

## The return of the osprey: 'A great success story'

By Susanna Sheehan  
Clipper Editor

As much a symbol of summer as the ice cream truck at the beach, the ospreys – the black, brown and white fish hawks – have returned to nest on towering platforms throughout Duxbury Bay.

Recently, Duxbury Conservation Administrator Joe Grady and Norman Smith, longtime director of Mass Audubon's Blue Hills Trailside Museum in Milton, began their yearly ritual of climbing up to the high platforms set in locations like the marsh off Hick's Point Road to check for osprey chicks to band.

Banding osprey provides conservationists with information about the locations of the birds' breeding and wintering grounds, migration routes, life span and offspring.

"The more information that is known about a species' life history and patterns, the more effective conservation efforts will be in helping them survive," states the Blue Hills Trailside Museum's Facebook page.



This osprey chick has a spectacular view of Kingston Bay from its nest on the marsh near Hick's Point Road.

Photos by Terri Nickerson



William Day, age 15, got close up and personal with three big osprey chicks in their nest during their banding day at Hick's Point landing.

There is an ID number for each bird and a phone number and email address on the bands so a person who finds a deceased bird can give information about where it was found and how it died.

Grady has been banding osprey chicks for more than 30 years. He says the bands returned from deceased ospreys tell some amazing stories of the birds that travel north to Massachusetts in the summer and will fly as far as South America in August and September

"It gives us some information when we have a band returned," he said. "We find out how old the osprey is and how it died. We've had a few birds hit and killed at

Hanscom Air Force field. One was shot by a farmer in Cuba."

Grady tells the story of a Duxbury chick born and raised on nest on Hick's Point Road in 1999 that was held captive in Haiti by a man who wanted a "free ride to the US" or a ransom for the osprey because he saw the words 'Washington, D.C.' on its band. A veterinarian was trying to save the bird, which was tied to a post, but it died before it could be rescued, said Grady.

Ospreys, which eat fish and dive into the water feet first to catch them, have made a strong comeback from the days when the pesticide DDT made their eggs so brittle that they would be crushed when the parents sat on the nest to incubate them. Grady said that the banding program has grown annually with 350 osprey chicks banded on the South Shore up from zero a few decades ago.

“When we first started, the osprey was on the threatened list and there were no nests on the South Shore,” Grady said. “There were just a few on Martha’s Vineyard and on the Westport River. They were nearly wiped out.”

Now there are close to a dozen poles in Duxbury with platforms housing nests that reach two to six feet in height and can be more than six feet wide.

According to Grady there are ten to 15 chicks in the nests around Duxbury Bay.

“It’s been a great success story,” he said.



**This osprey chick is one of as many as 15 chicks born in Duxbury this year. It will make its way to South America come winter.**