

Osprey Homebuilders

Wildlife Groups Create Habitat Off Loveladies

Bill Clarke stated simply, "I enjoy birds" while waiting on his bulkhead in Loveladies for Ben Wurst of the Conserve Wildlife Foundation to pick him up to install two osprey platforms that were a direct result of his generosity to the organization's habitat enhancement work.

After reading the July 9 story in The SandPaper, "Ospreys on the Rise," Clarke wanted to "get involved." "I saw a need was there and the work that was being done," Clarke said. "I pass marker 49A (in the bay) all the time and I see the (osprey) family on top. I read the osprey article and said, well, let's see what we can do."

As a result, the Conserve Wildlife Foundation received a \$10,000 donation to "enhance osprey nesting habitat and for the protection of shorebird habitat" from the Osprey Foundation, Clarke's family foundation.

"The foundation does not really have to do with ospreys, but the humanitarian work we do is inspired by them; they are incredible birds," Clarke explained. "They are the most obvious, but seeing all the shorebirds is great. I do have a life list (of bird species he has seen in his lifetime), but I am meek in comparison to some true birders."

"No one has all the glory, and everyone is willing to share information and concepts."

The Loveladies lagoon that Clarke sails out abuts the four-acre tract of marsh where the platforms were installed. "This land was originally to be developed back in the '50s, but back then someone had forethought and it was preserved," he said.

Clarke hopped aboard with Wurst and colleague Jeff Wettstien of the N.J. Division of Fish and Wildlife to meet up with a group from the Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge to install the platforms. "I suppose the refuge system bought this tract once the wetlands laws were in place in the '70s," said Jeff Sloane, a biotechnician with the refuge.

Sloane explained that the refuge continually buys tracts of land. The platforms were being erected on refuge land so Sloane and colleague Frank Szajko came out with three biology interns to help. "We help Ben (Wurst) and he helps us; we work together often," Sloane said.

Volunteers built the platforms near Wurst's office in Woodbine. "We did about 26 in one day," Wurst said. The plans for the platforms can be found at www.conservewildlifenj.org.

Intern Josh Higgins used the posthole digger to dig a four-foot hole. Like a well-oiled machine, the platform was slid into place. "We are making homes," Higgins said. The team hoisted the platform, with Clarke handling one of the ropes. "It is very gratifying to make it happen," Clarke said.

"It is great to see the networking between organizations," he said. "No one has all the glory, and everyone is willing to share information and concepts."

The team worked swiftly, leveling the pole, securing the platform with ground braces and sliding a small cedar pole into the ground 20 feet away for the perch. The installation took minutes, but its benefit to the osprey population will continue over time.

"Thank you," Wurst said to Clarke. "It is so important to get psyched about and see what is happening with groups all around us," Clarke concluded.

— Angela Andersen
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Photographs by Ryan Morrill

FOR THE BIRDS: (Top, clockwise) Biology interns Charles Barreca and Sarah Szymanski along with biotechnician Frank Szajko from the E.B. Forsythe Refuge unload materials to install two osprey platforms off Loveladies lagoon. Conserve Wildlife Foundation habitat coordinator Ben Wurst puts the finishing touches on a tower bound for the Barnegat Bay. The team works in unison to situate the tower within the marsh. The platforms are erected with a people-powered pulley system, complete with a slide board at the base for smooth installation into the detritus. These platforms are part of a statewide habitat restoration project led by CWF and myriad volunteers.

