



**Lynde Point Land Trust**  
**Bird Nest Enhancement/Monitoring Project**  
**2022 End of Season Report**

## Hello Fenwickians!

The **2022 Nesting Season** has come to an end, sadly, but we now can look forward to 2023 and the expected first signs of spring. It won't be long until the Osprey are back in the borough and rebuilding nests worn by winter winds.

### Purple Martin Status

Martin houses at the 13 locations were all occupied. Houses at the Walton and Webster sites, which received new pulley system poles and expanded to doubles, performed amazingly well, increasing nest numbers by 80% and 133% respectively.

#### Other data of interest includes:

- Estimated Fledge Rate: 77% - 83%
- Total Eggs: 233
- Nests With Eggs: 49
- 2021 Estimated Fledge Rate: 71%

This season, a banded Purple Martin was found nesting in the Webster martin house. After researching its color bands and US Fish and Wildlife band, we found that this female bird was hatched at the Hammonasset Beach State Park martin colony (Madison) in 2019. She successfully nested at Websters, laying 5 eggs.

In the coming months of the off-season, three additional poles will be replaced with the new pulley system poles, allowing for easier house cleaning and expansion of the colony.

### Osprey Status

Last fall, a new Osprey platform was installed (by an outside contractor) at the west end of Hepburn's Pond, the platform and nest now referred to as "Gosin." The new nest did well with three fledglings.

The adults have establish themselves on this tall platform, which is now scheduled to be lowered to lessen any view impacts for the borough. As noted in the spring report, taller platforms are often more attractive to potential occupants, bringing the birds away from surrounding vegetation which may conceal predators. Once established, the occupants should return to the same nest in the following year.

The Schmitt Platform has never hosted a nest, so over the coming months it will be raised to



Purple Martin (female) © VJ Anderson

Martin Nests	'16	'17	'18	'19	'20	'21	'22
1. Riggio	3	1	0	3	0	3	9
2. Walton	3	3	7	5	7	5	9
3. Keeney	0	2	2	7	6	5	4
4. Christensen	0	0	0	1	4	3	4
5. Bulkeley	0	1	3	4	0	6	2
6. 2nd Fairway W.	3	3	3	4	2	5	2
7. 2nd Fairway E.	3	3	4	5	5	7	5
8. Neely	3	2	3	3	2	3	2
9. Davis	3	3	1	0	5	7	7
10. 4th Fairway	0	1	4	1	4	6	0
11. Gay	3	5	4	1	5	5	2
12. Webster	5	6	6	7	7	6	14
13. Patterson	0	0	0	1	0	5	1
<b>Total Nests:</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>61</b>

Osprey Fledged	'16	'17	'18	'19	'20	'21	'22
1. West End	0	1	1	2	2	1	1
2. Hepburn	3	3	3	1	0	2	0
3. Neely	3	3	3	2	3	3	3
4. Staniford	1	1	3	0	2	2	3
5. Schmitt	NA	NA	NA	0	0	0	0
6. Sequassen	4	3	3	0	1	2	0
7. Hastings	0	0	1	3	3	2	3
8. Webster I	3	3	2	2	1	2	3
9. Webster II	NA	0	2	0	1	2	1
10. Gosin	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>



bring it out of the vegetation. Surrounding trees will be trimmed to further the relief.

In total for all borough Osprey nests, there were 25 eggs laid resulting in 17 fledglings, a 68% fledge rate. The attrition can be attributed to predation, likely by gulls on the eggs and Great Horned Owl on the young. It's not easy for Osprey to raise a family.

The Hepburn Platform was moved east during the construction of the new dune, so during the off-season it'll be moved back to its original position at the east end of the dune, as per requirement of DEEP. The nest did not fledge any young this year, so it will be good to give it more space in an effort to lower competition with neighbors.

### *Nest Boxes*

Most of the next boxes in Fenwick are occupied by Tree Swallows and House Wrens, but the highly aggressive and non-native House Sparrow is a constant problem, not only for these two species, but also for the Purple Martins. House Sparrows are known for their murderous tendencies, often killing all occupants of a house (five or more birds) in one marauding event, so their relocation is an ongoing focus for the Land Trust. The installation of bird boxes sounds simple, but once you realize what is happening out there, you quickly see that tending to the bird houses is like gardening, always something to be tweaked here, moved there, or simply removed.

### *Habitat Improvement*

The ecological value of land set aside for birds and other wildlife almost always fades over time if it's not maintained and improved, which means you need to work to keep the land you've preserved in good shape. Habitat improvement helps birds, beneficial insects, reptiles, amphibians, and mammals. It also helps undeveloped land store carbon, making these land improvement projects increasingly important in the effort to control the effects of climate change.

Planting meadows with either a mix of grassland-pollinator seeds or with young plants, including joe-pie weed, asters, and goldenrods is a great way to assist. Flowering dogwoods are a fine addition as a host plant for summer azure butterfly in its larval stage, while providing food during fall migration for thrushes and Scarlet Tanagers. Along meadow edges, gray birch, sassafras, red osier dogwood, and gray dogwood can be planted in a transition zone leading to woodland. These edge areas host a higher diversity of animal species, a phenomenon known as "edge effect." It's along these edges that birders often focus in search of the rare and unexpected.



