

# CAPE MAY, HAWK MOUNTAIN & BOMBAY HOOK

## SEPTEMBER 28 – OCTOBER 5, 2008

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*In the eastern United States, fall is perhaps the most affecting of seasons. Summer has lifted, the harvest is in, and though the air carries a promise of winter to come, there is a last warm chance to savor the abundance of nature. Thousands of birds, their brief annual residency in the northern latitudes completed, make their way down the coastlines and mountain ridges, pausing only to feed and rest. The feeling is very different from that of the spring migration, with its joyful song and sprightly breeding dress. However, this autumnal journey has a majesty and splendor that is truly unique. Our tour to Cape May, Hawk Mountain, and Bombay Hook is designed to allow you to experience the best that this very special season has to offer. Although we will see more than 150 species, this tour will focus on witnessing and understanding the migration spectacle, rather than amassing an amazing bird list.*

**September 28, Day 1: Arrival in Philadelphia.** Participants may plan to arrive in Philadelphia at any time today. If arriving by plane, you may request the complimentary hotel shuttle by calling them from the courtesy phone in the baggage claim area of the Philadelphia International Airport. Your tour leader will meet the group at 6:30 p.m. in the lobby of our hotel prior to our get-acquainted dinner.

NIGHT: Fairfield Inn by Marriott, Philadelphia

**September 29 – October 1, Days 2-4: Cape May and Environs.** On our first morning we will depart Philadelphia for Cape May. We may stop to bird en route or, if conditions look good for a big flight in Cape May, we may head there directly. We will have two full days, plus portions of two others, to experience the Cape May area. Since bird migration is very weather-dependent, our daily activities will be planned to take best advantage of local conditions. If winds are from the northwest, we will likely begin by seeking migrant landbirds in the woods near Higbee Beach. Late September and early October is the season of peak migrant diversity and a good cold front should produce a long list of woodpeckers, swallows, warblers, and sparrows. During our early morning birding, we should also see our first hawks, mostly Sharp-shinned and Cooper's, as they prowl the brush for a morning meal.

As the sun gets higher, we will head to Cape May Point, the prime vantagepoint for observing the passage of southbound raptors. Here, the land abruptly ends where the Atlantic Ocean meets Delaware Bay. Birds making their way south along the coast arrive at the point and must decide whether or not to strike out over open water. A few, particularly Peregrine Falcon, Northern Harrier, and Bald Eagle, continue unhesitatingly, but many "stack up" over Cape May and size up the situation more carefully. As a result, one can often see hundreds, sometimes thousands, of hawks in a single day. Raptor diversity is also excellent in late September and early October and, with luck, we could see the peak movement of Merlin and Peregrine.

There is no place in the United States which can best Cape May as an outdoor classroom for learning to identify raptors. One of the real pleasures of birding here is feeling one's skill at separating various species of hawks on the wing increase by the hour. In Cape May, one can easily see more hawks in a day than one might encounter elsewhere in a year! We will spend time discussing the different species and families of raptors and learning many useful identification techniques. We will also take part in a hawk banding demonstration where, depending on the day's catch, we should be able to observe a hawk or two in the hand, while learning about the research

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conducted each fall at Cape May. The Point is also good for other kinds of avian migrants, whether they be waterfowl, shorebirds, gulls, terns, swallows, or warblers, for here the movement of birds is virtually constant. If we do hit a slow spell, there are plenty of other good birding areas to keep us occupied, such as the South Cape Migratory Bird Refuge and Lily Lake.

This is also the best time of year to witness butterfly and dragonfly migration. The dunes can become a highway for passing Monarchs while Merlins and American Kestrels zip around Cape May Point chasing dragonflies. Louise has had many years of experience coordinating the Cape May Monarch Monitoring Project. She will share her knowledge and perform a Monarch tagging demonstration in a local butterfly garden.

If we should encounter rain or winds from a direction less conducive to migration, we will head for Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge, popularly known by its old name, "Brigantine", where thousands of waterfowl congregate. We may also check the ocean near Avalon for sea ducks, whose migration continues despite the weather. Actually, even if our weather is good both days, we will still want to do some birding in these excellent areas.

