

Delaware’s Osprey Monitoring Program

Osprey populations throughout the United States suffered serious decline in the 1950s and 1960s, largely due to the effects of the pesticide DDT, potentially harmful chemical compounds known as PCBs and other contaminants. Fortunately, after DDT and most PCB uses were banned in the 1970s, the population of this fish-eating raptor has recovered markedly, even in the face of residual contamination in the environment.

The osprey has had help in soaring again into the public's imagination as an icon of salt and fresh waterways. In the early 1990s, to assist the osprey’s recovery, the Delmarva Ornithological Society—with the support and partnership of the Division of Fish and Wildlife, the Division of Parks and Recreation, the Sussex Bird Club, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Geological Survey and private entities—took the lead in constructing, installing, repairing and replacing osprey platforms throughout the state.



Additionally, the Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife has conducted surveys since 1970 to document nest success. The U.S. Geological Survey biologists tested eggs and chicks for contaminants in 2001. Historically, osprey surveys were concentrated in the Inland Bays and Nanticoke River system, but the entire state of Delaware was surveyed in 2003, 2007 and 2014.

Osprey Nest Success in 2003, 2007 and 2014

	2003	2007	2014
Active Nests in DE	119	173	197
Successful Nests in DE	77	136	103
Nestlings	135	293	424

Active Nest = eggs or chicks seen in nest during at least 1 survey

Successful Nest = at least one chick reached banding age

Delaware’s osprey population continues to increase dramatically, yet there is still much to learn about the species in the state. For example, as an indicator species and a conservation success story, it is important to understand how osprey populations in Delaware continue to grow and expand in consideration of how this species may be affected by climate change and sea level rise. However, the Division of Fish and Wildlife does not have the capacity to continue surveys for this species to collect information on the exact dates of egg laying, chick flights, nest failure and other key nesting milestones are difficult to pinpoint. That’s where the data collected by volunteers comes in handy and will help inform and drive osprey conservation throughout the 21st Century.