

Wild Birds

In the Parks



of Hudson County



Patricia Hilliard & Marvin Silber



Ruddy Duck



Wood Duck

Front Cover Pictures

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1. Great Egret
2. Snowy Owl
(Global Terminal)
3. Mute Swan.
4. Great Blue Heron
5. Black Crowned
Night Heron



Snowy Egret

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Gold Finch



Green Heron

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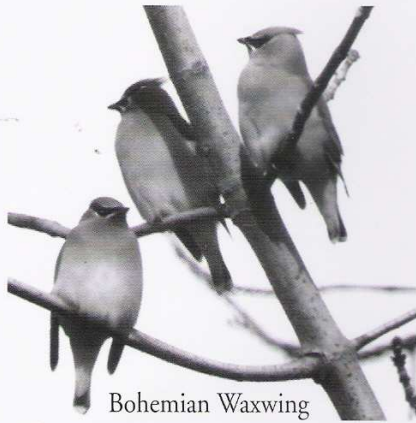
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Bohemian Waxwing



Woodcock



Saw Whet Owl



Grackle



Cattle Egret

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Pintail



Long-Eared Owl

The best bird watching locations in:
Bayonne • Harrison • Jersey City • Kearny
North Bergen • Secaucus

Introduction *Reasons, Seasons and Rarities*

Reasons

Birds fly. For this reason, we marvel at them. Some fly from one end of the continent to the other. They cross wide bodies of water and fly over or along steep mountains. With wings, birds can transport themselves into new areas of the world, escaping lands ravaged by winter to find food in more abundant fields and forests until the seasons change again. This ability to move quickly is the survival advantage birds gain with flight. During their migration, they move past tall buildings, radio and cell phone towers, jet engines and automobile traffic. These are the death traps that humans inadvertently create, but birds also face the threat of Nature's violent storms and strong winds that send birds off their customary migratory path. In spite of these challenges, birds lift their wings in flight so that they may continue their life on this Earth. To flightless humans, birds are a sign of freedom and hope.

An easy outdoor activity like bird watching can be shared with children or adults and benefit both by nurturing relationships. The adventure of seeing a new bird or watching birds use their unique skill of flight to aid in their survival helps us consider our own unique skills and how we can understand our own survival.

Many of the bird watching areas in Hudson County were once primary winter habitat for migrating ducks and birds. When Hudson County went through a stage of intense industrial development, especially during World War II, the land was taken for industrial production of armaments, the bays and rivers were used for shipping. The water was contaminated with toxins and sewage. When the factories became antiquated and industry moved out of the area, support for open space and natural areas gained strength. By restoring some of the land and water in Hudson County, the County and municipal governments have created islands of refuge for migrating and native birds. Because these areas are surrounded by urban development, they attract an intensity of bird populations. Ten minutes in Lincoln Park can add ten birds to your list. As part of the East Coast flyway from Canada to Mexico, Hudson County parks are becoming a haven for birds again.



Mockingbird

Seasons

There are four seasons in Hudson County, New Jersey. During spring, the birds can be seen carrying dry grass and twigs for nest building. Each bird has a preferred habitat for building its nest. Some birds, such as House Sparrows, nest in crevices of buildings. Other birds, such as Cardinals and Catbirds, make their nests in shrubs. Birds such as Herons and Egrets make their nests in trees along marshes.



Imm. Black-crowned Heron

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During summer, the birds search for food. Hawks look for rodents and rabbits. Egrets catch fish. Songbird chicks hatch from eggs when berries are ripe and insects fill the air. The adult birds make many trips back and forth to the nests carrying food to feed the young.

In late autumn, insects become dormant in the cold. Birds that eat insects must migrate out of the area or they will die of starvation. So, they lift their wings and go south. However, south is determined by where the bird has nested. Birds that nest in Hudson County will go to the southern U.S., the Caribbean islands and to South America. Birds and ducks that nested in the Canadian tundra in summer come to Hudson County to escape the cold of the far north.

In winter, the birds like Cardinals, White-throated and Song Sparrows eat seeds and dried berries and can stay in Hudson County. Their feathers block the wind to create a warm chamber around their bodies. Long-Eared Owls stay warm by roosting in pine trees that block the wind. At this time of year, ducks are seen coming down through the northwestern sky in huge flocks to land in Newark Bay and New York Harbor. Ducks have fat under their skin to protect them from the cold. They sit on the open water of the East Coast until spring when they migrate far to the north.

Rarities

One of the exciting aspects of bird watching is to find a bird that is rare. Two rare birds are occasionally seen in Hudson County. They are the Snowy Owl and the Yellow-crowned Night Heron.

In November 2000, three Snowy Owls appeared at Liberty State Park and stayed the entire winter. Snowy Owls migrate to the U.S. from Canada when the lemmings, a rodent in the North that is a food source to owls, are no longer available in large enough numbers. When the owls leave in search of food, it is called an irruption. They drop below the Canadian border and some ride the wind to Hudson County.

The Yellow-crowned Night Heron is a native species to New Jersey, but is now rare. This bird needs trees near swamps for nest building. Unfortunately, in decades past, the trees in New Jersey swamps were cut for use in building plank roads. In Secaucus, the trees in Schmidts Woods were protected as a park. In this park, the Yellow-crowned Night Heron have built nests and raised young. Watch for rare birds. Rare bird sightings should be reported to bird hotlines. See the web site listing in this book.



Snowy Owl

Wild Birds 2

GETTING STARTED BIRDING

Bird watching can be done with or without binoculars, but they improve the experience. An 8 x 23 small binocular is lightweight to use. Many bird watchers like the 50 x 32 to get closer views. Any binocular beyond those measurements will not perform well because your hands will not be able to hold them steady. Scopes can be used to see details of the bird's markings and face, and are useful for distant shorebirds.

Take Food and Water.

Along with your binoculars and/or scopes, it is wise to take some food and drink. Of course, it is always wise to take a cell phone for emergencies. In this booklet we let you know if restaurants are near the birding sites, but sometimes a snack in your pocket or a quick drink can extend your time outdoors.

Weather:

To really enjoy your bird watching, you must be prepared for any type of weather. The best birding seasons are spring and fall. These can both be cool and wet. Bird watchers often say, "Bad weather is good birding." This is because storms can drive migrating birds to land in fields and forests until the storm passes. So, many bird watchers go out, regardless of the weather. Be sure to dress warm and dry. Wear good shoes and take gloves and hats. It is often colder in open areas than it is in residential neighborhoods.

