



# Old Saybrook Conservation Commission

Quarterly Newsletter

3Q 2022

## Osprey, Our Amazing Neighbors

By Peter DeLisa

This spring, the Ospreys returned to Old Saybrook, and when they did, a sense of majesty was added to our beautiful local environment. It was only about fifty years ago that this species seemed destined for extinction, but today Osprey are thriving on the East Coast, rebounding from an all-time low of eight breeding pairs in Connecticut to the current hundreds. This comeback is astounding — the result of improved regulations on contaminants such as DDT and the resultant improved water quality. Keeping track of them all has become a major task.

The Connecticut Audubon Society needs volunteer reinforcements. Managing nest sites has become the focus of an Audubon program called Osprey Nation now beginning its fourth year. Osprey Nation is a citizen science program that spans Connecticut's many rivers and its coastal sound. There are more than one hundred volunteers monitoring in excess of five hundred nests across the state, but more monitors are needed. Connecticut Audubon has been working in harmony with Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) to maintain a dataset on these marvelous raptors. DEEP has been tracking Osprey nests to learn more about how the species is making its comeback, and because these birds are excellent indicators of environmental health. They only eat fish, which means the health of specific populations offers insight on local water quality. The more polluted a water source, the less healthy its fish and the Osprey that prey on them. With adequate monitoring, any changes in the Osprey population can be addressed. The volunteers of Osprey Nation are a big help!

Being a volunteer takes nominal commitment. Osprey Nation volunteers are required to observe a Connecticut nest for at least 15 minutes every two weeks. When the Osprey return in early May, volunteer stewards use



binoculars to check on the occupancy of their assigned nest site. Over the course of the five-month monitoring season, stewards keep tabs on nest activities, the number of eggs laid and subsequently hatched, and finally the number of hatchlings that fledge the nest. The Osprey Stewards record data about the observed nests



via an interactive map for the Connecticut Audubon Society. Being a steward is a wonderful opportunity to learn more about the environment and what's going on around you in your local community. You may direct your inquiry to the Osprey Nation program by visiting the Connecticut Audubon Society's website.

Ospreys are a conservation success story with a cumulative population increase of about 64% since 1966 resulting in their presently being a species of low conservation concern. As natural nest sites have succumbed to tree removal and shoreline development, specially constructed nest platforms and other structures have become vital to the Osprey's recovery. Sadly, a growing cause of death for Ospreys is entanglement at the nest. Adults incorporate bailing twine and other discarded plastic lines into their nest fabrication, and these can wrap around a chick's feet and injure it or prevent it from leaving the nest.

Osprey nests are built of sticks and lined with bark, sod, grasses, vines, algae, or flotsam and jetsam. The male usually fetches most of the nesting material and the female arranges it. As the pair return to the same nest annually, adding to the nest year after year, Ospreys can end up with a nest up to ten feet deep and six feet in diameter. The Osprey nesting habitat must include an adequate supply of accessible fish within a maximum of about twelve miles from the nest. The generally elevated nest sites prevent predation by mammals such as raccoons, and a long enough ice-free season provides the time needed by the young to fledge. Nesting Ospreys will defend only the immediate area around their nest.

These raptors are truly amazing birds, and a part of the wonderful fabric of our biosphere. Should you wish to read further about Osprey or other birds, I would recommend you consult the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at [www.allaboutbirds.org](http://www.allaboutbirds.org).

*Note: although this article is coming to print in the fall, do make a plan to monitor a nest if you live in the vicinity of one.*

## Plastic in Our Lives

by **Michael Osnato**

Many of us are aware of the mounting concern with the use and disposal of plastics. As an exercise, I counted the number of plastic items in my home. There were over eighty ranging from medicine containers to food containers. The preponderance of plastics in our lives is overwhelming.

