



Lynde Point Land Trust

Bird Nest Enhancement/Monitoring Project
2023 Start of Season Report

Hello Fenwickians!

The **2023 Nesting Season** is now in full swing with Purple Martins and Osprey occupying their summer homes, once again. It won't be long until you see young Osprey looking over the rim of the nests and adults busily feeding their young.

Purple Martin Status

Houses at the Neely, Davis, and Gay sites received new pulley system poles over the winter months, which will make monitoring and cleaning much easier, as well as allow for colony expansion with second houses.

As of the writing of this report (14 June), the 13 house sites have 43 nests with eggs. 16 additional nests are without eggs. The total egg count is 189. It's still early in the nesting process for martins, so hopefully the 16 additional nests will host eggs before too long.

Osprey Status

In the fall of 2021, 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 in 2022.

This tall platform, which was lowered over the winter to lessen view impacts for the borough, was occupied early in the 2023 nesting season, but since has been abandoned, leaving two eggs behind. It would be difficult to point to a definitive reason for this, but as noted in earlier reports, taller platforms are often more attractive to potential occupants, bringing the birds away from surrounding vegetation which may conceal predators. Great Horned Owls are the likely predator here. If one of the adults is killed, the other will abandon the nest.

The Schmitt Platform has never hosted a nest, so over the winter, it was raised to bring it out of the vegetation. Surrounding trees were trimmed to further the relief. This year still sees no nesting activity at this platform, but recently (13 June) two adult birds were seen perched within 20 feet.

The Sequassen nest has no eggs or young despite there being two birds at this nest earlier in the season. A single male Osprey has recently been seen sitting on the nearby perch pole. This



Purple Martin (male) © VJ Anderson

Martin Nests	'16	'17	'18	'19	'20	'21	'22	'23
1. Riggio	3	1	0	3	0	3	9	7
2. Walton	3	3	7	5	7	5	9	9
3. Keeney	0	2	2	7	6	5	4	5
4. Christensen	0	0	0	1	4	3	4	1
5. Bulkeley	0	1	3	4	0	6	2	2
6. 2nd Fairway W.	3	3	3	4	2	5	2	0
7. 2nd Fairway E.	3	3	4	5	5	7	5	5
8. Neely	3	2	3	3	2	3	2	3
9. Davis	3	3	1	0	5	7	7	2
10. 4th Fairway	0	1	4	1	4	6	0	1
11. Gay	3	5	4	1	5	5	2	1
12. Webster	5	6	6	7	7	6	14	6
13. Patterson	0	0	0	1	0	5	1	1
Total Nests:	26	30	37	42	47	66	61	43

Osprey Fledged Eggs/Young	'16	'17	'18	'19	'20	'21	'22	'23
1. West End	0	1	1	2	2	1	1	1/2
2. Hepburn	3	3	3	1	0	2	0	3E
3. Neely	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3Y
4. Staniford	1	1	3	0	2	2	3	3Y
5. Schmitt	NA	NA	NA	0	0	0	0	0
6. Sequassen	4	3	3	0	1	2	0	0
7. Hastings	0	0	1	3	3	2	3	1/2
8. Webster I	3	3	2	2	1	2	3	3Y
9. Webster II	NA	0	2	0	1	2	1	3Y
10. Gosin	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	3	2E
Totals	14	14	18	10	13	16	17	21

nest did not produce any young in 2022. Great Horned Owl is the likely predator.

The Hepburn Platform was moved east during the construction of the new dune, so during this last winter, it was 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 in 2022, so we hope that by giving it more space, reducing interactions with its neighbors, 2023 will once again see young in this nest. There are currently three eggs.

Nest Boxes

All boxes are occupied and being monitored for House Sparrow intruders. Desired species include House Wren and Tree Swallow.

Reimagining Bird Conservation in the 21st Century

Peter P. Marra, Ph.D., Laudato Si Professor of Biology and the Environment at Georgetown University and the director of the Georgetown Environment Initiative, recently shared his thoughts in Connecticut Audubon's *State of the Birds* publication.

“Slowing the loss of biodiversity across habitats on land and sea is one of the greatest environmental challenges humans face in the 21st century. Over the past 150 years, various forces of environmental change, including human-caused habitat loss, overharvesting, and invasive species, have driven extinctions. The rate is now being increased by climate change. In the Anthropocene these individual extinctions have defined the global biodiversity crisis, but they are not the only concern. Equally profound are the changes these extinctions cause in the larger ecosystem.

“Using data from multiple and independent monitoring networks, I co-authored a paper in *Science* in September 2019 that reported major population losses, nearly three billion birds, across much of the North American avifauna, in species from every biome. And greater losses are on the horizon. Well over half of the species (331 or 57 percent) that make up the North American avifauna show high vulnerability to extinction or are experiencing moderate to steep range-wide declines. This loss impacts an infinite number of ecological and evolutionary services, including pollination, seed dispersal, predator control, and scavenging.

