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Photographs by Ryan Morrill

## A Roost With a View

# Osprey Numbers on the Rise

It was just another day on the job for Ben Wurst, habitat program manager for the Conserve Wildlife Foundation of N.J. The sky was blue, the water was rippling, and the song of the osprey was heard off in the nearby marsh.

Coming from delivering an injured adult female osprey for rehabilitation, Wurst was onto his next job duty, banding osprey in the bay. "She was reported hanging from a nest on a channel marker with fishing line. She was very weak," Wurst said of his early-morning rescue as he untied the lines of the boat to go among the marsh islands behind Barnegat Light.

Tool belt filled with pliers and numbered metal tags in tow, the osprey-banding journey began. From early March to early August, Wurst can be seen inspecting, fixing and building osprey platforms or banding chicks in the nest to keep track of the ever-growing population of this statewide-threatened species.

Ospreys are raptors with a dark-brown upper body and a white head, which sometimes gets them confused with bald eagles. They have a prominent brown stripe from the eye that distinguishes it from an eagle. The underside of an osprey is also white, with the female having a distinct "brown necklace," Wurst explained. Ospreys have very long, narrow wings that are often bent at the elbow so that their wings form an "M" shape.

Not exclusively a shore species, ospreys nest close to salt or fresh water and feed almost

exclusively on fish. They build bulky nests in low trees, on poles and on platforms that have been constructed to attract the species. "The shoreline is its biggest hindrance; they need a good edge with some snags," Wurst said.

Stopping at the first of three locations on this day, at a nest east of Double Creek in the Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge, three chicks were found. "There were four in this one last year, which was a lot. Three made it. Two per nest is average," Wurst said.

The female osprey circled overhead with her distinct voice. "We have become a predator in her mind, and her song is saying to her chicks, 'Stay low in the nest,'" Wurst said. The chicks are banded between three and six weeks. They fledge, or leave the nest, at about seven to eight weeks.

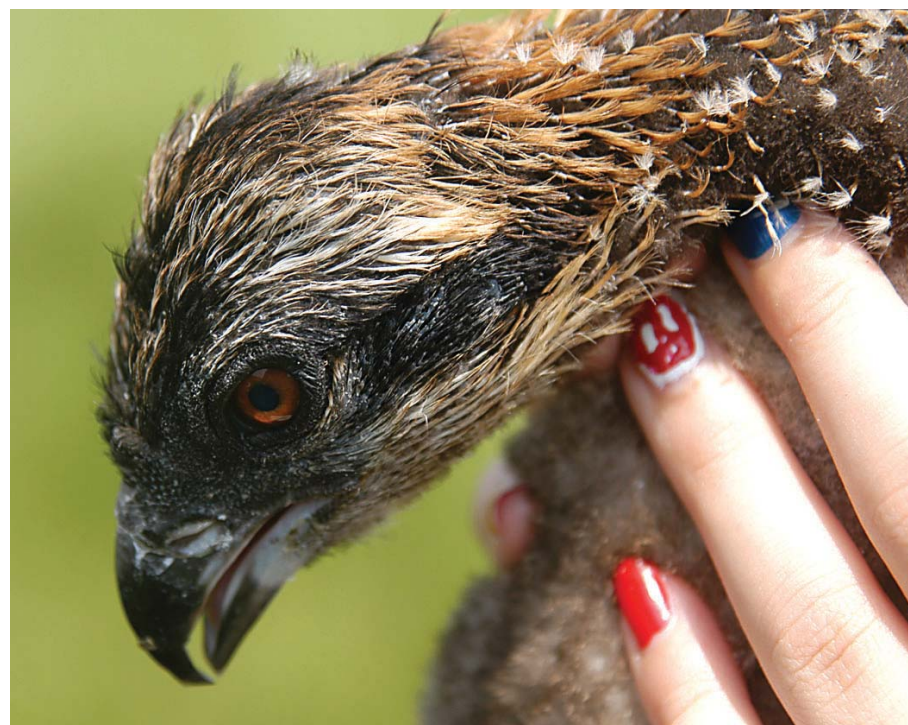
The Double Creek nest had two healthy sized chicks and one runt. "This guy doesn't look like he's going to make it - too small to band, and looks to be peck marks from nest mates on the head," Wurst said.

