

# Rare Snowy Owl perches in Lyndhurst Birders gather at NJMC's DeKorte Park



Story and photos  
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Birding enthusiasts and the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission are flying high over the sighting of two rare Snowy Owls in the meadowlands near Dekorte Park in Lyndhurst at the end of November. While there have been a few sightings previously reported this year in Liberty State Park in Bergen County, the initial sighting was very rare in the state. To find the *Bubo scandiacus*, (it's naturalist classification name) drive towards the John Gagliardi Memorial Ball Field off Valley Brook Avenue and look for the small army of birders with their tripods, scopes and binoculars at the ready on the roadside.

The devoted and serious birders like Lyndhurst resident Chris Takacs arrive as early as 6 a.m. in the area where the remaining owl has been repeatedly spotted, binoculars in hand

to search for the elusive bird.

"I live nearby and have been here at least sixteen times, I'll come at different times to take a look around," Takacs said.

Over the course of the day the numbers of birders vary with a mix of serious and amateur birders and the curious viewers. Be prepared, since the weather and the wind can test even the hardest of birders. The owl can also be found perched on top of the ball field lights surveying its hunting ground while keeping a close eye on the spectators. The large white owl has a rounded head, black bill and yellow eyes and has thin speckled black spots or small bands of black on its distinctive white plumage. It



hales from the extreme northern margins of the Arctic tundra. When their favorite food source of lemmings (small furry rodents) dwindles in their natural habitat, the owls are forced to migrate to southern Canada and the northern half of the United

States.

"While it is not unusual for them to fly into the United States it is very rare to find them this far south; the birds are young and have probably lost their way," Takacs said.

Kevin and Kelly Browne from Chatham came to Lyndhurst to take a look.

"We read about it on the net and took a ride. It might be our only chance to see one, it was amazing, we also saw three Northern Harriers," Mrs. Browne said.

As word of the Snowy Owls spread on the Internet visitors have flocked to the area. "People from Pennsylvania, Bloomingdale, Princeton, Maryland and West Virginia have driven up here, I also talked to people from Texas and North Carolina,

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I don't know if they were here visiting or what, but the word is getting out," Takacs said.

Locals from Nutley, Kearny, Bergen County and other nearby areas were about the park. While the Snowy Owl is the main attraction, knowledgeable birders keep their eyes and ears open to the many varied birds the meadowlands play host to.

There are many species of hawks living in the meadowlands that were making their presence known - Red Tailed

Hawks, American Kestrels, Cooper Hawks and Rough Legged Hawks and Northern Harriers.

Keen observers were able to spot a total of three eagles, two immature and one fully grown. Officials from the Meadowlands Commission were initially nervous about visitors spooking or disturbing the habitat of the meadow's varied wildlife, but birders on the whole practice unwritten rules of etiquette when birding.

Takacs offered some guidelines, "Watch from the roadside, respect the private property on the other side of the snow fence. Don't approach or disrupt

the birds and keep a respectful distance."

Recent spotting reports have indicated that one of the two owls has moved on. Making sure to bring a good pair of binoculars for a good look at the Snowy and a birding book to identify the many varieties of hawks and some of the other interesting birds living in the area is a good practice to have more fun. You can monitor the Snowy Owl sightings as well as other birds that call the meadowlands home on the Web blog of the NJMC at <http://www.meadowblog.tyepad.com/>

