

# USA: New Jersey

## Cape May in Spring

Mon 13<sup>th</sup> – Tue 21<sup>st</sup> May 2013



*Trip photos (clockwise, from top left): A swanky condominium for the **Purple Martins** at Cape May State Park • The spectacular male **Blackburnian Warbler** takes some beating! • A jewel-like offering to the female **Least Tern** on the beach • **Spicebush Swallowtails** were out in good numbers during our visit • Displaying **Red-winged Blackbirds** were one of the sights and the sounds of the week • A small group of lovely **Short-billed Dowitchers** at Brigantine – multiply this number by 1000 and you might have the total there on that day! © all photos from the tour by leader Brian Small/Limosa Holidays*

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

## Trip Diary

**Tour Leader: Brian Small**  
*with Rod & Jan Bull, and Dorothy Sowerby*

Sometimes things fail to live up to all the hype, but not so our inaugural spring tour to lovely Cape May this May. Having been to the Cape in the autumn on several occasions, the chance to go earlier in the year was particularly exciting – it is the nature of a migration watchpoint that you can go a number of times and each time it will be different. Like the UK, spring at Cape May was late this year and migration routes had been affected by the weather, which meant that despite all the special warbler species still being present (we saw 22 species in total) they were in a little lower numbers. The same, however, could not be said of the waders, which were passing through in spectacular numbers, with 10,000s of Semipalmated Sandpipers, Short-billed Dowitchers and Dunlin at various wetlands and at such close range.

As you would also expect at migration hotspots, there were also the inevitable surprises. Both Mississippi and Swallow-tailed Kites were seen at the Cape; Cedar Waxwings, Crossbills, Red-breasted Nuthatch and Purple Finch were all 'left-overs' from the record winter passage; Marbled Godwit and Red-necked Phalarope added to the shorebird variety and numbers – not that they needed it! If you add on the seabirds, such as Black Skimmer, Least and Forster's Terns, Great Northern Diver (Common Loon as they call it stateside), plus other birds such as Red-headed Woodpeckers, tanagers and tyrant-flycatchers, and then the butterflies and dragonflies, it builds up to a great trip.

However, one of the many nice aspects of this trip is the opportunity to get great views of many species, and we certainly did that. Another is the relaxed way you can revisit several sites, pick up new birds or simply have more views of those you have previously seen. Such is the wonder and appeal of birding Cape May!

### Mon 13<sup>th</sup> May

After our long flight to Philadelphia, it was pleasing to eventually clear customs and, with the vehicle collected, make our way down to Cape May – the verges were covered in American Robins and we saw our first Ospreys and Purple Martins. Though it wasn't quite dark by the time we arrived at the hotel, we were soon checked into our good and spacious rooms and off to Hemingways for our evening meal.

### Tue 14<sup>th</sup> May

Our first day's birding was to establish a familiar pattern of an early start collecting a picnic breakfast at Wawas, then off to one of a number of sites for our morning's birding. Today we chose Higbees and, having parked up and gulped down coffees and various hot snacks and doughnuts, we began to find our first birds... Carolina Chickadees and Wrens, a few warbler species showed well right away, with Prairie, Magnolia, Black-throated Green and Northern Parula all seen and heard; low down in the undergrowth were Indigo Buntings and Yellowthroats aplenty. Cardinals called but were generally elusive, but the same could not be said of a couple of stunning male American Redstarts, which sang their hearts out in their attempts to establish territories.

In the fields and paths, Field and White-throated Sparrows showed well; a couple of Hermit Thrushes moved quickly on, Grey Catbirds mooched and chased each other. Along the field edges, smart Eastern Kingbirds skimmed close to the vegetation; Great Crested Flycatchers flashed the rufous in their wings and tails; Tufted Titmice flitted. All the while things were moving overhead: Ospreys and Bald Eagles, Forster's Terns, Red-winged Blackbirds, Common Grackles and Brown-headed Cowbirds... Pause for breath. Just as we were about to leave, a Veery perched long enough to get 'scope views before it slunk off. It had been a great start, but we had to move on as the birds here began to go quiet.

Following a short drive, via the local deli to pick up lunch, we arrived at the State Park car park for a couple of walks. The first (pre-lunch) followed a quick watch from the Hawkwatch platform, marvelling at the large numbers of hirundines: the local breeding Purple Martins (the numbers of which picked up through the week) swooped around the nestboxes put out for them; Northern Rough-winged, Tree and Cliff Swallows were feeding in good numbers over Bunker Pond – but we could not find any Cave Swallows despite searching. Our quick walk produced 'Bronzed' Grackles (the browner form of Common), more White-eyed Vireos, even more Ospreys over the pools, and various groups of Turkey Vultures admixed with Red-tailed, Red-shouldered and Broad-winged Hawks.

After lunch, we sat again on the platform, though the reality was that with raptors overhead (we saw up to 15 Bald Eagles during the day at various places), swallows over the pond and waders around the pond shores, it was not much of a rest. We found the only Wilson's Snipe of the week, our first Short-billed Dowitchers and Least Sandpipers; a Cattle Egret flew over and two distant Green Herons were seen. We took an anti-clockwise walk around the State Park: the bushes along the pond edge held numerous Song Sparrows and Myrtle (Yellow-rumped) Warblers plus a few bright Yellow Warblers; the pools held new waders in the form of Semi-palmated and a lovely pale male Piping Plover, spotty Spotted Sandpipers and loud American Oystercatchers.

Walking away from the beach, through the reeds, we had many Yellowthroats – the males of which were really territorial and ever so smart; an amazing male Baltimore Oriole fed at the nest of 'tented' caterpillars, carefully pulling out the innards and leaving the irritating outer hairs as it fed. Having watched and photographed that and a couple of Glossy Ibis that flew over, we went into the wooded area we call the 'Arboretum' and found the most confiding Blue Grosbeak you could wish to see. Not content with showing at close range, at certain moments it would fly and pick food from around your feet – amazing!

