

*Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc.*

**CAPE MAY, HAWK MOUNTAIN  
& BOMBAY HOOK  
October 12-19, 2005**

**Leader: Marshall Iliff**

**ITINERARY:**

**Day 1, October 12:** arrival in Philadelphia; dinner at The Tavern at Burk's Bend

**Day 2, October 13:** Brigantine N.W.R. (actually Edwin B. Forsythe N.W.R., Brigantine Unit); lunch at Shea's Café near Brig; Cape May: 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue jetty, Sunset Beach, hawkwatch; dinner at Jackson Mountain Café. Cool, with steady rain throughout the day and moderate to strong NNE winds.

**Day 3, October 14:** Cape May: Cape May Point for warblers in cedars, Two Mile Landing and Two Mile Beach, Nummy's Island, Avalon seawatch; lunch at The Depot; Stone Harbor Point; dinner at Cucina Rosa. Cool, with cloudy conditions and occasional light drizzle. The winds shifting from NNE to NNW by early afternoon.

**Day 4, October 15:** Cape May: Higbee's Beach, hawkwatch; lunch at The Depot; Hidden Valley, The Beanery, CMBO store, hawkwatch; dinner at Cape Orient. It was a partly cloudy to clear (afternoon), warm, with moderate to strong NW winds.

**Day 5, October 16:** Cape May: Higbee's Beach (amazing flight!) and Cape May Pt. S.P.; lunch at Mario's, dinner at The Post House. Very windy and cool, but strong NW winds and clear skies overnight brought a massive songbird flight to Cape May, with excellent numbers of hawks also around.

**Day 6, October 17:** Hawk Mountain, PA; picnic lunch, dinner at Rose Hill Inn. Beautiful clear crisp fall day with temps rising to mid-70s and strong NW winds perfect for great hawkwatching, w/ about 600 hawks seen for the day.

**Day 7, October 18:** Bombay Hook NWR, DE; lunch at Sambo's; "wild goose chase" for Barnacle Goose at Great Oak Pond, Kent County, MD; dinner at The Fair Hill Inn. I was a beautiful clear, warm day with light NW winds.

**Day 8, October 19:** early morning birding at White Clay Creek; departure for home.

**SUMMARY:**

Our trip began with a day of heavy rain marking a solid week of wet weather that had settled in over the northeast. However, the very weather that was our bane ultimately was our greatest ally. The soggy weather had served as a barrier to migrating birds, which stacked up behind the clouds just waiting for a break. The first clear day was partly cloudy, but strong winds from the northwest brought hundreds of raptors to Cape May. The following night was the first really good one for migration and, with clear

skies and strong northwest winds, it brought with it a veritable flood of songbirds, raptors, and other birds that made this trip stand apart. Without trying hard for extra species, our tour total of 169 species was a record. The 3,076 raptors counted at Cape May October 15 produced the best hawk flight I have ever witnessed in the northeast. An amazing morning flight of warblers, flickers, and other birds October 16 was, likewise, the best songbird flight I have witnessed at Cape May. At Hawk Mountain we saw 576 raptors of 14 species for one of their better flights ever and certainly the best day I have spent there (the Golden Eagle will live long in my memory). In short, the migration spectacle on this tour was better than one could hope for, and will not soon be repeated.

Braving the winds and rain on our first day, we visited Brigantine where we managed to scope 14 species of shorebirds, along with numerous ducks, geese, and herons. The East Coast endemic Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow was a lifer for all, and rarities included an American White Pelican and a Hudsonian Godwit. Cape May that afternoon was even more difficult to bird in the torrents of rain, but we were treated to a magnificent flock of 500 Black Skimmers in a brief clear spell, and a vivid male Hooded Warbler (well past its normal departure date) that sought shelter in the cedars at Cape May Point State Park. Never again will I manage to see just one warbler at Cape May and have it be a Hooded Warbler—Yellow-rumped Warbler is usually so common it cannot be missed!

The next morning we returned to those cedars which were harboring other warblers struggling through the foul weather. We had great looks at Cape May, Blackpoll, Yellow-rumped, and Hooded, as well as Yellow-breasted Chat and Common Yellowthroat. Briefly seen species were Yellow and Bay-breasted, both tardy lingerers. Later in the day we cruised up the shore, adding to our shorebird list. A good evening flight of Merlins and Peregrines was a precursor of things to come. The next day brought the first real break in the weather. We birded Higbee's Beach early, but managed only a few choice species (including Clay-colored Sparrow!). The hawk watch was much busier, and the stream of Sharpies, Cooper's, and falcons entertained us for the rest of the day.

