

Cape May, NJ – Bird Beat #77

Part II

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In keeping with our practice of reserving a very long weekend for our Cape May trip, my brother and I planned our trip around the September 24-25 weekend. We picked this late-September timeframe for the greatest potential for species diversity. Large numbers of birds are more common in early September or mid-October, but late-September gives you the best window for both early and late-migrants but not usually peak numbers of individuals.



Cape May Warbler

As the weekend approached, it became evident that Friday-Sunday would be the best days, so we booked the ferry trip for Thursday, and we got ourselves ready for the adventure. Due to the cold front that would bring the birds, the trip over Delaware Bay on Thursday was dreary and the afternoon was downright rainy. We found out long ago that we don't melt in the rain, so we walked the State Park in the evening and tallied 6 species of warbler and a few other migrants in the poor conditions. The rain passed early though, and the wind had already switched to the northwest before we turned in for the night.



Black-Throated Blue Warbler

In keeping with our expectations, we were not met with a huge "fallout" of migrants on Friday morning but with a moderate number of birds of a high species diversity. By the end of the day, we had found a total of 20 species of warblers including 2 Connecticut warblers, a good bird even for Cape May, and a wide variety of other migrants including vireos, tanagers, thrushes, sparrows, raptors, and wading birds.

For those who aren't birders, a 20-species warbler day may not sound like much of an accomplishment, so I should stress how rare it actually is. My brother and I have been birding most of our lives, and, though we each have multiple 20-warbler days, I would wager a guess that neither of us have even 10 such days in our entire time birding. Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that Friday the 23rd of September 2022 was one of the best days for warbler species either of us has experienced.

Saturday proved to be a harder day for warblers (15 species) and Sunday was similar (16 species), but we were able to add one additional species (a late hooded warbler) for a weekend total of 21 species of warblers. Rest assured that Cape May isn't a one-trick pony, and in pure Cape May fashion, we had good numbers of hawks, shorebirds, and ducks to keep us busy over the weekend. When all was said and done, we left Cape May with a weekend total of 118 species (which could have been much higher if we had birded beyond Cape Island) and a lot of great memories. Not bad for 45 minutes of driving and a leisurely ferry ride. Oh yeah, for those of you who aren't really that into birding, I hear Cape May is a really nice vacation destination for those usual vacationy things like shopping, fine dining, and nice beaches... that is, if you are into that kind of thing.



Palm Warbler