The main concerns with plastic disposal are the effects on land and marine life. Here are some vital facts to note. Chlorinated plastic can seep into the ground-water or soil and cause harmful effects to the ecosystem and drinking water. It is the third most widely produced polymer after polyethylene and polypropylene. Common uses are for bottles and credit cards. Its production, use and disposal create persistent toxic pollution. It is especially toxic when burned and it doesn't decompose which results in plastic being present in some form. Hopefully we'll see an aggressive movement by private companies and governments to move away from chlorinated plastic.

Plastic pollution has become one of the most pressing environmental issues of our time particularly in our waters. Juxtaposed to this is the continued escalation of production of a myriad of disposable plastic products. Plastics in the water break down in microplastics. Micro-

plastics have been found by researchers in the deepest parts of the ocean and our planet's highest peak Mount Everest.

In addition to dangers to humans, plastics are deadly to millions of marine organisms and wildlife (i.e. birds, fish, whales, turtles) by being ingested or entangling them. Henderson Island in the South Pacific is cited as having thirty-eight million pieces of plastic in all sizes. Plastics in the ocean are extremely difficult to collect.

Old Saybrook has seven marinas and hundreds of boats in North Cove, Indian Town and other docks or moorings. In addition, boats are trailered to and from our boat launch areas. It is critical that with our beautiful fifteen miles of shoreline boaters do not contribute to the pollution of natural resources. Under no circumstances should boaters dispose of plastic objects in the water.

There are alternatives to using of plastic such as stainless steel, glass, platinum silicone, beeswax coated cloth, natural fiber cloth, wood, bamboo, pottery, and other ceramics.

This short article will hopefully be an incentive for our local citizens to further educate on this serious conservation issue and try to mitigate.

## Plastics and Trash - What Can a Person Do?

by **Christine Picklo**

We've read the articles, seen documentaries, and heard presentations and talks regarding the impact of plastics and trash in the environment. It can feel overwhelming and perhaps difficult to see how any one person can make a difference. But collectively each one of us can make a difference and set an example for our children, family and friends by taking action(s) that reduce our contribution to the growing trash and plastic issue.

Here are some ideas:

- Use reusable containers instead of plastic wrap, foil or zip lock plastic bags. We all have a drawer full of containers and lids; take a moment and organize them, take inventory of what you have and might need size wise.
- Use bar soap instead of liquid soap - it's cheaper and

comes in a paper wrap instead of a plastic container.

- If you use liquid soap, buy a brand that comes in refillable containers and reuse the pump bottles.
- Buy in bulk where it's feasible.
- Pay attention to packaging: is there a paper or box alternative to something in plastic?
- Remember to take reusable bags when doing all your shopping.
- Rethink bottled water. Most of us live in areas where the water is totally safe.
- Take a refillable water bottle on your outings.
- Read your newspaper and magazines online if that is an option.

No doubt you can come up with some more ideas - engage your family and make it a team effort!

## Reconsidering Wasps

by **Christine Picklo**

With the recent focus on the plight of declining pollinators, bees have received lots of attention. Wasps, a close-cousin, are seen in a different light - an insect to be sprayed and feared. However, you may not know that wasps also play an important role in our ecosystems; they are pollinators, provide pest control and seed dispersal.

In a recent published book, *Endless Forms: The Secret World of Wasps*, author and biologist Seirian Sumner details the important and vital role wasps play. They regulate populations of insects and other arthropods such as mites and spiders. They target a wide range of insects including crop-devouring pests such as aphids and white flies. And there is evidence of wasps visiting more than 960 plant species, of which 164 depend completely on them.



Only 1.5 percent of wasp species are likely to sting people if provoked according to biologist Heather Holm. This small percentage are social species such as paper wasps, hornets and yellow jackets that defend their nests.

Most wasps are solitary. So the best defense is to stay out of their way and not swat at them. And be aware of their nests.

When planting your pollinator garden, don't forget about wasps. Heather Holm's book: *Wasps: Their Biology, Diversity, and Role as Beneficial Insects and Pollinators of Native Plants* provides a list of native plants for the eastern United States. Their favorite plants include

golden rod, mountain mint and buttonbush.

*Note: Excerpted from an article by Laura Tangley in National Wildlife, August-September 2022.*