

Cape May

25 September–3 October 2009

Participants

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Lark Sparrow

Cape May is synonymous with bird migration in North America, so much so that its fame rivals that of other great migration hotspots in the world such as Eilat in Israel and Beidaihe in China. With tours running to both of the latter locations, Birdfinders offered its first tour to Cape May in autumn 2009. We enjoyed a week of excellent weather, good migration, fabulous local birding and did it all from a single comfortable hotel with very little time spent on the road, most our birding sites being close to ‘home’. The tour was a fantastic success, thoroughly enjoyed by all nine participants and the leader alike.

Day 1: Despite arriving on three separate flights, group members assembled in the arrivals hall at Philadelphia International airport nearly simultaneously ensuring a timely departure. The tour vehicle was already waiting and we were on the road in no time at all only to find ourselves battling with the Philadelphia rush hour traffic. Only after we’d crossed the Walt Whitman Bridge did traffic ease up. Thereafter, we were sped down the Atlantic City Expressway. The slow moving traffic however, had allowed some birding from the vehicle, and Martin, on his first trip to the USA, had already notched up Great Black-backed, American Herring and Laughing Gulls, along with Turkey Vulture and Double-crested Cormorant – all before dusk. After stopping for refreshment, the rest of the journey went smoothly as we headed south along the Garden State Parkway to Cape May. Despite arriving in darkness, our ideally situated hotel was found with little trouble thanks to excellent navigation from Bob. A friendly reception from our hosts and a very speedy check-in meant that we were in rooms unpacking by 21.00 and settled down for a good night’s rest. As one might imagine, the start of the following day in one of the world’s most famous migration hotspots was keenly anticipated by all.

Day 2: There’s nothing quite like the excitement of waking in a new birding destination. Even the parking lot of the local convenience store had good birds on view, which were enjoyed whilst sipping an early morning coffee. The first migrants of the trip were already on show as three Sharp-shinned Hawks and five Northern (Yellow-shafted) Flickers made appearances well before sunrise, and Snowy Egrets moved from roost out to the marshes. Driving the quiet country lanes to Higbee Beach WMA, a Black Vulture appeared low over the road promptly followed by more Sharp-shinned hawks and Northern Flickers. Arrival at Higbee Beach WMA found the parking lots quite full with vehicles, typical for a Saturday morning on Cape May at peak migration time. Walking the field edges, resident Northern Cardinals and Carolina Wrens called from the scrub, but it was the migrants that vied for most of our attention. Many more Northern Flickers, including a stream of thirteen birds, filtered through the bushes, some teeing up for scope views. Overhead more Sharp-shinned Hawks with Tree Swallows, Red-winged Blackbirds and two Bobolinks passed overhead were a taste of things to come. Strolling down to the ‘morning flight’ platform, several Blackpoll Warblers

appeared in the treetops, becoming our first 'identified' warblers of the trip and a good species for starters. As we walked out of the woodland deliberating where best to stand for the migration, a sudden cry of "Connecticut Warbler" rang out. The bird was right overhead and had been called by the official counter on the dike, Cameron Cox. It looked large and front heavy for a warbler giving a 'buzz-type' flight call and sporting a clearly defined grey-brown hood sharply demarcated from uniformly pale yellow underparts and long undertail coverts. Like most, if not all of the migrant warblers at Higbee, it headed northward and wasn't seen again. It was just like being thrown in at the deep end! Spending time close to the official counters on the dike and platform at Higbee Beach, we logged an impressive selection of species over the next two hours giving a first taste of the famed Cape May migration. Birds came at a comfortable pace, ideal for the first morning. At sea, Laughing Gulls, and Royal and Forster's Terns, were passing but it was really warblers and their allies that captivated most of the interest, Common Yellowthroat, American Redstart, Northern Parula, Black-and-white, Magnolia and Palm Warblers, Blue-grey Gnatcatcher and Red-eyed Vireo all appeared. Other migrants included the most ridiculously tame Solitary Sandpipers, Lesser Yellowlegs and Long-billed Dowitchers, these birds somehow determined to prove just how tame many birds can be in North America! Small numbers of Northern Shoveler and Blue-winged and Green winged Teals foraged all morning on the same slurry pools. Raptor enthusiasts were not disappointed as we logged about five Bald Eagles, including three adults together! American Kestrel, (Taiga) Merlin and several Cooper's Hawks were all easily outnumbered by the many Sharp-shinned Hawks that seemed to be constantly in the air. Heading back to the parking lot, we enjoyed Monarchs, Red-spotted Purple and American Lady Butterflies, two young Mourning Doves and a Red-bellied Woodpecker. It had been quite a morning for openers!