“As significant, the loss represents a major threat to the way we relate to nature, and it is indicative of impacts on other global environments that humans co-inhabit with so many other species. Birds connect people to their environment like no other organism in the natural world. We awake to their sounds, and they are usually the first wild animals we encounter when we walk out our front door.



Osprey Eggs © Roger Culos



Osprey © Bengt Nymen



Osprey © Mino Zig

“Birds are a critical touchstone to nature, a constant reminder of the inextricable link between humans and their environment. Migratory birds also demonstrate our global interconnectedness. Like other global resources held in common, they are a part of earth’s natural heritage that is shared among countries and cultures, and hopefully across generations. Their decline, given their demonstrated position as excellent indicators of ecosystem health, signals the decline of other global commons and the broader decline of ecosystem integrity itself. An ecosystem that we as humans equally depend upon.



Great Egret © Gary Leavens

“Although the factors contributing to bird population declines remain elusive, we are making progress in pinpointing how to identify why, where, and when the decline happens. Over the past 25 years, we have worked hard to spearhead studies on migratory birds throughout their annual cycle to demonstrate the links between their geographic connections (i.e., migratory connectivity) and where and when populations are most impacted. Using cutting edge technologies, we are advancing our understanding of where individual bird species breeding in the United States migrate and spend their winters, and the conditions they face on the migration route and in the non-breeding season. This information is critically important for understanding the causes of decline and for developing a path for species recovery.



Eskimo Curlew © James St. John

“We also know that today’s steep population declines are a clear indication that our existing conservation tools, including domestic laws and international treaties, are not sufficient to deal with present threats to birds and need to be wholly reevaluated.



Carolina Parakeet © James St. John

“This should not be that surprising. Many of the legislative and non-legislative measures in place to protect migratory birds and other species were adopted nearly 50 to 100 years ago—in the context of much less understanding of environmental and global interconnectedness and factors that impact species conservation. These measures often responded to specific environmental harms, such as the harvesting of egret feathers to be used in adorning hats or the impacts of a specific pesticide such as DDT on Bald Eagles, Ospreys, and other raptors. And although they protected individual and often non-migratory species, they are not effectively responding to contemporary environmental problems.

“We need only look to the extinction of several bird species in North America over the last century, such as the Passenger Pigeon, the Carolina Parakeet, and the Eskimo Curlew, to remember that even abundant species can go extinct rapidly. If current rates of avian decline continue, without conservation action aligned to deeper understandings of the causes of decline causation, the losses will be enormous.



Passenger Pigeon © James St. John

The Road to Recovery

“The next several years represent a critical juncture for con-



RECOVERING!



RECOVERING!



RECOVERING!

ervation. Estimates of biodiversity loss signal an urgent need for scientists and conservation groups to unite to set priorities, identify research needs, set a recovery agenda, and secure public support to avert additional listings under the Endangered Species Act.

“In early 2020, we initiated a new path forward in the conservation of North American birds—an effort we are calling the Road to Recovery, or R2R. It’s a collaboration among several of the leading bird conservation organizations and institutions in the country: Georgetown University, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, National Audubon, and the American Bird Conservancy. Its goals are to develop recovery plans for the most vulnerable bird species; promote scientific work that will lead to action that helps the most vulnerable species; and increase the efficiency and effectiveness of current resources. Within the next several months, this coalition will be releasing its U.S. State of the Birds report, focusing on improving science, carrying out new policies, and encouraging a range of conservation actions that everyday people can take.

“The *Science* article and the outreach efforts accompanying it succeeded in elevating awareness, making “bring back three billion birds” a clarion call across the bird conservation community. Yet narrowing the gap between conservation gains and hemispheric environmental degradation and habitat loss will require a deliberate reimagining of the scope and strategies of bird conservation. Today, more species than ever are sliding toward threatened and endangered status. Not only does that mean more species are closer to extinction, it also means that, if listed, species will be subject to regulatory action and cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. The time to act on this next set of what we are calling “species on the brink” is now!

When Birds Thrive, Humans Prosper

“To recover these species and avoid listing status, we need to be strategic and swift. In addition, just as the annual cycle of avian species connects multiple nations and cultures, our solutions to reverse declines must also fully engage a spectrum of collaborators, including ecological and social scientists, land managers, private industry, and policy makers throughout the hemisphere.

“Birds are indeed the quintessential canaries in the coal mine, and their decline signals broad scale ecosystem decay—an ecosystem upon which humans equally depend.

When birds thrive, humans prosper. Given the recent findings of bird population declines, we must assemble the best available information and chart the path for the recovery of these remarkable species so that future generations can enjoy them as we have. Efforts to protect birds will support efforts to protect other global resources that we depend on, and, in turn, humanity’s shared natural heritage.”

Atlantic Horseshoe Crab © Plant Image Library



UPDATE: Horseshoe Crabs and Birds

(Adapted from a June 1, 2023 article in CT Insider)

A ban on the harvest of horseshoe crabs in Connecticut waters that would require fines of up to \$25 is now awaiting signature from Gov. Ned Lamont. The state Senate approved the legislation in May. Gov. Lamont has yet to weigh in publicly on the bill.