The male osprey returned with a fish in his talons. His song and pitch were different from the female's, but the two were communicating, "doing their sky dance," said Wurst.

The male dropped the fish. "He needs to be ready for a predator. He knows where he put it and will get it when it's safe," Wurst said.

Once the banding was done and the boat departed, the female hovered over the nest as if

**EN-RAPTURED:** (Clockwise from top left) Osprey chicks hunker down atop a nest off Barnegat Light. A male osprey brings fresh fish for lunch. Evelyn Morrill, 8, of Bayville gently holds a fledgling. Ben Wurst of Conserve Wildlife Foundation is well equipped for the statewide Osprey Project. Helping hands band a chick.



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# Osprey

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to count the brood. The male returned with the family meal immediately after.

As the boat buzzed through the bay behind Barnegat Light near High Bar Harbor in the distance, the next two nests were seen in close proximity of one another. "That is about as close as two nests should be," Wurst said. The second sight lent a different angle. "Watch where you walk," Wurst said. A fledgling was at the base of the platform, alive but looking undernourished.

With two still in the nest, these birds were significantly larger than the first nest. "You can feel the chest bone on this one," Wurst said. All three were banded.

The final nest was empty with no sign of eggs. The platform was inspected by Wurst and determined to be in good shape. "The pole is straight and strong; the predator guard (a metal sheeting wrapped around the center of the pole to keep raccoons away) is in place, he said.

Wurst and another volunteer had come out in 2006 to retrofit the last two nests. "We banded two in this nest last year," Wurst said. His best guess at nest failure was the nor'easter in May. "The storm could have blown the nest out," he said.

The lack of natural nesting areas for the species has led to extensive osprey platform building statewide by many volunteers. "We come in and build or restore platforms with civic and nonprofit groups sponsoring the platforms, businesses and individuals," Wurst said. "We are trying to place nests in view, a safe distance but close enough so people can see the birds in action and the ecosystem alive."

The state Division of Fish and Wildlife sponsors the program and has detailed descriptions on how and where to construct a platform. "There are specific design plans, a material list and guidelines

for placement," said Wurst. Once a platform is installed, it needs to be mapped and submitted to the state for incorporation into the database.

"It costs about \$300 to build a platform; when they are built the birds come," Wurst said.

A perch, for the male bird, is a small pole that is usually located about 20 to 40 feet from each nest. "We do not install all the perches; sometimes there is a cedar pole already there."

Wurst said yacht clubs and businesses have sponsored platforms that have been placed within view of their sites. "It's a great way to include the community in a bigger effort."

In the 1970s, the insecticide DDT was banned in the United States. Osprey populations had been severely affected by the use of DDT, which caused high mortality for osprey eggs because the shells became too thin. The New Jersey population has since rebounded from an all-time low of about 70 nesting pairs, to more than 450. "We will conduct an aerial survey in 2009 for harder numbers," Wurst said.

Conservation efforts, including the building of special platforms for osprey nests, have been credited with the bird's recovery. "The male comes north first and looks for a good nesting location, the female comes soon after and they usually house keep the first year," Wurst explained.

The osprey is monogamous, and the pair will come back to the same nest year after year, Wurst explained.

Ospreys migrate south in October from New Jersey, but osprey pairs from New England may be seen in New Jersey skies in the following few weeks as they fly south. They spend the winter in South America and then migrate to North America in the spring to lay eggs. "They are found on every continent except Antarctica. The birds that summer to the north of us, winter in Florida, joining some of the resident birds down south," said Wurst.

Ospreys have excellent eyesight for spotting

fish from high above and can dive at fish from several hundred feet in the air. "The shallow water of Barnegat Bay is perfect hunting ground for the osprey," Wurst said. Often called fish hawks, ospreys hunt mainly fish and are seldom far from water. When hunting, they plunge feet first into the water to capture fish swimming near the surface.

"The great increase in numbers tells us that there is adequate food available, which tells us the waterways have a healthy supply of fish," Wurst said. Bunker and flounder are the fish most common here, he explained.

Ospreys have rough pads on their feet with little spines on them to help them grab and hold onto slippery fish. "They are not scavengers

like the eagle, they like fresh caught fish," Wurst said.