The next morning we spent the first hour-and-a-half watching streams of Northern Flickers, Mourning Doves, and various warblers stream northward past the Higbee's Beach morning flight tower—none of these birds had been here the day before. A rare Lark Sparrow added spice, but we concentrated on trying to identify warblers; Yellow-rumped were most abundant, but Black-throated Blues, Black-throated Greens, Palms, Magnolias, and Blackpolls were all in very good numbers. We undoubtedly saw 30,000 birds head north, and may have seen three times that number. As the flight died down slightly (it continued until past noon!), we headed into the fields at Higbee's where there were suddenly hundreds of Palm Warblers (just one the day before), sparrows, other warblers, and a smattering of other species. It was a wonderful morning, and we stayed in the Cape May area enjoying the warblers and hawks as long as possible. For many of us, this was a once-in-a-lifetime migration event.

We expected Hawk Mountain would be great as well, and the next day we drove up and hiked directly to North Lookout. In five hours of watching there was never a moment without a hawk to look at, and Sharpies were streaming by at or below eye level. We counted 578 raptors of 14 species with highlights such as crippling looks at an immature Golden Eagle right over the watch; an hour with nine Red-shouldered Hawks; and an early immature light morph Rough-legged Hawk!

On our final day we birded the Delaware Bayshore, where we were treated to large flocks of Snow Geese, shorebirds, and ducks, and added several species to our already long species list. An afternoon detour took us west to Maryland, where a reported Barnacle Goose did not materialize among the hundreds of geese at a local farm pond.

This was hands down the best migration I have witnessed at Cape May and Hawk Mountain, and it was a pleasure to share it with such a wonderful and genial group.

**BIRD LIST** (169 species – tour record!)

Tour highlights in ALL CAPS

N=New Jersey

D=Delaware

P=Pennsylvania

M=Maryland

**Snow Goose - N, D, M** - impressive blizzards at Bombay Hook NWR; also two hybrid Snow x Ross's at Bombay Hook

**Canada Goose - N, D, P, M**

**ACKLING GOOSE - N, P, M** - flyovers at Cape May and Hawk Mt.; 11 seen well on ground at Great Oak Pond, MD; this small version of a Canada Goose was a recent split in Aug 2004; the subspecies we saw was *hutchinsii* (Richardson's Goose).

**Brant - N**

**Mute Swan - N**

**Wood Duck - N**

**Gadwall - N**

**American Wigeon - N, D**

**American Black Duck - N, D**

**Mallard - N, D, M**

**Blue-winged Teal - N** - two at Cape May

**Northern Shoveler - N, D**

**Northern Pintail - N, D**

**Green-winged Teal - N, D, M**

**Lesser Scaup - M** - one early one at Great Oak Pond

**Surf Scoter - N**

**Bufflehead - D** - one early female at Bombay Hook

**Ruddy Duck - N, M**

**Common Loon - N, P** - 8 flew past Hawk Mt.

**Pied-billed Grebe - N, M**

**Brown Pelican - N** - one at Avalon, 6 at Stone Harbor Pt.; scarce this year.

**AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN - N** - one at Brig had been present for a while and was the rarest bird of the tour

**Double-crested Cormorant - N, D**

**AMERICAN BITTERN - N** - Tom scared one up at Brig

**Great Blue Heron - N, D, P**

**Great Egret - N, D**

**Snowy Egret - N**

**Little Blue Heron - N**

**Tricolored Heron - N**

**Black-crowned Night-Heron - N**

**Glossy Ibis - N** - three juveniles still at Cape May Pt.

**Black Vulture - N, D, P**

**Turkey Vulture - N, D, P, M**

**Osprey - N, P**

**Bald Eagle - N, D, P, M**

**Northern Harrier - N, D, P**

**Sharp-shinned Hawk - N, D, P, M** - wonderful flights at Cape May and Hawk Mt.

**Cooper's Hawk - N, D, P**

**Red-shouldered Hawk - P** - 10 at Hawk Mt.

**Broad-winged Hawk - N** - one at Cape May

**ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK - P** - one light immature over Hawk Mt.; early for this species.

