



News Release

Cape May County, New Jersey

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Birding and Butterflies

The delicate but determined Monarch butterflies flutter into Cape May County every fall, followed by nearly as many eco-tourists anxious to watch these delicate creatures pause exquisitely on swaying stalks of milkweed.

No one fully understands the mystery of why the Monarchs migrate south to California, Florida and central Mexico, but anyone who steps into an autumn morning and sees hundreds of Monarchs clustered on cedar trees will gasp with amazement at the sight of so many orange and black butterflies resting from their flight. By midday, warmed by the sun, the Monarchs will have resumed their travels. In addition to the colorful Monarchs, over a hundred other species of butterflies visit Cape May, usually between August and October.

The Jersey Cape with its peninsular geography, westerly winds and diverse habitats creates a hospitable environment for birds and butterflies to rest, feed and gather strength before continuing their migration. From September through November, Cape May County hosts hundreds of different species of birds, dragonflies, butterflies and the visitors who enjoy watching them.

Visitors to the Cape May and Cape May Point area can spot scores of birds and butterflies throughout the fall as they migrate south. The hawk viewing platform at Cape May Point State Park regularly hosts 100,000 visitors each season and the meadows between Cape May and Cape May Point is a prime place to see dozens of egrets

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gathered there during their annual migration. Egrets remain in the Cape May County area from March to September although some will winter over in mild weather and the meadow area is a popular living and feeding spot for the beautiful birds.

Egrets, with their snowy white plumage, abound throughout the county, perched in shallow water searching for their next meal. Members of the heron family, the egrets are territorial birds and form colonies during breeding season. For the novice, snowy egrets are a wonderful introduction to the world of bird watching. They are attractive, large and easy to spot with black bill and bright yellow legs. The Southern New Jersey area is also home to cattle egrets and great egrets who have showy plumes on their backs during mating times.

Anyone who doubts Cape May County's claim as a major birding site can check the statistics from the annual World Series of Birding -- last year 259 species were sighted and as many as 400 species of birds have been seen in the Cape May area. Both novice and experienced bird watchers can enjoy guided tours, programs and other special events offered by Cape May Bird Observatory in Cape May Point or Cape May Court House. Most workshops are intensive and coincide with the peak times for the numbers and diversity of species. Each workshop includes several days of outdoor bird study, field trips to key spots around the county and entertaining lectures. The Cape May Bird Observatory maintains a birding hotline (609-884-2626) for up-to-the-minute birding information.

For both amateur and serious eco-tourists, fall is the perfect time to visit Cape May County. Binoculars replace bikinis, cameras are more important than beach chairs. Cape May Point is probably the premier area for both bird and butterfly watchers but there are plenty of other spots around the county where eco-tourists of every age can marvel in the diverse wildlife of southern New Jersey.