Before heading to the Hawkwatch platform at Cape May Lighthouse State Park, we enjoyed a well-deserved brunch at a local café. At the state park, the elevated platform filled with birders, not all surprising for a Saturday at the peak of migration. Migrant raptors came through in manageable numbers, frequently called by the counters on site, ideal for a first day with the focus on identification. Several Ospreys, Bald Eagles, Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks, Merlin and American Kestrels filtered through. Perhaps, most impressive were a couple of 'cream-crowned' juvenile Peregrines of the Arctic race '*tundrius*', one of the longer distance migrant raptors through Cape May with some birds reaching South America. Also visible from the Hawkwatch platform a Common Moorhen (actually a pretty good bird in northeast USA), Belted Kingfisher and quite literally thousands of Laughing Gulls foraging over the ocean.

Later in the afternoon, we headed north to Avalon for some seawatching. Northwesterly winds had built up during the afternoon perhaps increasing the chances of migration over the sea. En route there was nice collection of herons in the salt marsh with Great and Snowy Egrets, a fine adult Little Blue Heron and over a dozen Boat-tailed Grackles. Seawatching was good, as was our timing, for we turned up just in time to view the first White-winged Scoter of the season! Larger numbers of Black with some Surf Scoters also passed south and slightly more surprisingly, three Blue-winged Teals passed along the rip tide. Caspian Terns constantly foraged at close range, whilst in the distance over 15 American Oystercatchers were flushed regularly by beachgoers. We also had fine views of a juvenile *tundrius* Peregrine resting on a breakwater. The final birds of the day were two American Woodcocks right over the hotel spotted by Martin as we waited to go to dinner in town. It had been fantastic first day with bird migration evident at just about every stop, the very stuff that we had been hoping to see.

Day 3: Rain moved in overnight becoming heavy and torrential by the morning. It was in the forecast so came as no great surprise. Despite this, we optimistically assembled at 07.00 and drove some of the quiet roads for signs of migrants. With little to show other than Mallards on a flood pool, the early morning session was shelved and we decided to meet again at 09.30 to reassess the weather. In the meantime, members of our party made an effort to find their own birds coming up with American Goldfinch, House Finch and Downy Woodpecker at the rear of the hotel. Roger had a Philadelphia Vireo in the same area, and gave a very good description, but alas it was a sole observer sighting and didn't make the group list. With rain showers still very much in the air we headed down the road to Cape May Lighthouse. Raptors weren't moving at all and we elected to walk the trail behind the dunes. Firstly, Yellow Warblers appeared offering good views quickly followed by two or three dowdy-looking juvenile Indigo Buntings, dull birds but close enough to offer a good identification lesson. Further along the trail an American Bittern flew up from the cattails and Pied-billed Grebes and Belted Kingfishers gave excellent views. As we crossed the dunes to check the beach, a couple of Savannah Sparrows showed well before a roosting flock of gulls on the beach captured most of our interest. Nowadays, birders check gull flocks diligently knowing that patient scanning may well produce a bird of interest. It wasn't too long before Sue found a Lesser Black-backed Gull amongst the Great Black-backed and American Herring Gulls, perhaps not the most exciting find for British birders but still an ABA Code 3 species and

thus one of the scarcest birds on the trip. As the heavens opened for another heavy shower, another Lesser Black-backed Gull was found in the same flock, but despite multiple scans that was the only rare Laridae we could find. Across the beach, looking towards Beach Avenue in Cape May, we could see a huge flock of Black Skimmers and an even larger flock of Tree Swallows, all swarming around a pavilion under which a wedding was taking the place making us wonder if the happy couple just happened to be birders! Returning back towards the Lighthouse, we enjoyed combing through a Canada Goose flock resting on the beach finding two different forms – *B. c. canadensis* and *B. c. interior*. With the weather constantly improving, birds at sea became increasingly visible highlighted by at least four Arctic Skuas (Parasitic Jaegers) chasing terns over the rip tide and two drake Surf Scoters including one relatively close to shore. We'd almost reached the parking lot when Sue spotted a Lark Sparrow teed up atop a bush next to the track. Lark Sparrows are rare migrants to the northeast coast in autumn and this bird gave excellent views, eventually flying back down to where it had originally been feeding. We concluded the morning with a Fish Crow at close range in the parking area, perhaps a little more mundane than Lark Sparrow, but still with a charm all of its own!

