

Fenwick

**Bird Nest Enhancement/Monitoring Project
Spring 2019 Status Report**

Hello Birding Fenwickians!

The **2019 Nesting Season** is underway! Many Osprey have returned to the borough and are already hard at work at rebuilding old nests and hopefully soon, starting new ones.

Platform, House, and Nest Status

After this winter, the borough is now home to two new platforms, one near Ann and Steve Schmitt's (the platform now known as "Schmitt") and one near the Webster II nest that was in the cedar tree last year (the nest fell out over the winter). We are hoping the cedar tree pair will move over to the more reliable base we've provided and that Schmitt will attract a new pair. Remember that, like at the Hastings and West End Nests, new nesters are often times young birds, so success is not always expected and may take two or three years to become evident.

Over the next couple of weeks, the Purple Martin houses will be reinstalled in anticipation of the first arrivals. Scouts come first and about ten days later the main body of the colony returns. The poles will all have new 316 stainless hardware, which will hopefully last a long time.

In the next month or so, and once the Osprey are on eggs, their nests and platforms will be inspected for hazardous debris which the adults may have added thinking it would be good nesting material. As often mentioned, monofilament fishing line is the biggest hazard to both adult and young.

Osprey Data

Last nesting season we had a wonderfully successful result, illustrated by the 28.5% increase in Osprey fledgling numbers. All nests were successful in fledging young as the two young pairs gained experience. Keep your fingers crossed for cooperative weather and a continuing abundance of Atlantic Menhaden (a.k.a. Bunker). Early season fish being caught by Osprey tend to be perch and catfish, later preferring the menhaden, once they become available.

Purple Martin Data

Unfortunately, the very aggressive House Sparrow, an introduced species from Europe and Africa that competes for space in the martin houses, took a huge toll last year. Surveying the houses at the end of the season



Above images courtesy of Andrew Griswold.

revealed a significant mortality for the martin. A more proactive approach will be employed for this season, including the trapping and removal of House Sparrows.

Nest Boxes

The Tree Swallow and wren boxes are all in good shape and should soon be occupied. Look for both House Wren and Carolina Wren. Marsh Wren is found along Crab Creek, but they do not use the boxes, preferring their elaborate, woven shelter.

Birds in the Borough

The winter months are truly the best time of year for wintering ducks and the two loon species. There were good numbers of Surf Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser, and Long-tailed Duck seen throughout the season. Both Common Loon and Red-throated Loon should still be present as they stage for their northern migration.

The Northern Harriers that frequent the borough through the colder months will soon be moving on to more northern nesting grounds.

Moving into the spring migration, look for increasing number of shorebirds including American Oystercatcher, and rarities like Piping Plover and Red Knot. And of course, all the songsters.

The area Red-tailed Hawk has built two new nests, still not yet fully committed to either one, but recently seen with his mate.

Other Sightings in the Borough

This has been an interesting year for seal sightings. Within the last month there have been numerous reports of Harbor Seal lazing on area beaches from Fenwick to Fairfield. I always question sightings of apparent Harbor Seals on beaches, since this is not a common behavior for this skittish species, which prefers to haul-out on rocks. Additionally, those reporting the seals have been able to approach the animals and get great images. These facts in conjunction with the images proved that indeed the seals seen were not Harbor Seals, but the less skittish and rarer Harp Seal. Young Harp Seals have large dark irregularly shaped spots, unlike the more uniformly, small spotted Harbor Seal. If seen well, you will notice that Harp Seal has a more dog-like

| <u>Osprey Nest/ Platform</u> | <u>'16 Fledged</u> | <u>'17 Fledged</u> | <u>'18 Fledged</u> | <u>'19 Eggs/ Young</u> |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. West End | 0 | 1 | 1 | |
| 2. Hepburn | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| 3. Neely | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| 4. Staniford | 1 | 1 | 3 | |
| 5. Schmitt | NA | NA | NA | |
| 6. Sequassen | 4 | 3 | 3 | |
| 7. Hastings | 0 | 0 | 1 | |
| 8. Webster I | 3 | 3 | 2 | |
| 9. Webster II | NA | 0 | 2 | |
| Total Fledged | 14 | 14 | 18 | |

| <u>Martin House</u> | <u>'16 Nests</u> | <u>'17 Nests</u> | <u>'18 Nests</u> | <u>'19 Pairs</u> |
|---------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| 1. Riggio | 3 | 1 | 0 | |
| 2. Walton | 3 | 3 | 7 | |
| 3. Keeney | 0 | 2 | 2 | |
| 4. 34 Pettipaug | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| 5. Bulkeley | 0 | 1 | 3 | |
| 6. 29 Pettipaug | X | 0 | 0 | |
| 7. 2nd Fairway West | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| 8. 2nd Fairway East | 3 | 3 | 4 | |
| 9. Neely | 3 | 2 | 3 | |
| 10. Davis | 3 | 3 | 1 | |
| 11. Fourth Fairway | 0 | 1 | 4 | |
| 12. Gay | 3 | 5 | 4 | |
| 13. Webster | 5 | 6 | 6 | |
| 14. Patterson | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| Total Nests: | 26 | 30 | 37 | |



Photographer unknown

head shape compared to the short snouted Harbor Seal. Keep an eye out for beach-resting seals and the largest of our area seals (600 pounds or more), the Gray Seal, known colloquially as “Horse Head.”