There were 238 active nests reported in 2007 from a ground survey spawning 424 chicks statewide. "The only way to really get a recovery for tracking with the bands is from a dead bird. It's hard to see bands on adults," Wurst explained.

Wurst has a week left of osprey duty before the chicks get ready to fledge. "I would love to follow them where they go for the winter," he said.

Anyone wishing to learn more, volunteer or sponsor a nest may go to [www.conservewildlifenj.org](http://www.conservewildlifenj.org) or contact Wurst at 628-2103.

— Angela Andersen

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# Scallop Boat

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Miller said of the second to last flare ignited.

But as sunset overtook the sky, commercial fishing boats began to overtake the popular scallop fishing area — a good sign, the fishermen agreed. The Mud Hole is a busy place for commercial fishing, and many vessels visit it on a regular basis; Miller and Glock seemed to be ignored for the better part of 12 hours while they floated near the sunken boat. But about 45 minutes after lighting the last flare, they saw an 89-foot trawler steaming in their direction. The vessel *Stiris One*, homeported in Jones Inlet, Long Island, had the life raft programmed into the ship's direction finder. As soon as the trawler pulled up the last set, it steamed over to rescue the stranded mariners.

Later, in the kitchen of Einselen's home, the men laughed and referred to the experience as a barrel roll. But at the time, the two barely made it to the life raft, and it was quite a different situation. Although the raft deployed, it was unclear whether the EPIRB — their only connection to the U.S. Coast Guard and Search and Rescue — should have deployed under 15 feet of water.

For Glock, the rescue seemed to reconfirm his love for his soon-to-be bride, Gyl Schuller, who is pregnant with Glock's child, her third.

"While we were out there for 12 hours, we became disheartened," Glock recalled. "I was just wearing a bathing suit and wool socks. There was no time to get anything else, and we were unsure how long we'd be floating at sea."

By the time the men were rescued, almost an entire day had passed; they left at 10 p.m. the night before and weren't rescued until after sunset the next day, July 2. The crew aboard the trawler gave them warm clothes. Miller and Glock called Einselen for a ride back home as soon as they hit the New York port.

Einselen suspects the vessel's scallop cargo shifted in the hold, which would normally be offset by the weight of diesel fuel. The shift could have moved the vessel so far to one side that the boat rolled. He said the recent rise in fuel prices has forced commercial fishermen to run as light as they can on fuel, allowing enough for the trip out and then back in for the purpose of efficiency and economy. Also, by carrying lower amounts of fuel, the boats can go faster.

Top-heavy accidents are not uncommon with commercial clam boats; Heavy clam-catching cages can outweigh the hull and fuel and cause the vessels to overturn. Other incidents have occurred when clam dredges were caught in

vessel propellers, rendering the boat useless and unable to navigate.

Einselen said he keeps everything up to date on his vessels and the EPIRB is among those elements most important to his crew's survival. He said the EPIRB was set with an up-to-date battery and should have started sending signals to the U.S. Coast Guard as soon as it was deployed from its hydrostatic release, but it did not. Einselen believes there was some sort of manufacturing error involved in the EPIRB's lack of deployment, an issue he plans to pursue further with the manufacturer.

Einselen said he would try to salvage his vessel, but without the exact coordinates of his sunken ship, which would have been provided by an activated Emergency Positioning Radio Beacon, he's pretty much at the mercy of a salvager.

He said the Mud Hole as a fishing site is already filled with so much debris, it would make the effort of salvagers, who would have to dive between 20 and 30 fathoms to reach the boat and its last known position, sketchy at best. They would have to sift through old lobster pots and other lost gear to find the sunken vessel.

On Tuesday night, a week after the incident, Einselen was tired of telling the story and correcting the versions that had reached the local grapevine. He said he is very grateful that no one was hurt, and very glad that about a year ago he had moved the life raft to the front of the boat so that it was easier to access. And, he reasoned, he can continue to scallop on the permit that came with the vessel. He also owns the *Antoinette*, another gillnet boat.

"Had it been at night and the water was cold — well, that's how boats go missing without a trace," Einselen said.

Officials with the U.S. Coast Guard sector air station were unaware of the incident and eager to find more information as of Tuesday. They said they would have assisted if they had known.

