



Lynde Point Land Trust
Bird Nest Enhancement/Monitoring Project
2020 End of Season Report

Hello Birding Fenwickians!

The **2020 Nesting Season** has come to a close! At the writing of this report, there are still one or two young Osprey hanging around near the Webster nests, but the balance of the Osprey and Purple Martin colonies are well on their way south, some flying as far as the southern edge of Brazil. We wish them luck for a safe journey and return next spring.

Purple Martin and Osprey Status

The cleaned Purple Martin houses have been returned to storage after collecting the data on how many nests the colony hosted. The trend of increasing numbers witnessed over the last five years, has continued this year with a total of 47 nests. As mentioned in previous reports, this species is 100% dependent on humans to provide housing, the colony's success directly related to this and sound management practices. Key to this year was a more active discouraging of House Sparrows who compete with Purple Martin (and often kill young and adults). With collaboration of Connecticut Audubon staff and borough volunteers, the invasive sparrows' toll was kept to a minimum.

Extrapolating the number of nests out to calculate the number of fledglings is done by using a conservative multiplier of 2.5 fledglings per nest. More accurate counting is not easily done with the current house and pole construction we are using in the borough.

The new Osprey platform installed to replace Webster I was received well by the returning pair. Building a new nest from scratch was not a problem for this experienced pair, masters of stick construction. Other platforms are being monitored for future replacement, one on the schedule for this winter. With the new dune, the Hepburn platform will need to be moved to the northeast about 100 feet.

The 2020 Osprey season started off strongly with 22 eggs noted across the nine nests on May 22, but suffered some attrition by the following count on June 18, which recorded 15 hatchlings and four eggs. The final fledgling count was 13, thankfully above the low count from 2019. As you may remember, last year's lower fledgling count was a result of Great Horned Owl predation. These year-to-year fledgling fluctuations are not unusual, but an upward trend is what we hope to see for a healthy colony that offers room for expansion.



Image by VJ Anderson

Martin Nests	'16	'17	'18	'19	'20
1. Riggio	3	1	0	3	0
2. Walton	3	3	7	5	7
3. Keeney	0	2	2	7	6
4. 34 Pettipaug	0	0	0	1	4
5. Bulkeley	0	1	3	4	0
6. 2nd Fairway West	3	3	3	4	2
7. 2nd Fairway East	3	3	4	5	5
8. Neely	3	2	3	3	2
9. Davis	3	3	1	0	5
10. Fourth Fairway	0	1	4	1	4
11. Gay	3	5	4	1	5
12. Webster	5	6	6	7	7
13. Patterson	0	0	0	1	0
Total Nests:	26	30	37	42	47

Osprey Fledged	'16	'17	'18	'19	'20
1. West End	0	1	1	2	2
2. Hepburn	3	3	3	1	0
3. Neely	3	3	3	2	3
4. Staniford	1	1	3	0	2
5. Schmitt	NA	NA	NA	0	0
6. Sequassen	4	3	3	0	1
7. Hastings	0	0	1	3	3
8. Webster I	3	3	2	2	1
9. Webster II	NA	0	2	0	1
Total Fledged	14	14	18	10	13

The colony on the Old Lyme side of the river, primarily on Great Island, suffered significant attrition this year. Speculation on the causes are weather and food related with the timing of weather events and the arrival of the larger menhaden schools (the main food source for Long Island Sound Osprey).

In a 2017, Old Lyme native and Osprey expert, Dr. Paul Spitzer wrote, “In the eastern coastal US, when food and nest sites are abundant, breeding Osprey often cluster in “exploded colonies.” Nesting density along portions of the East Coast from VA to ME makes it the “Great Osprey Heartland.” In much of this region, from VA to southern New England, the most important prey species is the migratory Atlantic Menhaden, *Brevoortia tyrannus*. Menhaden are planktivorous, schooling fish of the herring family. Swimming near the water’s surface, they sieve plankton on their gill rakers, making them vulnerable to the Osprey’s classic dive. Ospreys’ colonial nesting habit enables transfer of fresh information about menhaden school location when a laden male returns, so there is a “beehive” function at these classic nesting colonies. Males often do a noisy, hovering flight display when delivering a menhaden. Menhaden are perfused with blood, which streams from talon punctures as the noisy male Osprey deliver them to the colony. So I tell people: “It’s like the plains of Africa out there, with tactical-minded Osprey preying on ‘herds’ of menhaden.”

He continues saying, “Menhaden are an essential food-chain link in many east coast ecosystems. Our society casts abundant nutrient runoff into coastal waters, which results in dense blooms of plankton. Menhaden are uniquely capable of conveying this fertility up the food chain. They support game and food fish such as striped bass and bluefish; at times humpback whales; and a variety of piscivorous birds including Osprey, Bald Eagle, Brown Pelican, Northern Gannet, and Common Loon. However, menhaden are also commercially purse-seined in huge quantities, then reduced to oil and meal for many products—for most of which there are economic substitutes. Menhaden are also used as bait for crab and lobster, thus supporting a human food chain with many beneficial economic multipliers. So, everyone wants a piece of these fish, and annual, regional harvest quotas are imposed by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. Com-



Image by Andrew Griswold.



Courtesy of NASA.



Courtesy of Ayuwat Jearwattananok/Macaulay Library.

mercial menhaden harvest is the second largest by weight in the U.S., exceeded only by Alaskan Pollock.”

Proper management of this important resource should be on all New Englanders’ radar screen.