As recently as 2020, fishermen in Long Island Sound captured thousands of horseshoe crabs each year, mostly to be cut up and used as bait in traps for whelk and eels, which fetch better prices back on shore. Strict new regulations put in place by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection last year, however, reduced that harvest by up to 92 percent and forced fishermen to find alternative sources of bait, according to the agency.

Conservation advocates and lawmakers continued to push for an all-out ban, following in the footsteps of states like New Jersey and South Carolina that have taken an aggressive approach toward protecting the ancient species. "They've survived ice ages, they know how to survive if we just leave them alone," said state Rep. Joe Gresko, D-Stratford, who co-chairs the Environment Committee. "It's not smart to harvest a species into extinction." The population of horseshoe crabs in Long Island Sound has plunged since the 1990s, prompting the Atlantic States Marine Fishery Commission to downgrade the species' status in the New York region to "poor." That decline has raised alarm among a coalition of advocacy groups and researchers who have spent decades monitoring populations and tracking the armored creatures' movements throughout the region.

In addition, the ecological link between the horseshoe crabs and migratory shorebirds such as the red knot — which feast upon the crabs' nutrient-rich eggs during their long trek to Arctic breeding grounds — has drawn the involvement of groups such as the Connecticut Audubon Society.

"This bill is good for horseshoe crabs, good for the shorebirds that rely on horseshoe crab eggs for food, and good for the Long Island Sound ecosystem," said Tom Anderson, a spokesman for the Connecticut Audubon Society. "Great work by the House and Senate in making it a priority."

A similar bill to ban the hand-harvesting of horseshoe crabs passed the House last year, only to die in the Senate during the frenzied final days of the legislative session. Because nearly all of the commercial harvest occurs along beaches where the crabs come ashore to breed, a ban on hand-harvesting would effectively function as a moratorium on the fishery, according to DEEP.

Red Knot (summer) © Hans Hillewaert



Red Knot (winter) © JJ Harrison



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



Artwork © David Allen Sibley

Lawmakers, led by Gresko, tried again this year and easily won approval for the ban in both the House and Senate, which voted 35-0 on Tuesday evening to send the proposed ban to Lamont, whose signature is needed for the bill to become law.

In testimony submitted to lawmakers earlier this year, DEEP Commissioner Katie Dykes expressed neutrality on the bill, noting the ongoing decline in the fishery following the agency's existing regulations.

The agency would also have the ability to issue permits authorizing limited hand-harvesting for educational or scientific purposes, so long as the commissioner is able to determine that the harvest will not negatively impact the species overall population.

Birds in the Borough

A few weeks ago near Hepburn's Pond, a bird of note was heard calling, the elusive Virginia Rail. This secretive species is not rare, but mostly goes undetected across all 48 states as it makes its way through the narrow passages of salt and fresh water marshes. At 9.5 inches long and weighing only three ounces, this denizen of the shadows is built for this environment. "Thin as a rail" is something early ornithologists and hunters noted about this family of birds, their ability to flatten themselves laterally to fit between the stalks of densely packed vegetation. Listen for the Virginia Rail's wheezy, piglike grunting that both male and female birds use to communicate. If lucky while watching the edges of Hepburn Pond and other similar areas, you may get a glimpse of this very handsome, shy marsh dweller. It is likely you will hear this bird before you see it, so learn the calls. Be patient!

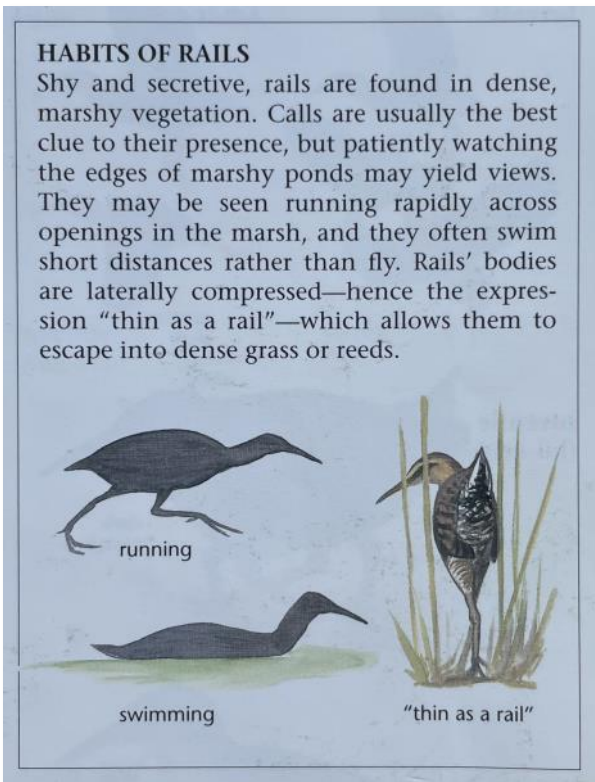
Enjoy your wonderful bird garden!

Cheers,

Andy

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