American Bittern (Botaurus lentiginosus): 30” in length, 36” wingspan. Found in freshwater wetlands with tall vegetation, Bitterns are often hunkered down. Difficult to see, their camouflaged feathers keep them hidden among the reeds. During the winter months, they will move towards the coast or areas with moving water. They eat fish, crustaceans, frogs, and insects, like other herons, by slowly wading as they forage. Bitterns are nearly always solitary, even when nesting. Nests will be built in areas of thick vegetation emerging from the water. Sound: A deep pumping oong-ka-choonk. Typically calls at night.

Green Heron (Butorides virescens): 18” in length, 25” wingspan. From afar, Green Herons are short, stocky birds standing on short yellow legs, and hidden among plants along bodies of water. With a closer look, the birds are actually quite beautiful. These small herons will wait patiently for prey of small fish to come where they wait before snatching them up in their thick, sharp beaks. They will sometimes “fish” by using sticks or insects to lure in prey. Sound: Harsh, explosive skew and raspy clucks, kuk-kuk-kuku-kuk.

Great Blue Heron (Ardea herodias): State Species of Special Concern 50” in length, 75” wingspan. Commonly found along Hunterdon County waterways, the Great Blue is the most familiar species of heron. These herons move slowly through the water, sometimes up to their chest, and strike quickly once a fish or small mammal is within sight. Most of the time, Great Blue Herons have a gray-blue coloring with gray legs and a yellow beak, but occasionally a Great Blue has a white coat instead. It is listed as an NJ Special Concern species due to wetland habitat loss. Sound: Squawking roh-roh-rohs when arriving at a nest. A disturbance can trigger a series of clucking go-go-gos, building to a rapid frawnk squawk. Chicks give a tik-tik-tik call.

Black-crowned Night Heron (Nycticorax nycticorax): 26” in length, 45” wingspan. Unlike many other herons, Black-crowned Night Herons have very stout, thick proportions, including the legs. Their necks are thick and they have large, flat heads with hefty beaks. Their dark accents and gray beaks aid them in hunting at night. The yellow legs blend into reeds along the shore. Juveniles are brown with large white spots on the wings and blurry streaks underneath. Black-crowned Night Herons can be found in marshes to estuaries to reservoirs and lakes. Given their name, these herons do most of their hunting at night and hunker down along the shore during the day. The best time to see these herons would be in the evening when they are heading out to forage for fish and other animals found in the water. When nesting, they can often be found among other herons and egrets on protected islands in stick nests. Sound: Barking squawk when disturbed. Guttural notes followed by a raspy woc-a-woc call, harsh screams and hoarse clucks. Males give a hissing plup to attract females.

Little Blue Heron (Egretta caerulea): 25” in length, 40” wingspan. Little Blue Herons are rare visitors to Hunterdon. The best bet to see one would be during migration. They will rest in streams, swamps, and flooded plains. These smaller herons are dark blue and purplish in color. Juveniles are pure white. They have yellow eyes, yellow-green legs, and black beaks. Little Blue Herons are “stand and wait” predators, like several of the other herons. Instead of dashing about, they will wait for prey to come to them. To change position, they will slowly walk or fly to a completely new location. Nesting sites are among other herons’ nests. Sound: Usually silent; can make harsh squawks.
Snowy Egret (Egretta thula):
25” in length, 40” wingspan. Snowy Egrets are smaller than their cousins, Great Egrets. As with other egrets, they were endangered due to their plumage being harvested for decorations before laws to protect them were put in place. Similarly, they are all white but have black bills and legs with bright yellow feet and face skin. Snowy Egrets spend most of their time near the coast but can be spotted breeding in inland wetlands. Unlike some other herons, these birds may be seen chasing fish and other aquatic animals along the shore before spearing them, which makes for a very animated display. Males and females take turns incubating their eggs. As one mate takes over for the other, it sometimes presents a stick, as if passing off the baton. Sound: Mostly quiet except on breeding sites, where they give raspy or nasal calls.

Great Egret (Ardea alba):
40” in length, 55” wingspan. These birds are tall and slender with sparkling white feathers, all yellow beaks, and black legs. They will hunt in normal heron fashion by wading and waiting in shallow water near the shore for an unsuspecting fish or frog. Then egrets will strike into the water and spear their prey. Great Egrets are found in both saltwater and freshwater areas. Being colonial nesters, they will settle on secluded islands away from predators in nests made of sticks high up in trees. In Hunterdon, they are most commonly seen in fall migration (July through October). The Great Egret is an alluring sight in many North American wetlands. In the late 19th century, these beautiful birds have been promulgated for the protection of breeding sites, where they give raspy or nasal calls.

Sound: Harsh, raspy, rick-rack call.

It is the policy of the County to provide reasonable accommodations to persons with disabilities upon advance notice of need. Persons requiring accommodations should make a request at least two weeks prior to program attendance.