Please Follow Birding Ethics.

No trespassing on private land. No vandalizing. Treat birds with respect in regard to nesting areas and stay far enough back to avoid alarming the birds. Don't rescue baby birds. The parents are the experts in caring for their young and they are usually right above your head when you find the baby bird.



Snowy Egret



Pheasant

A List of Bird Guides to Expand Your Identification Skills:

The data about birds in this booklet was obtained from the following: *A Field Guide to the Birds* (Eastern) by Roger Tory Peterson. This book has arrows that point to the marks on the bird that indicate exact identification.

Stokes Field Guide to Birds by Donald and Lillian Stokes. This book shows actual photographs of the birds and gives details on their population decline or increase, habitat and behavior.

The Complete Birder, A Guide to Better Birding by Jack Connor, foreword by Roger Tory Peterson. This gives you an understanding of the hobby of birding, including how to buy binoculars, an understanding of migration and of bird life.

National Geographic Reference Atlas to the Birds of North America. Compiled and Edited by Mel Baughman. This book shows the variety of birds of North America and the extent to which they travel in their migrations. Maps answer many questions about where the birds can be found.

The Encyclopedia of North American Birds by Michael Vanner. This book has beautiful close-up pictures of the birds and gives concise information about habitat, food and reproduction of birds.

Web Sites of Interest

New Jersey Audubon www.njaudubon.org
Cornell Lab of Ornithology www.ebird.com
American Bird Conservancy www.abcbirds.org
Magazine and web site www.birdwatchersdigest.com
Magazine and web site www.birdersworld.com
Virtual birder: www.virtualbirder.com/vbirder
Where to bird today? See: www.camacdonald.com/birding/birdsusa.htm
A link list of world wide birding sites: www.birdingonthe.net

How I became a “Birder.”

by Michael Britt

It all started on the streets of Hudson County. I lived in Bayonne for twenty-five of my twenty-seven years, spending the first thirteen downtown on the eastside. As a young boy, I was fascinated by dinosaurs. I soon realized that I would never be able to study these creatures in the wild because they had gone extinct, tens of millions of years ago. So, my focus shifted to animals that still exist. To this young boy, there was something better than cartoons on television nature programs! I watched the Wild America series religiously and with the advent of the Discovery channel, various biomes and organisms invaded my living room. A new spark ignited. I was going to learn as much as I could about creatures that some believe evolved from dinosaurs: the birds.

Some of the bird species I saw on television were soon observed in the wild. But wait a minute, that’s a paradox. Hudson County is not the wild! Or is it? I soon learned the truth through a series of revelations. One day after school, while I was in the seventh grade, a friend and I were riding bikes. We were approaching his neighborhood and saw his mother and little sister on Lexington Avenue and 3rd Street in Bayonne. They were both throwing rocks at a small, ornate, fierce-looking bird that was perched on a utility wire. We asked, “What in the world are you doing?” They said they saw the bird on the wire trying to catch the bird that was hiding under the car. I saw a Mourning Dove hiding under the car, but I didn’t know what the bird on the wire was. A local novice birdwatcher came with a field guide. He hurriedly flipped through the pages to the section on raptors then announced that we were looking at a small falcon called an American Kestrel. I was surprised that a falcon could be in Bayonne. Soon after this event, once again on my bike, the sky began to rain feathers on a bright sunny day. I looked up and recognized another bird from the nature programs. It was a Peregrine Falcon plucking a bird’s feathers as is customary before feeding. I learned soon after that this species was nesting in town on the Bayonne Bridge.



Red-tailed Hawk

From this day on, I developed a pair of trained eyes and realized that there was more in Hudson County than lots of people, cars and buildings. There were wild birds of all different sizes, colors, and varieties. The more I looked, the more I discovered. One favorite hangout was the old city landfill down on Constable Hook in Bayonne. It was here that I saw my first herons, egrets, hawks, owls and something that I swore returned from the prehistoric era to haunt me, the Black Skimmer.

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Kestrel and Dinner

Eventually, I was strong enough and bold enough to ride my bicycle from Bayonne all the way to Liberty State Park to enjoy an even greater assortment of birds. Soon, I had visited all of Hudson County’s wild areas from the big rock at Laurel Hill to the marshes of Kearny, through the mature woodlands in North Bergen, back to the expanse of Newark Bay where loons and a large wintering raft of Canvasbacks can be observed.

We may live in the most urbanized and only deer-free county in the state of New Jersey, but Hudson County has its wild areas too. Because most of the county is developed, the entire remaining natural habitat is a magnet for wild birds offering them shelter, nesting grounds, and foraging areas. Hopefully the following words and pictures will encourage you to find out what you’ve been missing.



L to R: Marvin, Pat and Michael



Snow Geese

Biography of Contributors:

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Patricia Hilliard, writer and activist, editor of the Liberty State Park Conservancy newsletter, member of New Jersey Audubon, fifteen years experience bird watching in Hudson County.

Marvin Silber, wild bird photographer and member of New Jersey Audubon, twenty years experience photographing birds in New Jersey. His pictures have appeared in the Jersey Journal, Bergen Record, Star Ledger, the 1996 NJ Fish Game and Wildlife Calendar, NJ Audubon Magazine and other publications. Tour guide for Hudson County Community College, Jersey City, NJ.



Yellow-crowned Night Heron

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The Birds: HERONS AND EGRETS



Great Blue Heron

The Great Blue Heron is the biggest heron in Hudson County. It stands up to 4 feet high (117 cm) with a wingspan of up to 6 feet (183 cm) wide. It watches from the river edge then wades out to catch fish, insects, frogs and crabs to eat. The Great Blue Heron uses the tall grass to protect it from the winter cold and summer heat. When a Great Blue Heron flies overhead using slow strong wing beats, its silhouette reminds us of pterosaurs, the flying dinosaur.

Black-crowned Night Heron

The Black-crowned Night Heron hunts mainly at night, early morning, evening or when the tide is low. Its diet contains marine worms, crabs and small fish. This heron stands at a height of 2 feet (64 cm), with a wingspan of over 3 feet (112 cm). It may appear to have no neck until it strikes out at a fish. The Black-crowned Night Heron builds its nest in driftwood or in dead trees. This heron stays in Hudson County during the winter as long as water is free of ice.



