



## **Press Release** **For Release May 22, 2008**

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### **Crowded House at CT Audubon's Osprey Nesting Platform: 4<sup>th</sup> of 4 Eggs Laid Hatches This Morning – A First for Our Milford Point Nest! View the Action Live & 24/7 on State's 1st Osprey Cam: [www.ctaudubon.org](http://www.ctaudubon.org)**

**Milford, CT, May 22, 2008** – The e-mails starting arriving at our offices well before 9 a.m. this morning, from Osprey Cam viewers who were either seeing part of an empty shell or what looked like a fourth small chick's head peeking from the nesting platform at Connecticut Audubon Society's Coastal Center. And the news is all good: for the first time ever (since 1997, when the current nesting platform was erected), our Osprey pair has produced four eggs **that have all hatched!** The fourth chick appeared today sometime before 7:22 a.m.

"For all four Osprey eggs to hatch is a strong indication that both Osprey adults are in good reproductive health. Hopefully, weather and food availability will favor the survival of all the offspring," said Milan Bull, Connecticut Audubon Society's Senior Director of Science and Conservation and Editor-in-Chief of "Connecticut State of the Birds." "We'll have a better indication of what is happening statewide as we check in with and receive reports from other Osprey nest locations," said Bull.

According to Bull, it's considered "normal" when an Osprey pair produces three or four eggs. "During a good year, when the weather cooperates and food is in good supply, two or three of the Osprey hatchlings will fledge. But during a poor year, only one Osprey hatchling may make it to fledge." This year our Osprey pair laid four eggs in fairly quick order: on April 6, April 9, April 12 and April 15, 2008. During the incubation period, which typically lasts 28 to 35 days, both parents protected the Osprey eggs. This year hatching commenced on May 16, with the second, third and fourth eggs hatching on May 17, May 18 and today. (In 2007, four eggs were laid between April 11 and 19, 2007. The first egg hatched May 22, the second hatched May 25 and the two remaining eggs failed. July 13, 2007 marked the first solo flight for one of the Osprey chicks. By July 23, 2007 both chicks were practicing their take-offs and landings. By September 4, 2007 both adults and one chick had left the nest, heading for points south -- somewhere between Florida and Venezuela -- and the remaining chick left shortly thereafter.)

This year the male Osprey returned to CT Audubon's Milford Point nesting platform on March 21, 2008 and the female returned on March 23. Many people viewed the Ospreys' return via Connecticut Audubon Society's Osprey Cam at [www.ctaudubon.org/action/osprey.htm](http://www.ctaudubon.org/action/osprey.htm), the first in the state. A pair of Osprey has been returning to the platform, located in the 840-acre Charles Wheeler Salt Marsh, since 1997. Our viewers come from all over the state – and across the country! Here's one example, from an e-mail we received on May 19, 2008:

*Dear Mr. Elkins [Ken is CT Audubon's Director of Education],  
My son's elementary school in Mariposa, California has been watching the osprey cam over the last weeks and following the progress of the eggs. This morning (Monday) the cam seemed to be out-of-order. Can you let me know what the problem is and when we can expect to view the osprey.  
Thank you,  
Diane [last name deleted]*

Similar to the Bald Eagle and other raptor species, Osprey populations have been making a remarkable comeback in recent years along the Connecticut coastline. In the 1940s and 1950s the Osprey population was plentiful in Connecticut. In the 1960s, however, Connecticut’s Osprey population virtually disappeared. (Table 2, below, provides the results of annual statewide surveys conducted by CT DEP Wildlife Division staff.)

“Connecticut’s Osprey populations reached their lowest points in 1973, when only 3 successful nests and 4 fledglings were observed statewide, and again in 1974, when only 9 active nests were observed,” said Julie Victoria, Wildlife Biologist with CT DEP’s Wildlife Division, Wildlife Diversity Program. “As with Bald Eagles, the rapid decline of Ospreys was directly attributed to the effects of pesticides, particularly DDT, on breeding populations. The most significant factor in the recovery of the Osprey was the restriction placed on the use of organochlorine pesticides. Use of DDT was banned in the U.S. in 1972. When the first Connecticut ‘Endangered and Threatened Species’ list was compiled in 1992, Ospreys were listed as a ‘Species of Special Concern.’ The list was reviewed 5 years later and Ospreys were de-listed in 1998 due to the success of their recovery. While Ospreys are no longer a Connecticut-listed species, they are still protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and as such, their eggs and nests cannot be destroyed.”

In the late 1970s, these long-winged hawks began returning in increasing numbers, adapting to new man-made nest sites constructed by individuals and private groups in and around rivers, marshes and coastal areas, and successfully fledging. In the early to mid-1980s, CT DEP began an aggressive program of Osprey nest platform construction and public education in cooperation with public and private organizations, Connecticut Audubon Society, other wildlife and conservation non-profits and individual. (Due to the Osprey’s de-listing in 1998 and to resource constraints, CT DEP no longer constructs Osprey nesting platforms.)

