

TRAILS OF CAPE MAY POINT STATE PARK

Cape May Point State Park's constantly changing shoreline, dunes, freshwater coastal marsh and ponds, forested uplands and beaches make it a well-known location for hiking and viewing wildlife, especially during the fall bird migration. The park is located on the southern tip of New Jersey where the Atlantic Ocean and Delaware Bay meet. The park's interpretive center houses a classroom and museum that highlight the area's natural and historic importance. In addition to nature, a historic lighthouse and World War II Gun Battery, locally known as the "Bunker," can be visited. Three blazed trails lead visitors through the park's varied habitats. Wildlife can be viewed from observation platforms.

Duck Pond Trail

Red • 0.5 miles • Hiking and accessible

Easy • Boardwalk trail to ponds

Trailhead East side of parking lot. **Duck Pond Trail** is wheelchair accessible and offers visitors access to the Lighthouse Pond West and East. Each pond has a platform at the water's edge to view wading birds, ducks and muskrats, as well as the occasional osprey or river otter. In the late fall and winter, the ponds may be covered with many species of wintering ducks. The ducks are scattered, almost daily, by hunting bald eagles. The ponds are fresh water and are protected from salt water flooding by the sand dunes and beach replenishment programs. Bass, sunfish, bullfrogs, northern water snakes, painted turtles and snapping turtles may be seen if the water is clear enough (after a rainfall). In July and August, the marsh is covered in white and pink crimson-eyed rose mallow (a native wild hibiscus). The woodlands along the trail are being managed to control exotic vines and shrubbery. Hundreds of native trees have been planted to replace those lost to storms or smothered by the vines. Watch for black rat snakes, black racers, rabbits and box turtles. Birding highlights include common yellowthroat, yellow warbler, white-eyed vireo and yellow-breasted chat. In late summer and fall, the trail edges are a riot of colorful wildflowers and butterflies. Watch your step, praying mantis often bask right on the trail in the fall. For more exercise, or to view other wildlife and flowers, continue your adventure on the Monarch Trail.

Monarch Trail

Yellow • 1.2 miles • Hiking

Easy • Loop trail through center of park

Trailhead East side of parking lot. Start on the Duck Pond Trail. Go right at the first fork. **Monarch Trail** splits off at the second fork. The trail is partially boardwalk. Monarch Trail offers hikers the opportunity to see different habitats, including a reforestation area, a freshwater wetland marsh, coastal dunes and the beach. The trail was named for the monarch butterflies that feast on colorful wildflowers in the fall. Birding highlights include indigo bunting and blue grosbeak. Watch for deer and wild turkey in the reforestation area. Red-tailed hawks hunt here in the winter. A service road in the reforestation area adds an extra loop in the trail, allowing additional wildlife viewing opportunities. Al's Pond is the highlight of the trail. Situated at the edge of an oak/hickory grove, Al's Pond has a viewing platform to watch for waterfowl. Hikers may return behind the sand dunes while watching waterfowl in Shallow Pond or return on the beach to view the World War II Gun Battery. Showy, black and white oystercatchers are often seen on the beach in summer.

Plover Trail

Blue • 1.5 miles • Hiking

Easy • Long loop trail around ponds and beach dunes

Trailhead East side of parking lot. Start on Duck Pond Trail, go right at the first fork and then take Monarch Trail at the second fork. The trail is partially boardwalk. **Plover Trail** splits off at Al's Pond. Plover Trail offers a longer hike along the beach and coastal dune. Both Plover and Monarch Trails allow hikers the

opportunity to view shorebirds, as well as view other wildlife along the shore. Plover Trail was named for the endangered piping plovers that occasionally nest on the beach. Least terns and oystercatchers may also nest here. During the fall and winter, hikers may return behind the sand dunes while watching waterfowl in Shallow Pond or return on the beach and view the World War II Gun Battery. The end of Plover Trail is closed in the spring and summer for beach nesting birds so hikers must retrace their steps and exit via Monarch Trail. The neighboring trails of the Cape May Migratory Bird Refuge can be accessed near the end of Plover Trail.

Why is Cape May Point the Fall Birding Capital of the USA?

Cape May Peninsula is the first major peninsula for birds heading south on the East Coast. Cape May Point is located on the southern tip of this peninsula. Flying fall migrants (birds, butterflies, dragonflies and bats) are pushed by prevailing Northwest winds towards the Atlantic Coast. Reluctant to fly over the ocean, the migrants hug the coastline and are funneled through the Cape May Peninsula to Cape May Point State Park where you are today. Cape May is famous for fall raptors (hawks, eagles and falcons). An estimated 30,000 raptors a year have been seen here and historic highs have exceeded 80,000. If hawks are your passion, consider visiting our Hawk Watch Platform, attending a weekend Hawk Banding Demonstration, or enjoying a guided bird walk.

TRAIL SENSE AND SAFETY

Be alert, be careful Stay on the trails to avoid poison ivy and tick habitat.

Be respectful Foot traffic only. No bikes, skateboards or pets on trails. Please keep off dunes as they protect the fragile freshwater wetlands from coastal flooding. Stay out of roped-off beach nesting areas and don't feed or harass wildlife. Swimming is not permitted.

Be aware The trails are utilized for a variety of activities, including jogging, strolling and painting watercolors.

Protect against ticks Bring insect repellent, wear light-colored clothing, tuck pants into socks, stay on trails, check yourself when you get home, shower and launder clothes immediately.

Report issues to the park (609) 884-2159. Emergency numbers 1-877-WARN-DEP (1-877-927-6337) or 911

Cape May Point State Park

305 Lighthouse Ave.

Cape May Point, NJ 08212

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