Osprey © Mino Zig



House Wren © Rhododendrites

Hand-in-hand with work on planting should always be an effort on clearing invasive plants, including mugwort, stilt grass, ailanthus, invasive viburnums, barberry, knotweed, and more. Among the native plants to replace them, northern blue flag iris, Pennsylvania sedge, spotted crane's bill (a native geranium), and great blue lobelia are all fine choices.

### *Horseshoe Crabs and Migratory Birds*

In 2020, the Connecticut Audubon Society called on state officials to ban the harvest of horseshoe crabs in Connecticut and to increase law enforcement efforts to curtail illegal horseshoe crab harvesting. Legal harvesting as well as poaching have contributed to a steep population decline. Horseshoe crabs are in peril in Long Island Sound, and so are the birds that rely on their eggs for food.

Horseshoe crab populations have been in decline in Long Island Sound and elsewhere for at least 17 years, jeopardizing these ancient creatures themselves while also imperiling the many species of migratory shorebirds that eat the horseshoe crabs' protein-rich eggs.

Connecticut Audubon notes that because of the poor stock levels of horseshoe crabs in our region, the most effective course of action is to invoke a moratorium on the harvest of horseshoe crabs in Connecticut.

In 2019, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, which sets quotas for commercial fishing, determined that the region's horseshoe crab population was in "poor" condition. In response, the CT DEEP considered changing the state's horseshoe crab regulations.

Horseshoe crabs – which are harmless to humans and largely docile – generally thrive in shallow coastal waters, where they live in marshes and bays. They emerge from the sea in late spring and early summer to lay their eggs. Shorebirds, in particular the Red Knot, time their migration to their northern breeding grounds to coincide with the horseshoe crabs' egg-laying.

The drastic drop in the number of horseshoe crabs in Long Island Sound and especially along Delaware Bay, has led to a near collapse of the population of Red Knots, which recently were listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Red Knots used to be fairly common on the beaches at Milford Point, and at Sandy Point in West Haven. No longer. Their numbers have dropped far enough that in recent years sightings have been limited to a handful. Sadly, a Red Knot on our beaches now is a noteworthy occasion.

Horseshoe crabs are harvested commercially for use as bait in the eel and whelk/conch fisheries. The 2022 season in Connecticut ran from May 22 to July 7, with horseshoe crab fishing outright banned in Milford, Stratford, West Haven,



Camp Teacher © CT Audubon



Red Knots © Dick Daniels

Federally-threatened Red Knots depend on an abundant supply of horseshoe crabs eggs for survival.



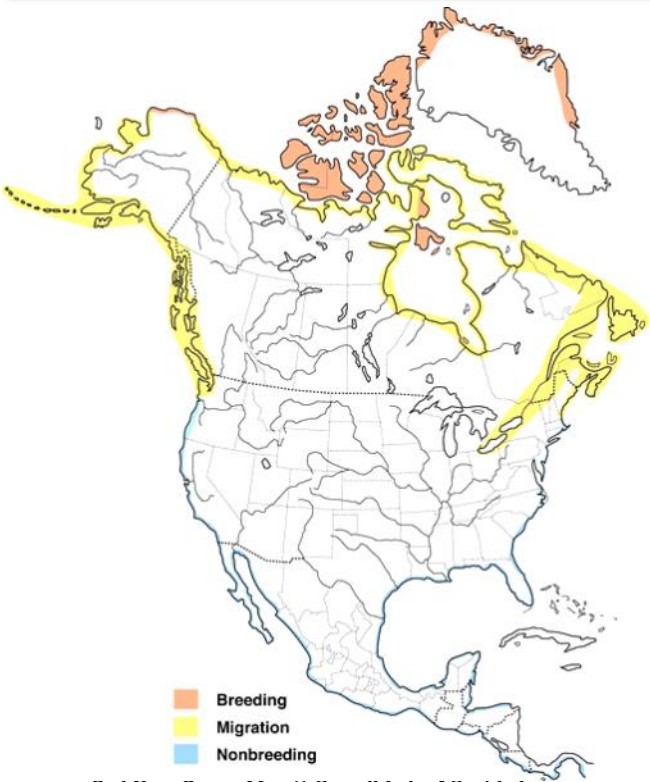
Atlantic Horseshoe Crab © Plant Image Library



Red Knot (summer) © Hans Hillewaert



Red Knot (winter) © JJ Harrison



Red Knot Range Map © Cornell Lab of Ornithology

and Westbrook. The CT DEEP issued only 12 licenses, with no plan to issue more.

Over the last 20 years, the number of horseshoe crabs harvested in Connecticut has ranged from 12,175 in 2001 to a high of 32,535 in 2008. From 2013 through 2018 the number was about 20,000 per year.

Connecticut Audubon’s call for a ban echoes that of the state’s leading horseshoe crab expert, Prof. Jennifer Mattei of Sacred Heart University in Fairfield. Mattei and a team of students and volunteers, working under the name of Project Limulus, have been studying the state’s crabs for more than two decades.