**Red-tailed Hawk - N, D, P, M**

**GOLDEN EAGLE - P** - one immature at Hawk Mt. gave great looks.

**American Kestrel - N, D, P, M**  
**Merlin - N, D, P**  
**Peregrine Falcon - N, P** - many seen, including both *anatum* and *tundrius* subspecies  
**American Coot - N**  
**Wawa - N, D, P** - a tour favorite, both subspecies seen (bathroom and non-bathroom)  
**Black-bellied Plover - N**  
**Semipalmated Plover - N** - great flocks on beach at Stone Harbor Pt.  
**Killdeer - N, D, P, M**  
**American Oystercatcher - N**  
**American Avocet - D** - Bombay Hook only  
**Greater Yellowlegs - N, D**  
**Lesser Yellowlegs - N, D, M**  
**HUDSONIAN GODWIT - N** - one at Brig was a lucky find  
**MARbled GODWIT - N** - 15 at Nummy's Island  
**Whimbrel - N** - two at Stone Harbor Pt.  
**Ruddy Turnstone - N**  
**Red Knot - N**  
**Sanderling - N**  
**Semipalmated Sandpiper - N, D** - more common than usual, with 10-15 at Brig and Stone Harbor  
**Western Sandpiper - N, D**  
**Least Sandpiper - N**  
**BAIRD'S SANDPIPER - N** - one juvenile on the beach at Cape May Pt. was a rarity  
**White-rumped Sandpiper - N** - good looks at both adults and juveniles  
**Pectoral Sandpiper - N**  
**Dunlin - N, D**  
**Stilt Sandpiper - N, D**  
**Short-billed Dowitcher - N**  
**Long-billed Dowitcher - N, D**  
**Wilson's Snipe - N**  
**PARASITIC JAEGER - N** - one at Cape May  
**Laughing Gull - N, D**  
**Ring-billed Gull - N, D**  
**Herring Gull - N, D**  
**LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL - N** - great looks at an adult and a second-winter on the beach at Stone Harbor  
**Great Black-backed Gull - N, D**  
**Caspian Tern - N**  
**Royal Tern - N**  
**Common Tern - N** - great looks with Forster's  
**Forster's Tern - N, D, M**  
**Black Skimmer - N** - amazing flock of 500+ along Cape May beachfront; others at Brig  
**Rock Pigeon - N, D, P, M**  
**Mourning Dove - N, D, P, M** - many in morning flight 15 Oct  
**Chimney Swift - N** - four over Cape May Pt.  
**Belted Kingfisher - N, D**  
**Red-bellied Woodpecker - N, D**  
**Yellow-bellied Sapsucker - N, D** - nice look on our final morning  
**Downy Woodpecker - N, P**  
**(h) Hairy Woodpecker - P** - heard-only at Hawk Mt.  
**Northern Flicker - N, D, P**  
**Eastern Wood-Pewee - N** - one at Cape May  
**Eastern Phoebe - N, D**  
**Blue-headed Vireo - D, P**  
**Red-eyed Vireo - N**  
**Blue Jay - N, D, P**  
**American Crow - N, D, P, M**  
**Fish Crow - N**

**Common Raven - P** - one at Hawk Mt. w/ the Golden Eagle  
**Tree Swallow - N, D, P** - some incredible swarms  
**Northern Rough-winged Swallow - N** - up to 10 at hawkwatch 15 Oct  
**BANK SWALLOW - N** - one late one at hawkwatch 13-15 Oct  
**Barn Swallow - N** - one late one at hawkwatch 15 Oct  
**CLIFF SWALLOW - N** - one late one at hawkwatch 13-15 Oct.  
**Horned Lark - D** - nice looks near Bombay Hook  
**Carolina Chickadee - N, D**  
**Black-capped Chickadee - P**  
**Tufted Titmouse - N, D, P**  
**Red-breasted Nuthatch - D** - on our last morning  
**White-breasted Nuthatch - N, P, D**  
**Brown Creeper - D** - nice looks on our final morning  
**Carolina Wren - N, D, P**  
**House Wren - P** - Bennie only  
**Winter Wren - P** - another Bennie only bird  
**Golden-crowned Kinglet - N, D**  
**Ruby-crowned Kinglet - N, D, P**  
**BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER - N** - one late at Cape May Pt.  
**Eastern Bluebird - D**  
**American Robin - N, D, P**  
**Gray Catbird - N**  
**Northern Mockingbird - N, D, P**  
**Brown Thrasher - N**  
**European Starling - N, D, P**  
**American Pipit - N** - flyovers at Cape May  
**Cedar Waxwing - N, P, D**  
**Tennessee Warbler - N** - one at Cape May  
**Northern Parula - N** - very common this year  
**Magnolia Warbler - N** - stunning, close views  
**Cape May Warbler - N** - great looks at Cape May Pt.  
**Black-throated Blue Warbler - N** - common 15 Oct  
**Yellow-rumped Warbler - N** - Myrtle subspecies; seen by thousands on 15 Oct (the Higbee's counter estimated 34,000!)  
**Black-throated Green Warbler - N** - great looks  
**Pine Warbler - N**  
**Palm Warbler - N, D** - hundreds on 15 Oct. Most were Yellow (*hypochrysea*) subspecies, but we had several "Western Palm Warbler" (subspecies *palmarum*) at Cape May for comparison  
**Blackpoll Warbler - N**  
**BAY-BREASTED WARBLER - N** - Linda spotted one at Cape May Pt., for a surprisingly late record  
**Black-and-white Warbler - N**  
**American Redstart - N**  
**Northern Waterthrush - N** - heard only  
**Common Yellowthroat - N**  
**HOODED WARBLER - N** - a cooperative male at Cape May Pt. 12-13 Oct was both late and rare locally  
**YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT - N** - one at Cape May Pt.  
**Eastern Towhee - N**  
**Chipping Sparrow - N**  
**CLAY-COLORED SPARROW - N** - stunning looks at one at Higbee's Beach 14 Oct; rare migrant in Cape May.  
**Field Sparrow - N, D**  
**LARK SPARROW - N** - one in the huge morning flight 15 Oct was a local rarity.  
**Savannah Sparrow - N, D**  
**SALTMARSH SHARP-TLD. SPARROW - N** - we tracked down this mouse-like bird at Brig and again at 2 Mile Landing  
**NELSON'S SHARP-TLD. SPARROW - N** - good look at *alterus* at Brig  
**Song Sparrow - N, D, P**  
**Swamp Sparrow - N, D**

