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Rhode Island Osprey

The Rhode Island Osprey Nest Monitoring Program was founded in 1977 by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management to collect data on the 13 nests that present in the state. Unfortunately, the Osprey population had suffered severe declines from 1940-1970 due to exposure to the harmful pesticide, dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT). When DDT was federally banned in 1972, researchers saw the importance in observing local Osprey populations.

In 2010, The Audubon Society of Rhode Island assumed management of the program. Since then, volunteers have worked each summer to observe each nest in the state on a weekly basis, to note breeding behaviors and the number of young that are produced by each nest each year.

In 2025, 135 Osprey monitors collected data on 391 nests across Rhode Island! In this report, we will discuss the results of our monitoring, as well as highlight some interesting stories from the 2025 season.



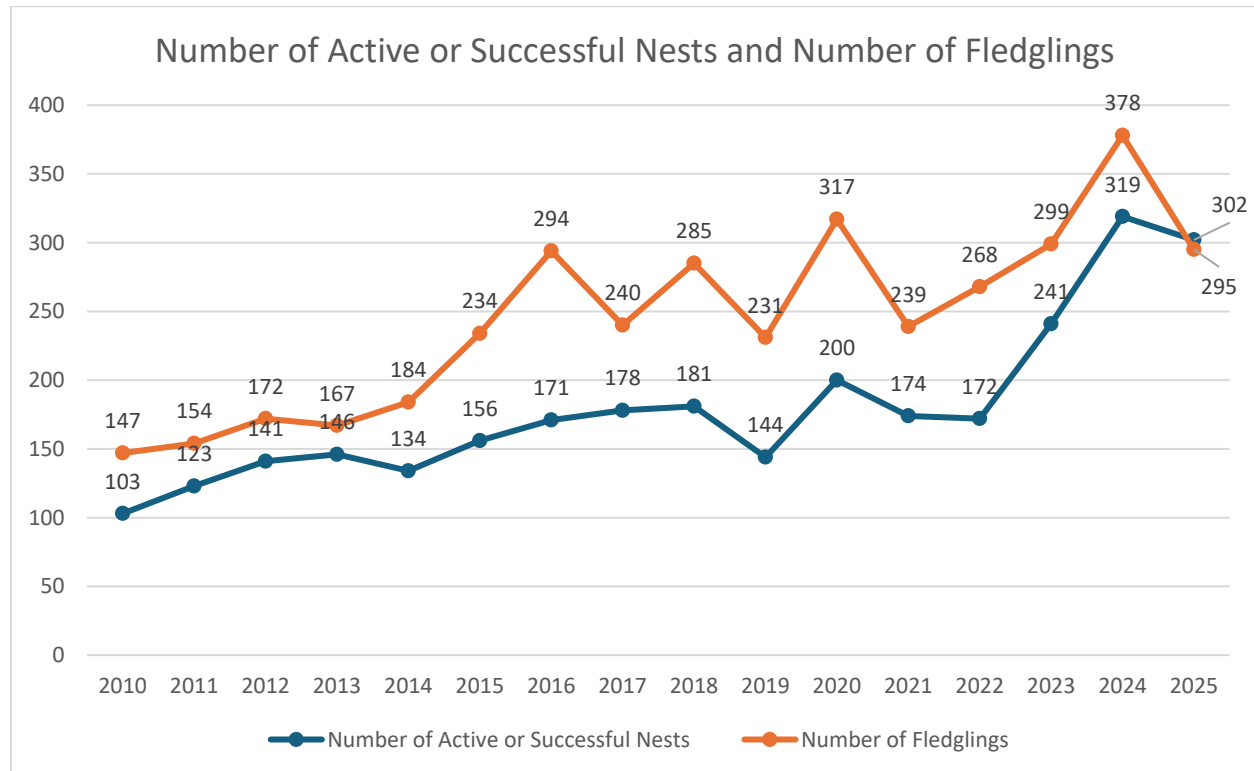
Pair of Osprey in Nest with Newport Bridge in background. Photo by Norm Grant.

2025 MONITORING RESULTS

Number of Monitors	135
Total Number of nests in RI	428
Number of Nests Monitored	391
Number of past sites with no nest found	71
Number of inactive nests	29
Number of active nests (includes both active <i>and</i> successful nests)	302
Number of successful nests (a subset of the above category, counting only nests that produced young that survived the season)	171
Number of nests with unknown status	9
Number of Fledglings	295

Table 1. Summary of monitoring data.

Figure 1. Trends of the number of active nests and number of fledglings from 2010-2025.