Based on her observations and those of dozens of Project Limulus volunteers over the years, Mattei estimated that in addition to the legal harvest, thousands of horseshoe crabs are illegally harvested every spawning season in Connecticut.

The result of the legal and illegal harvests is a near-collapse of horseshoe crabs.

In her testimony to the CT DEEP, Mattei wrote: “The density of spawning horseshoe crabs is so low that the females cannot find mates and therefore this population is not reproducing at its maximum potential. The density of spawning horseshoe crabs in Long Island Sound is so low that shorebirds do not have the eggs as a food resource.... The overharvest of this species in Connecticut and New York has resulted in the ecological links to shorebirds and fish to be broken.”

For 2022, changes to horseshoe crab fishing rules in Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies Section 26-159a-17 were approved by the Connecticut General Assembly Legislative Regulation Review Committee in April and were finalized by the Secretary of State on May. The new regulations delayed the opening of the commercial horseshoe crab season until three days after the last new or full moon (whichever came later) in May, implemented a 5-day “lunar closure” centered on the first new or full moon (whichever came first) in June, and reduced the daily hand-harvest possession limit from 500 to 150 crabs. The existing Horseshoe Crab Hand Harvest License Endorsement requirement, closed areas, season closure date in early July, and weekend closures remained in place.

This is a good start toward better conservation practices regarding this very important food source for Connecticut’s rarest migratory shorebirds. Connecticut Audubon and its members supported legislation in Hartford that would have banned commercial fishing for horseshoe crabs altogether. That bill passed the House unanimously,



but was not brought to the floor for a vote in the Senate, killing it for this year.

### *Birds in the Borough*

A good early fall find was a male **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** in the trees bordering the seventh fairway. This good sized member of the woodpecker family, larger than the familiar Downy Woodpecker, is more often heard than seen, its squeaky cat-like mewling carrying some distance. This species is best known for its behavior of drilling hundreds of “sapwells” in tree trunks.

According to Cornell University, “The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker makes two kinds of holes in trees to harvest sap. Round holes extend deep in the tree and are not enlarged. The sapsucker inserts its bill into the hole to probe for sap. Rectangular holes are shallower, and must be maintained continually for the sap to flow. The sapsucker licks the sap from these holes, and eats the cambium of the tree too. New holes usually are made in a line with old holes, or in a new line above the old.

“Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers have been found drilling sapwells in more than 1,000 species of trees and woody plants, though they have a strong preference for birches and maples.

“The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker is the only woodpecker in eastern North America that is completely migratory. Although a few individuals remain throughout much of the winter in the southern part of the breeding range, most head farther south, going as far south as Panama. Females tend to migrate farther south than do males.

“The oldest known Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was a male, and at least 7 years, 9 months old. He was banded in New Jersey and found six years later in South Carolina.”

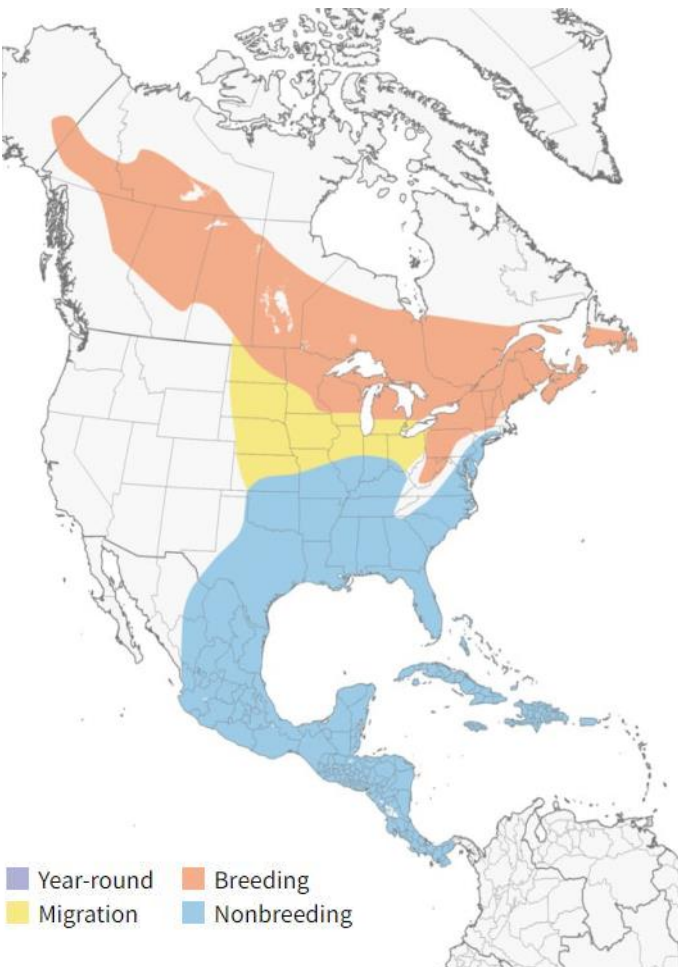
### **Enjoy your wonderful bird garden!**

Cheers,

*Andy*

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Yellow-bellied Sapsucker Range Map © Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Cover Image by Andrew Griswold