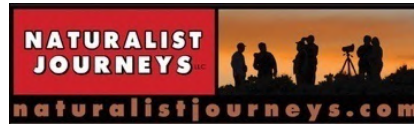
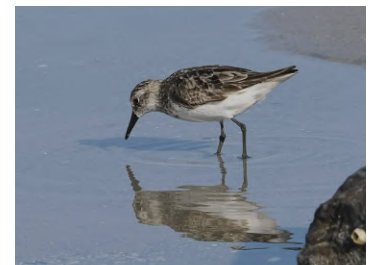


# Cape May, New Jersey | October 1-7, 2024 Trip Report | by Greg Butcher



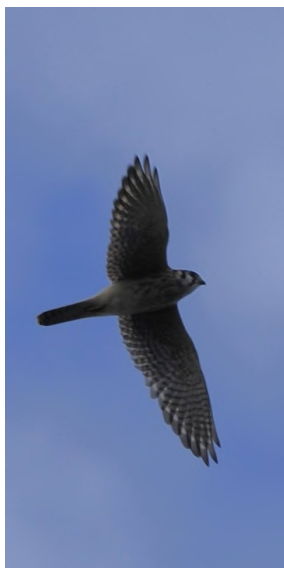
With guide Greg Butcher, and participants Carol and Jeff, Carol (Muz), and Janet and Steve.



## Tues., Oct. 1

## Arrival in Philadelphia | Drive to Cape May

On the first day of October, five intrepid birders from Kentucky -- Steve and Janet Kistler, Jeff and Carol Sole, and Carol "Muz" Friedman -- landed at the Philadelphia airport and met up with Naturalist Journeys' Greg Butcher to drive to the Hawkwatch Platform in Cape May New Jersey. We immediately enjoyed multiple Merlins and Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks to get a taste for what was to come. Before dinner, we checked out Broadway



Beach across the street from our hotel and made our first acquaintance with the beach's Black Skimmer and Royal Tern flock (not to mention several species of gulls). Then we gorged out at Sapore Italiano.

### **Wed., Oct. 2**                      **Broadway Beach | CMBO | Cape May Point**

After starting the next morning on the beach again, we enjoyed a great local breakfast at Oceanview, a short walk from our hotel and the beach. Then we headed down to Cape May Bird Observatory's Northwoods Center for our first warblers: several yellowthroats, a Black-and-white, and an Ovenbird. Then we wandered around Cape May Point State Park, where our most memorable sighting was Doug Wechsler, a prominent retired ornithologist and Steve Kistler's college roommate. A single Common Gallinule and a flock of White Ibises were notable too. We picked up sandwiches and sides at Westside Market and returned to the state park for a picnic near the lighthouse. We added a number of common species in the afternoon and visited The Nature Conservancy's Garrett Family Preserve for a change of pace and a lot of botanizing. Dinner was at The Blue Pig in Congress Hall close to our hotel.

### **Thurs., Oct. 3**                      **Higbee Beach and Saltmarsh Boat Tour**

On October 3, we started pre-dawn at the Morning Flight Platform at Higbee Beach. As New Jersey Audubon Vice President David Mizrahi would say a few days later, it was slow, "but not pathetic". We all enjoyed the Bobwhite Bobbina, an Eastern Wood-Pewee, a Blue-headed Vireo, a Rose-breasted Grosbeak, 3 Lincoln's and a Swamp Sparrow, and several warblers not seen by all. After breakfast snacks, the trails at Higbee Beach were pretty quiet, but we all enjoyed the sunning Yellow-billed Cuckoo. One of the highlights of the trip was the afternoon boat ride on the *Osprey* through the *Spartina* saltmarshes, producing many American Oystercatchers, Black-bellied Plovers, Ruddy Turnstones, gulls, Forster's Terns, Ospreys (of course), Tree Swallows, and Boat-tailed Grackles. Other highlights included both species of night-heron and two truly Great Cormorants. Two Mile Landing (north of the Cape May Canal) is not on everyone's agenda, but we were rewarded with leisurely looks at a Clapper Rail in the open. We returned north of the canal for dinner at Secondo Panico.

