New Jersey, September 24-
October 10, 2015 Vladimir Dinets

I had to spend two weeks in Princeton, New Jersey, mostly babysitting while my wife was attending a conference. I’ve also been to NJ for a few days in the fall of 2003 and 2013, and in winter of 2016. Here’s what I learned.

*New Jersey Wildlife Viewing Guide* by Laurie Pettigrew (1998, Falcon Publ., hereafter *NJWVG*) lists numerous sites for *Virginia opossum, little brown myotis, big brown bat, coyote, grey and red foxes, river otter, American mink, striped skunk, American black bear, Northern raccoon, bobcat, white-tailed deer, Eastern cottontail, American beaver, Northern porcupine, Eastern gray, pine and Southern flying squirrels, Eastern chipmunk, white-footed mouse*, and muskrat. *NJWVG* also mentions Alpine Boat Basin as the only site for *Eastern woodrat* (now *Allegheny woodrat*), Dot and Brooks Evert Memorial Nature Trail and Wharton State Forest for *long-tailed weasel*, and Island Beach State Park for *grey and harbor seals* and *bottlenose dolphin*. *Pequest Wildlife Management Area* is said to have *bat* boxes, while emergencies of multiple bat species including *Indiana myotis* can be seen at Hibernia Mine in Wildcat Ridge Wildlife Management Area (but note that *NJWVG* was published before the WNS outbreak).

Other locations I’ve read about but haven’t checked out are Sandy Hook in Gateway National Recreation Area for *grey and harbor seals* (winter only), Trenton for white-morph *Eastern grey squirrel*, and United Methodist Church in Tranquility for *little brown bat*. 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*, but occasionally get also *fin and minke whales, Cuvier’s beaked whale, short-beaked common and striped dolphins*, and other species. Try longer pelagic birding trips with *capemaywhalewatch.com*.

NJ is a small, overpopulated state. Despite its size, the mammalian fauna differs a bit between northern and southern parts. In the north are the Appalachian Mountains where *Eastern water shrew*, *hairy-tailed-mole, Eastern small-footed myotis, Northern flying squirrel*, and (more recently) *fisher* occur at higher elevations. *Sunrise Mt*, in *Highest Point State Park* (the highest in NJ) has limestone outcrops where *long-tailed shrew* and *ermine* have been collected, although not recently. In the south are the Pine Barrens, an area of pine forests growing on sand, famous for herping. Check out *Greenwood Forest Wildlife Management Area*, which, according to *NJWVG*, has *masked shrew, Eastern mole, woodland and Southern red-backed voles*, and *meadow jumping mouse*; and Belleplain State Forest, where I saw a *least shrew* and a *grey fox* in 2003, and *Southern red-backed vole* occurs according to *NJWVG*. The southernmost point of NJ is Cape May, one of the best birding sites in Eastern USA, particularly during the fall migration; *marsh rice rat* and *red fox* are common there.
Other than these areas, natural habitats are mostly limited to lowland hardwood forests, coastal marshes, meadows, and swamps. Swamps are usually small, but two are big: Dismal Swamp near Edison and Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. The latter has an impressive checklist including abundant **starnose mole**, **Indiana myotis**, **woodland jumping mouse**, and lots of other small mammals (see [http://www.fws.gov/uploadedFiles/Region_5/NWRS/North_Zone/Great_Swamp_Complex/Great_Swamp/GSMamals.pdf](http://www.fws.gov/uploadedFiles/Region_5/NWRS/North_Zone/Great_Swamp_Complex/Great_Swamp/GSMamals.pdf)). I visited it briefly in winter and saw a **woodland vole** on the road S from the visitor center (that road is closed for cars at night and is great for night walks) and lots of **mink** tracks. There are some nice trails and boardwalks over swamps leading to blinds with bird feeders where shrews and rodents might show up at night.

**Princeton** has a few small nature reserves. About 1% of **Eastern grey squirrels** there are black morph. **Charles H. Rogers Wildlife Refuge** (see map at [http://www.princeton.edu/~llarson2/rogers/images/iaswoods.pdf](http://www.princeton.edu/~llarson2/rogers/images/iaswoods.pdf)), where I saw two **smoky shrews** in as many days, both in daytime (later the rains started, the leaf litter became wet, and I couldn’t hear shrews anymore). There is an observation platform overlooking a marsh where **muskat** and, reportedly, **mink** can be seen. I did a few hours of spotlighting there and saw one **whitefooted mouse**. Adjacent to the refuge are **Institute Woods**, a larger, drier forest with old-growth patches; I saw a **Southern flying squirrel**, a few **Eastern chipmunks** (along Trolley Track Trail), a **masked shrew** (under a rotten stump near a small creek flowing along the western side of Von Neumann Dr.), and a **silver-haired bat** (in a small hollow tree at the southern end of the footbridge). The long, narrow **Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park** is a good place to see **Northern raccoons** patrolling the shores, while **white-tailed deer**, **Eastern 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.