**Table 2.\* Summary of Connecticut Osprey Breeding Activity since 1969.\*\***

<b>Year</b>	<b>Active Nests</b>	<b>Successful Nests</b>	<b>Total Young Fledged</b>	<b>Average # of Young Fledged Per Active Nest</b>
1969	16	7	10	0.63
1970	13	5	8	0.62
1971	12	3	8	0.67
1972	10	4	9	0.90
1973	10	3	4	0.40
1974	9	4	7	0.78
1975	10	5	10	1.00
1976	10	7	14	1.40
1977	10	9	20	2.00
1978	14	8	15	1.07
1979	15	14	25	1.67
1980	19	15	26	1.37
1981	22	17	36	1.64
1982	29	16	34	1.17
1983	34	24	40	1.17
1984	38	24	46	1.21
1985	44	34	72	1.64
1986	38	29	62	1.63
1987	35	29	74	2.11
1988	51	40	95	1.86
1989	52	44	91	1.75

Year	Active Nests	Successful Nests	Total Young Fledged	Average # of Young Fledged Per Active Nest
1990	55	45	95	1.73
1991	66	55	121	1.83
1992	66	51	97	1.47
1993	65	54	119	1.83
1994	95	67	137	1.44
1995	103	76	148	1.44
1996	106	78	143	1.35
1997	131	111	243	1.85
1998	141	110	203	1.44
2001	176 (and 244 nesting platforms)	152	286	1.62

\*Table provided by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, Wildlife Division.

\*\*Information not available for 1999 and 2000.

In 2003, Connecticut Audubon Society, with the support of Westport businessman and conservationist Leon Hirsch, built the first “Osprey Cam” in the state, to provide 24/7 live web coverage of its Osprey nesting platform at Milford Point. CAS’s Osprey Cam enabled CT DEP wildlife biologists, ornithologists and bird lovers to observe and track the breeding, nesting and fledgling behavior of the Osprey – as well as “freeze” the action and take photos of the ospreys! Every March since then, thousands of amateur and professional birders start tuning in to [www.ctaudubon.org/action/osprey.htm](http://www.ctaudubon.org/action/osprey.htm) to witness the ups and downs of Osprey housekeeping via Connecticut’s first “Osprey Cam.” In 2006, Connecticut’s second Osprey Cam, operated by the Maritime Aquarium in Norwalk, went on line.

#### **More General Information about Ospreys**

**Clutch size:** 2-4 eggs (3 on average). Incubation: 28-35 days. Life span: 15-20 years (in the wild).

**Appearance:** Osprey are large (22” to 25” in length) black-and-white fish-eating raptors, with a bold white forehead and eyebrow, and a wingspan of 58” to 72” inches. Both males and females are similar, but females generally exhibit more spotting (a “necklace” of spots) on the breast than males and are generally a little larger. In flight, they hold their wings back in a characteristic “M” shape. An adult Osprey generally weighs between 2 and 2.4 pounds.

**Mating habits:** Ospreys mate for life but will often accept another mate if one of the pair dies.

**Nesting habits:** Ospreys nest in tree tops, poles, towers, stubs, sometimes rooftops, chimneys, navigation buoys, rock pinnacles, stick piles, and even on the ground, but never far from water. Nesting material includes sticks, grass, seaweed and clods of mud. Other materials have also been found in Osprey nests: oars, fish nets, life preservers, hay rake, toy boats, brooms, boots, shoes, dolls, baskets, plastic sheeting and bags, door mat, bird wings and bleached bones. (In 2006, a blue stuffed teddy bear adorned CAS’s Osprey nesting platform in Milford!). Adults return year after year to rebuild and add material to the nest. Some nests are occupied every year for 40 or more years by a succession of birds and reach a depth of over 10 feet. Fledglings leave the nest after about 8 weeks from their hatch date.

**Eating habits:** Strictly fresh-caught fish: herring, flounder, striped bass, bluefish, perch, eels, goldfish, shad, carp, catfish, trout and many others. Ospreys plunge-dive feet first into the water to catch fish that are either swimming near the surface or in shallow water.

**Natural enemies:** Crows, gulls and raccoons will eat unguarded eggs and young.

**Voice:** Loud, rich musical whistled series of chirps (“cheep, cheep, cheep”) or rising, shrill whistle -- “whew, whew, whew, whew.”

**Range:** Ospreys are found on every continent except Antarctica. In the northeast U.S., Ospreys migrate south from September to early November, to winter in the Gulf States, Florida and Central America, returning to the northeast by mid to late March.

**About Connecticut Audubon Society:** Founded in 1898 by pioneering conservationist Mabel Osgood Wright, Connecticut Audubon Society conserves Connecticut’s environment through science-based education and advocacy focused on the state’s bird populations and their habitats. Connecticut Audubon Society operates nature facilities in Fairfield, Milford, Glastonbury and Pomfret, an EcoTravel office in Essex and an Environmental Advocacy office in Hartford. Connecticut Audubon Society manages 19 wildlife sanctuaries around the state, preserves over 2,600 acres of wildlife habitat in Connecticut, and educates over 200,000 children and adults annually. Working exclusively in the state of Connecticut for over 100 years, Connecticut Audubon Society is an independent organization, not affiliated with any national or government group. For membership and other information, please visit [www.ctaudubon.org](http://www.ctaudubon.org).