History of DDT - Eagles and Osprey

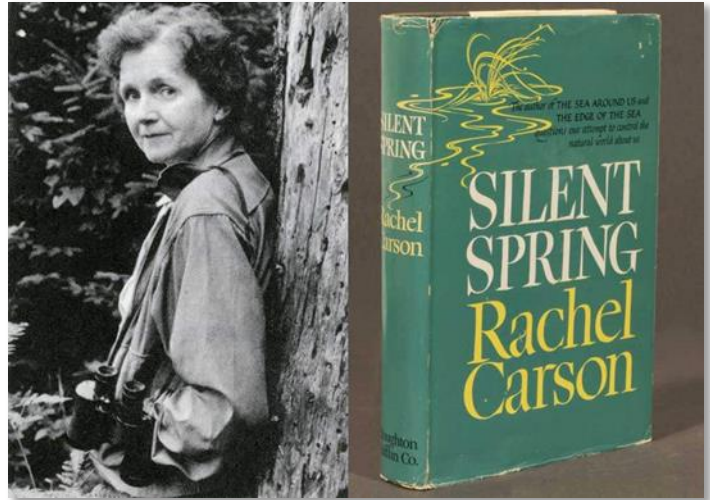
Many of you may know that the ban on DDT happened about a decade after **Rachel Carson** published *Silent Spring*. She was perhaps the finest nature writer of the Twentieth Century, remembered more today as the woman who challenged the notion that humans could obtain mastery over nature by chemicals, bombs, and space travel than for her studies of ocean life. Her sensational book warned of the dangers to all natural systems from the misuse of chemical pesticides, questioned the scope and direction of modern science, and initiated the contemporary environmental movement.

Less well known is that Bald Eagles played an important role in *Silent Spring* in making the case against DDT. In making the case, Carson drew upon two pieces of evidence. The first came from a retired banker named **Charles Broley**. After he retired, Broley moved to Florida, like most people who retire. He needed a hobby, so at the suggestion of the National Audubon Society, he began to band Bald Eagles in their nests.

Bear in mind, that this was a 65 year old, with no tree climbing experience, who would climb as high as 75 feet to the top of a tree to band an eagle with the parent birds threatening to attack him. Undaunted, Broley banded more than 1,000 eagles between 1939 and 1949. He noticed a decline in the number of active nests beginning in 1947. 80% of the nests failed to produce young between 1952 and 1957. In 1958, he drove more than 100 miles to find a single eaglet to band. There were adult eagles at only ten nests.

Rachel Carson corroborated Charles Broley's findings with additional data from Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in Pennsylvania, one of the premier sites to record migrating raptors in the eastern U.S.. The curator of the sanctuary, **Maurice Broun** noted that historically, 40% of the migrating Bald Eagles were first year birds. Between 1955 and 1959 it was noted, that first-year birds made up only 20% of the total count. What had happened to the young Bald Eagles?

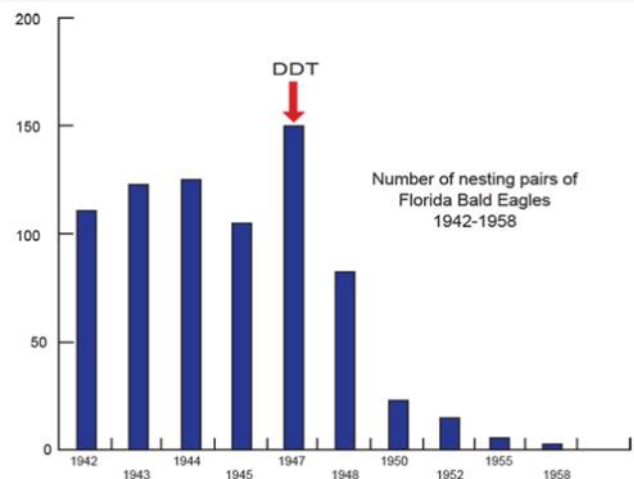
It was **Rachel Carson's** genius, uniting these two pieces of data to make the claim that Bald Eagles were de-



Archival Image



Image by Joseph Janney Steinmetz



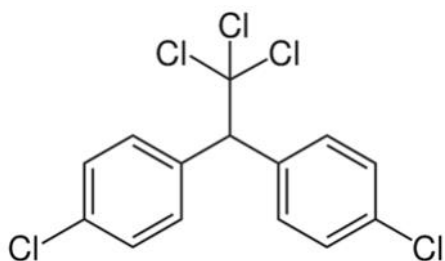
Courtesy of eagles.org

clining. In time, fewer young Bald Eagles would mean fewer adults. It soon became clear that DDT bioaccumulated in the food chain, reaching toxic levels in the fish that served as the Bald Eagles' chief food source. It initially seemed that DDT exposure resulted in sterilization for the adult eagles which led to infertile eggs and fewer young eagles.

