On the cloudy day of Saturday, October 14, 2023 at 7AM, 25 young birders (including parents) went on a birding trip to Jones Beach - West End, located in Long Island, along with our trip leader, Tim Healy.

Rainy weather was our last wish. Though the chance of rain was high, we were sure it wouldn’t affect the number of birds. After a night of surprisingly good migration, we were confident about the bird forecast. While waiting for other young birders to arrive, some of us scanned the jetty. We were greeted by a pair of Black Scoters and some Double-crested Cormorants here and there. Once the other young birders and their parents arrived, we did introductions and then continued around the Boat Basin.

A couple of young birders got their first-of-year (FOY) Dark-eyed Juncos at a small patch of fallen leaves by the parking area. While circling the hedgerows and low vegetation of the area, we came across two common fall migrants, Golden-crowned Kinglets and Ruby-crowned Kinglets. These were first-of-season (FOS) birds for some of us. In this same area, we noticed American Robin flyovers, as well as a secretive Hermit Thrush skulking along the lawn. Looking at the sky, many of us saw a Merlin, smaller and shorter-winged than a Peregrine Falcon. We also noticed a Common Raven soaring.

Moving along to the roadside, we saw more kinglets as well as a very good variety of sparrows mixed in loose flocks. Since there were many sparrows mixed in, we tried to differentiate and ID some of them. We found that the sparrow group consisted of White-throated Sparrows, Song Sparrows, Savannah Sparrows, Swamp Sparrows and a lucky sparrow that was spotted by Tim Healy, our trip leader, the Lincoln’s Sparrow. Since this was a life bird for many, we didn’t leave with just one quick look. Instead, we waited until the sparrow made itself known again, and took the time to get good looks at it. When the sparrow went back into the bushes and wasn’t coming out again, we decided to move on.

After deciding to move on, we immediately got quick looks at a late Yellow Warbler. It was interesting to find this bird, as it should’ve been gone a while ago. At the same spot, we got a glimpse of a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker flying across the road. In the distance, we heard Eastern Towhees calling, as well as a quick look at a flyover Rusty Blackbird. We confirmed this due to the “chook” calls it was giving as it flew over. Back at the Boat Basin, we noticed that the tide was too high, and there weren’t many shorebirds. Then and there, we made the decision to go to the Energy and Nature Center, which had a diversity of cool...
species over the last couple of days, and then come back to the Boat Basin, once the tide lowers. Flocks of American Black Ducks circled us as we walked to our cars and drove to the Energy and Nature Center.

As soon as we entered the West End 2 parking lot, some of us had the chance to see a single Killdeer minding its own business. After gathering up again, we started walking towards the Energy and Nature Center. Walking through the Wildflower Meadow brought us some good first species such as groups of Savannah Sparrows, Swamp Sparrows, an early Winter Wren, Eastern Phoebes, a Blue-headed Vireo, and a mature Bald Eagle that flew right over our heads. Soon after seeing these birds, presumably the same Bald Eagle showed up further away, and interacted with an Osprey. The Bald Eagle prompted the Osprey to drop its fish, which the Bald Eagle later picked up for itself. This was a cool interaction between these two raptors that many of us enjoyed seeing.

After coming to the end of the Wildflower Meadow, there was a path that led us to the beach. We walked that path which was full of habitat. It consisted of brushy habitat to our left, and marshes and a flooded swale to our right. As we walked parallel to the flooded swale, we noted Swamp Sparrows, Greater Yellowlegs, Wood Ducks, and Northern Harriers.

Once arriving at the beach, we saw flybys of huge terns, which were Royal Terns. On the horizon, we saw several species of gulls which were too far away to differentiate. Along with the gulls, there were two gull-sized birds with falcon-like flapping. After watching them for a while with our spotting scopes, we also saw white flashes as they flapped their wings. Trip leader Tim Healy confirmed that these were Parasitic Jaegers, a new bird for the club’s life list! We were pumped to discover such a bird.

On the sandbar, species such as Dunlin, Sanderling, and Lesser Black-backed Gulls were present. As time was passing by fast and the clouds started moving in overhead, we knew we had to head back to the Coast Guard Station to catch some shorebirds before it was too late.

As we started walking back to the parking lot, we heard a small passerine species giving pip-it calls. True to its call, it was an American Pipit. Only some of us got pictures as it was a quick flyover. Soon after continuing, the parent of a young birder found an unfortunate deceased Winter Wren. We suspected it passed due to stress, because there weren’t any visible injuries present. Young birder Arabella Pajoohi suggested taking the wren to the American Museum of Natural History (located in New York City) to preserve the bird, and keep it as a specimen at the museum. Arabella offered to take the Winter Wren to the museum.

We soon arrived back at the West End 2 parking lot, then drove back in our cars to the Coast Guard Station. When we arrived back at the Coast Guard Station, we noticed it was drizzling. Though it was drizzling, we kept searching. A bird that stood out to us was a definite grebe, north of the Coast Guard Station. It kept drifting west as the water pushed it. Some key features we noticed of this grebe were a small build, a thin bill, and a possible molting plumage. There were times when we thought we had lost sight of it, but it was really diving. We also noticed that there wasn’t a forewing patch, which is a key feature of Horned Grebes. We left this bird as a presumed rare Eared Grebe, adding bird number two, to the NYSYBC life list!

Excited about two life birds for the club, we noticed it started raining heavier. We all quickly gathered under the roof of the Boat Basin bathrooms and shared eBird accounts for the list. We also decided to scope the West End for shorebirds. We were able to make out a Ruddy Turnstone, a flock of Black-bellied Plovers, and a lone Red Knot, all on the sandbar. Since the views of the shorebirds weren’t that open, some of us decided to fight the rain and walk to the West End to get better looks at the birds, while others decided to call it a day due to the rain. That is when we went our separate ways and said goodbye.

With a great day of birding and gaining two new life birds for the club, the trip was definitely a great one! Sincere thanks go to our trip leader, Tim Healy, who spotted a majority of the birds we saw. If we lost sight of a bird, he did everything he could to relocate it. This trip would not have been as great as it was without Tim!

— Pranav Kumar, age 13

Bird List (71 species, including 2 club lifers):  https://ebird.org/checklist/S153971617