Dorothy was feeling tired, so having quickly dropped her back at the hotel, the rest quickly visited the Beanery and the Meadows. The Beanery was quiet, though we saw a nice male Black-and-white Warbler – another new warbler for the day. The meadows were lovely in the late afternoon, and we saw a small flock of Semipalmated Sandpipers and the only American Coot of the trip. What a day...

### Wed 15<sup>th</sup> May

With an arrangement to pick up former Limosa employee Mike Crewe (now resident at the Cape), we again stopped at Wawas, collecting a coffee and snack for Mike also, and were quickly on our way north up to Belleplain State Park, where we hoped for various speciality birds. Mike's knowledge of the local bird song really helped and before long we were out of the vehicle at a 'special' bridge listening to all sorts. Ovenbirds, Eastern Towhees, Wood Thrush, Yellow-throated Warbler were all heard as we settled at the bridge to hopefully see some of them.

The first bird was a fly-over calling Great Northern Diver, quickly followed by a pair of Prothonotary Warblers just over the road, then an Eastern Phoebe perched low by the bridge – its nest was under it – while an Acadian Flycatcher called from up the small creek. A flighty Louisiana Waterthrush gave brief perched views as it moved about its territory and a vocal male Hooded Warbler did likewise – you had to be quick. A short distance away and we were soon watching Ovenbirds, Eastern Towhee, and Yellow-throated and Worm-eating Warblers thanks to Mike's ears; another male Hooded Warbler did its best to hide, but a White-breasted Nuthatch showed well as it crept up a nearby trunk. The nest of a Ruby-throated Hummingbird was picked out on a thin branch right above our heads, a dainty collection of lichen in which she occasionally would come and sit. An Acadian Flycatcher called incessantly and we were soon able to see it, though it was a little elusive. However, the sight of a flame-coloured male Blackburnian Warbler was for some the highlight of the morning.

Non-avian highlights came in the form of Ebony Jewelwing damselfly, Horace's and Juvenal's Duskywings, and Eastern Tiger and Spicebush Swallowtails. But we were soon into birding mode as three Scarlet Tanagers appeared in trees by the road. A short walk away, seeing a pair of Wood Thrush on the track, was nice, but having initially heard the song of a Blue-winged Warbler its producer was found perched in a Juniper and 'scoped up - it performed brilliantly, a real star. As we returned to the vehicle another Wood Thrush was seen and photographed collecting nesting material from a trackside pool. A fine lunch was had in Woodbine then we headed off west to Heislerville and a shorebird bonanza. As we arrived a light rain fell, but this was virtually ignored as the roadside pool was absolutely teeming with waders, so much so it was hard to know where to start. Perhaps with the Black-crowned Night Herons in the trees behind us, but right in front of us (some virtually at our feet) were 1000s of Semipalmated Sandpipers, many of which were singing – a delightful trilling. Dunlin too numbered in their 1000s, looking so much smarter than most of those that pass through the UK in spring, as did Short-billed Dowitchers. Amongst them were Least Sandpipers, (Ruddy) Turnstones, Grey (Black-bellied) and Semipalmated Plovers. An awesome sight!

Continuing around the pool, we found a Killdeer on its territory, before parking up and walking out to the shore where Mike showed us some of the Horseshoe Crabs that had gathered to spawn in Delaware Bay – their numbers being hit hard by harvesting for catfood (of all things!!) and consequently affecting shorebird numbers – we watched as nets were placed out as part of the efforts to monitor their numbers. In amongst the tidal creeks we found a couple of gorgeous (!?) Clapper Rails. Yet more waders were found on the back pool, again in vast numbers, but we moved on, this time to stop at Jake's Landing. Here we found several Marsh Wrens, Seaside Sparrows (plus a very brief Saltmarsh Sparrow) and a fine Northern Harrier.

Our last stop off the day was at Cook's Beach, where we watched c. 200 Red Knot and Sanderling along the shore, with huge numbers of noisy Laughing Gulls and a few Boat-tailed Grackles. We dropped Mike off at his home and reluctantly returned to the hotel, our heads still spinning with the birds seen during the day.

### **Thu 16<sup>th</sup> May**

The day had dawned warm and very sultry, and it got even hotter throughout. Our early start at Higbees was seemingly quiet, but with layers peeled off we persevered and were rewarded. Good views were had of three Yellow-breasted Chats and a Bobolink, two Blackpoll Warblers were new, but were outnumbered by Yellow and Magnolia Warbler (each of which we saw c. 10 during the day), more Yellowthroats, Yellow-rumped and Black-throated Green Warblers. Two flight-only Red-headed Woodpeckers then taunted us with their calls deep in the woods; c. 30 Cedar Waxwings and a lone Red Crossbill flew over as we watched a Blue-grey Gnatcatcher on its nest, and were followed by a roadside Turkey. All the while, numerous bright-blue male Indigo Buntings sang their hearts out. Out in Delaware Bay, Bottle-nosed Dolphins surfaced and three Brown Pelicans moved north.

At the State Park again, and following lunch, we made another circuit of the reedbeds and pools, following the boardwalk clockwise this time. Another Warbling Vireo was found, to add to that we had seen in the morning, plus more Northern Parulas and another fantastic male Blackburnian Warbler, which we showed to a local lady who swore it was a male Baltimore Oriole!! Things were very quiet in the heat of the day, but were quickly livened up by the sight of a displaying male Red-headed Woodpecker, which declared itself and its territory from various trees, one directly above our heads – an awesome sight and another highlight. Along the shore we found a couple of Savannah Sparrows.