After lunch in town, we headed north to Two Mile Landing hoping for skulking sparrows. Seaside Sparrow was the first to appear which we found with little trouble but there was neither hide nor hair of its scarcer cousin, Saltmarsh Sparrow. Attention suddenly diverted to herons when an all-dark heron with a buffy-coloured head and neck was seen in flight by most of the group except the leader! Even before it landed in the saltmarsh it was called as a Reddish Egret, the lack of white underparts convincingly ruling out an immature Tricoloured Heron. This turned out to be one the most intriguing birds of the trip. After consulting numerous references it soon became clear that there is currently no accepted record of Reddish Egret for Cape May or New Jersey! It is, however, mentioned as 'hypothetical' for Cape May suggesting that there have been other sight only observations. Despite lingering in the area for another two hours the bird wasn't seen again, or on any subsequent visits. If a potential 'state first' had just slipped through our fingers, there could be no complaints about the multiple views of Clapper Rail, one of which gave a prolonged exhibition out in the open. Killdeer and Least Sandpiper also showed incredibly well. Greater Yellowlegs rested in the saltmarsh blending so well that superficially the flock size looked to be about five birds. In actual fact, thorough scanning produced a total much closer to fifty!

Our final destination was Nummy's Island. Seemingly quiet at first, roadside birding did eventually give excellent views of Tricoloured Herons and Yellow-crowned Night-herons, Boat-tailed Grackle and Song Sparrow (but again no Saltmarsh Sparrow!). In the distance, looking towards Stone Harbour, large flocks of Red Knot, Black-bellied Plover, Sanderling and American Oystercatcher rested at high tide and Chris came up with a Ruddy Turnstone, quite a spot at that range. More diligent searching produced four Black Brants of the pale-bellied form and two juvenile Brown Pelicans passed south offshore. The latter closed our observations for the day and we headed back to the hotel for a shower, followed by dinner and the log in town.

Day 4: Clear skies and a westerly breeze off Delaware Bay greeted our arrival at Higbee Beach. The deluge from the previous morning had left numerous puddles including one so large that it denied access to the dike, which we had climbed quite easily two days earlier. As a result our group divided forces, most electing to stay on the 'morning flight' platform whilst a few braved the muddy climb to the top of the dike where the 'official' passerine count takes place. Either way, it turned to be a fine morning with both stations seeing most of the birds reported. A steady stream of American Redstarts and Northern Parulas were among the most obvious warblers to appear followed by a nice assortment of migrants including Bobolink, Cedar Waxwing, Red-eyed Vireo, Eastern Wood-pewee, Baltimore Oriole, Blue-grey Gnatcatcher and Yellow-rumped, Nashville, Black-and-white, Blackpoll and Palm Warblers. A showy Brown Thrasher, defying its reputation as skulker, may or may not have been migrant but gave cracking views. Offshore, birds moving south out of Delaware Bay included American Black Duck, three Surf Scoters and an adult Arctic Skua (Parasitic Jaeger), the latter being the first of the season to be seen from the dike at Higbee. The best birds of the morning, however, were a fly-over American Golden-plover consorting with Black-bellied Plovers and a fine adult Red-headed Woodpecker. The woodpecker's appearance was pre-empted by a text message alert that basically said "Red-headed Woodpecker heading your way, towards Higbee Beach". Within minutes the bird appeared and perched for an extended period in spindly trees being most easily visible from the top of the dike. How sweet it is when birds perform on cue, especially the good ones! It had been a superb morning but feeling the need for pastures new, we headed north to Brigantine, breaking the hour-long journey with the first 'Wa Wa experience' of the tour.