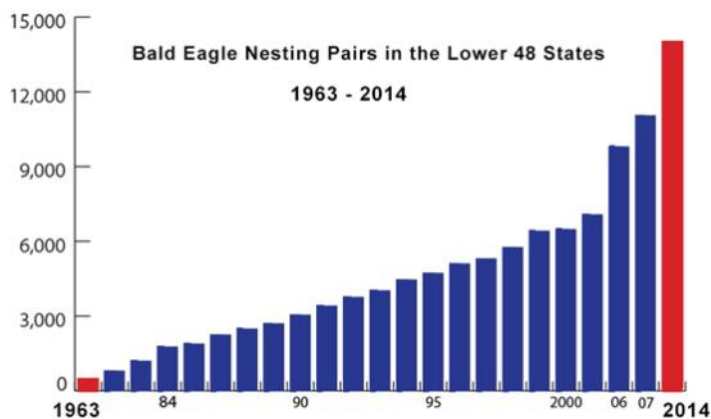
Several years after *Silent Spring*, scientists then determined that DDE (dichlorophenyl-dichloroethylene), the principal breakdown product of DDT, accumulated in the fatty tissues of the adult female bald eagles. DDE impairs calcium release necessary for normal egg shell formation, resulting in thin egg shells and reproductive failure. Adult Bald Eagles and other top-of-the-line predators like Osprey, Brown Pelican and Peregrine Falcon literally crushed their own eggs when attempting to brood.

With the ban on DDT and the introduction of endangered species legislation, the Bald Eagle and Osprey have made a dramatic recovery. In 1995, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service downgraded the eagle's status from "Endangered" to "Threatened" and in 1999, called for removing the Bald Eagle from the list altogether. In the year after *Silent Spring* appeared, National Audubon biologists recorded only 417 nests. Recently, Fish and Wildlife biologists determined that more than 15,000 pairs of Bald Eagles now live in the contiguous 48 states. As a result of DDT, Osprey declined by over 90% between 1950 and 1970 to numbers below 8,000 pairs in the lower 48 states, but are now seeing a significant recovery to numbers over 50,000 pairs (but not yet to the estimated pre-DDT numbers).

With *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson likely saved the Bald Eagle and Osprey from regional extinction.



Archival Image



Courtesy of eagles.org



Image by Joseph Janney Steinmetz

Featured Species

Blue-winged Teal, *Spatula discors*

by Nick Bonomo, EcoTravel Tour Leader

As spring finally takes hold after this year's particularly long winter, our marshes, both inland and coastal, will really begin to awaken. One of our most familiar and easily-observed groups of birds, the ducks, are in peak migration and can be seen readily in most wetlands. Keep an eye out for this dapper migrant species among the flocks of familiar waterfowl.

What it looks like: A male Blue-winged Teal is truly unmistakable. Its dark blue-gray face and black bill stand in strong contrast with the large white crescent that extends vertically between the bird's bill and eye. That huge white slash on the front of its otherwise dark face can be seen from a great distance.

The sides of its breast are speckled golden brown and black, while a bright white "hip patch" is obvious on the bird's side, positioned just in front of its tail. This combination of high-contrast coloration and fine patterning make the male Blue-winged Teal one of our more attractive and easily identifiable ducks.

The female's markings are much more subtle. Like most female dabbling ducks, she is rather plain brown. There are no obvious distinguishing marks as she swims.

Look for a bird slightly larger than the more common Green-winged Teal with a broad gray bill and a subtle small area of pale feathering at the base of the bill. Any identification doubt will depart if she flies, as she will flash a powder blue wing patch on her inner forewing that cannot be missed.

The male also shows this trait in flight. Beware that female Northern Shovelers share this blue patch with our teal, but a female shoveler has a rather large, spatulate orangey bill and is larger in size.

Luckily, at this time of year, females are generally paired with the much more obvious males.

When to look: The Blue-winged Teal is one of our less common migrant ducks, but it occurs regularly in pairs or small flocks during the month of April. We're at peak season right now.

Where to find it: Any marsh or pond could do the trick, either freshwater or saltwater. Along the coast, you might check the marshes at Milford Point in Milford or Shell Beach in Guilford. Inland, the Portland



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Fairgrounds in Portland and both Little Pond and Cemetery Pond in Litchfield are reliable for this species.

Conservation status: The Blue-winged Teal is classified as a species of Least Concern by the IUCN Red List. It has a very large population size, breeding as far north as Alaska and wintering as far south as northern South America.

Enjoy your wonderful bird garden!

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