Black-crowned Night Heron can be seen at Liberty State Park in the wildlife area next to the Administration Building. They can also be seen in Lincoln Park West from the parking lot facing west and can also be seen roosting at Laurel Hill Hudson County Park.

The Birds: HERONS AND EGRETS

Yellow-crowned Night Heron:

Yellow-crowned Night Herons are making a slow recovery in their numbers in Hudson County, though they are still a rare species. They are a wading bird, but they need forest trees for nesting. Their population was diminished by the removal of tall trees in the wetland regions. Yellow-crowned Night Herons feed mainly on crabs, fish and insects. They are about 2 feet tall (62 cm) with a wing span of 3 feet 6 inches (107 cm).



Green Heron:

Green Herons are small secretive herons that move in and out along the edges of the shoreline. The feathers on their backs appear to be almost blue or teal in color rather than green as their name indicates. The under-parts of their bodies are brown. These herons eat insects, fish and small invertebrates.



Black Skimmer

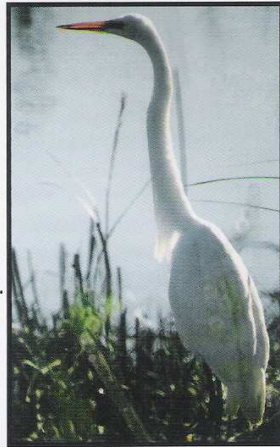
Black Skimmers can be seen in Hudson County during the summer months and into the autumn as they migrate south. Skimmers like to glide over the narrow channels during the changing of the tides. They catch fish by gliding their bright orange bills in the water. When a fish enters their bill, they snap it shut. Black Skimmers have returned to Hudson County because the water quality is improving.



The Birds: HERONS AND EGRETS

Great Egret:

Great Egrets have black legs and yellow bills. This is important to remember to avoid confusing it with other herons and egrets. Great Egrets come to Hudson County in March and may linger until December if the winter is mild. To avoid the severe cold, egrets migrate as far south as Central America. When Great Egrets fly up out of the tall grass, their large wings seem like the wings of angels. This bird can grow to over 3 feet (99 cm) tall and can have wings that spread as wide as 4 feet (130 cm). In spring, you may see Great Egrets flying with sticks in their bills. They gather sticks and twigs to build rickety nests in the tops of trees. They live together in rookeries. When Great Egrets arrive at the nest, they greet each other with calls and raised wings. Great Egrets eat fish. They regurgitate some fish into the mouths of their young.



Snowy Egret:

Snowy Egrets are small and have black bills, black legs and yellow feet. The yellow feet at the end of black legs are a unique feature not seen in any other bird in North America. Snowy Egrets come to most Hudson County parks in April and leave in October. Their migration takes them to Florida, Cuba and Central America for the winter. The Snowy Egret is the “showy” egret with its fluffy plumage. In the 1800’s, ladies hat-makers captured the birds to use their plumes for decorations.



This use led to the near extinction of the Snowy Egret. Laws were passed banning the use of its plumes. These days, the Snowy Egret has successfully recovered and now is quite common. This bird can grow to 2 feet (61 cm) tall and can spread its wings to over 3 feet (104 cm). Snowy Egrets eat fish and worms. Sometimes they will vibrate their bills in the water to attract fish then stab at them.

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The Birds: HAWKS, FALCONS

Red-tailed Hawk

Red-tailed Hawks are common in Hudson County. They are about 2 feet tall (56 cm) and have wings that spread about 4 feet wide (127 cm). When they circle in the air above fields and grasslands, the sun shines through their reddish-brown tails. This makes identifying the Red-tailed Hawk an easy task. In winter, you can see them sitting in tall trees. Red-tailed Hawks build their nests from sticks and grass in the crotch of trees. Usually, two hawks are fledged from each nest in early spring. The best places for viewing Red-tailed Hawks in Hudson County are Lincoln Park and Liberty State Park.



Osprey

The Osprey is referred to as the “fish hawk” because it circles over water in search of fish that it can see in the water below. Once the Osprey has located a fish, the bird dives into the water and catches the fish. As the Osprey flies away it shakes the water out of its wings. The Osprey is careful to carry the fish with its head facing forward and the tail behind, parallel to the Osprey’s own body. This lowers the wind resistance and makes it easier for the Osprey to carry the fish to a site where the Osprey then tears it open and eats. The Osprey can grow to 2 feet (64 cm) tall with a wingspan of as much as 6 feet (183 cm) long.



Northern Harrier

“Marsh Hawk” is the nickname of the Northern Harrier because it is so often found in marshes and swamps. The male Harrier is gray; the female is brown. Both have a white rump patch above the tail. Northern Harriers can be identified also by the way they fly, gliding close over the top of the tall grass. The Harrier can stand almost 2 feet high (58 cm) and has a wingspan that can reach as long as 4 feet (122 cm). Harriers were more common in Hudson County in the past. The best places to go to see Northern Harriers are Liberty State Park, Laurel Hill, Kearny Marsh and Mill Creek Point/Park.



Northern Harrier

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The Birds: HAWKS, FALCONS AND OWLS

Snowy Owl:

The Snowy Owl is not a common visitor to Hudson County. It arrives only when the rodent population in Canada has diminished. The owl's native habitat is tundra grassland so it is attracted to similar grasslands in Hudson County. Snowy Owls are about 2 feet tall (58 cm), but have huge wings up to 5 feet (152 cm) wide. Landing on snow covered ground, the bird seems to disappear. Only its big yellow eyes give it away. Its presence was documented in Hudson County in November, 2000 and it departed in April of 2001. Snowy Owls prey upon rabbits, rodents, feral cats and geese.



Peregrine Falcon:

This Falcon has nested on the tall office buildings in Jersey City and in Manhattan. The Palisades cliffs are the natural home of the Peregrine Falcon. Peregrines sweep through the sky at high speed and often grab Pigeons and Starlings out of the air, tear off their heads and take the dead birds back to the hungry young Peregrine in their nests high above the city. Peregrine Falcons can grow to 1 foot (51 cm) tall with a 3 feet (112 cm) wingspan. They are best identified by their "tear-drop" black markings at the sides of their faces.



