

# NJMC welcomes a new visitor

BY JIM WRIGHT

New Jersey Meadowlands  
Commission

This winter, the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission has added a brand-new bird to its checklist—an unexpected visitor from the Arctic called the Northern Shrike.

The pale gray bird resembles a mockingbird but is a ferocious hunter. It eats smaller birds and mice, and sometimes impales them on thorns or barbs of barbed wire to save for later consumption. No wonder the bird has a “can opener” at the end of its beak—and a black mask across its eyes.

And as far as we know, the shrike is officially a first for the Meadowlands. It wasn't included on our latest “Birds of the Meadowlands” checklist. The shrike is our 278th species—a reminder of what great habitat the Meadowlands provides for all sorts of birds.

The shrike was first spotted along Disposal Road in mid-December by a birder from Central Jersey, and it soon began to attract a steady stream of bird-watchers from across the state. Dozens upon dozens have scanned the former landfills by the AMVETS Carillon along the bumpy two-lane road in hopes of adding the rarity to a year list or life list.

In late December, one birder



JIM WRIGHT/NJMC

## A Northern Shrike at Disposal Road.

braved a snowstorm in hopes of seeing the bird by year's end because the shrike would be the 300th bird he saw in New Jersey in 2009. He had to return two days later to reach his goal. Another birder battled howling winds for three hours to get a glimpse of the bird. He had been searching for a decade, but had never seen the bird in New Jersey before. When he finally found the shrike the following day, he smiled from ear to ear.

When New Year's Day rolled around, many birders were back again, eager to start their 2010 lists with such a rarity. Now that is one popular bird!

Unfortunately, this shrike is also an extremely uncooperative bird. While most Northern Shrikes tend to perch high up in

bare trees for extended periods of time, providing great views of it, it seems this shrike will pop up only for a minute or so then disappear for hours, leaving birders to futilely scan the terrain with their binoculars.

But sometimes birders do get lucky. Lyndhurst resident Chris Takacs saw the shrike one January morning near his backyard feeder. This bird didn't come for seeds—it was hunting for a feathered breakfast.

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*NJMC Communications Officer Jim Wright maintains the Commission's daily nature blog, [meadowblog.net](http://meadowblog.net) – featuring beautiful photography and the latest info on the region's abundant natural wonders.*