DISCUSSION

In Audubon's sixteenth Osprey monitoring season, both the monitors and the *monitored* faced challenges. Most notably, the severe thunderstorm on July 3rd brought 59 mph winds, dozens of downed trees, and tens of thousands of power outages across the region. Unfortunately, this weather also destroyed many Osprey nests at a time when most of the young are yet to hatch or too young to fly. Fledgling production saw a three-year low at 295 fledglings, a drastic decline compared to the 378 fledglings observed in 2024 (Figure 1). Despite this tragedy, our data shows many reasons for hope. We still observed 295 active or successful Osprey nests, the second highest that we have ever seen, the first being 2024. This indicates that there will still be a strong breeding population in Rhode Island in 2026. We also retained 135 volunteers in 2025, the same number of volunteers that we had in 2024. This retention shows that there are still so many community members that are dedicated to observing and conserving this species now and into the future. Finally, although unfortunate, a severe weather event like the storm on July 3rd is a random environmental factor that limits Osprey population growth. Our data does not indicate that population growth in Rhode Island is being limited by systemic issues such as overfishing or loss of habitat.

2025 was also a season of "firsts" for the RI Osprey Nest Monitoring Program. This was the first season where we observed an active Osprey nest on the cell phone tower adjacent to Audubon's Powder Mill Ledges Wildlife Refuge in Smithfield, RI (right). This is the first nest we have ever observed in Smithfield, indicating that northwestern Rhode Island may be an important area for Osprey nesting in the coming years. Even better, this nest successfully fledged one young bird!

This was also our first season collaborating with Osprey Watch, a global Osprey monitoring program ran by the Center for Conservation Biology at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. On Osprey Watch, Audubon monitors submit data with nearly 7,000 other monitors all over the world! This collaboration allows for our data to help inform Osprey conservation locally, regionally, and globally!



Active Osprey Nest on the Powder Mill Ledges Wildlife Refuge Cell Phone Tower in Smithfield, RI. Only wing is visible in nest. Photo by Tim Pratt.



Osprey Watch Logo.

CONCLUSION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank everyone who helped contribute to this season's data collection. Whether it was spending hot hours in the sun observing young birds, showing "the ropes" to new monitors, granting permission to Audubon for our monitors to access your private property, or taking to the water to observe some of our nests on offshore islands, your input and dedication matters. With our new collaboration with Osprey Watch, our data is informing conservation decisions that are much bigger than our own community. This season was not without its challenges, but we all came together to collect this important data. At times it can be exhausting, both physically and emotionally, but seeing how 135 people from all over Rhode Island work together for a common goal is nothing short of inspiring.

I also want to extend a special thank you to some of our supporters, such as Jon Mitchell, the Land Stewardship Coordinator for the Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve on Prudence Island, for collecting data on all of the Prudence Island nests, Kim Gaffett of The Nature Conservancy on Block Island who collects data on all of the Block Island Nests, and Dave Correia of Exxon-Mobil who generously coordinates with Audubon Osprey monitors to collect data on all of the nests in the East Providence Exxon-Mobil facility.

I also thank Audubon itself, all the board members, staff members, and community members for giving me the honor of Audubon's Volunteer of the Year this year.

As the coordinator of this program for three years, I have had such an amazing opportunity to meet all of you and hear all your Osprey stories. Many of you have heard me wax poetic time and time again over the "Osprey story", the personal story that all of us have that inspired us to volunteer with this program. Whether you have been monitoring Osprey since the program was managed by RIDEM, or if this was your first season monitoring, there is a story that got you out of the house and into the world of Osprey! However, with that said, this will be my final year as Coordinator of the Rhode Island Osprey Monitoring Program. When I first started with this program in 2023, my goals were to grow our volunteer base, our media outreach, the scope of our nest monitoring, and improve our data submission and management methods. Now, I am very proud to have accomplished all these goals! The upcoming monitoring seasons will be managed by Audubon's Director of Bird Conservation, who will take the role in 2026.

Osprey License Plate

Show your support for Osprey with Rhode Island Osprey license plates for your car! Purchase of an Osprey plate supports environmental conservation through education. The cost is only \$43.50 with \$20 supporting environmental education programs and \$23.50 for production of the plates. A link to the form may be found on the Audubon website at www.asri.org. Once you complete the form it is automatically forwarded to the RI DMV for processing.



About The Audubon Society of Rhode Island

The Audubon Society of Rhode Island is a membership-based, independent not-for-profit conservation organization. It is dedicated to protecting birds, wildlife, and their habitats through environmental education, advocacy, and land conservation. The state's first environmental organization, Audubon now protects nearly 10,000 acres in a network of refuges, pristine properties and wildlife habitats. Audubon Society of Rhode Island is not affiliated with National Audubon.

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