The Birds: DUCKS, GEESE AND SWANS

Winter is the best time to view ducks, geese and swans in Hudson County because they stay here to avoid the harsher climate of their nesting grounds in Canada. The inlets along the Hudson and Hackensack rivers are where the birds can be seen diving for food and sleeping in large clusters as they float on the cold water. Go to the harbor walkway in Liberty State Park to see rafts of Ruddy Ducks and Scaup. Bayonne's South Cove Commons shopping mall has a walkway along the golf course toward New York Harbor where Mergansers and Buffleheads can be seen diving in and out of the water. Stephen Gregg Park in Bayonne looks over Newark Bay where you can see Mergansers, Buffleheads and Loons. In Jersey City, go to Lincoln Park and view Hooded Mergansers from the parking lot that overlooks the small lakes. Laurel Hill Hudson County Park and Secaucus Mill Creek Point also give a good view of river where many migratory ducks can be seen.



Red-breasted Mergansers:

Red-breasted Mergansers are a diving duck that can be seen from the walkway at Liberty State Park. The ducks dive for fish, mollusks and crustaceans in the waters of New York Harbor. These ducks migrate down from Canada to stay the winter in Hudson County then leave in March or April for their nesting grounds in the north.



Buffleheads:

The Bufflehead duck is a fun-loving little black and white duck that bobs up and down in the ice cold water of winter in Hudson County. These ducks are usually seen on coastal waters, but occasionally stop in small lakes and rivers in search of fish, small mollusks and aquatic insects. In their nesting habitat in the north, they nest in trees. Their courtship starts in Hudson County in January. Watch for their aggressive chasing and splashing as they choose their next mates before migrating to Canada for nesting.



Common Loon

The Birds: DUCKS, GEESE AND SWANS



Brant:

Brant can easily be mistaken for Canada Geese, but they have a few special features of their own. Their heads and necks are black with a small white slash. They eat grass, algae and seaweed. When flying overhead their soft feathers make a whirling sound. They coo their ruk-ruk call to each other as they travel in a flock for greater safety. They migrate, flying in a straight line through the sky, from the Canadian tundra to Hudson County and the Jersey shore in winter.



American Widgeons



Family of Mallards



Mute Swan:

The Mute Swan is actually native to Europe. European immigrants brought the Mute Swan to Hudson County in the 1800's so they could remember something of beauty from their mother country. When Mute Swans face each other, their arched necks form the two sides of a heart. The swan's body is large with a grand wingspan of 5 feet (152 cm). The swan lays 4 to 8 pale gray-green eggs in a feather nest placed near the water. For food, the swan likes to eat soft green leaves, algae and any grass seed or grains. In winter, Mute Swans must find shelter among the tall grass to survive. They fly to open water when lakes freeze and can frequently be seen on the Hudson and Hackensack River when the Meadowlands are covered with ice. Mute Swans have been seen at Kearny Marsh, the Hackensack Meadowlands and Liberty State Park.

The Birds: DUCKS, GEESE AND SWANS

Hooded Mergansers:

Hooded Mergansers are small ducks that build their nests in trees. They are in New Jersey most of the year. They prefer wooded lakes where they find and eat small fish, crustaceans and aquatic insects. In Hudson County the best place to view Hooded Mergansers is at Lincoln Park West. They put on quite a show during mid-winter when they begin choosing a mate. Females bob their heads as males lift their crest feathers in display.



Ruddy Ducks and Scaups:



These ducks are seen in large flocks from the walkway at Liberty State Park. The wonder is that their flocks can sometimes be as large as 200 to 300 ducks. Ruddy Ducks look like floating sugar bowls with a spoon sticking out the side. Male Scaups are black ducks with white side panels. The females have white rings around the top of their bills. These ducks rest throughout the winter in the waters of Hudson County but return to Canada for nesting in summer.

Mallards:

Mallards are a common duck in Hudson County and can be seen in almost any park. The female is always brown but the male Mallard acquires a shiny green head during breeding season. By mid summer, the male loses his green feathers and appears to look much like the female. Mallards have as many as 10 ducklings in the spring and early summer. They feed on leaves, seeds and insects.



Canvasback Duck



Shoveler



Muscovy Duck

The Birds: DUCKS, GEESE AND SWANS

Horned Grebe:

Something that looks like a strange duck sitting low in the water is the Horned Grebe. Watch as it throws itself forward to dive into the cold coastal waters along the Jersey shore. The Horned Grebe gets its name from the rims at the top of its head which turn golden as spring and mating season approach. Go to Liberty State Park in March at sunset and look across New York Harbor. You will see the spectacle of the glittering horns of the Grebe as they reflect in the evening sun light.



Canada Goose:

The Canada Goose is the name given to this common goose, but the family tree of Canada Goose has smaller and larger varieties. Flocks of 25 to 50 can be seen in a "V" formation in the sky. In winter, the Canada Goose migrates to the Hudson County area. Huge flocks feed on the green grass of golf courses and lawns. The goose is also happy with any food given by humans. But don't be fooled into believing that the Canada Goose is not cautious. In spring, Canada Geese parents are very protective of their young and will use their bills to attack anyone who appears to be putting their young at risk. Move slowly and speak gently to the parent geese if you want to admire their young.

Other Birds of Interest



American Coot



Common Tern

The Birds: SONGBIRDS AND WARBLERS:

There are many types of songbirds. Cardinals are the most popular songbirds with their bright red feathers and pointed heads. Robins with their red breast are easy to identify. House Finch and Song Sparrows are the little brown birds that sing two of nature's most beautiful songs. Mockingbirds are the true musicians because they can imitate all the other birds' songs.

Mockingbird:

Being the champion of the songbirds, Mockingbirds either mimic other birds or compose songs of their own. During mating season, these birds sing morning, noon and night. Mockingbirds patrol their neighborhood and give out warning calls to other birds when danger is near. They gang up on cats and swoop down and peck at them until the cats are driven out of the area. Mockingbirds love berries and fruit and also eat seeds and insects. They stay in Hudson County through the winter. Male and female Mockingbirds look identical. They lay eggs in spring and are busy feeding berries to their young when the Mulberry trees ripen in Hudson County.



Cardinal:



Cardinals are the bright red songbirds seen on Christmas cards. They stay in Hudson County throughout the seasons. Cardinals eat berries and seeds and prefer pine trees for nesting and shelter.