"I was regretting my losses," Einselen said of the thousands of dollars in electronics equipment, time spent working on the vessel, and many other aspects of the boat that he likely will never use again. But then he got a condolence letter from an old fishing colleague who lost his vessel and the lives of two crewmembers when another boat crashed into his.

"I really am a lucky guy despite my misfortune."

Among those great fortunes Einselen counts in his favor are the two dedicated fishermen who work alongside him.

"I know if I bought a new boat tomorrow, they'd both be here working for me," he said.

— Susan Montgomery

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\* \* \*

**The PlayDate has an answer for parents who want a safe place for their kids to play while they enjoy a few hours of vacation time.**

"There is a safe and fun environment for parents to drop off the kids for three hours and catch a band playing at one of the local bars or have a peaceful dinner at one of the great restaurants," says Kelly Murawski, of The PlayDate on Route 72 in Manahawkin. The PlayDate has started "Parents Nite Out."

"Parents can feel confident that their children are having more fun than them," said Murawski. "It actually should be called 'Child's Nite Out' with how much fun the kids will have."

Contact Murawski at 597-2700 or e-mail [theplaydate@verizon.net](mailto:theplaydate@verizon.net) to learn more about this service.

\* \* \*

**The Ocean County College Foundation will honor the OceanFirst Foundation as its 2008 Humanitarian Organization of the Year at the college foundation's annual Summer Gala on Saturday, Sept. 6, at 6 p.m. on OCC's Main Campus in Toms River.**

The "Beach Party"-themed gala will feature sumptuous gourmet food prepared by Joe Leone's, live music by Mission Dance Entertainment, and both silent and live auctions. One feature at this year's live auction is four tickets to the last game in Yankee Stadium with a limousine and dinner. In addition, the sale of 50/50 cash raffle tickets could total up to \$10,000 for the winner.

Proceeds from the Summer Gala will support the mission of the OCC Foundation.

According to Sandy S. Broughton, executive director of the college foundation, the gala allows business and community members to support scholarships and special programs and projects for students at Ocean County College.

The OceanFirst Foundation is a generous contributor to the OCC Foundation.

"We are very pleased to be honoring this wonderful organization for its outstanding commitment and involvement in the community and business life of Ocean County," said Broughton.

The first of its kind in the nation, the Ocean-First Foundation was established by an endow-

ment of \$13.4 million in OceanFirst stock in conjunction with the bank's initial public offering. Since that time, nearly \$20 million has been contributed back to the community in small and major grants, including more than \$634,000 to the Ocean County College Foundation. Ocean-First Bank was founded more than 100 years ago, as a building and loan association with the simple goal of helping its neighbors realize their dreams. It is the largest and oldest locally headquartered community bank in Ocean County.

Gala tickets are \$250 per person. Ad journal opportunities are available. Auction items may also be donated.

For more information on the Summer Gala, to become a sponsor, or to make a donation, call the OCC Foundation at 732-255-0492.

\* \* \*

**SCORE, "Counselors to America's Small Business," announces a new section specifically for young entrepreneurs at the SCORE web site, [www.score.org](http://www.score.org).** The new content area offers valuable mentoring and resources to help high school, college-age and 20-something small-business owners succeed.

Visitors to [www.score.org/young.html](http://www.score.org/young.html) will find the following resources:

- Insights for Young Entrepreneurs features key articles on: entrepreneurship as a career choice; Web site design; university assistance; and how to start smart.

- Resources for Young Entrepreneurs lists more than 35 organizations, groups and web sites that offer news, strategies and assistance.

- Competitions for Young Entrepreneurs features eight awards that help encourage and recognize business success.

- Stats on Young Entrepreneurs provides the latest research and facts on Generation X and Generation Y entrepreneurship.

- How SCORE Can Help You highlights SCORE's free online and face-to-face counseling, low-cost workshops and free eNewsletters.

The Ocean County SCORE Chapter is based in Toms River but has counselors on Long Beach Island and the Southern Ocean County mainland. For more information, call 732-505-6033. Also, SCORE can be found on the web at [www.score.org](http://www.score.org).

*Business-related news can be sent to [mariascandale@thesandpaper.net](mailto:mariascandale@thesandpaper.net)*



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