NIGHTS: La Mer Beachfront Inn, Cape May

**October 2, Day 5: Cape May; Drive to Nottingham.** This morning we will spend time visiting any areas we may have missed near Cape May, staying into the early afternoon if the migration is particularly good. We will then head across the Delaware River to the small town of Nottingham in southeastern Pennsylvania. Most years we have opted to take the Cape May-Lewes Ferry, a pleasant boat ride across the mouth of Delaware Bay then proceed to Nottingham through the tiny state of Delaware. Though the ferry does not generally encounter any truly pelagic bird species, we have at times observed loons, scoters, and Northern Gannets during the crossing. If time and route allow, we will check the loblolly pines of Henlopen Acres, a quiet neighborhood in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, for Pine Warbler and Brown-headed Nuthatch.

NIGHT: The Inn at Nottingham

**October 3-4, Days 6-7: Hawk Mountain and Bombay Hook.** The weather will once again determine our exact schedule, but we will aim to spend all of one day atop Hawk Mountain viewing the passage of birds of prey and a second birding Bombay Hook and other productive areas in nearby Delaware. Hawk Mountain hosts many of the same raptors as Cape May, but there the similarity ends. In place of the sand dunes of the Jersey shore are the rocky outcroppings of the Kittatinny Ridge, surrounded not by seawater, but by fertile river valleys. The area is well forested, and we will certainly have a commanding and enchanting view as we scan the skies. After checking the feeders at Hawk Mountain's fine nature center, we will walk the trail to the North Lookout, where we hope to add to our already long list of hawks. Here we have a better chance for Golden Eagle and Northern Goshawk than in Cape May, though neither reaches its peak until later in the fall. Note that the rocky trail to the North Lookout will not prove easy for people who are not comfortable walking up trails on uneven footing. The North Lookout itself is a jumble of large boulders that require some agility to scramble over.

In general, Hawk Mountain is better than Cape May for observing the passage of buteos, as well as for studying the adult plumages of accipiters. It is often possible to view hawks from above, as they pass through the valleys below. We may also see Common Raven, a bird that is not a hawk, but often acts like one. You never know what will pass by at Hawk Mountain; there is even an old (and controversial) record for Kermadec Petrel, a pelagic bird from the Pacific Ocean!

On our other full day we will explore the Bombay Hook area of central Delaware. The wide variety of habitats there attracts a good mix of species, and we have even been treated to such rarities as Ross's Goose, Ruff, and Hudsonian Godwit in past years. A check of favorite marshes, woodlands, and farms may yield views of Barn and Barred owls, along with Seaside and Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed sparrows. Most spectacular, however, is the virtual blizzard of Snow Geese that carpets the marshes and fields.

NIGHTS: The Inn at Nottingham

**October 5, Day 8: Departure for Home.** This morning we will have an hour or two for birding, and we usually elect to bird along White Clay Creek in nearby Newark, Delaware. Woodland birds abound here. Two we will try to see are Pileated Woodpecker and Barred Owl. After a late breakfast, we will return to the Philadelphia International Airport, arriving at approximately 10:30 a.m. Participants may schedule return flights for anytime after 12:00 p.m.

**EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS:** Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour will be limited to 12 participants.

**TOUR LEADER:** Louise Zemaitis and Michael O'Brien

**Louise Zemaitis** is an artist and naturalist living in Cape May, New Jersey. She is a popular field trip leader in Cape May where she leads bird and butterfly walks and teaches birding workshops as an Associate Naturalist with Cape May Bird Observatory. Louise is also coordinator of the Monarch Monitoring Project in Cape May and curator of the Cape May Bird Observatory Art Gallery. An honors graduate at Temple University's Tyler School of Art, she enjoys working as a freelance artist and her illustrations have been widely published.

