



# CAPE MAY MIGRATION MADNESS

## SEPTEMBER 26 – 30, 2024

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**Tour leader: Jason Weckstein**  
**Maximum group size is 7 participants**

**Price: \$2125 per person**  
Based on double occupancy  
**\$490 single room supplement**

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Check out the trip website here: [redhillbirding.com/capemay](https://redhillbirding.com/capemay)

To register, fill out the booking form here: [redhillbirding.com/bookingform](https://redhillbirding.com/bookingform)

Cape May is one of the world's great bird migration hotspots. As millions of birds follow the eastern shoreline of the United States in fall, they get funneled to the southernmost point in New Jersey, where they are faced with a predicament: continue south over water, or turn back north. Regardless of their ultimate decision, they end up at Cape May. September and October are rocking months in Cape May, when the combination of warblers, sparrows, hawks, falcons, shorebirds, ducks, and seabirds makes for incredible birding and diverse experiences.

This trip is timed to coincide with the best of Cape May's fall migration. It is perhaps the best "outdoor classroom" anywhere for learning about the wonders of migration and the intricacies of bird identification. While we will make an effort to see as many species as possible, we will also take our time to study the birds in front of us. Among the birds that we will look for that we don't normally find in the Chicago area are American Oystercatcher, Brown Pelican, Tricolored Heron, Laughing Gull, Royal Tern, Black Skimmer, Brant, Clapper Rail, Parasitic Jaeger, Northern Gannet, three species of scoters, Great Cormorant, Seaside Sparrow, and Saltmarsh Sparrow. Late September and early October is both the peak of falcon migration and the peak of monarch butterfly migration.

## ITINERARY

**Day 1, Thursday, Sep 26:** We will meet at the Philadelphia Airport at 2pm Eastern Time, load up the van, and make the 1.5 hour drive to Cape May. After dropping our things at the hotel, we will start birding at one of the many excellent birding spots within a short driving distance of the hotel.

**Days 2-4, Friday-Sunday, Sep 27 – 29:** We will have three full days of birding around Cape May. Because this is a relatively short tour, we will have early mornings and long days in the field. However, because most of the birding sites are in close proximity to each other and to the hotel, it will be easy to drop people at the hotel if they would like to take a break, and pick them up again later. Most of our birding will be around Cape May, but we will make an excursion to Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge (still usually referred to by its former name, Brigantine), about a 1.5 hour drive from Cape May, with its extensive saltmarshes and freshwater impoundments. This is a great place to see waders, ducks, terns, and shorebirds, possibly including Brant, Black Skimmer, Saltmarsh Sparrow, and Clapper Rail.

**Cape May Point State Park:** At the heart of Cape May migration is this remarkable state park, right at the southernmost point of New Jersey. It includes the famed Cape May Hawkwatch Platform. We will spend time here during the day watching the hawk migration, which at this time of year, with the right weather, should feature vast numbers of Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Northern Harrier, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, and Osprey, not to mention Tree Swallow, American Robin, and other passerine migrants. The ponds here are often filled with ducks and shorebirds while the coastal thickets and woodlands are filled with passerine migrants.

**Higbee Beach:** Famed for its "morning flight," where on good days large numbers of passerines can be seen migrating as day breaks, we will start some of our birding days here. The birds, fortunately, often land here as well in the hedgerows and fields, and it is a wonderful place to study passerines and passerine migration.

**Stone Harbor:** North of Cape May on the Atlantic Coast, the beaches and saltmarshes here are home to an excellent diversity of coastal birds. Tricolored and Little Blue Herons and Snowy Egrets populate the marshes, American Oystercatchers dot the beaches, and flocks of shorebirds, sometimes including Stilt Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher, and both yellowlegs, move around to find the best mudflats. Clapper Rails skulk in the marshes here, too, but seeing one is always a challenge.

**South Cape May Meadows:** This Nature Conservancy preserve abuts the state park. Trails loop the preserve's ponds, which often hold a variety of dabbling ducks, waders, and shorebirds. The reedy edges are home to rails and snipe, but it takes some luck to see them. The surrounding vegetation provides temporary homes to warblers, wrens, sparrows, and other migrants and the beach usually hosts a flock of gulls and terns.

**This is just a small sample** of places we will visit. Other spots in the area that we may visit include The Beanery, Cox Hall Creek, Avalon Seawatch, Lake Lily, and various beaches and dunes around Cape May. We will make sure to stop into the Cape May Bird Observatory visitors' center as well, with its wooded lot and excellent gift shop. Our daily itinerary will depend on what we have seen previously and what the conditions are like, as different weather conditions favor different birds and thus different birding locations.

