Our trip started on a moderate morning on November 19th in the Jamaica Bay National Wildlife Refuge parking lot just off the highway. We gathered with our scopes and after everyone arrived, our leaders, Dennis and Bobbi of the Brooklyn Bird Club, as well as everyone else introduced themselves. Then, wasting no time, we all began walking down the trail through the shrubs and the cedars anticipating a great day at one of the most remarkable birding locations on the Atlantic Flyway.

This area was relatively silent, except for a few Northern Cardinals who lingered in the bushes. The real action didn’t begin until we reached a viewpoint of the bay; here we cast our scopes on a conglomeration of Brant wading amongst the marsh grasses. But the Brant were not the only ones lingering in the bay that morning, among them was a much smaller species of waterfowl. Skirting the flocks of the familiar goose of the seas and the arctic were Horned Grebes. Because they were diving down and up again and moving about the bay, it took awhile before everybody got a good look at them.

After we finished up with the grebes, we moved over to the pond. Here, we were greeted by flocks of Hooded Mergansers as well as some Herring Gulls. However, again, they were not alone. Minutes after we began looking at the pond, an enormous flock of Scaup (Greater and Lesser) touched down. They were present in numbers which allow for waterfowl migration to be a wildlife spectacle of North America. There were Gadwalls there as well as Northern Pintails, Northern Shovelers, and a few Redheads lingering among the scaup. And hence there was the majestic display typical of West Pond ducks gathered in the center while a few Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets patrolled the margins.
Once again, we moved on to another section of the pond with some caged oyster beds on the opposite sides. We hoped to see dowitchers and some hoped to perhaps even find a Eurasian Wigeon among the flock of their American cousins. To our disappointment we did not see either, but while looking for the dowitchers, we found some Dunlin, yet another bird to add to the list for the day.

After this, getting towards the end, we encountered some of our trip highlights for the day which both coincidentally involved raptors. We encountered a Peregrine Falcon which perched on a tree and stayed there grooming itself long enough for people to get several good photos of it. Then finally, we came upon a few other birders watching for something. After we asked and found out, we rushed over in excitement. Within a nest box in the marsh was a Barn Owl. It was very difficult to see, and we only got a slight glimpse of it, but that alone was still very exciting.

At the end, after walking back on the trail, perhaps wondering whether those finches that had flown overhead really were Pine Siskins, we reconvened at the Visitor Center. We organized the eBird report, said our goodbyes, and left, going back to our homes with a day to remember. And it would not have been possible without our trip leaders; Dennis Hrehowsik and Roberta Manian. So to the both of them, thank you.

– Oscar Schilling, age 16

Trip Bird List by Julian Batista:  https://ebird.org/checklist/S155506405

Group Photo on next page
Trip leaders Bobbi and Dennis with happy young birders, photo © Susan Joseph