Resting at the platform, relaxing as we watched the Purple Martins and more raptors was rather nice, if warm. As the day cooled, we made the short drive north to Nummy's Island, catching the tide perfectly as the muddy island in the channel was just beginning to form and was covered by yet more waders, including c. 2,000 Knot and c. 1,000 Dunlin, amongst many others. A single Tri-coloured Heron was found with a Hudsonian Whimbrel, 20 Pale-bellied Brent Geese, while numerous Eastern Willets displayed. The final port of call was north of Nummy's, at Avalon, where we found both Yellow-crowned and Black-crowned Night Herons in the trees and yet more warblers, including Magnolia and Yellow-rumped. A Yellow-billed Cuckoo perched briefly before moving on, but it had been a warm day and time to call it to a close.

### **Fri 17<sup>th</sup> May**

Another fine, sunny and very warm day meant the migration really had settled down to a bit of a trickle. Starting again at Higbees, it was obvious that not much was happening. Another Yellow-billed Cuckoo, fly-over Purple Finch, Cedar Waxwings and Red Crossbills plus the usual warblers – Prairie, Magnolia, Yellow. But these were to be eclipsed by an Olive-sided Flycatcher, which fed high in a bare tree – there are few spring records of this species at Cape May.

Leaving earlier than usual, as we passed the field opposite the Hidden Valley car park, an Eastern Kingbird caught our eyes, but they were soon diverted by a sparrow-like bird, which perched briefly then dropped out of view. Parking the car, we found the bird – a male Dickcissel – which we watched before it flew off in company with a male Orchard Oriole that had joined it. Walking into the fields of Hidden Valley, we found more Eastern Kingbirds, Blue Grosbeaks and Orchard Orioles, but no more sign of the Dickcissel. Just as we started back to the car, a Belted Kingfisher flew over and was good to see as it was the first (and only) one we saw on the trip.

Dropping in at the Beanery was nice, not just because we met up with Mike again, but also because we were able to see more good warblers: male Blackpolls sang, as did Yellow and Northern Parulas, but the best was a singing Yellow-throated Vireo. As we were about to leave, Mike called that he had just been texted about a Swallow-tailed Kite seen over nearby fields, so we walked briskly back to the vehicle scanning the sky, but to no avail. Driving round to Stevens Street, we found a few parked cars but birders looking in various directions; however, a quick scan of the tree tops produced the 'biggy', and having got every one on it, we watched as it soared up high with a small group of Turkey Vultures, right overhead but gaining height all the time. As the Swallow-tail drifted off north there were plenty of happy faces all round – a great way to end the morning.

A celebratory coffee and cake was taken at Bellavida, then we had a relaxing lunch at the Hawkwatch, where we could sit down and use the facilities, watching the Purple Martins that had increased in numbers. A brief walk produced nothing new as we strolled round the ponds - until suddenly, whilst (again) checking the sky for raptors, two smaller birds flying towards us were instantly recognised as Mississippi Kites – an adult and a

second-year. Though a little distant, through the 'scope we were all able to note the silvery white panel on the upperwing of the adult as they hawked over the woods for c. 10 minutes before they too drifted off north. Two great kites in a day!

A post-lunch drive up to the old golf course at Villas (Cox Hall Creek WMA), then a walk around was a little hard work. We saw numerous Chipping Sparrows and Yellowthroats, but the only sign of the hoped-for Eastern Bluebirds were one or two calling just out of sight. As expected, numerous Ospreys flew over, but less usual was a fine Northern Harrier. Back at the vehicle, a Great Crested Flycatcher caught our eye, but accompanying it was a small *Empidonax* flycatcher, which we watched carefully and its prominent eye-ring and very short primary projection identified it as a Least Flycatcher. Calling in at the airport, we watched several Shore (Horned) Larks on the grass and perched on the signs on the airfield.

Ending the day at the Meadows, we took a relaxing stroll out to the beach, where many pairs of Least Terns were flying about, the males with jewel-like fishy offerings to entice the females. American Oystercatchers piped about, but a quick scan of the sea produced a distant blob; switching to the telescope it was discernible as a Western Grebe – the bird that had spent the winter at Cape May. As it was well to the north of us and just off the town, we drove back to the hotel and upon checking the beach, there it was, drifting south past the breakwater. Walking on to the stones, produced great views and photo opportunities.

### Sat 18<sup>th</sup> May

Time to ring the changes and as the forecast was for a fairly cloudy and cooler day, it was a good opportunity to head up to Brigantine, where the cloudier conditions would suppress the heat haze and the 'no-see-ums'. We made an early start, picking up both breakfast and a picnic lunch at Wawas, before driving the 40 miles or so north to the reserve.

Brigantine is a very large area of coastal tidal marsh and enclosed 'tanks', where you can drive round on the embankments to watch the birds. Straight off we could tell that it was going to be an amazing day for waders as both the mud (on a falling tide) and the pans were covered in birds: vast numbers of Semipalmated Sandpipers and Short-billed Dowitchers, but many Dunlin, Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs, c. 50 Hudsonian Whimbrel, Semipalmated and Grey Plovers, Least Sandpipers, Eastern Willets, American Oystercatchers and an obliging single Marbled Godwit. Bald Eagles flew over and two were even seen settled on the mud; every post had an Osprey nest – how many pairs?... 30? On the platform in the marsh, we found a pair of Peregrines, and the odd Northern Harrier floated across.