Brigantine, or more accurately Edwin B. Forsythe NWR, was typically blustery making observations difficult at times. By using the vehicle as a windbreak, our first stop overlooking the impoundments produced an excellent selection of

shorebirds. Sue's keen eyes picked up a first-winter Stilt Sandpiper in amongst a close group of five Lesser Yellowlegs. Despite showing some decurvature in the bill and a well-marked supercilium, the Stilt Sandpiper disappeared remarkably well within the yellowlegs. Large flocks of shorebirds, mostly 'peeps' fed in the open pans, often being flushed by Peregrines and Northern Harriers. Invariably they would settle down quickly and by sifting and sorting through the flocks we found Dunlin, Semipalmated and Least Sandpipers to be the most common with seven White-rumped Sandpipers, six Western Sandpipers, five more Stilt Sandpipers and four Pectoral Sandpipers amongst them. A distant bird, suggestive of Baird's Sandpiper, turned out to be a juvenile White-rumped Sandpiper on closer inspection, the only juvenile amongst the seven white-rumps present. Having had our fill of shorebirds, attention turned to the pink and gaudy with reports of a long staying Roseate Spoonbill on the refuge. Despite a pretty thorough search along the eight-mile drive loop we came up empty, rather surprising for a bird that shouldn't have been too difficult to find. The drive loop was far from disappointing though as we marvelled at the sheer numbers of Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, American Wigeon, American Black Ducks and shorebirds present on the refuge.

Heading back towards Cape May, we closed the day at the Avalon seawatch. Both Great and Cory's Shearwaters had been reported lingering there on the previous day but seeing them was always going to be a long shot. Neither could be found, nor had they been seen that day according to the official seabird counter on site, but we did have a magnificent juvenile Brown Pelican sail right overhead and out along the breakwater. Well beyond the rip tide, a couple of distant Northern Gannets flew south. The last bird of the day at Avalon was a Ruddy Turnstone sharing company with a House Sparrow on the seawall!

Day 5: The day dawned cool and blustery with winds in the westerly quarter once again. The calls of several nocturnal migrants could be heard over the hotel well before first light, certainly indicating that birds were on the move. The group met at 06.30 ready to go and arrived at Higbee Beach parking lot just 15 minutes later. Again our party divided forces, some opting for the 'morning flight' platform whilst others again elected for the more exposed position atop the dike. Either way, it was another good morning. Another Connecticut Warbler was called early on by the expert counters on the dike. During the morning many tens of warblers passed both stations including Nashville, Blackpoll, Black-and-white, Black-throated Blue, Magnolia, Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Green, Bay-breasted, Pine, and Palm Warblers, plus over 15 American Redstarts and 10 Northern Parulas. Other migrants included Blue-headed and Red-eyed Vireos, Eastern Wood-pewee, Scarlet Tanager, Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Blue-grey Gnatcatcher. Arguably the best warbler was a very bold Prairie Warbler that preened in a holly bush just yards in front of the morning flight platform, much to everyone's adoration. The walk back to the vehicle was enlivened by a couple of thrushes lurking in the shadows – some saw Swainson's and some saw Grey-cheeked. Both were present but it was the Swainson's that put on the best show, perching for a while on a low branch. In the same area, Roger along with two American birders, had watched a female-type Hooded Warbler close to the road, which sadly eluded the group. Returning to the parking lot, it transpired that a visiting British birder had seen two or three Connecticut Warblers actively feeding along a woodland edge close to the dike. With all of us needing good views of this species we had little choice but to take our chances and go back! Unfortunately, the warblers couldn't be found but the jaunt did allow most of the group to catch up with male Black-throated Blue Warblers. Several Indigo Buntings and two Solitary Sandpipers were also found on the trail. Conditions looked favourable for raptor migration, so again we found ourselves heading for Cape May Lighthouse State Park. In the event, warblers took precedent and we enjoyed superb views of a Bay-breasted Warbler feeding in the low cedars next to the restrooms. Also present were several Blackpoll and Palm Warblers. Highlights at the Hawkwatch platform included the first Broad-winged Hawk of the tour, plus several Bald Eagles, Peregrines and Merlins and rather nice views of a late Chimney Swift.

After a fine lunch we couldn't resist looking for skimmers on Cape May seafront, two hundred of which gave point blank views on the public beach offering super photographic opportunities. Close by, similarly exquisite views of Forster's Terns and Laughing Gulls were enjoyed by all. We then headed north to Stone Harbour Point where our target bird was Piping Plover. On arrival the size of the beach coupled with sand being blown horizontally by a strong westerly wind looked a little daunting. The place had the feel of a desert in a sand storm rather than a New Jersey beach! Large areas of the flats had also been roped off to protect feeding shorebirds so the venture had the makings of a real challenge. A large roost of American Oystercatchers, on closer inspection, actually contained two Marbled Godwits. Bob, having had his fill of the godwits, turned around and casually drew attention to nine Piping Plovers resting in the strand line just meters away. They must have been sitting there the whole time as we wrestled with scopes in the wind trying to get everyone on the distant godwits. The plovers on the other hand were nothing but confiding and charming, and a photographers dream! The walk back to the vehicle produced more Piping Plovers, several

