



**Lynde Point Land Trust**  
**Bird Nest Enhancement/Monitoring Project**  
**2021 Start of Season Report**

## Hello Birding Fenwickians!

The **2021 Nesting Season** is now in full swing! Osprey and Purple Martin have returned from southern wintering grounds, built nests, and now the first hatchlings have emerged. The borough's housing options for these two species are so well populated that we surely need to consider some expansion.

### Purple Martin and Osprey Status

The cleaned Purple Martin houses were returned to their 13 locations. Clearly the trend of increasing numbers witnessed over the last five years is continuing with a total of 235 eggs among 69 nests recorded as of June 17 this year. This is all very exciting and promising for the Fenwick colony. By far the number of adult birds currently at the houses exceeds all recent history.

Early this year, a new Osprey platform was installed to replace the Hepburn Platform, which needed relocation because of the ongoing dune project that went past the anticipated arrival date of Osprey. There were concerns from both Connecticut Audubon and DEEP about how close the relocation was to the Neely and Webster I platforms, but it looks as though the spacing is fine with all three mentioned nests, currently with three young each.

In comparison to this years 22 hatchlings and one remaining egg, 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 at the end of the season was 13, higher than the lowest count in 2019. As you may remember, 2019'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, expanding colony.



Image by VJ Anderson

Martin Nests	'16	'17	'18	'19	'20	'21
1. Riggio	3	1	0	3	0	3
2. Walton	3	3	7	5	7	5
3. Keeney	0	2	2	7	6	5
4. 34 Pettipaug	0	0	0	1	4	5
5. Bulkeley	0	1	3	4	0	6
6. 2nd Fairway West	3	3	3	4	2	5
7. 2nd Fairway East	3	3	4	5	5	7
8. Neely	3	2	3	3	2	3
9. Davis	3	3	1	0	5	7
10. Fourth Fairway	0	1	4	1	4	6
11. Gay	3	5	4	1	5	5
12. Webster	5	6	6	7	7	7
13. Patterson	0	0	0	1	0	5
<b>Total Nests:</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>69</b>

Osprey Fledged	'16	'17	'18	'19	'20	'21 Young
1. West End	0	1	1	2	2	2
2. Hepburn	3	3	3	1	0	3
3. Neely	3	3	3	2	3	3
4. Staniford	1	1	3	0	2	3
5. Schmitt	NA	NA	NA	0	0	0
6. Sequassen	4	3	3	0	1	3
7. Hastings	0	0	1	3	3	2/1 egg
8. Webster I	3	3	2	2	1	3
9. Webster II	NA	0	2	0	1	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>23</b>



Courtesy of Rhododendrites.

So...what statistics from the rest of the state's Osprey can we use to measure the success of the Fenwick colony?

Here is some data from across the state:

- Median arrival date (pair on nest): April 3rd
- Median egg-laying date (first incubation observed): April 28th
- Median hatching date (feeding/first hatchlings): June 12th
- Average number of hatchlings per nest: 2.19
- Median date of first fledging: July 30th
- Average number of fledglings per nest: 2.04
- Percentage of young that fledge: 93.2%

Some things to keep in mind are that these dates are not exact, as observations by the statewide group of stewards are not daily. We can assume that the actual median for most of these metrics falls at least several days before the date listed. "Average number of hatchlings" is not synonymous with clutch size, data we can't easily collect, given that most stewards can't see into the nests they monitor. Studies in Massachusetts have documented an average clutch size of 3.3 eggs, and if numbers in Connecticut are similar, we can assume dud-eggs or the death of young hatchlings to be widespread. This seems the best explanation for an average hatchling number that is lower than the average expected clutch size.

Likewise, the "percentage of young that fledge" number does not account for hatchling mortality that may have occurred before steward detection — it is surely somewhat inflated on this account. Stewards often can't get a confirmed hatchling count for weeks after hatching; hatchling presence can be initially confirmed by feeding or singular sightings, but it isn't until the hatchlings are large and upright that their exact number is known. Infant mortality is therefore easily missed, and the fledging percentage is skewed by hatchling counts netting only healthy, well-developed individuals.

In Fenwick, we use a ladder to get up to the nest for accurate egg and hatchling counts. Bottom line...the Fenwick colony looks very healthy.