Then there were the wildfowl and terns. A large flock of Black Duck held a few Mallard and Shoveler, while a small flock of Brants flew by; Forster's Terns were ever-present and we found a Caspian and three Gull-billed later in the day. Careful checking of the bushes by the track got us more Savannah Sparrows, including one very pale grey bird, with pinkish streaking below that looked like an 'Ipswich Sparrow', but also Seaside and good views of Saltmarsh – though the Seaside Sparrows chased them about a lot. Eventually, we managed to pick out four White-rumped and a single Pectoral Sandpiper from the teeming hordes of waders on the pans.

Returning by the back road, we stopped to check for ducks on the ponds, eventually finding a pair of Wood Duck, a male Baltimore Oriole and a splendid male Yellow Warbler. In the trees at the picnic site we found plenty of Tufted Titmice, lots of robins as usual and the Purple Martin nest boxes seemed full.

Well, this was the moment: Rod had kept on about this for the whole week and we could not put it off any longer. Upon our return to Cape May, we drove down to Sunset Beach just so he could see....THE LOOKOUT TOWER!! With his photo taken next to it, we walked down to the café and had a coffee, watching a good flock of Black Scoter round the wrecked boat, but also lots of Bottle-nosed Dolphins surfacing just offshore. Back at the State Park, we had a quick walk round, adding very little to our ever-expanding list until a young Glaucous Gull flew over to land on the beach off the Meadows.

### Sun 19<sup>th</sup> May

Our last full day's birding sadly dawned cloudy and cool, with drizzly rain in the air. Our visit to Higbees in the early morning was quiet and becoming increasingly wet, so we cut it short and headed north towards Heislerville in the hope that the rain might clear as we drove along. It is great when a plan comes together, and so as we arrived at the car park and the rain had stopped, we were able to watch the waders on the first large pan in the dry. Though a little fewer in number the waders were more varied and we picked out a male Wilson's Phalarope

and a White-rumped Sandpiper, plus with careful searching two Western Sandpipers amongst the many, many Semipalmated. In the breeding colony of cormorants and herons, we counted over 200 Black-crowned Night Herons. As the tide fell, the mudflats became exposed, only to be covered again in birds!

The back pool was very busy and before long we had found a beautiful female Red-necked Phalarope, one of the birds of the trip for some. This bird produced a mini twitch. More sifting through the shorebirds also produced many Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, but most pleasing was an adult Stilt Sandpiper, whilst good numbers of Glossy Ibis passed over.

The drizzle began again and so we left, heading inland a way, towards Belleplain, in the hope it might brighten up. Sadly it didn't, but we were able to see Eastern Phoebe and much better views of Yellow-throated Warbler before heading back to the Bellavida for a late lunch. By now the rain had stopped and we spent our final afternoon almost where we came in, walking anti-clockwise around the State Park. By now there were few, if any gaps on our list and we just enjoying 'seconds' or 'thirds' of many birds: Spotted and Least Sandpipers in the beach pools; Purple Martins in the nestboxes. However, in the small copse, a new bird in the shape of a lovely Blue-headed Vireo was found; and having watched and photographed this for a while we moved on to the arboretum, where we found a Red-breasted Nuthatch, another new species for the week and destined to be our last.

To give time to pack, we returned to the hotel early. It had been a cool and quite tiring day, but well worth the effort.

### **Mon 20<sup>th</sup> May**

Our last morning, warm and sunny as it turned out, and so we made the traditional start at Wawas then Higbees, where great views of Blue Grosbeak and Yellow-breasted Chat were had, plus a calling Eastern Wood Pewee and two fly-over Great Northern Divers – their beaks seemingly always open (?). A walk around the streets near the Bird Observatory was very pleasant, if relatively quiet bird-wise, though brightened up by Red-eyed Vireo, Cedar Waxwings and Scarlet Tanager.

Back at the hotel, we had a quick wash and change into travel clothes, then it was off to Philadelphia and our overnight flight home, with arrival back in London next day. As ever at Cape May, it had been a great trip and sad that just as you begin to get to grips with the warblers and their ID, inevitably you have to leave. We had seen many great birds and each will have their own highlight, but it is great to just go somewhere that birding can be enjoyed so much and is enthused about by many. I for one can't wait to go back... again!

*Brian Small*

## **ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED**

*(total of 182 species recorded by the group)*

### **Wild Turkey *Meleagris gallopavo***

Noted on three dates: at Belleplain on 15<sup>th</sup>, one at hidden Valley the next day and then three at Belleplain on 19<sup>th</sup>

### **Canada Goose *Branta canadensis***

Seen daily

### **[Pale-bellied] Brent Goose (Brant) *Branta bernicla bernicla***

Small flocks of wintering birds, totalling c. 60 birds were noted at Nummy's Island, Brigantine and Cape May

### **Mute Swan *Cygnus olor***

Regular on Bunker Pond and other lakes; seen daily

### **Wood Duck *Aix sponsa***

A pair around a nestbox at Brigantine appeared to be calling young out of the nest

### **Gadwall *Anas strepera***

Common on Bunker Pond and the Meadows

### **American Wigeon *Anas americana***

Recorded on four dates on Bunker Pond and Brigantine

### **Black Duck *Anas rubripes***

Large numbers at Brigantine (c. 500), but also at Heislerville and Bunker Pond

### **Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos***

Noted on seven dates

**Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors***

Just one pair at the Meadows on the evening of 17<sup>th</sup>

**Shoveler *Anas clypeata***

Three at Brigantine

**Black Scoter *Melanitta americana***

Three past Cape May on 14<sup>th</sup>, but then 32 at Sunset Beach on 18<sup>th</sup>

**Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis***

One on Bunker Pond throughout and up to six at Heislerville

**Great Northern Diver (Common Loon) *Gavia immer***

Ten offshore on 14<sup>th</sup>, but then singletons flying over, sometimes calling at various sites, such as Higbees or Belleplain

**Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata***

Singles on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>

**Western Grebe *Aechmophorus occidentalis***

The overwintering bird was seen on 17<sup>th</sup>

**Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps***

Just one on the Meadows on 17<sup>th</sup>

**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 Brigantine, where over 50 were seen

**Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax***

Large numbers in the rookery at Heislerville, with over 200 birds counted, but also at Brigantine and Avalon

**Yellow-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax violacea***

Just one at Avalon on 16<sup>th</sup>

**Green Heron *Butorides virescens***

Three sightings at the State Park and one at Heislerville as it flew across the road

**Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis***

One flew in from the west and then continued north over Bunker Pond on 14<sup>th</sup>

**Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias***

A huge heron seen on four dates in low numbers

**Great White Egret *Ardea alba***

Noted daily, but frequently on Bunker Pond and most numerous at Brigantine

**Tri-coloured Heron *Egretta tricolor***

Just a single adult at Nummy's Island on 16<sup>th</sup> and two at Brigantine the next day

**Snowy Egret *Egretta thula***

Seen frequently on freshwater pools

**Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis***

Three north past Higbee beach

**Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus***

Seen daily sometimes in huge numbers roosting or flying past

**Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura***

Seen daily with many over the Hawkwatch on the first two days

**Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus***

Likewise, but in lower numbers

**Peregrine *Falco peregrinus***

Just a pair at Brigantine

**Osprey *Pandion haliaetus***

Nests in amazing densities in Delaware Bay and the marshes up the coast

**Swallow-tailed Kite *Elanoides forficatus***

One with TVs over the Beanery on 17<sup>th</sup>, was a star bird of the week

**Mississippi Kite *Ictinia mississippiensis***

Two from the State Park on 17<sup>th</sup>, an adult and immature

**Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus***

Noted on four dates, with the highest number on the first full day of up to 15

**Northern (Hen) Harrier *Circus (cyaneus) hudsonius***

Seen at Jake's landing, Villas and Brigantine – all birds appeared to be 2<sup>nd</sup> years

**Sharp-shinned Hawk *Accipiter striatus***

Very few, with a grand total of three: singles at Higbees on two dates and the Meadows on one

**Cooper's Hawk *Accipiter cooperii***

More common than Sharpies, but still few noted at the same sites; max. of five on 17<sup>th</sup>

**Broad-winged Hawk *Buteo platypterus***

Noted on three dates, the five two overhead at the Hawkwatch on 14<sup>th</sup>

**Red-shouldered Hawk *Buteo lineatus***

Good views of two or three at the Hawkwatch on various dates

**Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis***

Compared with the previous two species this is a much larger bird and we saw several daily

**Clapper Rail *Rallus longirostris***

Six on 15<sup>th</sup> at Heislerville and Jake's Landing; others at Brigantine

**American Coot *Fulica americana***

One at the Meadows on 14<sup>th</sup>

**American Oystercatcher *Haematopus palliatus***

Good numbers seen at the Beach at the State Park, Nummy's Island, Cook's Beach, Heislerville and Brigantine – the voice and plumage (especially leg colour) is very different to 'ours'

**Grey [Black-bellied] Plover *Pluvialis squatarola***

Very smart in breeding plumage, large numbers seen at Heislerville and Brigantine, but other flocks were seen flying over calling at various places

**Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus***

Seen on seven dates in small numbers at the State Park, but in good numbers at Nummy's Island, Brigantine and Heislerville

**Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus***

Breeding at the car park at the State Park and Heislerville

**Piping Plover *Charadrius melodus***

Very pale males seen in the breeding areas at the State Park beaches

**Wilson's Snipe *Gallinago delicata***

One at Bunker Pond on 14<sup>th</sup>

**Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus***

1000s at Heislerville and Brigantine; many others seen at Nummy's Island, Bunker Pond and even flying over

**[Hudsonian] Whimbrel *Numenius [phaeopus] hudsonicus***

One at Nummy's Island and 51 at Brigantine on 18<sup>th</sup>; rather different to 'ours'; sometimes treated as a separate species, but genetics and song suggest not yet

**Marbled Godwit *Limosa fedoa***

One at Brigantine

**Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca***

Seen on four dates, at Heislerville, the Meadows, but 150+ at Brigantine

**Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes***

Lower numbers than Greater, but at the same sites

**Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria***

One at Bunker Pond on 14<sup>th</sup>

**Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularia***

Lovely spotty breeding birds seen along the shore pools at the State Park on four dates

**[Eastern] Willet *Catoptrophorus [semipalmata] semipalmata***

Noisy displaying birds seen at Nummy's Island, Heislerville and Brigantine – likely to split from Western at some stage in the future

**[Ruddy] Turnstone *Arenaria interpres morinella***

Smart adults seen at Heislerville (100s), Cook's Beach, Nummy's and Brigantine

**[Red] Knot *Calidris canutus rufa***

Several 100 at Cook's Beach, but over 2,000 at Nummy's on 16<sup>th</sup> – also, small parties moved along the beach

**Sanderling *Calidris alba***

25+ at Cook's Beach and one on Cape May beach

**Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla***

Spectacular numbers seen at Heislerville and Brigantine, numbered in tens of thousands, their soft trilling 'song' one of the memories of the week; often very tame and other great views at the State Park

**Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri***

Very painstaking searching of the 1000s of Semi-ps produced two at Heislerville on 19<sup>th</sup>

**Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla***

Common at all wetland sites, with 100s at Heislerville and Brigantine

**White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis***

Five at Brigantine and one at Heislerville on 19<sup>th</sup>

**Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos***

One at Brigantine on 18<sup>th</sup>

**Dunlin *Calidris alpina hudsonia***

Excellent numbers in breeding plumage of the long-billed North American race, with 1000s at Heislerville, Brigantine and Nummy's Island. Genetic studies have shown that the form *hudsonia* is more isolated than other Dunlin forms

**Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus***

One adult at the back pool at Heislerville on 19<sup>th</sup>

**Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor***

One male at Heislerville on 19<sup>th</sup>, sadly stayed out in the water rather than come close

**Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus***

A beautiful female on the back pool at Heislerville on 19<sup>th</sup>

**Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis***

Four dates at the beach or Heislerville

**Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus***

Seen daily

**Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus***

A first-winter (second year) flew over the State Park and landed on the beach off the Meadows on 18<sup>th</sup>

**American Herring Gull *Larus smithsonianus***

Common and seen daily

**Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus***

Now a regular feature on the beach at Cape May though only one was seen – we didn't really look for them...