**Michael O'Brien** is a freelance artist, author, and environmental consultant living in Cape May, New Jersey. He has traveled extensively throughout North and Central America and has a passionate interest in migration, bird vocalizations, and field identification. At home in Cape May, Michael serves as an Associate Naturalist with Cape May Bird Observatory for whom he conducts numerous workshops, writes a monthly ID column and photo quiz (see [www.birdcapemay.org](http://www.birdcapemay.org)), and, for many years, conducted a fall songbird migration count. He is co-author of *The Shorebird Guide*, *Flight Calls of Migratory Birds*, and *America's 100 Most Wanted Birds*. His illustrations have been widely published in books and field guides, including the *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America* and the new *Peterson Field Guide to Birds of North America*. Michael also has an intense interest in butterflies and leads several "Birds & Butterflies" tours with his wife, Louise Zemaitis.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for the tour is **\$2140** per person in double occupancy from Philadelphia. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 8, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Philadelphia and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$320**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

**TOUR REGISTRATION:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$300** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 90 days prior to the tour departure date.

**CANCELLATION POLICY:** Refunds are made according to the following schedule: If cancellation is made 90 days or more before the tour departure date, the deposit less **\$125** per person is refundable. If cancellation is made between 90 and 70 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 70 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions, as well as any transfers from one tour to another. *We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself.*

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If you cancel:

90 days or more before departure date  
Between 90 and 70 days before departure  
  
Fewer than 70 days before departure date

Your refund will be:

Your deposit minus \$125.  
No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance will be refunded.  
No refund available.

**TRIP CANCELLATION INSURANCE:** Application forms for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. We **strongly recommend** that you purchase trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions are available, however, stipulations apply usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering. Contact the VENT office prior to registration for details.**

**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.**

**AIR INFORMATION:** Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

**BAGGAGE:** To prevent crowding in the vehicles, we ask participants to limit your luggage to one medium sized suitcase per person, plus one carry-on bag. As a precaution, if you are flying to meet the tour and checking luggage, we urge you to pack a change of clothes, your binoculars, any medication, toiletries, and other essentials into your airline carry-on bag.

**CLIMATE & CLOTHING:** Fall on the East Coast tends to be the most pleasant weather of the year. Expect mild-to-warm afternoons, with chilly mornings and evenings. It is wisest to dress in layers, beginning the day with a light jacket or windbreaker over a sweatshirt or sweater, which in turn covers a long-sleeve shirt or T-shirt. Later, as the day gets warmer, one can adjust easily by removing layers. Jeans or similar durable, comfortable pants are most practical for this tour. Choice of footwear is largely a matter of personal preference. Sneakers or tennis shoes are generally quite suitable, though it might be a good idea to bring rubber boots as well, in case the going gets wet (especially if you are interested in looking for Sharp-tailed and Seaside Sparrows).

The trail to Hawk Mountain's north lookout is rocky, and some may wish to bring light hiking boots for added ankle support. The trail will not present a difficulty for those who can handle a moderate uphill climb and a number of steps. However, it may not be possible for those who have trouble walking; those individuals may stay at South Lookout or at the visitor center. **Bring waterproof footwear or old tennis shoes in the event of an optional walk in the salt-marshes for sharp-tailed sparrows.**

Though we will hope for blue skies and sun throughout, it is likely that we will have some rain. Be prepared with a raincoat or poncho. A winter jacket or parka, a warm hat, and some gloves or mittens will be useful if we get a good strong cold front. Of course, a good strong cold front is exactly what we want in order to have the best birding. Dress will be informal, though you may wish to bring something to change into for dinner; e.g., an oxford or similar shirt and slacks or a simple dress. Jackets, ties, and formal dresses are not required.

**EQUIPMENT:** You should pack a pair of binoculars in good repair, along with a belt pack or day pack (good for carrying books, sunscreen, extra film, etc.). An alarm clock is essential. Your leader will have a spotting scope; but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so. If you are bringing a camera, we suggest you bring sufficient film also, as it will not always be readily available during the tour. If you are trying to decide which pair of binoculars to use, you would probably do well to bring versatile ones like 7 or 8X42's. Migrating hawks often pass at moderate to great distance, but songbirds can be observed relatively closely. You are

welcome to bring a camera. There will be good opportunities to photograph scenery. Birds, as we all know, can be more or less cooperative depending on their whim.