The male is bright red but the female is tan with some tinges of red. Both birds have the top-notch on their heads. Cardinals can be seen in the thickets at Liberty State Park or in the berry bushes at Lincoln Park or any place in Hudson County where pine trees are abundant.

Goldfinch:

The Goldfinch is New Jersey's state bird. Its bright yellow feathers are noticeable in summer, but are drab in winter. Goldfinch eat seeds, such as thistle seed, so they are able to stay all winter in Hudson County. They build their cup-like nests in shrubs and small trees. The male bird brings food to the female who stays on the nest until the young hatch.



The Birds: SONGBIRDS AND WARBLERS:

Red-winged Blackbird:



This bird is the true harbinger of spring. The male birds, with their bright red and yellow shoulder patch, arrive in Hudson County in late February or early March. After they have located a good nest site, usually one with tall grass and a tree nearby for monitoring the nest, they await the arrival of the female birds, whose feathers are dull to camouflage them during nesting. These

birds can be found at Lincoln Park in Jersey City and many of the other parks in Hudson County that have tall grass along the waters edge.

Baltimore or Northern Oriole:

The male Oriole sits at the top of a tree singing loudly. His bright orange throat feathers are seen as a blazing flame. Below in the tree, there may be a female sitting inside the woven basket nest that hangs by strands from the end branches. The Orioles always build their nests near fruit bearing trees and berry bushes. They depend on these fruits to feed their chicks. Orioles have nested several summers in Bayonne Stephen Gregg Park.



Eastern Bluebird:

Bluebirds are songbirds that like open fields with a few trees and plenty of wild berry bushes that they can feed from all-year-round. During summer they also eat insects and worms. Bluebirds like to make their nests in abandoned woodpecker holes in dead trees. Bluebird boxes (with a 1 1/2 inch wide entrance hole) have made it possible for Bluebird populations to increase in spite of competition from Starlings and House Sparrows. Bluebirds have been seen at Liberty State Park.



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The Birds: SONGBIRDS AND WARBLERS:

Warblers are very small birds that come in many different colors. Many migrate through Hudson County in April and May on their way to the pine forests of Canada. In autumn, most warblers migrate to South America. They pass through Hudson County in September and October. To enjoy warblers you will need to have a bird guide that gives details on how to identify them. There are so many that we are not able to go into details in this guide. Many bird watchers find that warblers are the most challenging bird to find and identify because they are small and move very quickly.



Yellow-rumped Warbler:

The Yellow-rumped Warbler is named for the yellow spot on its rump between its black and white wings, at the top of its black tail. While most warblers eat insects, the Yellow-rumped Warbler includes bayberries and seeds in its diet so it is able to stay in Hudson County all year round. Look for the Yellow-rumped Warbler in shrubs and berry bushes near water.



Yellow Warbler:

The yellow warbler is seen as a quick flash of yellow at the top of a tree or bush. Its song is a complicated song which many bird watchers describe as "Sweet, Sweet Sweeter than Sweet." The sighting of the Yellow Warbler is a sweet experience. It can be found in shrubby areas near water. Try your luck at finding a yellow warbler in any of Hudson County's parks.



Song Sparrow

Blue Jay



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THE PARKS

In the next few pages of this booklet, the parks are listed and described with attention to which wild birds can be seen in a particular park and what amenities are available for the bird watcher.

The parks in Hudson County have gone through many changes during the recent years. In Year 2000, Governor Whitman proclaimed the opening of the waterfront area of Liberty State Park. This area, which gives a full view of Ellis Island and the Statute of Liberty, was completely landscaped and planted by horticulturists to create a "New York Central Park" style of park, complete with play grounds, walkways and lawns. In the future, Liberty State Park is scheduled to have the 225 acres between Freedom Way and Phillips Drive restored. Excavation of contaminated land will be done to expand the wetlands. Boardwalks will meander through the marsh, meadows and new growth forests to allow the public to observe and enjoy various types of habitats in the park.

More restoration of parkland in Hudson County has occurred in Lincoln Park. West of Route 440, in Lincoln Park, one lake in the wildlife area has been restored through the planting of native Arrowhead and Cattails that filter drainage waters. The banks of the lake have been transformed with the planting of Rose Mallow, Milkweed, Bayberry and other native species. New bridges have also been installed. Boardwalks, a dog field and a small golf course are being planned for Lincoln Park.

Laurel Hill Park in Hudson County has been reclaimed. Wild flowers and trails enhance the land along the Hackensack River at the base of the giant rock. In the future, Laurel Hill Park will gain an Interpretive Center building to provide amenities and educational opportunities in the park. One of the best features of Laurel Hill Park is the availability of canoes and kayaks for rent. One of the easiest and safest trips can be made by traveling north on the Hackensack River along the eastern shore from the boat launch. Marsh Wrens sing from the reeds as swans and geese paddle in the water nearby.

In the Secaucus area, the newly created Mill Creek Point and Mill Creek Wetland Trail are the result of mediation to restore lost habitat. These wildlife areas now offer the best view of the Meadowlands.

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Liberty State Park Interpretive Center

THE PARKS Continued

The Meadowlands are the result of glaciers that melted thousands of years ago creating a particularly rich environment for migratory ducks and birds. Even now the Meadowlands has a record 265 bird species that pass through or nest in the region.

Much of Hudson County's land has transitioned from wildlife habitat to land shaped by human use. During the 1800's the salt marsh grasses and the cedar forests were harvested from the Meadowlands and used by European immigrants who began farming the land. Later, developers bought the flat stretches of farmland for homebuilding. During the industrial development of the 1940's, the Meadowlands were filled for the construction of roads, foundries and war industry. Decades later, with the changing attitudes toward nature, the people of the Meadowlands began to struggle over the restoration and preservation of the Meadowlands. This led to the creation of the NJ Meadowlands Commission, which was given the task of maintaining a balance between development and the restoration and preservation of the unique natural areas in northern New Jersey's Meadowlands.

This changing attitude toward nature led to the creation of the New Jersey Open Space and Outdoor Recreation Plan and the New Jersey Balanced Land Use Standards. The increasing population and the disappearance of open space made many people treasure the open spaces that remained. In many communities, citizens pressed for the preservation of wild or abandon areas. In Bayonne, New Jersey, a major highway, Route 440, was designed to travel along the west side of Bayonne. When the project was re-routed, the land lay fallow.

