbers; more yellow brilliance, the males neatly streaked rufous below

Blackpoll Warbler *Setophaga striata*

Several seen on five dates, including a good number of stunning males but also good numbers of females on some days

Black-throated Blue Warbler *Setophaga caerulescens*

Five birds – all females – seen over three dates, 16/5-18/5

Pine Warbler *Setophaga pinus*

Noted on five dates, with two bright males at the State Park on 15/5 our first; Belleplain was predictably the best spot

Myrtle Warbler *Setophaga coronata*

Small numbers seen on five dates, with good views of several along Lily Lake

Yellow-throated Warbler *Setophaga dominica*

We obtained really good views of several at Belleplain on our three visits, with a nest found on 17/5 and some really great views on 21/5 right down by the edge of the road

Prairie Warbler *Setophaga discolor*

Only seen on three dates, with the best a male at Higbees on 16/5

Black-throated Green Warbler *Setophaga virens*

Every one's a winner! This stunning bird was seen on four dates but only singletons

Canada Warbler *Cardellina canadensis*

We were lucky to see three of these little crackers at CMBO on 20/5, with two males and a female showing near the road. Mind you we had to work hard for them; after a brief view we did not find them again for an hour, but perseverance paid off. Our last and 23rd warbler species

Wilson's Warbler *Cardellina pusilla*

One at Higbees, 16/5, showed very nicely along the edge of the trees

Orchard Oriole *Icterus spurius*

Seen on six dates, with several burnt-orange and a few immature-looking males at various spots; females only seen at the Beanery, 18/5

Baltimore Oriole *Icterus galbula*

The first were at Higbees on 16/5 with up to six males and females; also noted on 16/5 and 19/5

Brown-headed Cowbird *Molothrus ater*

Low numbers on seven dates

Red-winged Blackbird *Agelaius phoeniceus*

Lots about the State Park, Meadows and Brigantine; recorded on every day

Common Grackle *Quiscalus quiscula*

Many seen daily of two forms: the 'normal' glossy blue birds, but also 'bronzed' birds at the State Park

Boat-tailed Grackle *Quiscalus major*

Noted at Heislerville, Jake's Landing and Reed's Beach, Nummy's and the Wetland Institute on four dates

Bobolink *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*

Two males and a female at Higbees on 16/5

Song Sparrow *Melospiza melodia*

Singing birds seen in bushes and gardens along the beaches on seven dates

Swamp Sparrow *Melospiza georgiana*

One very secretive bird at Brigantine, 18/5

Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis*

Small numbers on five dates, with our best views along the beach trail, 15/5

Seaside Sparrow *Ammodramus maritimus*

Up to ten at Reed's Beach and Jake's Landing

Chipping Sparrow *Spizella passerina*

Seen well and heard singing at several locations on six dates

Field Sparrow *Spizella pusilla*

Just two: one in song at Higbees, 16/5, and on the beach at the Meadows, 21/5

Scarlet Tanager *Piranga olivacea*

Very bright red males were seen at Belleplain and the CMBO, but just singles on three dates

Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus*

A male at the arboretum, 15/5, a female at Higbees, 16/5 and then two males along Lily Lake, 20/5

Northern Cardinal *Cardinalis cardinalis*

Noted daily, frequently heard singing but often elusive, despite the bright colour

Blue Grosbeak *Guiraca carulea*

The first was an immature male on the beach trail, 16/5, then three the next day at Higbees – and that was it!

Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea*

One of the sights and sounds of the week; electric blue males with deeper blue heads, were seen at several sites on five days

BUTTERFLIES

Eastern Tiger Swallowtail *Papilio glaucus*

Spicebush Swallowtail *Papilio troilus*

Red-spotted Purple *Limenitis arthemis astyanax*

American Lady *Vanessa virginiensis*

Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

Clouded Sulphur *Colias philodice*

Red-banded Hairstreak *Calyopsis secrops*

Common Buckeye *Junonia coenia*

Eastern Tailed Blue *Everes comyntas*

Horace's Duskywing *Erynnis horatius*

Pearl Crescent *Phyciodes tharos*

Zabulon Skipper *Poanes zabulon*

DRAGONFLIES & DAMSELFLIES

Rambur's Forktail *Ischnura ramburii*

Carolina Saddlebags *Tramea carolina*

White Corporal *Ladona exusta*

Blue Corporal *Ladona deplanata*

Lancet Clubtail *Gomphus exilis*

Twelve-spotted Skimmer *Libellula pulchella*

Banded Pennant *Celithemis fasciata*

MAMMALS AND OTHER 'CRITTERS' (* roadkill)

Eastern Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*

Eastern Cottontail *Sylvilagus floridanus*

Common Bottle-nosed Dolphin *Tursiops truncatus*

White-tailed Deer *Odocoileus virginianus*

Musk Rat *Ondatra zibethicus*

Eastern Chipmunk *Tamias striatus*

Virginia Opossum *Dideplhis virginiana* *

Northern Raccoon *Procyon lotor* *

Woodchuck *Marmota monax*

Red-bellied Terrapin [Turtle] *Pseudemys rubriventris*

Painted Terrapin *Chrysemys picta*

Horseshoe Crab *Limulus polyphemus*