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NY/NJ HARBOR HERONS STUDY TRACKS EGRETS' COMMUTE

Preliminary findings from this summer's data show that egrets nesting in metropolitan area need the Meadowlands to feed

LYNDHURST, N.J. – Northern New Jersey is a crucial feeding ground for egrets that nest in colonies in New York City, according to preliminary data from a first-ever study by the New Jersey Audubon Society and New York City Audubon. The study, part of the Audubons' ongoing Harbor Herons Project, was assisted and sponsored by the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission.

With the help of 50 volunteer citizen scientists, the two non-profit groups have been tracking egrets that nest on the East River and near Staten Island, in an effort to see where and how these birds forage for food in New Jersey.

“This study underscores the importance of the Meadowlands for so many birds,” said Robert Ceberio, Executive Director of the NJMC. “Egrets and

herons and all sorts of shorebirds feed here, and such threatened species as peregrine falcons and ospreys nest here.”

This year’s research found that several locations in the Meadowlands were prime spots for the egrets to feed and hang out during the day.

Snowy egrets, for example, seem drawn to two sites in Secaucus – the Secaucus High School Marsh and Mill Creek Marsh. Great egrets favor the fresh-water and brackish marshes in Kearny, with an average of 20 of the huge white birds seen there during the surveys by volunteers. Both species of egrets, along with Great blue herons and other herons, can be readily seen in wetlands throughout the region from April through October.

The volunteers also record data on tides and habitat and how they relate to bird use, contributing crucial information that can be used to make decisions on creating new habitats through restoration, controlling water levels at impoundments, and managing the Meadowlands District for the right mix of conditions for these birds.

As part of the study, researchers banded several birds and put transmitters on 17 Great egrets in an effort to keep track of their travels. Some of those birds have been seen in the Meadowlands, and a Great egret's radio signals have been picked up in Lyndhurst and North Arlington.

In all, volunteers regularly have been monitoring sites in Ridgefield, Secaucus, Lyndhurst, North Arlington and Kearny, as well as locales in Raritan Bay. The site surveys conclude at the end of October, with a conference on the study planned for December.

JPEG images available including: Great egret flying, Great egret with radio transmitter, Snowy egret, close-up of radio transmitter. Contact Jim Wright at the number or email listed at top of release.