Many people, including those in such groups as the New Jersey Audubon, and the Hackensack River Keeper, began to see the possibilities of restoring habitat for wildlife in abandon sites. After removal of debris from the land south of the re-routed highway, wetland grasses and shrubs were restored.

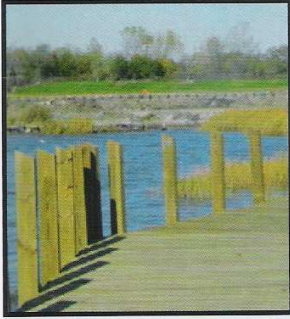
A boardwalk, outdoor nature amphitheater and bird blinds were installed for viewing wildlife. This restoration of the land gave the people of Hudson County another opportunity to enjoy nature and the waterfront.



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Nest of Ospreys

Parks Continued



The "New" North 40 in its early stages at Stephen Gregg Park in Bayonne

This is the North 40 or Rutkowski Park. From the amphitheater that looks out over the restored wetland and Newark Bay, students can view and learn about the biological diversity that exists in wild areas. In the shallow waters where fish lay eggs, where muskrats tunnel in the shoreline and birds build nests in the reeds, the city dweller reunites with the forces of nature.

Yet, while enjoying nature in Hudson County, the city dweller never loses site of the amenities of civilization. Many of the parks in Hudson County are near restaurants, shopping and mass transportation. Hudson County nature lovers may want to keep in mind that County parks give access to the restrooms from April until mid-November. These are Laurel Hill Park, Bayonne Stephen R. Gregg Park, North Bergen James J. Braddock Park, and Kearny's West Hudson Park. The city parks of Schmidts Woods Park in Secaucus and Kearny's Gunnell Oval have their restrooms available only during summer months. Liberty State Park is operated by the state of New Jersey and restrooms and heated public areas are open and available year-round in the park's Administration, Terminal and playground buildings.

Enjoy the benefits of seeing the Wild Birds in the Parks of Hudson County by making bird watching a part of your life. Good Birding!

3 PARK GROUPS

City Parks - Yellow

County Parks - Blue

State Parks - Green

Herring Gull



Laughing Gull



Kearny Marsh - Gunnell Oval:



On the west side of the county, Kearny Marsh is the best area to see Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Common Gallinule, Least Bittern, Osprey, Black-crowned Night Heron and Marsh Wren. Go to the water at the back of the park and follow the trail that runs along the water. West Hudson Park is down Schuyler Avenue from Gunnell Oval and the tall trees and shrubs in that park attract migrating warblers and hawks in spring and fall.

Amenities: There is an adequate restroom at Gunnell Oval (but it is not wheel chair accessible) between the ball fields and Schuyler Avenue. It may be closed during winter.

Directions: In Kearny, go up Schuyler Avenue and look for the Gunnell Oval sign near Quincy Avenue. Turn in and follow the road to the back of the park where the wetland is located. A trail runs along the wetland. A canoe trail is also marked in the swamp.



Cormorant



Black-crowned Night Heron

Bayonne - South Cove Commons, Lefante Way off Route 440

The Cove walkway is a surprising combination of modern shopping center and wildlife habitat. Could this be the best of both worlds? Fast food restaurants to one side of the large parking lot and wading birds such as Plovers, Sandpipers, Snowy Egret, Great Egret, Great Blue Heron and the amazing Black Skimmers that zigzag up the rivulet during low tide in summer. During spring and fall migration seasons, Osprey and Bald Eagle have been seen from this location. The walkway extends beyond the parking lot, past the Scottish links golf course and out to the bay. Along the way you will cross several long bridges and see open sky with wide ranges of short and tall grass that provide habitat for many sparrows and wading shore birds.

Ten Great Blue Herons have been seen at this site along with a flock of 20 Black-crowned Night Herons.



Amenities: Plenty of fast food restaurants. The grocery store and laundry could tempt a bird watcher to do chores after a splendid morning of bird watching.

Directions: If driving, watch for the South Cove Commons shopping mall sign off Route 440 going south. Turn onto Lefante Way and enter the shopping center parking lot or take the Hudson Bergen Light Rail to the 34th Street stop. Walk across the parking lot to 32nd Street and cross Route 440 to the shopping mall sidewalks.

Collins Park in Bergen Point, Bayonne.

Collins Park shares a feature with two other famous bird watching locations, Pelee Point on Lake Erie and Cape May Point in New Jersey. These locations are peninsulas. They are often gathering points where birds await the perfect wind to aid them in their migration across bodies of water. In Hudson County, Collins park is the point of crossing in autumn for Winter Wren, Chickadees, Eastern King Birds and others. Bird watchers should walk the trail and observe what types of birds are in the tree tops and on the shoreline. In spring, the birds in the trees and on the shore are new arrivals who have already made their crossing and are on their way north.

Amenities: Some restaurants operate on First Street which runs along this park. Broadway is near-by where shopping and restaurants are readily available. The park has several restrooms that are open during summer. The trails are wheelchair accessible with a small bridge that may present some difficulty.

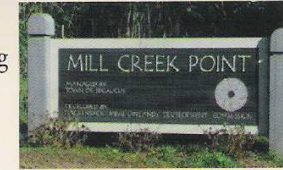
Directions: If you are coming from outside Bayonne, take the Light Rail to 22nd or 34th street stops then walk two blocks to Broadway and take the Broadway Avenue bus to the park which is at First Street.



Eastern King Bird

Secaucus - Mill Creek Point - Schmidts Woods, Mill Creek Park

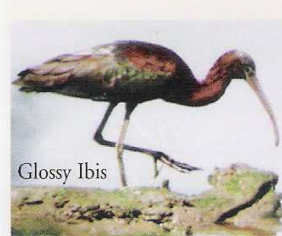
Mill Creek Point offers a great viewing platform of the upper Hackensack River. Bring your lawn chair, wheel chair or use the benches at the Point. September and October are good times to watch the arrival of Northern Harrier Hawks over the marshes and the many ducks migrating into Hudson County from Canada. The Parks Department did a nice job of installing signs along the banisters that show pictures of the ducks and their names for easy identification.



Schmidts Woods is nearby and offers open clear trails through wooded areas and thickets where warblers and other songbirds can be observed. In recent years, the Yellow-crowned Night Heron, a rare species, has been seen nesting in the treetops. Please keep your dog on a leash to avoid scaring the Yellow-crowned Night Herons who walk along the park grounds like they own the place and they do!

