



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Delaware River / Delmarva Coastal Ecosystem

Twin Capes Initiative

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Cape May, New Jersey and Cape Charles, Virginia (Twin Capes) are among the most important migratory bird “stopover” areas in the world. Availability of suitable stopover habitats is critical toward providing food resources that migrating songbirds need to accumulate energy quickly and safely to survive migration and breed successfully. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service’s (Service) Delaware River / Delmarva Coastal Ecosystem Team has adopted the Twin Capes Initiative as one of its primary themes. Our goal is to ensure the long-term availability of quality habitats from Cape May to Cape Charles to meet the needs of migrating songbirds. Objectives are to: increase available migratory bird habitats through acquisition, enhancement, and restoration; determine seasonal habitat use through research (to guide land acquisition and management strategies); and obtain public support through education and outreach.

Four current projects to conserve migratory bird use of these critical stopover points within the coastal ecosystem are summarized below.

- Researchers with the Cape May Bird Observatory, in association with the Cape May National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), will document habitat associations in songbirds during fall migration stopovers along the Atlantic Coast of the Cape May peninsula to determine: habitat characteristics (*e.g.*, vegetation, food availability); food acquisition potential and energetic condition; and variation of habitat use among species, between ages and sexes within species, and during migration (*e.g.*, older, more dominant individuals may force juveniles or females into suboptimal habitats).
- Researchers with the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory, in association with the Eastern Shore of Virginia NWR, will document characteristics of migratory bird species through mist-netting, banding, body measurement, weighing, aging, sexing, and fat reserve assessment; and will use point-count surveys to document bird usage of habitat types to assess stopover ecology in the spring. Spring bird movements will be compared to banding data collected at the nearby Kiptopeke Songbird Station to reveal information about wintering habits and preferred migration routes.
- The Service’s New Jersey Field Office, *Partners for Fish and Wildlife* Program will work with The Nature Conservancy to restore 40 acres of grasslands at Cape Island Creek Preserve in Cape May County. The project will convert a 40-acre crop field to native warm-season grasses to benefit grassland birds, many of which are declining State-wide.
- The Service’s Delaware Bay Estuary Project Office will develop materials for display and distribution at the Delaware River and Bay Authority ferry terminals to educate the public about the importance of the Twin Capes as staging and entry areas for migratory birds and gain support for habitat protection and restoration. This outreach effort will build on work in Cape May and Cape Charles by the New Jersey Endangered and Non-game Species Program, Cape May Bird Observatory, Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory, and Service Refuges.

*The mission of the
U.S. Fish & Wildlife
Service is working with
others to conserve, protect
and enhance fish, wildlife,
plants and their habitats
for the continuing benefit of
the American people.*