**Day 5, Monday, Sep 30:** After breakfast and some morning birding, we will return to Philadelphia to meet our flights home, arriving at the airport no later than 1pm Eastern Time.

## IMPORTANT NOTES

### Contact and registration information

To sign up, each participant should complete the [booking form](#). Once we receive the form, we will send you information about paying the trip deposit. If you have any questions before registering, please contact the office at [info@redhillbirding.com](mailto:info@redhillbirding.com).

### Tour leader

The tour leader for this trip is **TBD**.

### Timing

The trip will **begin** on **Thursday, September 26** at 2pm EST, at the Philadelphia Airport, and will **end** at the Philadelphia Airport on **Monday, September 30** at 12:00pm (noon) EST. There are many non-stop flights daily between Chicago and Philadelphia; please plan your flights accordingly.

### Physical difficulty

This trip is **physically easy**. The terrain is almost entirely flat, and while we may be on our feet for extensive periods, we will be walking at a "birding pace." We will occasionally be walking on soft sand beaches.

### Pace

The pace of the trip is **moderate**. We will maximize the amount of time we spend in the field with early mornings, breakfast in the field, and fairly long days. That said, birding spots are all concentrated in a small area, so if you would like an afternoon break it can be easily arranged. There are unlikely to be any nighttime birding excursions.

### Price

The price of the trip is **\$2125** per person and the single room supplement is **\$490**. This price **includes** all meals (excluding alcoholic beverages) from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 5; all transportation and accommodation during that period; an expert Red Hill Birding guide with

a scope and audio equipment; all park entrance fees; and a bound checklist to keep track of sightings during the trip. It **does not include** alcoholic beverages, travel insurance, optional activities, snacks, laundry, tips (apart from meals), or other items of a personal nature.

A deposit of \$450 per person and the submission of the [booking form](#) will secure your place on the trip. Upon receiving your booking form, we will send you deposit details. Final payment is due by June 28, 2024. We accept payment by Zelle, check, and bank transfer. We also accept payment by credit card with an additional 3.1% processing fee.

### Photography

The photographic opportunities in Cape May during migration are excellent. That said, this is primarily a birdwatching tour, so while there will be ample opportunities for photography along the way, we will not be making special considerations for photographers.

### Weather

Like early October in Chicago, the weather at that time of year in Cape May can be quite unpredictable. Plan for chilly weather, possibly as low as the 40s, especially in the early morning. Rain is possible. The temperature is likely to be mild during the day, but can feel much colder if we are standing in a strong wind on the hawkwatch platform or looking for shorebirds along the beach.

### Food

Breakfasts will generally be eaten in the field--you will get to know Wawa, the world's best convenience store, very well. We will usually take sandwiches from a local café for a picnic lunch. Dinner will be eaten in one of Cape May's many wonderful restaurants. If you have food allergies or other dietary restrictions, please let us know in the booking form and we will be sure to accommodate them.

### Packing considerations

You will generally want to wear comfortable clothing that you don't mind getting a little dirty while we are walking trails. The dress for the tour is entirely casual. Think about spending a day in the field in the Chicago area in early October. Long pants and long sleeves are recommended. Comfortable walking shoes are a must. Also bring an umbrella and/or raincoat as well as a mid-weight jacket or sweater for cold mornings. The best birding occurs after cold fronts pass through.

In terms of gear, you will want to bring the usual binoculars, field guide, hat, camera, and other gear you are accustomed to going birding with. A reusable water bottle will help you stay hydrated. For coffee drinkers, a travel coffee mug is a nice thing to have along in the morning to keep your coffee hot.

### Tipping

We aim to provide **exceptional service**, using guides that are knowledgeable, interesting, personable, and experienced. While tipping is never expected, if you feel that your guides went above and beyond, you are welcome to leave them a gratuity. Tips at restaurants are included in the cost of the tour.

### **Travel insurance**

We do not require travel insurance for domestic trips. However, we recommend purchasing it to help protect you against the unexpected. For your convenience, we offer travel protection through Travelex Insurance Services. For more information on the available plans or to enroll, go to [www.travelexinsurance.com](http://www.travelexinsurance.com) or contact Travelex Insurance Services at 800-228-9792 and reference location number 13-0441.

Travelex Insurance Services, Inc CA Agency License #0D10209. Travel Insurance is underwritten by, Berkshire Hathaway Specialty Insurance Company, NAIC #22276. 55Y

Note that to be eligible for some benefits, travel insurance must be purchased within 1-2 weeks of paying the trip deposit.



*Black Skimmers in front of the Cape May Lighthouse (photo by Josh Engel)*