**Laughing Gull *Leucophaeus atricilla***

Seen daily; noisy breeding adults everywhere, but largest numbers at Cook's Beach feeding on crabs' eggs

**Bonaparte's Gull *Chroicocephalus philadelphia***

A single second year at Heislerville on 15<sup>th</sup>

**Least Tern *Sternula antillarum***

Wonderfully common and tame; numbers seemed to increase as did breeding activity with lots of males tempting females with tiny fish – yet another highlight of the week

**Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica***

Three at Brigantine

**Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia***

One flew over Brigantine on 18<sup>th</sup>

**Royal Tern *Sterna maxima***

Seen on just three dates, with two on the beach at Cape May

**Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri***

Very common and seen daily

**Black Skimmer *Rynchops niger***

Four dates, with a flock of up to 30 at Heislerville, six north offshore on 16<sup>th</sup> and at Brigantine

**Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia***

Seen daily

**Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura***

Seen daily in good numbers

**Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus***

Four birds: one at the Beanery on 15<sup>th</sup>; two on 16<sup>th</sup> – Higbees and Avalon; one at Higbees on 17<sup>th</sup>

**Chimney Swift *Chaetura pelagica***

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

**Ruby-throated Hummingbird *Archilochus colubris***

Twelve in total, though at least half were just 'zaps'; seen on the nest at Belleplain, but others 'scoped up, too

**Belted Kingfisher *Ceryle alcyon***

Just the one over Hidden Valley on 17<sup>th</sup>

**Red-headed Woodpecker *Melanerpes erythrocephalus***

One of the highlights on the trip was the male at the arboretum on 16<sup>th</sup>, though we had seen two earlier in the day at Higbees – a very smart bird indeed when seen well

**Red-bellied Woodpecker *Melanerpes carolinus***

Noted on just four dates in small numbers, but another smart woodpecker

**Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius***

One seen really briefly at the 'arboretum' on 16<sup>th</sup>

**Downy Woodpecker *Picoides pubescens***

Several views of single birds on four dates – one at the arboretum the best

**Hairy Woodpecker *Picoides villosus***

Three dates and c. six birds at Belleplain, Higbees and the Beanery

**Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus***

Just two at Higbees in the morning of 16<sup>th</sup>

**Eastern Phoebe *Sayornis phoebe***

A pair at Belleplain on our two visits

**Olive-sided Flycatcher *Contopus cooperi***

Another surprise during the week was this single bird at Higbees early on 17<sup>th</sup> – by mid morning it had gone

**Eastern Wood Pewee *Contopus virens***

Seen and heard on four dates, most frequently at Higbees

**Acadian Flycatcher *Empidonax virens***

At least three birds heard calling on 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, but only one seen

**Least Flycatcher *Empidonax minimus***

Just the one at Villas on 17<sup>th</sup>

**Eastern Kingbird *Tyrannus tyrannus***

Good numbers (up to 10) seen daily, mostly in the cultivated fields at Higbees

**Great Crested Flycatcher *Myiarchus crinitus***

A really smart flycatcher seen on six dates, with the best views at Higbees on 14<sup>th</sup>, when we saw 10+ at various places

**White-eyed Vireo *Vireo griseus***

One of the sounds of the week, the distinctive song was heard at several sites, but seen well at the Beanery, the State Park and Higbees

**Yellow-throated Vireo *Vireo flavifrons***

Just the one, a singing bird at the Beanery on 17<sup>th</sup>

**Blue-headed Vireo *Vireo solitarius***

A fine bird was found in the small copse at The State Park on 19<sup>th</sup> and allowed for great observation and photographs

**Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus***

Noted on four dates, at Belleplain, Higbees and the State Park, but only in ones or twos

**Warbling Vireo *Vireo gilvus***

Relatively non-descript, but with a fine song, we saw three birds on two dates, two at Higbees (16<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>) and one at the State Park (16<sup>th</sup>)

**Blue Jay *Cyanocitta cristata***

Seen on seven dates, but in small numbers

**American Crow *Corvus brachyrhynchos***

Seen daily in low numbers

**Fish Crow *Corvus ossifragus***

Seen daily along the coast; a bit of a nasty bird as we watched one group catch and then kill a tired Purple Martin at the State Park on 15<sup>th</sup>

**Cedar Waxwing *Bombycilla cedrorum***

Small parties of up to 30 seen at Higbees on two dates, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>; two were at Cape May on 20<sup>th</sup>

**Carolina Chickadee *Poecile carolinensis***

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

**Tufted Titmouse *Baeolophus bicolor***

Noted on three dates in low numbers, with the largest group of eight at Brigantine on 18<sup>th</sup>

**Sand Martin (Bank Swallow) *Riparia riparia***

Oddly very few seen, with a grand total of five from 14<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> – the last two seen near Philadelphia airport

**Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota***

100s were at the State Park on 14<sup>th</sup>, but had gone the next day – and that was that!