Mill Creek Park: Entering Mill Creek Park is like stepping out of one world and into the exact opposite. The parking lot is shared with a shopping mall, but once you pass through the Mill Creek Park gate, the wonderful world of Nature begins. This newly restored and replanted wildlife area is growing native species of swamp grasses and shrubs that are already inviting birds to nest and feed there. The sky dominates and the Northern Harriers cast their wing shadows over the returning habitat. Trails are clear and easy to walk. This is a great area to view smaller ducks like the Common Merganser, migrating Wood Ducks and Green Wing Teal.

Amenities: Restaurants and shopping in Mill Creek Mall. Restrooms in Schmidts Woods during summer months. Portable toilets may be available on road near Mill Creek Point, and in shopping mall at Mill Creek Park.



Glossy Ibis

Directions: Mill Creek Point and Schmidts Woods: Drive to Exit 16E to Paterson Plank Road, turn left, then go right on Franklin to Gillis Street, turn left then right on Koelle Blvd which wraps around Schmidts Woods and becomes Mill Ridge Road. Take Mill Ridge Road north to Mill Creek Point.

Direction to Mill Creek Park: New Jersey Transit Bus #85 goes to Mill Creek Mall which is next to Mill Creek Park. To drive, take Route 3 to Harmon Meadows Blvd. Turn left onto Park Place, then left onto Mill Creek Drive. Go into the parking lot near the grocery store. Park near the wildlife area gate and enter.

Jersey City - Lincoln Park of Hudson County



Lincoln Park West

In Jersey City there is the beautiful Lincoln Park. The first sign of spring to be seen in this park occurs in February when the Red-Winged Blackbirds arrive in the tall trees at this

entrance near the statue of President Lincoln. As spring progresses the birds move down the hill toward the marsh where they build their nests. Bird watchers have seen Red-tailed Hawks catching squirrels in the large trees. Several species of woodpecker reside here in winter. Geese and Mallards paddle around in the pond. To see more wildlife cross the bridge to Lincoln Park West.

Lincoln Park West

has two fishing ponds that attract Great Blue Heron and Great Egrets. Follow the nature trail to catch a glimpse of fish laying eggs in the shallow water during spring and early summer. Osprey occasionally perch in the tall trees. The westward pond has an island and a Night-crowned Heron rookery in the willow trees at the water's edge. Hooded Mergansers and the rare Pied-Billed Grebe are winter residents in this pond.

Amenities: This park lies between Kennedy Boulevard and the Hackensack River with West Side Avenue crossing the middle. The Hudson Shopping Mall on Route 440 is nearby where diners and fast food restaurants can be found. The park is generally wheelchair accessible, but some stairs do exist. Restrooms are near the playground off West Side Avenue and near the bridge that crosses into Lincoln Park West.

Directions: Kennedy Boulevard and West Side Avenue are the best car routes to the park. Parking is available near the picnic areas. New Jersey Transit bus #80 and bus #10 make stops at Lincoln Park.



Great Egret at Lincoln Park West

Bayonne - Stephen R. Gregg Hudson County Park

Bayonne's Gregg Park has a formal park setting with paved sidewalks, a gazebo and stone bridge overlooks. The upland forest invites many species of Woodpeckers, Wood Thrush, Veery and Ovenbirds as they migrate through in spring and fall. During these seasons the best place to find warblers, such as the Black-Throated Blue Warbler, is the line of trees near the pond between the lower and upper level of the park.

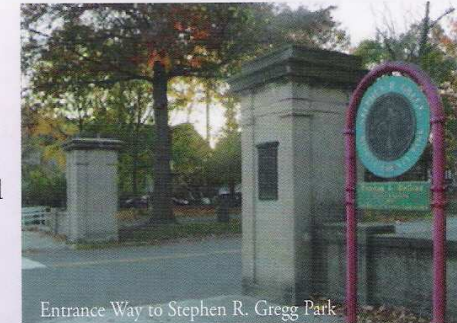
In the northwest corner of the lower level of the park you can visit Rutkowski Park, the restored wetland with the new boardwalk. This restored habitat offers great viewing of the Red-winged Blackbirds and Marsh Wren. You will also likely see American Widgeons, Great and Snowy Egret and Double Crested Cormorants. Loons have been seen on Newark Bay from this park in winter.

Amenities: The park has plenty of parking space on the lower level and on the side streets. Restrooms are located on Kennedy Boulevard and one is near the restored wetland in the lower level. Much of the park is wheel chair accessible. Though no restaurants are in the park, many can be found on Broadway, in Bayonne, just a few blocks to the east. Picnic areas are available in the center of the park.



The pond at Stephen R. Gregg Park

Directions: Stephen R. Gregg Hudson County Park is located on the west side of Bayonne between 38th and 45th Streets off Avenue C and Kennedy Boulevard. The park can be reached by car or by the #10 bus that runs along Kennedy Boulevard or the #81 NJ Transit bus along Avenue C.



Entrance Way to Stephen R. Gregg Park

Secaucus - Hackensack Meadowlands

- Laurel Hill Hudson County Park:

From the steep rock of "Snake Hill" to the Hackensack riverbank, Laurel Hill offers a variety of habitats for bird watching. Warblers and hawks use the upland area while wading birds such as the Great Blue Heron and the Great Egret wander along the shoreline where the Marsh Wren sings its rattling song from the reeds. On the river in winter, migratory flocks of Canvasback ducks or Mute Swans can be seen along with an occasional Bald Eagle. Harriers fly over the Sawmill Creek marsh on the other side of the Hackensack River.

Amenities: Driving is the best way to arrive at this park which offers plenty of parking. There are good clear trails and benches with views over the river. At present, the park offers a temporary portable toilet. (A nature interpretive center with amenities is planned for the future.) Restaurants are available in the town of Secaucus. During summer, there is a rental office where you can obtain canoes/kayaks for paddling the Sawmill Creek Wildlife Management Area. This gives an opportunity to see more birds in the marsh on the other side of the Hackensack River. Be mindful of the tides so that you don't get stranded in the marsh.

Directions: Take NJ Turnpike to Exit 15X, to "County Road" then go north and turn left on "New County Road" which runs west into the park.