Western Sandpipers and Sanderlings, along with migrant Black Scoters, Black Brant and another juvenile *tundrius* Peregrine. Finally, back at Two Mile landing, Saltmarsh Sparrow again eluded us but it was interesting to watch Great and Snowy Egrets, and about five Tricoloured Herons flying in to roost in a distant copse. A Glossy Ibis, the only one of the tour, was heading towards the same roost and seen by most of the group. As we departed, some 200 Fish Crows flew overhead, presumably on their way to roost as well. We returned to Cape May for dinner and the log in town.

Day 6: The skies had cleared and it was the first windless morning that we'd had since arriving. The air was heavy with the calls of small nocturnal migrants well before first light. The morning had the potential for a huge flight and upon arrival at Higbee Beach it was clear that most of the birders in the local area had come to the same conclusion. Various chips, tsips and buzzes could be heard from the dense woodland as we walked through to the watch points. The 'morning flight' platform was already crowded but somehow most of our group found a place to stand, whilst a couple of others elected to try watching from the dike once again. The morning began with the intriguing sight of a Peregrine carrying prey over the sea. The prey item was medium sized but with notably long dangling legs and proportionately long toes. It was likely a rail, perhaps Virginia or Sora and probably a migrant that provided easy pickings for the Peregrine as it struggled over Delaware Bay. Despite much anticipation from expert and novice alike, the 'hoped for' big flight didn't happen. Instead, small numbers of warblers filtered through Higbee Beach for the early part of the morning – amongst them up to five each of Northern Parula, Black-and-white, Black-throated Blue, Magnolia, Cape May, Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Green and Bay-breasted Warblers with ten plus each of American Redstart and Blackpoll and Palm Warblers. Other migrants included Red-eyed and Blue-headed Vireos, Scarlet Tanager, Baltimore Orioles and for those on the platform, an Eastern Meadowlark. After brunch at our now regular oceanside restaurant, it became clear that raptors were on the move and we had a nice selection of birds just from the restaurant parking lot – Bald Eagle, Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks and a couple of Peregrines. We therefore felt a little deflated when very few raptors appeared to be moving at Cape May Lighthouse. Highlights however, did include a couple of Broad-winged Hawks and perhaps half-a-dozen Chimney Swifts. Seven American Coots appeared to be new arrivals on the pool in front of the raptor watch and several close warblers gave exceptional views at close range, including Palm and Black-throated Green Warblers right in front on the deck.

Mid afternoon, we ventured north of Cape May to Jake's Landing, actually an expansive area of saltmarsh fringed by woodland. Wide horizons and big skies greeted us once we drove out as far we could. The view was wonderful and birds could be seen all around, most notably Northern Harriers. These fine raptors were in the air constantly from our arrival until dusk. An estimate of about 35 harriers, including a couple of cracking adult males, was decidedly conservative. The habitat looked perfect for Saltmarsh Sparrow, which again became our focus for a short while. Seaside Sparrow and Eastern Meadowlark were seen, but alas no saltmarsh could be coaxed into view. Several sparrows in the gravel parking area proved to be Savannah and Song and with them, a superb Clay-coloured Sparrow. The latter was another good sparrow find, along with the Lark Sparrow earlier in the week. A Marsh Wren skulked in the weedy fringes and was far less co-operative. Attention then turned to woodland, in fact a section of the Belleplain State Forest. It was rather quiet at first but after some time we eventually had reasonable views of both Red-breasted Nuthatch and Hairy Woodpecker before locating a much larger feeding flock close to the edge of the forest. This lively flock contained Blue-headed Vireo, Pine Warbler (5), Cape May Warbler (2), Yellow-rumped Warbler, Northern Parula, Black-and-white Warbler, American Redstart, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Chickadee, Red-bellied Woodpecker and Brown Creeper. Behind us, a pair of Great Horned Owls called spontaneously but despite our best efforts couldn't actually be seen. The owls and the feeding flock had distracted us from departure and we left at dusk deciding to have supper en route to Cape May.

