



Take A Kid Birding®
Young Birder's How-to Guide: Autumn in Cape May



Sample Autumn Itinerary for Young Birders

- ✓ Be sure to check the postings on “View from the Cape” for recent sightings information.
- ✓ Please refer to the *Cape May Birding and Butterflying Map* for detailed directions. A downloadable version is available under the link: [Birding Maps and Checklist](#).

7-8am: Arrive at Higbee Beach WMA at the end of New England Road. There is a parking lot here, but if you arrive more than half an hour after sunrise your chances of finding a parking spot will be slim, especially on a good flight morning. There is a smaller overflow parking lot that is often open, located just to the left and before the main lot on New England Road.

7/8am-10am: Stop first at the Morning Flight Project Platform (follow the dirt road to the right as you face the main parking lot and you will see the observation platform on your left) to view overhead songbird migrants. Then backtrack down the road and bird the main Higbee Beach WMA trails. Focus on the sunlit field edges to find migrants feeding and resting. There can be much to see here on a fall morning; take all the time you need and don't feel that you're tied to this schedule!

10:15am: Arrive at Cape May Point State Park near the end of Lighthouse Avenue in Cape May Point (just look for the lighthouse!). Restrooms are available here in the buildings directly south of the lighthouse. There is also a natural history museum in the park which contains interesting information and artifacts from Cape May's past.

10:30-12:30pm: Scan the skies for raptors at the Cape May Autumn Hawk Watch or search for various migrants along the park's trails, which pass through woodlands, freshwater marshes, ponds, dunes and beach. Note that hawkwatching in Cape May is not limited to the hawkwatch platform; you can see migrating hawks from many vantage points on Cape Island. This is land's end for migrating birds - anything is possible here.

12:30-1:15pm: At this point you have two options: 1) Break for lunch, or 2) Keep birding. The State Park is an ideal spot for a picnic lunch or there are many restaurants and sandwich shops in town to choose from. See “Places to Eat, Shop, Stay and Play” for a listing of local businesses that support CMBO.

1:15pm: Arrive at The Nature Conservancy's Cape May Migratory Bird Refuge, located on the south side of Sunset Boulevard, near Bayshore Road. There is a nice parking area here, and you'll find that this is one of Cape May's most accessible birding sites. Please note that The Nature Conservancy collects an entrance fee for this property if you do not already possess an access pass.

1:15-2:45pm: Walk the path through the CMMBR. It's a loop, so you can start on one side or the other- it's your choice! You may notice the recently restored habitat here. The

meadows used to be heavily infested with Phragmites; a tall, invasive, non-native plant which is abundant in Cape May. The reconstruction will help to restore less-dominant native vegetation. Look for shorebirds, wading birds and songbirds along the paths, and watch for seabirds and shorebirds from the beach.

3:00pm: Arrive at CMBO's Northwood Center, located by turning left out of the CMMBR parking lot and heading south on Sunset Boulevard towards the Concrete Ship and Sunset Beach. Take a left onto Lighthouse Avenue, then take the second right onto East Lake Drive. (Look for the CMBO sign on the right side of the road before the turn.) Our center is the first building on your right. Park along the side of the road.

3:00-3:30pm: Visit the center, check the sightings sheets for recent finds, and add your own to the list! Feel free to check out the nature store, or talk with the friendly CMBO staff. Then bird around the center. While there are no trails at Northwood, you can view the feeders and explore the property which can hold migrant songbirds on good flight days and even be as productive as Higbee Beach. Migrant waterbirds are frequently on Lake Lily (directly across the street).

3:30-4:15pm: Drive to 7th Street, at the north end of Avalon. See the *Cape May Birding and Butterflying Map* for detailed directions. *Note:* The Avalon Seawatch begins on September 22nd. If you are in Cape May before that time, you can visit another great place to watch waterbirds, Sunset Beach, located on Cape Island at the west end of Sunset Boulevard.

4:15pm: Arrive at CMBO's Avalon Seawatch, located at the seawall at the end of 7th Street.

4:15-5:15pm: Spend an hour at the Avalon Seawatch. If you have a spotting scope, this is a perfect place to use it, as migrating waterbirds are often fairly distant.

By now it will be getting late in the day, and you or your family might be quite tired from a day in the field. This is okay--there are many other things to see and do in Cape May! However, if you wish to continue birding, here are a few suggestions:

1. Late-day Birding: Any of the sites you visited earlier can be productive again later in the day. A popular late-day spot is the Cape May Migratory Bird Refuge. You might want to take one last relaxing stroll along the east path of the "Meadows" and spend some time atop the observation platform (just remember that the gates close ½ hour after sunset!). Another option is to sit on the hawkwatch platform to watch Merlins and other raptors engaged in late-day hunting. Raptors are often lower and in view for longer periods at the end of the day. Higbee Beach can also be worth an early evening stop, even though the birds may not be as concentrated or as easy to find as they were first thing in the morning. The options are endless; that is what makes Cape May so great.

2. Nocturnal birding: As dusk falls on land's end, look for nocturnal migrants that are funneled to the tip of the Cape May Peninsula. A study of migrating owls is conducted in Cape May each fall, and if you happen to visit during late-October or early-November,

you might be able to witness an owl-banding demonstration. A “Twilight Watch” for migrating owls, bats, and herons takes place Wednesday evenings at the CMMBR September through October. Check the Naturalist’s Calendar or call CMBO for dates and times for these programs. Both the CMMBR and the State Park are excellent places to explore on your own, watch for migrating owls and listen for nocturnal migrants overhead.

Final Wrap Up

This sample itinerary is meant to provide you with the basics for birding and enjoying Cape May in the fall! We hope this guide is useful to both you and your family. If you have any other questions or wish to explore alternatives to the above-outlined schedule, please feel free to contact us! Remember that your main objective is to learn and to have fun--make those your priorities and we promise your trip to Cape May will be unforgettable.

Good birding and good luck!

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