Kingfisher



Stilt Sandpiper



Yellow Legs

North Bergen - James J. Braddock North Hudson Park:

North Hudson Braddock Park has some of the largest trees in Hudson County and attracts the forest birds, such as Flicker, Nuthatch and Wood Thrush. The under-story of the park, which is made up of shrubs and small trees, is where the beginner bird watcher will see many types of warblers in the spring.

As the crow flies, North Hudson Braddock Park is directly across the Hudson River from Central Park in New York City. The possibility exists that Pale Male, the famous Red-tailed Hawk of Central Park, may have relatives living in North Hudson Park, sitting in the tops of the tall trees.

The lake of North Hudson Park has Red-winged Blackbirds in the reeds on its shore, while Mute Swans and Canada Geese sail its open waters.

Amenities: Parking is available in lots and along park drives. Wheel chair users are frequently seen in the park. The North Bergen and Guttenberg shopping district are also nearby. Restrooms are located at the playground near the park office.

Directions: The #23 and #156 New Jersey Transit Buses run near the park. A bus stop is located on 79th Street. Drive to North Bergen along J.F. Kennedy Boulevard to 79th Street, then turn East. Go about six blocks to the park entrance.



Children at North Hudson Park



Red-bellied Woodpecker



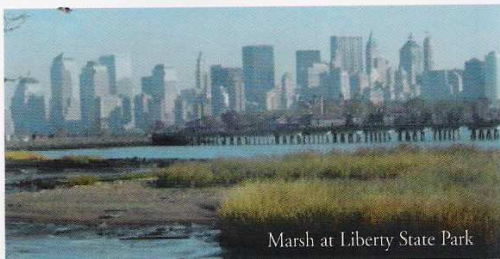
Killdeer



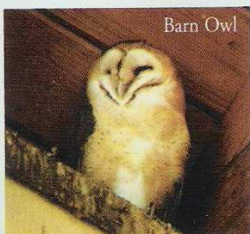
Downy Woodpecker

Liberty State Park in Jersey City/Newport

Liberty State Park was created for the people, by the people, and of the people, but the birds love it too! The park's bird list has 239 species. Located behind the Statute of Liberty and Ellis Island, Liberty State Park offers over 200 acres of habitat for birds and small animals such as raccoon, rabbit and muskrat.



In spring and summer, Great and Snowy Egrets can be seen along with Great Blue Heron and Black-crowned Night Heron. The graceful Black Skimmer glides over the salt marsh near the Administrative Building (south end of the park). Go to the Interpretive Center (center of the park on Freedom Way) and walk along the brick trail. Watch for Mourning Doves, Pheasants, Robins, Mockingbirds, Cardinals and Goldfinch.



In winter, be sure to dress for cold winds and watch for an occasional Snowy Owl, Red-tailed Hawk or Northern Harrier. They can be seen in the fields viewed from Liberty Walk, a walkway along the waterfront where huge rafts of ducks, sometimes as many as 200 to 500 in a flock, can be seen. These ducks migrate to Hudson County from their nesting grounds in Canada. Regular winter visitors are Rudy Ducks, Greater and Lesser Scaup, Red Breasted Mergansers, Horned Grebes, Canvasback Ducks and the cute little black and white Bufflehead Ducks that dive in and out of the ice cold water.

Amenities: There are many parking lots available near sites of interest. Maps are available at the park's Administration Building, Interpretive Center and at the Railroad Terminal Building.

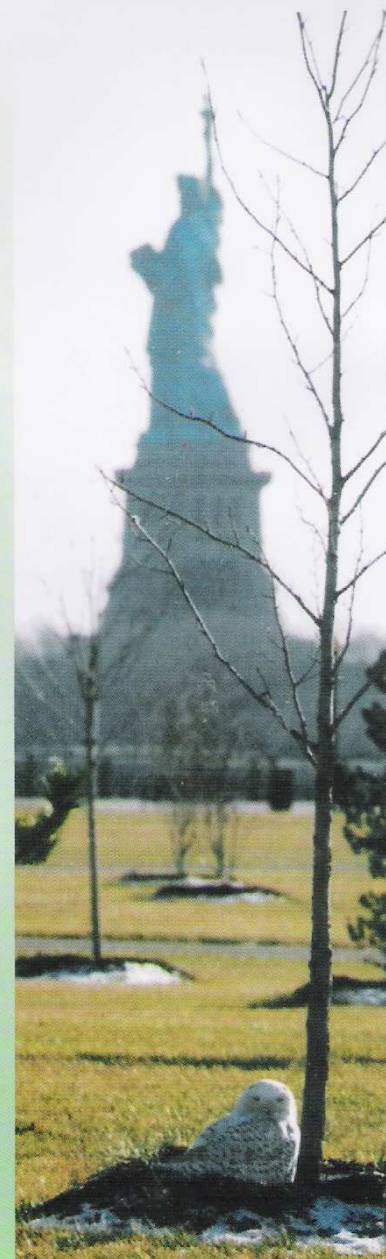


Restrooms are available at the Administration and Terminal buildings (open in winter) and other locations (though sometimes closed on Sundays).

The park is fully wheel chair accessible. Fast food is more readily available in summer than winter at the CRRNJ Terminal Building. There are two restaurants in the area. One is inexpensive and located on Morris Pesin Drive outside the park while the other is located in the marina at the north end of the park.

Directions: Take the NJ Turnpike Extension to Exit 14B and follow the signs. The Hudson Bergen Light Rail stops just outside the park, but it is a long walk to sites of interest in the park, so take NJ Transit #305 shuttle bus from the Light Rail to park interior. From Manhattan: Take the NY Waterway Ferry from Pier 11 at the foot of Wall Street to Liberty Harbor Marina in Liberty State Park, then walk or take shuttle #305 to points of interest.

Snowy Owl visits
Liberty State Park, Jersey City

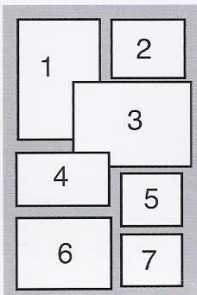


Map of Hudson County Parks



Wild Bird Watching Sites

February 2005



Back Cover Pictures

1. Great Blue Heron
2. Immature Black Crowned Night Heron
3. Yellow Crowned Night Heron
4. Green Heron
5. Red-tailed Hawk
6. Snowy Egret
7. Snowy Owl

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