

Migrating birds a hit in Meadowlands

BY JIM WRIGHT
NJMC

DeKorte Park has been a birding paradise in recent weeks.

More than 200 graceful white egrets have been congregating regularly in the main tidal impoundment, giving the park the look of the Everglades. You don't have to be able to identify birds to enjoy nature's amazing display.

What's more, plenty of other fascinating birds have been in clear view along the Marsh Discovery Trail, foraging for food and just hanging out.

If you take a walk along the trail, which includes a boardwalk across the marsh, you'll have a chance of seeing these birds. Just look where the birders are looking, and ask if you might borrow their binoculars for a look.

The reason for all this bird activity is routine maintenance being performed on the two Meadowlands Commission buildings—the Meadowlands Environment Center and NJMC Headquarters—that line the water's edge.

Contractors are called in at set intervals to make sure that the pilings that support the building are in solid shape, and that requires that the water in the main tidal pool be pumped out for a few weeks.

As a result, water levels have been historically low, and the resulting mud flats have provided a smorgasbord for egrets, shorebirds, gulls and other birds.

The snowy egrets and great



JIM WRIGHT/NJMC

Egrets have been seen in the area getting ready for their migration.

egrets have provided the most amazing sights as they bunch together to fish in the remaining shallows. One birder counted 100 great egrets and 230 snowy egrets in the main tidal impoundment, also

known as the Shorebird pool or the Kingsland Impoundment.

The egrets are chowing down in preparation for their migration south to warmer climates. How long they stay depends on the weather. They could leave any day, or stay another week or two.

The low water levels have also exposed the shorelines along the huge islands of phragmites throughout the impoundment. As a result, two seldom seen birds have been on view—a shy little bird called a least bittern and a small hen-like bird called a sora.

The least bittern is so secretive that many ardent bird-watchers have never seen one. One gentleman at DeKorte said this bittern was his nemesis bird for more than 30 years—until he visited DeKorte. The smile on his face said he'd accomplished his mission.

Other recent noteworthy sightings: golden plovers, Wilson's phalarope, immature blue heron, Caspian terns, long- and short-billed dowitchers, stilt sandpipers, pectoral sandpipers and white-rumped sandpipers, and (on Sept. 30) an adult bald eagle.

NJMC Communications Officer Jim Wright maintains the Commission's daily nature blog, meadowblog.net—featuring beautiful photography and the latest info on the region's abundant natural wonders.

NATURE NEXT DOOR