



# News Release

*Cape May County, New Jersey*

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## **Discover the natural beauty of Cape May County**

The delicate but determined Monarch butterflies have already started to flutter into Cape May County and will soon be followed, no doubt, 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 are a prime place to see dozens of egrets 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.

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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.

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. Years ago there were several thriving heron colonies in Stone Harbor, which boasts the only heronry in the United States located within a municipality, and nearby Avalon. Most of the birds have left those nesting sites, but experts say it is not a cause for concern since the egret population changes and redistributes itself.

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 263 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.

The early fall season offers plenty of opportunities for boat trips to see the last of the dolphins and perhaps a whale before the ocean and bay waters temperatures gradually cool.

September days offer warm afternoons for a kayak trip through back bays, inlets and the salt marsh areas to experience plant life, tidal flows, fish, crustaceans and even some lazy turtles sunny themselves in the late afternoon. In Wildwood, at the Boardwalk and Garfield Avenue, the area's connection to the ocean has been immortalized with a Wyland Whaling Wall, a giant mural of whales and dolphins swimming in the ocean, painted by marine artist Wyland during a summer tour in 1993.

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Bike rides around the southern peninsula of the county offer another perspective to enjoy the ecology of the area. Hiking through Belleplain State Forest or the County Park, with its botanical gardens and nesting areas for woodpeckers and Eastern Bluebirds can be a solitary or family activity for a fun September day outdoors.

The Wetlands Institute on Stone Harbor Boulevard, in the midst of 6,000 acres of coastal wetlands, is a must see stop for families, novice ecologists or serious environmentalists. Inspired by the concerns of over development, the World Wildlife Fund met in Cape May County in 1969 to discuss conservation plans. Among the speakers were talk-show host Arthur Godfrey and Charles Lindbergh. In 1971 the Wetlands Institute opened.

Dedicated to public education and scientific research, the Institute offers live exhibits, aquariums, an observation tower and guided tours with trained instructors to help teach visitors more about the importance of wetlands and the fragile eco-system. A video camera provides an up close and personal look at osprey nesting in the marshes and visitors are also able to see Scotch Bonnet Island, the largest nesting area in the world for laughing gulls.

Avalon, which shares Seven Mile Beach Island with Stone Harbor, has one of the last high dune areas in the state. To protect this fragile environment the dunes are covered with natural foliage and vegetation with several access paths that provide opportunities for visitors to explore and enjoy this undisturbed coastal environment.

For those more interested in botany than biology, Leaming's Run is open into the fall with acres of exquisite fall flowers, replete with birds, butterflies, dragon flies and damsel flies flitting from garden to garden disturbing no one. Visitors can savor the absolute breathtaking beauty of the gardens, ponds and bridges punctuated only with the silence of nature that entices everyone to linger as long as possible. The 25 individual gardens and colonial farm are located on Route 9 in Swanton. Leaming's Run also has the largest uncut forest in Cape May County.

The Nature Center in Cape May on the harbor continues many of its programs into September including garden walks, unruffled birding for the beginner, tidal marsh tours by kayak and beach combing along the cove.

Other ecological stops around the county include Higbee Beach in the southern part of county and the Lester G. McNamara Wildlife Management Area, the Dennis Creek and Beaver Swamp Wildlife Management Area, all in the northern areas of Cape May County.

For more information call the Cape May County Department of Tourism at 800-227-2297 or visit the website at [www.thejerseycape.com](http://www.thejerseycape.com).