

Keep your eye out for eagles

BY JIM WRIGHT
NJMC

On the last day of September, a harbinger of winter flew majestically over DeKorte Park: An immense bald eagle with a beautiful white head and tail suddenly appeared about 50 feet above the reeds, heading south.

The bird was one of the first bald eagles we had seen flying over the park since last spring, and a reminder that just as the landscape changes every autumn, so does the birdscape.

The bald eagle I saw flying above the Marsh Discovery Trail boardwalk that Wednesday afternoon was most likely migrating, and the shorebirds that have been feeding on the park's mudflats the past many weeks haven't been far behind.

The migrating eagle and the departure of the shorebirds represent a changing of the guard in the tidal impoundments of DeKorte Park. In the coming weeks, we should have our usual arrays of canvasback ducks, pintails, ruddies and green-winged teal.

If we are lucky, we might even catch the arrival of an uncommon Eurasian green-winged teal, a little guy that has now returned faithfully to the tidal impoundment closest to the observatory, by the small parking lot, for several winters in a row.

But the recent bald eagle sighting will not be the last we see of these great birds for a while. (In fact, we



JIM WRIGHT/NJMC

A bald eagle has been spotted in the Meadowlands.

saw a second soaring over DeKorte just the next day.)

In one of nature's remarkable comebacks, America's national symbol has made a strong recovery over the years after the misuse of the pesticide DDT almost eradicated the enormous raptors in the 1950s and 60s.

Now, more and more bald eagles are making their winter homes in North Jersey.

"I think we'll have another good winter for bald eagles in the Meadowlands," says NJMC naturalist Michael Newhouse. "It's supposed to be another cold winter to the north, and when the lakes and rivers up there start to freeze over, the eagles head south."

Newhouse said one bald eagle spent most of last winter in a marsh in Carlstadt. It was first spotted on

the annual Christmas Bird Count in mid-December.

Other bald eagles, including a few believed to be nesting near the Oradell Reservoir, found their way down the Hackensack River to the Meadowlands. They were seen many times flying over the district in general and DeKorte Park in particular.

Since bald eagle flyovers were a fairly common sight in Lyndhurst last winter, there's no reason why this winter should be any different.

That late-September Eagle was, we hope, a sign of great raptors to come.

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