

## **A global friendship agreement through the lens of the Cape May Bird Observatory**

By David La Puma, Director of NJ Audubon's Cape May Bird Observatory

The intent of bird observatories around the world can be boiled down to assessing the needs of birds, using that assessment to educate a variety of different audiences, and ultimately to support wildlife and wildlife habitat conservation. Bird observatories tend to be located at strategic points of migration concentration, and data from each point is valuable especially with regards to the local needs of the birds (and other wildlife) moving through it.

But as bird observatory operators, we see the greater value in our efforts when we can bridge the gaps between our individual sites and work collaboratively to ask and answer bigger questions, and potentially impart greater impact than the sum of our individual locations.

It is with this guiding principal that the Cape May Bird Observatory embarked on a Friendship Agreement with both the Falsterbo Bird Observatory in Sweden, and the Spurn Bird Observatory at Spurn Point, United Kingdom; Three south-facing peninsulas with a rich history of migration monitoring, and connecting people to the wonders of bird migration.

So far the three-way friendship has yielded some great results. Regular Skype meetings have given each observatory a broader understanding of bird migration around the world. Last fall David La Puma travelled from Cape May to both Falsterbo and Spurn to deliver lectures on bird observatory operations at CMBO, and a joint presentation with Björn Malmhagen from Falsterbo, about the similarities and differences between the Falsterbo peninsula and Cape May. In 2017 we will embark on our first major joint initiative, a 'young birder exchange' between the three observatories. Cape May Bird Observatory is excited to welcome two visiting young birders from abroad, as well as send one each to Falsterbo and Spurn, to foster the skills and information exchange between our respective organizations.

CMBO is looking forward to hosting Rob Adams and Nick Whitehouse (Spurn Bird Observatory) and Björn Malmhagen (Falsterbo Bird Observatory) at the 2017 Cape May Fall Festival where they will be delivering an evening keynote lecture. CMBO is also excited to be hosting the 2nd International Bird Observatory Conference, October 26 - 30th, where bird observatories from around the world will descend on Cape May to exchange ideas and experiences, and hatch plans for future collaboration. More information can be found on <http://birdcapemay.org>

## **The Birding Year in Cape May – 2016**

By Tom Reed, Migration Count Coordinator for NJ Audubon's Cape May Bird Observatory

2016 was an interesting period for bird study in the Cape May area. The year's average temperature of 56.4°F ranked as the third warmest since recordkeeping commenced in 1895. A mild winter meant that some species lingered in greater numbers than usual (Forster's Tern, Western Sandpiper) while others seemed to stay to our north (Snow Goose, Rough-legged Hawk). The observatory's Winter Raptor Survey was again conducted at numerous saltmarsh outposts, and continued to collect valuable data on raptor population densities. The season was brightened by a Varied Thrush that lingered from December and represented just the 2<sup>nd</sup> county record, a Le Conte's Sparrow photographed at Jake's Landing, and the highly coveted Great Skua found during a February pelagic trip.

Spring migration is always a toss-up, as the geographic magic that brings migrants to Cape May in fall does not guarantee their presence on the return trip, yet the 2016 edition would prove to be a good one. Volunteer-led monitoring at Cape May Point continued to shed light on previously undocumented northbound movements of many species. Fog and rain conspired to produce a strong fallout of passerines at Cape Island on the second of May, likely the best spring flight in several years. Another solid flight graced participants during the 33<sup>rd</sup> annual World Series of Birding, where the top Cape Island team compiled an excellent total of 164 species. The season's headline birds included Swainson's Warbler, Bicknell's Thrush, and Brown Booby.

Summer frequently brings forth a few surprises from points south, and this was certainly the case in 2016. A flock of 12 Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks made for a stunning sight at West Cape May, a Brown-headed Nuthatch played hide-and-peek in the dunes at Cape May Point, and a Wilson's Plover was skillfully detected at Stone Harbor Point. A bit further afield, a pair of Mississippi Kites successfully nested in Ocean County, a first for New Jersey, while numbers of wandering non-breeders were detected at Cape May on several days. As always, summer, at least in the eyes of the birder, is short-lived on this peninsula and southbound movements of passerines and shorebirds were noted by Independence Day.

Autumn is Cape May's golden season, and CMBO's annual monitoring efforts were launched on August 15, the first day of the Morning Flight songbird count. Neotropical songbird migration was unremarkable early on, and a lack of cold fronts also adversely affected the start of the Cape May Hawkwatch, though strong daily movements of Osprey were a definite highlight. The weather became more active by October, just as the Avalon Seawatch was getting into gear with increasing numbers of cormorants and scoters streaming south over the Atlantic. A couple of classic cold fronts brought two of the best Sharp-shinned Hawk flights witnessed at Cape May this decade, along with excellent movements of short-distance passerines and a notably early invasion of Cave Swallows. Katy Duffy's long-term owl banding project indicated a decent flight of Northern Saw-whet Owls. The fun kept rolling into November, as the first third of the month was dominated by westerly winds and included a single morning with half a million American Robins moving past Cape May Point. The Hawkwatch and Seawatch continued strong through much of the month, with a small push of Northern Goshawks stealing the spotlight. It was not a monster season for rarities, yet Black-chinned Hummingbird, Arctic Tern, White-winged Dove, and Franklin's Gull were all nice finds. As the dust was settling from the busy fall season and a busy 2016, a sharp Brewer's Blackbird added some excitement to the year's final days.

*For the full year-in-review, plus some great articles, illustrations and photographs, become a member of New Jersey Audubon's Cape May Bird Observatory (<http://featheredgeoptics.org/cmbomembership>) and receive your annual Peregrine Observer in late summer of this year!*