**OTHER ITEMS TO BRING:**

- An alarm clock is useful, as hotel wake-up calls are notoriously undependable.
- A durable pillow or cushion can make time spent hawkwatching more comfortable. Those sold in sporting goods stores under the name "Hot Seat" are specially designed for outdoor use, but an old blanket would also work so please don't feel pressured to run out and buy something.
- On at least one day, it will be necessary for us to carry our lunches. A small daypack or fanny pack will thus be useful. Bring a water bottle, preferably plastic, which holds at least one pint.
- Insects should not be a major problem at this time of year; repellent is optional.
- There are excellent nature center/book stores at Hawk Mountain and the Cape May Bird Observatory, so a little souvenir money can come in handy.

**HEALTH:** If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication. As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots.

**PHYSICAL EXERTION:** Our tour will involve little strenuous physical activity. Days with some walking, some driving, and some sitting at lookout points will be the norm. The trail to Hawk Mountain's North Lookout can be challenging, but we will take our time. It is about half a mile through the woods on a steady gradual slope. The trail has many small rocks embedded in it; however, they are more of a nuisance than a danger. In the very unlikely event that anyone feels it is impossible to make it up the trail, that person may stay at the South Lookout. Though generally not as advantageous for seeing numbers of hawks, there is a lovely view and a few birds may be seen.

**SUGGESTED READING:** Our website, [www.ventbird.com](http://www.ventbird.com) offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from this store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You may also visit such other online stores such as [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), and for those out-of-print or hard-to-find titles, [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) or [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) which specializes in ornithology books.

***Field guides:*** Any of the popular North American or Eastern North American guides will suffice, though the National Geographic and Sibley Eastern book are probably the most useful and certainly the most current:

National Geographic Society. *A Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. 5th ed. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2006.

Sibley, David A. *The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America*. Chanticleer Press, 2003

***Reading and reference:***

Dunne, Pete, David Sibley and Clay Sutton. *Hawks in Flight*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988. Written by three men who have birded Cape May extensively for years, this book describes in great detail the techniques used by hawkwatching devotees to separate this often confusing group. Unlike most bird guides, which emphasize colors and patterns of feathering, this book explains the use of less tangible marks like shape and flight pattern. It is heavily biased toward hawks of the eastern United States.

Wheeler, Brian K. and William S. Clark. *A Photographic Guide to North American Raptors*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987. More in the mold of a standard field guide, but utilizes photographs to help identify the raptors which occur in the U.S. and Canada. It is a great improvement, at least in terms of field ID, over Clark and Wheeler's previous effort, the Peterson series guide, *Hawks*.

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- Liguori, Jerry. *Hawks From Every Angle*. Princeton University Press, 2005. One of the foremost experts on the field identification of hawks in North America, Jerry spent three years as Cape May's hawk counter.
- Brett, James. *The Mountain and the Migration*. Kempton PA: Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, 1948. (Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, Rt. 2, Kempton, PA 19529, 215/756-6961.) Written by Hawk Mountain Sanctuary director James Brett, this book provides a good overview for that area.
- Broun, Maurice. *Hawks Aloft: The Story of Hawk Mountain*. Kempton PA: Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, 1948. Regarded as a classic. May be out of print.
- Connor, Jack. *Season at the Point*. Chronicles a year's fall migration at Cape May and the birders who are drawn to it.
- Dunne, Pete and David Sibley. *The Wind Masters*. For information on the ecology and life histories of North America's raptors, presented in a highly readable, personal style.
- Harrison, Hal. *Roger Tory Peterson's Dozen Birding Hotspots*. An entertaining account of a visit to both areas.
- Kaufman, Kenn. *Advanced Birding*. Peterson Series. This field guide contains a good chapter on the accipiters (Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, and Northern Goshawk).
- Watts, May Theilgard. *Master Tree Finder*. A pocket-size booklet.
- Weidensoul, Scott. *Living on the Wind*. A must read for this trip, this book outlines many amazing examples of avian migration and explains how and why it happens.
- Peterson and Audubon both publish volumes on North American mammals, eastern reptiles and amphibians, insects, and plants.
- Kaufman Focus Guides publish birds, butterflies, and mammals of North America.

**TIPPING:** Tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

**RESPONSIBILITY:** Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. Where this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect December 27, 2007 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.