**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 nestboxes put out for them were in great demand

**Northern Rough-winged Swallow *Stelgidopteryx serripennis***

Again seen daily and in fair numbers

**Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica***

Noted daily in good numbers

**Shore (Horned) Lark *Eremophila alpestris***

Four seen at Cape May airfield on 17<sup>th</sup>

**Marsh Wren *Cistothorus palustris***

Three or four loudly singing birds were seen at Jake's Landing on 15<sup>th</sup>

**Carolina Wren *Thryothorus ludovicianus***

Noted regularly through the week

**Northern House Wren *Troglodytes aedon***

Seen and heard on six days, with one visiting a nest at the arboretum on 19<sup>th</sup>

**Blue-grey Gnatcatcher *Poliophtila caerulea***

These tiny little waifs are always a delight to see, and we had really good views, especially at Higbees, where we found a nest on 16<sup>th</sup>

**Red-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta canadensis***

Just one at the arboretum on 19<sup>th</sup>

**White-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta carolinensis***

The two at Belleplain on 15<sup>th</sup> were rather nice

**Grey Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis***

Recorded daily in fair numbers, especially on 16<sup>th</sup>

**Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos***

As above, this was seen and heard commonly

**Starling *Sturnus vulgaris***

Everywhere

**Eastern Bluebird *Sialia sialis***

Just one male at the same site along R47 on 15<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>

**Hermit Thrush *Catharus guttatus***

Two at Higbees on 14<sup>th</sup>; sadly the only ones we saw

**Veery *Catharus fuscescens***

Super shy, so it was nice to get 'scope views of one at Higbees on 14<sup>th</sup> and another there on 15<sup>th</sup>

**Wood Thrush *Hylocichla mustelina***

Yet another highlight of the week, a pair was seen at Belleplain collecting nesting material – though we heard them deep in the woods also

**American Robin *Turdus migratorius***

Abundant. Every lawn or patch of grass seemed to have four or five robins on them

**House Sparrow *Passer domesticus***

Recorded daily

**American Goldfinch *Carduelis tristis***

Seen on three dates in small groups; the bright sulphurous males are rather odd-looking

**Purple Finch *Carpodacus purpureus***

Three at Higbees on 14<sup>th</sup>

**House Finch *Carpodacus mexicanus***

Seen daily with best views being of at the hotel

**Red Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra***

One and four flew over Higbees calling, on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> respectively

**Northern Parula *Setophaga americana***

Seen on five dates, with the ten on our first day at Higbees and the State Park being the daily max.

**Blue-winged Warbler *Setophaga pinus***

At Belleplain on 15<sup>th</sup>, Mike took us to a small abandoned cranberry clearing where a super male sat in the open singing

**Yellow Warbler *Setophaga petechia***

Seen on seven dates, but in much lower numbers than in the Autumn; however this was more than compensated for by the brilliance of the yellow of the males, broken by neat rufous streaking below – ouch!

**Blackpoll Warbler *Setophaga striata***

Recorded on four dates, the first being two females at Higbees on 16<sup>th</sup>; singing, handsome males were seen at the Beanery and the State Park also

**Yellow-throated Warbler *Setophaga dominica***

Two singing birds seen and heard at Belleplain on 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> – seen well on the last date

**Blackburnian Warbler *Setophaga fusca***

Of all the American wood warblers, few can match Blackburnian for sheer brilliance - it seems to have all the attributes put into one species. The first at Belleplain on 15<sup>th</sup> followed by three the next day at the State Park

**Magnolia Warbler *Setophaga magnolia***

Another super smart bird, the males were especially evident and we saw up to ten on some days

**Black-throated Blue Warbler *Setophaga caerulescens***

Just one female at Higbees on 14<sup>th</sup>

**Myrtle (Yellow-rumped) Warbler *Setophaga (coronata) coronata***

Depending on which taxonomy you follow, this attractive migrant warbler is variously treated as a full

species, Myrtle Warbler (International Ornithological Congress), or as the eastern race of Yellow-rumped Warbler (American Ornithologists' Union). Whatever your preference, we had great views of a few on four dates – max up to ten on 14<sup>th</sup>

**Black-throated Green Warbler *Setophaga virens***

Almost the first warbler we saw – a male at Higbees on 14<sup>th</sup> – then just four more at Belleplain, Higbees and Avalon

**Prairie Warbler *Setophaga discolor***

Several singing birds were seen at Higbees on every visit

**Pine Warbler *Setophaga pinus***

Three or four at Belleplain on 15<sup>th</sup>

**American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla***

Males in all their black-and-orange loveliness were seen at Higbees (three dates) and the Beanery; females noted at both locations and at Avalon on 16<sup>th</sup>

**Hooded Warbler *Setophaga citrina***

Heard and eventually seen at Belleplain on 15<sup>th</sup> (up to three) and on 19<sup>th</sup>

**Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia***

Rather thin on the ground and seen on just four days, the first male at the Beanery on 14<sup>th</sup> was our tenth warbler species for the day

**Prothonotary Warbler *Protonotaria citrea***

A pair was seen by the road at Belleplain on 15<sup>th</sup>; one was at Higbees on the next day

**Worm-eating Warbler *Helmitheros vermivorum***

Two at Belleplain on 15<sup>th</sup>

**Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapilla***

Heard often at Belleplain on 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, but seen on only a couple of occasions

**Northern Waterthrush *Parkesia noveboracensis***

One, our last warbler species (of a total of 22!) for the week was found at the State Park boardwalk on 17<sup>th</sup>

**Louisiana Waterthrush *Parkesia motacilla***

One or two on breeding territory at Belleplain on 15<sup>th</sup>

**Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas***

Recorded frequently along the low bushes bordering fields or really territorial males in the reeds at the State park – the smart males look a little sad for themselves, but they made us happy to see them so well