### *Nest Boxes*

The Tree Swallow and wren boxes (used by both House and Carolina wrens) are well occupied, but are in some instances suffering attacks from competing species, specifically House Sparrows. Additionally, House Wrens are known to carry-off eggs of other species nesting in a box and then taking over the space. One solution is to offer more nesting boxes. Inter and intra species competition for nesting space and territories requires a significant expenditure of energy and often ends with nothing to show for the efforts. In the worst case scenarios, it can result in death for some birds. It is not an easy time out there. Birds truly are modern dinosaurs... little velociraptors!



Image by Swamy HKM



Image by Swamy HKM



TREE SWALLOW-MALE

Courtesy of Rhododendrites.

## Birds in the Borough

Singing at a couple locations in the borough, one can find the non-descript **Willow Flycatcher**, seen on a recent land trust sponsored bird walk at Hepburn Pond and often heard singing just north of the golf course Starter's Shack. Listen for the distinctive song, a harsh and burry *RITZbew*, *RRRITZbeyew*, or *rrEEPyew*, often alternating between these songs. Willow Flycatcher is in the family of Empidonax flycatchers, all very similar in appearance but distinctive in song.

Cornell University notes, "Willow Flycatchers are still common in most parts of their range, though their populations declined by 46% from 1970 to 2014, according to Partners in Flight. The estimated global breeding population is 9.4 million. Willow Flycatchers rate an 11 out of 20 on the Continental Concern Score, which means they are not on the Watch List. Although the species is still common, the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher is a federally listed endangered species. Its population is threatened by Brown-headed Cowbird parasitism, habitat loss and degradation, and overgrazing."

**Yellow Warbler** was also seen on the land trust bird walk, again at Hepburn Pond. The brightly colored and active males of spring and summer are easy to identify with their brick red breast streaks on an electric yellow background. You are likely to hear their song before seeing them, the mnemonic commonly used being *sweet sweet I'm so sweet*. Look for this bird in wet brushy habitat, such as willow thickets and field edges.

Conservation notes for the Yellow Warbler published by Cornell note that "Yellow Warblers are one of the most numerous warblers in North America but their populations have been slowly declining, and have decreased by 25% between 1966 and 2014, according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey. Partners in Flight estimates a global breeding population of 90 million with 37% spending some part of the year in the U.S., 15% in Mexico, and 57% breeding in Canada. They rate a 6 out of 20 on the Continental Concern Score and are not on the 2014 State of the Birds Watch List. In the western U.S. the grazing of rangelands can degrade Yellow Warbler nesting habitat, particularly stands of willow trees along creeks. The Brown-headed Cowbird lays its eggs in the nests of many species including Yellow Warbler, and this can reduce their breeding success. Like many migratory songbirds that move at night, Yellow Warblers are at risk of collisions with buildings. They can be attracted to and killed by tall, lighted structures such as TV towers and tall buildings."



WILLOW FLYCATCHER

Image by VJ Anderson



WILLOW FLYCATCHER

Image by VJ Anderson



YELLOW WARBLER

Image by Rhododendrites

## Keep an Eye Out

As we move into the heat of the summer, due to the increased water temperatures and the ever improving quality of the food resources Long Island Sound offers, coastal Connecticut can sometimes attract bird species that are not so commonly seen in our waters. Some pelagic species will drift into the Sound in search of food, one such species being the **Wilson's Storm-Petrel**. If you are a fisherperson spending time out near Bell 2 just east of the Old Saybrook breakwaters, keep an eye out for this species, especially if you're using fish oil to attract fish. Storm petrels have an incredible sense of smell and will follow a scent from miles away. Once on scene, storm-petrels patter across the surface as they search for food comprised of mostly plankton and bits of offal. This bird is about an inch and a half bigger than a Tree Swallow and three-quarters of an inch smaller than a Purple Martin, so not very big. Note the warm brown coloration and distinctive white rump patch.

Wilson's Storm-Petrel breeds on Antarctic coastlines and nearby islands notably the South Shetland Islands during the southern hemisphere's summer. It spends the rest of the year at sea, and moves into the northern oceans during our summer. The species is common off eastern North America in the northern summer but a bit harder to find near shore.

Tagging along with the storm-petrels, one might hope to see one of the shearwater species that also normally reside not too far off of the Atlantic coast, the most likely of these being the **Cory's Shearwater**. Take a look online to learn more about this family of talented oceanic flyers. Many a boat has been named "Shearwater!"

**Enjoy your wonderful bird garden!**

Cheers,

*Andy*

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(Cover image courtesy of Andy Griswold.)



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