Nest Boxes

The Tree Swallow and wren boxes (used by both House and Carolina wren) were all occupied this nest season, with some use by House Sparrows. All boxes are in good shape (inspected and cleaned) and will again be left out during the off-season for use as night roosts for Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, Downy Woodpecker, and Eastern Bluebird (and the occasional mouse or flying squirrel).

Birds in the Borough

Recently spotted in the borough (near the Seventh Tee), the **Brown Creeper** is one of the smaller woodland birds and almost always found on the largest of the area trees. Their typical feeding behavior is to start at the bottom of the main trunk and climb their way upward as they probe crevices for invertebrates with their narrow, down curved bill. Once reaching a height of about 10 feet, they’ll fly back to the trunk base and start climbing up again. Their high pitched calls may assist you in finding this hard-to-see but relatively common species.

Cornell University notes that populations may have increased in New England in recent decades, as a result of forest regrowth and the many large trees that were killed by Gypsy Moths and Dutch Elm Disease, creating nesting habitat. The spraying of DDT to combat the disease in the 1950s likely harmed Brown Creeper populations.

Within the last few days, there have been two juvenile **White-crowned Sparrows** behind 4 Nibang Avenue. This location in the fall is a wonderful “sparrow pit,” because of the mix of seed-bearing grasses and shrubs. The adults of this species are striking with their gleaming white crown stripes. First winter, sub-adult, birds have a brown crown and are as big as the adults. Because of the timing of the nesting season and migration, we tend to see more first-winter birds in our area than adults. Young White-crowns are a good find and exciting to see, considering how far they have traveled to get to us,



Brown Creeper

Image by David Badtke/Macaulay Library.



Image by Scott Martin/Macaulay Library.



White-crowned Sparrow

Image by Michael Borque/Macaulay Library.

some as far north as the Arctic Circle. This large, gray-fronted sparrow stands out among the many Song and White-throated Sparrows at this site and contrasts nicely with the large flocks of Dark-eyed Junco that have recently arrived.

Like many other species, White-crowned Sparrows come to feeders for sunflower and other kinds of seeds, but are more likely to stay on the ground eating seeds dropped by other birds. Making a brush pile is a good way to encourage this species, and others, to spend time in your yard or other natural areas.

Keep an Eye Out

Over many years of bird sightings in the borough, I've been lucky to find **Short-eared Owl** a couple of times, one time flushing from the grasslands southeast of Crab Creek. This species is described as being "crepuscular," meaning most active at dusk and dawn, spending most daytime hours resting and concealed in the grasses.

Short-eared Owls live in large, open areas with low vegetation, including "prairie and coastal grasslands, heathlands, meadows, savanna, tundra, marshes, dunes, and agricultural areas," according to Cornell Lab of Ornithology. "Winter habitat is similar, but is more likely to include large open areas within woodlots, stubble fields, fresh and saltwater marshes, weedy fields, dumps, gravel pits, rock quarries, and shrub thickets. When food is plentiful, winter areas often become breeding areas."

The best time to look for this species is at dusk, when hunting Short-eared Owls are just starting their evening flights. Look for a bird about the size of a small gull with rounded wings and a loose wingbeat and bounding flight. Note the buffy patches in the wings, seen while in flight. This species eats small mammals, mostly mice and voles, so you'll see them patrolling just above the marsh grasses as they search for a meal.

Cornell notes, "Owl populations tend to fluctuate in close association with the cycling populations of their mammalian prey. They also eat birds including adult and nestling terns, gulls, shorebirds, songbirds, storm-petrels, and rails."



Juvenile White-crowned Sparrow

Image by Ryan Schain/Macaulay Library.



Short-eared Owl

Image by Tony Varela.



Courtesy of USFWS.

Black Scoter, *Melanitta Americana* (a duck species), seem to be more prevalent this fall than in recent years, an uncommon but regular migrant in our area. They breed in subarctic regions and winter in coastal areas along both coasts. Diving ducks (rather than dabblers like Mallards), they dive to find crustaceans and mollusks, their main food source.

Black Scoter are small, stocky, diving ducks slightly smaller than a Mallard but larger than a teal. The adult males are all black with a yellow-orange knob at the base of the upper mandible. Juveniles and females are grey-brown with a dark cap and lighter cheeks. Black Scoters are listed as Near Threatened by the American Bird Conservancy.

Additionally, look for small groups of diving ducks in open water, off shore, or in the lower Connecticut River. Scoters are found in deeper waters, not usually in shallow waters near shore like Mallard and Black Duck. Waterfowl of all sorts are moving through in the coming weeks in large numbers. Almost anything could show up, but look especially for the American Widgeon, Northern Pintail, and Green-winged Teal in the marshes, and Long-tailed Duck, Surf Scoter, and White-winged Scoter along the coast.

Happy Birding!

Let me know if we can help you with a new binocular or spotting scope to better enjoy your wonderful bird garden close-up!

Cheers,

Andy

Andrew Griswold
 Director of EcoTravel
 Connecticut Audubon Society
 PO Box 903 (30 Plains Road)
 Essex, CT 06426 USA
 860-767-0660
agriswold@ctaudubon.org

www.ctaudubon.org/ecotravel



Cover image courtesy of Andy Griswold.



Male, female, and young Black Scoter

Image courtesy of The Crossley ID Guide Eastern Birds.



Northern Pintail

Image by Paul Hueber/Macaulay Library.



Green-winged Teal

Image by Alan Wilson.



Long-tailed Duck

Image by Wolfgang Wander.