**Yellow-breasted Chat *Icteria virens***

A total of four seen at Higbees – three on 16<sup>th</sup> and one on 19<sup>th</sup>

**Orchard Oriole *Icterus spurius***

Seen on four dates, with first burnt-orange male at Mike's garden on 15<sup>th</sup>, after which we heard and saw them well at various places, with quite a few immature-looking males

**Baltimore Oriole *Icterus galbula***

The first was a brilliant male at the State Park on 14<sup>th</sup>, feeding on 'tented' caterpillars; also seen at Higbees and Brigantine

**Brown-headed Cowbird *Molothrus ater***

Worryingly, very common

**Red-winged Blackbird *Agelaius phoeniceus***

Very, very common

**Common Grackle *Quiscalus quiscula***

Many seen of two forms: the 'normal' glossy blue birds, but also browner 'Bronzed' birds at the State Park early in the week

**Boat-tailed Grackle *Quiscalus major***

Noted at Heislerville, Jake's Landing and Cook's Beach on 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, Nummy's on 16<sup>th</sup>, and Brigantine on 18<sup>th</sup>

**Bobolink *Dolichonyx oryzivorus***

Just one, a female, at Higbees on 16<sup>th</sup>

**White-throated Sparrow *Zonotrichia albicollis***

Noted on three dates, with ten on 14<sup>th</sup> being the max.

**Song Sparrow *Melospiza melodia***

Singing birds seen in bushes and gardens along the beaches and commonly at Brigantine

**Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis***

Just two dates: smart birds at the arboretum on 16<sup>th</sup> and at Brigantine on 18<sup>th</sup>; one bird at the latter stood out distinctly in being very pale grey above and with pale tawny streaks below – perhaps an 'Ipswich Sparrow'

**Seaside Sparrow *Ammodramus maritimus***

Seen at Jake's landing on 15<sup>th</sup> and Brigantine on 18<sup>th</sup>; quite long billed

**Saltmarsh Sparrow *Ammodramus caudacutus***

The first at Jake's landing on 15<sup>th</sup> disappeared quickly before we all saw it, but we made up for this with several at Brigantine on 18<sup>th</sup> – remember their mustard yellow faces

**Chipping Sparrow *Spizella passerina***

Seen well and heard singing at several locations

**Field Sparrow *Spizella pusilla***

Quite a few seen at Higbees and Hidden Valley on various dates

**Eastern Towhee *Pipilo erythrophthalmus***

Seen and heard at Belleplain on 15<sup>th</sup>

**Scarlet Tanager *Piranga olivacea***

Very bright red males and a number of females were seen at Belleplain, the State Park and Higbees, with over ten seen at the latter two sites on 16<sup>th</sup>

**Summer Tanager *Piranga rubra***

A male seen at Belleplain on 15<sup>th</sup> and another at the beanery on 17<sup>th</sup>

**Blue Grosbeak *Guiraca carulea***

There were plenty around and we had cracking views of many, though the best was at the arboretum on 14<sup>th</sup>, which showed down to minimum focus on the binoculars

**Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus***

Three males and a female at Higbees on 17<sup>th</sup>

**Dickcissel *Spiza americana***

One male at Hidden valley on 17<sup>th</sup>

**Northern Cardinal *Cardinalis cardinalis***

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

**Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea***

One of the sights and sounds of the week; electric blue males were seen at several sites, but commonly and best at Higbees on all our visits

**BUTTERFLIES**

**Eastern Tiger Swallowtail *Papilio glaucus***

**Black Swallowtail *Papilio polyxenes***

**Spicebush Swallowtail *Papilio troilus***

**Checkered White *Pontia protodice***

**Cabbage White *Pieris rapae***

**Small White *Artogeia rapae***

**American Lady *Vanessa virginiensis***

**Clouded Sulphur *Colias philodice***

**Orange Sulphur *Colias eurytheme***

**Cloudless Sulphur *Phoebis senna***

**Juniper Hairstreak *Callophrys grineus***

**Red-banded Hairstreak *Calyopsis secrops***

**Common Buckeye *Junonia coenia***

**Spring [Holly] Azure *Celastrina ladon***

**Eastern Tailed Blue *Everes comyntas***

**Common Sootywing *Pholisora catullus***

**Juvenal's Duskywing *Erynnis juvenalis***

**Horace's Duskywing *Erynnis horatius***

**Pearl Crescent *Phyciodes tharos***

**DRAGONFLIES & DAMSELFLIES**

**Rambur's Forktail *Ischnura ramburii***

**Familiar Bluet *Enallagma civile***

**Green Darner *Anax junius***

**Carolina Saddlebags *Tamea carolina***

**Common Sanddragon *Progomphus obscura***

**White Corporal *Ladona exusta***

**Blue Corporal *Ladona deplanata***

**Lancet Clubtail *Gomphus exilis***

**Mantled Baskettail** *Epethica semiaquea*  
**Twelve-spotted Skimmer** *Libellula pulchella*  
**Ebony Jewelwing** *Calopteryx maculata*

**MAMMALS AND OTHER 'CRITTERS'**

**Eastern Grey Squirrel** *Sciurus carolinensis*  
**Eastern Cottontail** *Sylvilagus floridanus*  
**Common Bottle-nosed Dolphin** *Tursiops truncatus*  
**White-tailed Deer** *Odocoileus virginianus*  
**Musk Rat** *Ondatra zibethicus*  
**Starry-nosed Mole** *Condylura cristata*

**Red-bellied Terrapin [Turtle]** *Pseudemys rubriventris*  
**Painted Terrapin** *Chrysemys picta*  
**Black Rat Snake** *Elaphe obsoleta obsoleta*

**Horseshoe Crab** *Limulus polyphemus*