**White-throated Sparrow - N, D, P**  
**Dark-eyed Junco - N, D, P**  
**Northern Cardinal - N, D, P**  
**Blue Grosbeak - D** - two at Bombay Hook  
**Indigo Bunting - D**  
**DICKCISSEL - N** - one dull immature at the hawkwatch feeders 14 Oct  
**Bobolink - N** - briefly at Brig, one flyover at Higbee's  
**Red-winged Blackbird - N, D**  
**Eastern Meadowlark - N**  
**Rusty Blackbird - N, P** - scope views at Higbee's for some; one at Hawk Mt.  
**Common Grackle - N, D** - large flocks  
**Boat-tailed Grackle - N**  
**Brown-headed Cowbird - N, D**  
**House Finch - N, D**  
**American Goldfinch - N, D, P**  
**House Sparrow - N, D, P**

Leader only: Northern Gannet, Nashville Warbler, Yellow Warbler (cf. *aestiva* at Cape May Pt. 13 Oct), Scarlet Tanager, Baltimore Oriole, Purple Finch

**MAMMALS** (4 species)

**Eastern Gray Squirrel - N, P, D**  
**Eastern Cottontail - N**  
**Eastern Chipmunk - P**  
**Muskrat - N** - one at Beanery

**BUTTERFLIES** (12 species)

**Orange Sulphur - N**  
**Clouded Sulphur - N, D**  
**Cloudless Sulphur - N** - 8 at Cape May 15 Oct  
**Cabbage White - N, D**  
**Red-banded Hairstreak - N** - one at Higbee's 15 Oct was leader-only  
**Common Buckeye - N**  
**AMERICAN SNOUT - N** one at Higbee's 15 Oct.  
**Mourning Cloak - N, D**  
**American Lady - N** - several seen  
**Red Admiral - N** - one seen well at Higbee's  
**Monarch - N, D, P, M**  
**Common Checkered-Skipper - D** - one at Bombay Hook

**DRAGONFLIES** (6 species)

**Common Green Darner - N**  
**Blue Dasher - N** - leader-only  
**Eastern Pondhawk - N** - leader-only  
**Wandering Glider - N**  
**Carolina Saddlebags - N**  
**Black Saddlebags - N**  
**meadowhawk sp. - N** - just 2, leader-only

**HERPS** (7 species)

**Spring Peeper - N** - this small frog was heard at Cape May  
**COPE'S GRAY TREEFROG - N** - one seen in bluebird box at Hidden Valley; rarely seen.  
**Green Frog - N** - one at Cape May  
**Eastern Painted Turtle - N** - ten at Bombay Hook  
**Red-bellied Turtle - M** - leader only at Great Oak Pond  
**Black Rat Snake - N** - one captured at Bombay Hook  
**Eastern Garter Snake - N** - one at Cape May was leader only