

On the Osprey

Birding by Boat

Cape May, NJ
September 7, 2024



BCDC was delighted to host a unique field trip on Saturday, September 7, 2024, Birding by Boat on the Osprey, in Cape May. A lively group of BCDC members and friends joined the 2.5 hour boat ride on a cloudy, clear balmy morning to explore the backbay salt marshes of Cape May county.



Captain Bob and naturalist Patty did an excellent job of pointing out birds as we cruised slowly along calm waterways. A Merlin and several Belted Kingfishers immediately greeted us, along with numerous Double-crested Cormorants and Laughing Gulls. We passed many Ospreys including a pair of begging juveniles that refused to leave the nest, though the parents were done bringing food to their grown offspring. White Ibis populations have increased rapidly in recent years, and we saw several dozen of them mingle with Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets, Little Blue Herons, Tricolored Herons, and Great Blue Herons.



Captain Bob expertly maneuvered the stealthy "Osprey" to the edge of the spartina marsh, for close looks at foraging Semipalmated Sandpipers, and roosting Black-bellied Plovers, Short-billed Dowitchers, Greater Yellowlegs and American Oystercatchers.



Clapper Rails flying across the marsh were a life bird for several folks, along with a few Seaside Sparrows popping up briefly.

We motored slowly past jetties where hundreds of Common and Forster's Terns stood with Ruddy Turnstones and a few Spotted Sandpipers. On a stretch of beach we ogled hundreds of Great Black Gulls along with a big flock of Royal Terns, two Caspian Terns, and a surprise Brown Pelican.



On a railing we found a juvenile Royal Tern next to two 1st year birds, noticing the different bare part colors between the two ages; yellow bill and legs in the juvenile and orange bill, black legs in the older bird.



We enjoyed further comparisons when we encountered juvenile Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night-herons clustered in coastline cedar trees. Note the different shapes of the bills as well as the color between the two birds; narrower and yellowish in the Black-crowned, and black and dagger-like in the Yellow-crowned.

We were treated to a lone Black Scoter floating past our boat, a Northern Harrier skimming low over the marsh, and several Boat-tailed Grackles foraging in marsh grasses.

Thanks to all who joined this wonderful experience birding Cape May saltmarshes from the "Osprey."