### **Fri., Oct. 4 South**                      **Cape May Meadows | The Wetland Institute**

Following a tip from a friend, we went to the blind at South Cape May Meadows before sunrise and enjoyed 3 Virginia Rails wandering in and out of sight. It didn't seem like a lot of birds, but we got 34 species before David's bird-banding demonstration and memorable quote. The banding crew captured our first Blackpoll Warbler and White-throated Sparrow while we were there. The Wetlands Institute provides a great boardwalk over the



saltmarsh and produced 3 Palm Warblers, an adult Little Blue Heron, and a Tricolored Heron. Stone Harbor Point was closed because of beach erosion, but the jetty at the head of the point produced 29 Red Knots, 100 Sanderlings, six Semipalmated Plovers, two Semipalmated Sandpipers, and our first Dunlin. We visited the Avalon Sea Watch, but it was early in the season and late in the afternoon, so the lone Gannet looked like a tiny dot on the horizon. We had a Costa-Rica-themed dinner in a homey atmosphere at Bella Vida Garden Café.

### **Sat., Oct. 5                      Higbee Beach | Whale Watch Boat Trip**

We were able to see gulls and terns in Delaware Bay from the Higbee Beach Morning Flight platform Thursday morning, so we went early this morning to Higbee Beach's bayside jetty near the ferry dock. We had a pair of Bald Eagles, shorebirds, gulls, terns, and other species, but not the seabirds we were hoping for. The highlights were a flock of 20 scaup and another flock of 35 White Ibis. On our way to the Two-Mile Unit of Cape May National Wildlife Refuge, we ran into a 10-mile race, so we spent more time with the starlings and pigeons than intended, but we were rewarded with our first Eastern Towhees, both kinglets, and a Cape May Warbler in among a few yellowthroats. We found out that the best lunch spot was outside Muz's 4<sup>th</sup>-floor room with a great view of the meeting of Delaware Bay and the Atlantic Ocean, the lighthouse, and a flock of perhaps a thousand Tree Swallows flying overhead. We joined a whale cruise in the afternoon and were rewarded with long and close views of 3 dolphins and a Humpback Whale. The only seabird was a single Cory's Shearwater. We were a bit surprised that the boat stayed within swimming distance of shore throughout and returned to port through the Cape May Canal. Today was the traditional pizza party with takeout from Brothers Pizza 2. Due to popular demand, we ate outside Muz's room on the hotel's 4<sup>th</sup>-floor to enjoy the evening.

### **Sun., Oct. 6                      Brigantine | Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge**

Our last full day was the best day of our trip, to Brigantine/Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge. A dawn flight of 50 (or more) Yellow-rumped Warblers greeted us near the Visitor Center along with Pine, Palm, and Blackpoll. We had flocks of Red-wings, bluebirds, Blue Jays, and starlings and small numbers of both kinglets, chickadees, towhees, White-throats, phoebes, with a Brown Thrasher and a Brown Creeper to boot. The boardwalk over the first marsh produced Saltmarsh and Savannah Sparrows, Marsh Wren, and another Clapper Rail in the open. The eight-mile loop was as productive as usual. We had a Seaside and another Saltmarsh Sparrow, six species of ducks, nine species of shorebirds (including Stilt Sandpipers), and five species of herons/egrets. Highlights included harriers, peregrines, and great looks at an American Golden-Plover mixed in with Black-bellies. We



lunched over the marshes at Oyster Creek Inn. A stop at Jake's Landing on the way back to Cape May allowed us to hear a calling American Bittern. Our last dinner was at Oyster Bay.

## **Mon., Oct. 7                      Cape May to Philadelphia**

Some groups stop birding on the last day, but not this one. Our last trip to Broadway Beach produced our best look at a Surf Scoter and a Western Sandpiper; and after another breakfast at Oceanview, the drive to the airport took us by a (Western) Cattle Egret and a raven. Greg dropped everyone off at the airport at the end of a great week at the southern Jersey shore.

*Photos: Group (Janet Kistler - JK), Humpback Whale Tail (Jeff Sole - JS), Semipalmated Sandpiper (JS), Semipalmated Plover (JS), Snowy Egret (JS), American Kestrel (JS), Lesser Black-backed Gull (JS), Osprey (JS), Eastern Phoebe (JS), Northern Flicker (JS), Northern Bobwhite Quail (JS), Yellow-billed Cuckoo (JS), Herring Gull (JS), Clapper Rail (JS), Semipalmated Sandpiper (JS)*