Day 7: The first day of October dawned cool, clear and full of birds. We began with the traditional start at Higbee Beach. On arrival, the professional counter (Cameron Cox) drew our attention to a calling Bicknell's Thrush clearly audible in the forest adjacent to the dike. It called for several minutes though wasn't seen. Nevertheless, it was a reminder of the skills shown by many of the professional birders at Cape May. Not only that, but their unhesitating willingness to share information greatly enhanced the friendly birding atmosphere at Cape May. The migration picked up considerably after a slow first half-hour and we later enjoyed a steady stream of birds throughout the morning. Black-throated Blue Warblers featured prominently with over 20 recorded, and Blackpoll (45), Palm (20), Black-and-white (8), Black-throated Green (10), Bay-breasted (3), Nashville, Magnolia and Prairie Warblers, Northern Parula (20) and American Redstart (35) were all noted as well as the first Blackburnian Warblers (2) and Ovenbird of the trip. Again, watchers from the dike were rewarded Connecticut Warblers – three birds in total, all close fly-bys and all identified by the experts. Non-warbler species appearing for the first time included Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Yellow-

bellied Sapsucker and Rusty Blackbird. We later wandered around the fields at Higbee Beach WMA and continued to be impressed by the numbers of new arrivals, especially Eastern Phoebes (20+), Grey Catbirds and Swamp Sparrows, which seemed to be everywhere. We also did especially well to find two Field Sparrows, a White-eyed Vireo and an early Dark-eyed Junco. After brunch, we checked the Beanery (Rea Farm), which was rather quiet by comparison, after a very productive morning. The walk however, did yield excellent views of Ruby-throated Hummingbird with prolonged views of a late female/immature perched out in the afternoon sunlight. A small flock of migrants working a beautiful Red Maple swamp contained a Northern Waterthrush and very good views of a Brown Creeper. Overhead, raptor migration included an actual 'kettle' of seven Broad-winged Hawks. The final part of the day focused on Cape May where we enjoyed a Ring-necked Duck and a Green Heron on Lily Lake and good views of a male Blue-winged Teal plus an immature Little Blue Heron in Cape May meadows. Overhead, thousands of Tree Swallows swarmed in a pre-roost gathering, the flock containing at least one Cliff Swallow. Dinner and log call for the last full day was taken in town.

Day 8: With thoughts turning to the journey home, it seemed appropriate that the final morning at Higbee Beach would be the slowest of the entire week. The mood wasn't particularly enhanced when we were greeted by muggy southerly winds and overcast skies, just about the worst conditions for seeing migration at Cape May. When it's time to go home, it's time to go home! Even so, we rallied and had nice views of Blackpoll, Yellow-rumped and Black-throated Green Warblers, Northern Parula, Belted Kingfisher and Northern Flicker. Those on the top of the dike were rewarded, once again, with another close fly-by Connecticut Warbler! Later we walked the trails around the Beanery hoping to find a more amenable Connecticut Warbler but found very few migrants other than American Redstart, Red-eyed Vireo and Grey Catbird. We did, however, have our first and only Wood Duck of the tour. After loading up for the journey to the airport we called in at our favourite oceanside café for a last brunch and then headed to Brigantine where, as always, it seemed to be blowing a hooligan! The state of the tide looked good for sparrows so again we tried for Saltmarsh but to no avail – only Savannah and Seaside Sparrows would show. On the impoundments, we found the usual overwhelming assortment of wildfowl and shorebirds, and again had success in finding Pectoral, White-rumped, Stilt and Western Sandpipers. Two newly arrived Snow Geese rested amongst Great Black-backed Gulls providing a nice surprise and another addition to the tour list. Our focus then turned to gaudy pink birds once again. As we drove around the impoundments we found countless Great and Snowy Egrets and then stumbled across an impressive roost of Black-crowned Night-herons. As we set up scopes on the night-herons, Chris proclaimed, "there it is, I've got the spoonbill", but its appearance was rather brief as it promptly walked behind a stand of cattails and straight out of view! Even so, all of the group managed something of a view and soon afterwards we drove around to a different vantage point and had prolonged, albeit distant views. The Roseate Spoonbill, which is a rarity in New Jersey, was really the last bird of the tour and a fitting end to a fine migration-based holiday. We packed our 'scopes, changed our boots and headed for Philadelphia airport arriving in good time for our respective flights home.

From a leader's perspective this was a memorable and enjoyable tour greatly enhanced by some lively banter and a hard working but happy group. We closed the tour with 173 bird species, highly respectable for a single base trip and setting a high bar for future tours to Cape May.

James P. Smith