

Mammalwatching in New Jersey

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NJ is a small, overpopulated state. Despite its size, the mammalian fauna differs a bit between northern and southern parts. Species common throughout (even in cities) include **Virginia opossum**, **red fox**, **northern raccoon**, **white-tailed deer**, **eastern cottontail**, **white-footed mouse**, **eastern grey squirrel**, **eastern chipmunk**, and **woodchuck**. The latter is particularly common along freeways in NE part. When I lived in West Orange, I could sometimes see baby **squirrels**, **chipmunks**, **woodchucks**, **cottontails** and **deer** in my backyard at the same time.

Northern NJ is dominated by the Appalachians, with many wetlands between the ridges and along the coast. Some areas feel surprisingly remote: narrow roads, half-abandoned townships, dense woods, light traffic, poor cell phone reception.

Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area is the best place for night drives (try Old Mine Rd.). **Bobcat**, **black bear**, **striped skunk**, **fisher**, **northern porcupine**, **deer mouse** and **southern flying squirrel** are all possible. There are many abandoned houses where **eastern small-footed**, **little brown** and **northern myotis** roost on summer nights.

High Point State Park is the best place in NJ to see **northern flying squirrel** and **American beaver**; it is also said to have **river otter**, **porcupine** and **snowshoe hare**. Sunrise Mt. (NJ's highest at 1803'/550 m) has limestone outcrops where **long-tailed shrew** has been collected in the past. **Hairy-tailed mole**, **eastern water shrew** and **ermine** live in Dryden Kuser Natural Area in the N part of the park, but are rare.

Walkill National Wildlife Refuge has **bobcat**, **eastern coyote**, **grey fox**, **muskrat** and **beaver**.

Waywayanda State Park is a good place to look for **fisher**, **river otter**, **bobcat**, **bear**, and **porcupine**. **Hairy-tailed mole** and **pine squirrel** occur in shady hemlock ravines.

Clinton Road between the eastern edge of the above park and Newfoundland is well-known to birders; mammals include **long-tailed weasel** (along powerline cuts S and E of Van Orden Rd. junction), **southern bog lemming** (in swampy sections of the same powerline cut), and **southern red-backed vole** (in Norway spruce grove at the intersection with Schoolhouse Cove Rd.). Powerline cuts here and around nearby Sparta are also popular with **bears**. Also near Sparta, Sterling Hill Mining Museum has a weeping spruce tree in the far end of the parking lot where I found a **red bat** roosting (in June).

Weis Ecology Center on Snakeden Rd. in Wanaque has a network of trails, one of which leads to Roomy Mine where **little brown myotis**, **big brown**, **eastern red**, and **tricolored bats** occur. The mine is gated, but bats sometimes hang near the entrance on summer nights. Look also for **bobcat**, **grey fox**, **skunk**, and **red squirrel**.

Palisades Interstate Park, a rocky escarpment along the Hudson River, has NJ's last population of **Allegheny woodrat**. It occurs in piles of large boulders at cliff bases – try Alpine Boat Basin area. It's a state endangered species, so trapping is out of question and spotlighting must be done in a way that doesn't constitute harassment (try red light).

Wildcat Ridge Wildlife Management Area is a good place to look for **coyote**, **otter**, and **muskrat**. Gated Hibernia Mine once sheltered ~30k hibernating bats. The numbers are much lower today, but on October evenings it's still possible to see swarming **Indiana** and **little brown myotis** at the entrance. On summer evenings **little brown myotis**, **big brown**, and **tricolored bats** emerge in small numbers.

Black River Wildlife Management Area is a good place to see **American mink** and **otter**. You can sometimes spot them by walking along the river, but it's better to kayak.

Tranquility's United Methodist Church has a huge roost of **little brown myotis**.

Mud Pond near Frelinghuysen is a nice forest lake where **beaver** and **muskrat** occur (ticks and chiggers are also outstandingly abundant in spring). Look for **southern bog lemming** and **bear** on the shores.

Central NJ is a rather faceless area of lowland hardwood forests, coastal marshes, meadows, and swamps.

Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge has an impressive checklist including “abundant” **starnose mole**, **Indiana myotis**, **woodland jumping mouse**, and lots of other small mammals, as well as **otter**, **skunk**, **coyote**, **grey fox**, and **bobcat**. I visited it about 20 times and didn't see any of those (never a single molehill!), but found a **least shrew** along one of the boardwalks, a few **northern short-tailed shrews** along trails and under logs, a **woodland vole** near the visitor

center, two **meadow voles** near the headquarters, some **mink** tracks, lots of **deer**, **raccoons**, **red foxes**, and **white-footed mice** (the latter two mostly in summer), one juvenile **southern flying squirrel** along another boardwalk, and one **bear** in the wilderness area. **Bear** tracks are common in more remote parts; I once found that a bear had been tracking me and my friend when I walked back on the same trail. In 2016 **red foxes** had cubs in a burrow under the visitors' kiosk at the main trailhead. The best times to visit are cool summer nights after a cold front passes, dry fall mornings, warm, foggy early spring nights, and evenings after the first hot days of late spring.

South Mountain Reservation has a deer enclosure where **woodland vole** and **northern short-tailed shrew** are common. The northwestern part of the park is a good place to see **hoary bats** flying over lakeshores in early fall, and **Norway rats** living along swampy forest streams. Further N on the same ridge is Eagle Rock Reservation where bat boxes are installed at trailheads; they are usually vacant but sometimes used by **northern myotis** as night roosts. There is also a viewpoint where **hoary bats** can often be seen on late summer evenings; I once got scope views of one roosting in a tree, but never manage to find another one despite much searching.

Sandy Hook in Gateway National Recreation Area has **grey** and **harbor seals** in winter, as well as the northernmost population of **marsh rice rat**. It's a good place for seawatches; in late June of 2017 a **sei whale** was visible offshore for about an hour.

Princeton has a few small nature reserves. About 1% of **eastern grey squirrels** there are black morph. In Charles H. Rogers Wildlife Refuge I saw two **smoky shrews** in as many days, both in daytime. There is an observation platform overlooking a marsh where **muskrat** and, reportedly, **mink** can be seen. Adjacent to the refuge are Institute Woods, a larger, drier forest with old-growth patches; here I saw a **southern flying squirrel**, a **masked shrew** (under a rotten stump near a small creek flowing along the W side of Von Neumann Dr.), and a **silver-haired bat** (in a small hollow tree at the southern end of the footbridge). Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park is a good place to see **raccoons** patrolling the shores, while **deer**, **cottontails** and **woodchucks** are often seen in meadows; another place to look for them is Princeton Battlefield State Park, where I also saw one **meadow jumping mouse** and three **meadow voles** in about 6 hrs of spotlighting. **Hoary** and **eastern red bats** sometimes feed over the canal at dusk and even in broad daylight.

Trenton has white-morph **eastern grey squirrels**, but they are rare and difficult to find.

Southern NJ is mostly occupied by the Pine Barrens, a sandy area of pine forests, famous for herping.

Wells Mills County Park is an excellent place to see **opossums**: many of those feed on insects under parking lot lights on summer nights. Surrounding roads are good for **grey** and **red foxes**.

Greenwood Forest Wildlife Management Area is said to **masked shrew**, **Eastern mole**, **long-tailed weasel**, **woodland** and **Southern red-backed voles**, **pine squirrel**, and **meadow jumping mouse**. I never saw any of those, but found it and the nearby Forked River Mountain Wildlife Management Area to be excellent places to look for **southern flying squirrels**, particularly in the fall.

Dot and Brooks Evert Memorial Nature Trail and Wharton State Forest are said to have **long-tailed weasels**. The latter also has **otter**. I visited them only briefly and didn't see anything worth noticing.

Belleplain State Forest is a good place to look for **least shrew**, **grey fox**, and **muskrat**. **Evening bat** and **southern red-backed vole** are also said to occur here.

Island Beach State Park has small numbers of **grey** and **harbor seals** in winter (look from the jetty); **bottlenose dolphins** are sometimes visible from the same jetty in summer.

Cape May is the southernmost point of NJ is one of the best birding sites in Eastern USA, particularly during the fall migration. **Red fox**, **marsh rice rat**, and **muskrat** are common in coastal wetlands. Look also for **skunks** during the highest tides when parts of the area get flooded and skunks concentrate elsewhere. There are plans to reintroduce **Delmarva fox squirrel**.

There is a variety of whale- and dolphin-watching tours from Cape May, Atlantic City and other locations; they usually go after **bottlenose dolphins** and **humpback whales**. Full-day trips (capemaywhalewatch.com) sometimes get **fin** and **minke whales** and **common dolphins**. A few times a year Paulagics (paulagics.com) runs 24-hr trips from Cape May; they occasionally get **North Atlantic right whale** (spring and fall), **sei whale**, **Cuvier's beaked whale**, **striped dolphin**, and **long-finned pilot whale**; other spp. are also possible.