

Summary for July 30th, 2004.

Dennis Puleston, whom we honor with this website and these wonderful pictures of Ospreys, was an inveterate traveler. In many ways, he was like an osprey; he had a home range where he kept close to family and friends, and he had migratory homes, which in Dennis' case, could have been any one of the seven continents. All his friends knew when he was to be away and looked forward to his returning and to viewing his slides. During his slide presentations, we knew that we would learn about wildlife especially the birds.

Many reasons existed for participating in Dennis' presentations...not unlike Hugh Johnson's admonition, in his classic book about wine, suggesting two reasons for studying grapes; one, to learn about what you are drinking and two, to learn about geography. True, we also would learn about geographic places that stirred our imagination. At first they were just names; then they became places we wanted to visit like: the Seychelles, Deception Island, Point Wild, Moffin Island, the Northwest Passage, Moorea and Ternate, to name a few. In his later years, Dennis traveled to Antarctica more than 35 times; that is at least 70 crossings of the Drake Passage, that infamous body of water between the tip of South America and the Antarctic Peninsula. We listened to Dennis to learn about the birds and soak up some geography, sometimes while sipping a glass of wine.

When Dennis traveled to Antarctica, as with many travelers, it became his seventh and last continent. But, the osprey that nested near his home, may have exceeded any wildlife sighting he experienced. And, the Osprey, a traveler like Dennis, is no slouch; it nests on six continents. Before man appeared on earth, 13 million years ago, avian paleontologists tell us that fossils of Ospreys occurred in both Europe and North America suggesting their widespread distribution. While the fossil species seems to have been less robust than the present one, it is, nonetheless, a fish-eating hawk. Today, Ospreys occur throughout the world. Generally, they breed in the Northern Hemisphere (Eurasia and North America), and these birds migrate south into equatorial and southern latitudes for the winter (South America and Africa). Others that live in the Southern Hemisphere tend to be non-migratory. A perplexing problem for biologists is the question of why some Ospreys don't remain on wintering grounds to breed. Similarly, Dennis didn't stay on his wintering grounds either.

Remembering the first Osprey I ever saw is impossible, but I do remember the photo taken of one when I was 12. According to Alan Poole, Roy Wilcox, and a handful of other bird banders, had banded more than 40% of all Ospreys worldwide. Just after World War II, Roy took me to Gardiners Island, so he could band even more Ospreys. With his camera, I took a photo of him next to an Osprey nest that had been built directly on the ground. There are no land predators like raccoons or foxes on Gardiners so ground nests were common

and many of them had been used for years, if not decades. The nest was taller than I was. His camera was on a tripod, which made the taking easier. We were standing in the densest colony of nesting raptors in the world, an estimated 300 pairs. Gardiners Island was the epicenter of colonial nesting Ospreys. On that day, began, with encouragement from others, especially Dennis, my life long love of birds...and Ospreys especially.

In 1962, a friend took me to view an Osprey in Scotland where it nested for the first time since 1916. It was a magical day dimmed only slightly by the concertina wire around the base of the nest to ward off egg thieves. By the end of the 20th century Scottish Ospreys were on the rebound. English Ospreys nested for the first time in more than a century and a half in the year that Dennis died, 2001. Assisted by an artificial nest site built on the shore of Bassenthwaite Lake in the Lake District, nesting Ospreys returned to England. For three years this nest has been successful and has contributed to the tourism of the area. (Details of these efforts can be seen on www.ospreywatch.co.uk.) Public concern for and research on the Osprey has increased dramatically.

Dennis Puleston continued the research that Roy Wilcox had begun on Gardiners, and it was here, using eggs that had not hatched that discoveries were made about the effect DDT was having upon Osprey reproduction. These eggs analyzed by Dr. Charles Wurster, at Stony Brook University, led us to form the Environmental Defense Fund (now Environmental Defense). Our aim was to ban DDT, a purpose that was accomplished in 1972 when the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, William Ruchelshaus, banned this destructive pesticide nationwide. This decision, with the subsequent decline of DDT in the environment, led to the recovery of three fabulous species: the Osprey, the Peregrine Falcon and the Bald Eagle.

The combination of banning DDT and an aggressive reintroduction program heralded the return of the Osprey. Both Michael Male in film and David Gessner in print have titled their efforts, *The Return of the Osprey*. Today, Ospreys are rebounding in those areas where DDT use has been abolished. In other places Ospreys are challenged by habitat destruction, egg collecting and nest disturbance but attitudes have changed. Consequently, Ospreys will continue to thrive on six continents for years to come.

Another threatened raptor occurs on six continents...the Peregrine Falcon. It was decimated by the use of DDT. The Peregrine aided by the ban on DDT and a reintroduction program, has returned to areas not generally thought of as 'the wilds.' Surprisingly, Peregrines returned to cities. New York City claims to have the highest concentration of Peregrine Falcons of any place in the world with 15 nests in 2004. In some cities and at some sites, TV cameras have been installed to show the world their nesting behavior. A quick search on Google reveals numerous animal video camera locations. Indeed, the number of animal cams seems to proliferate on a *reproductive* schedule all its own.

Bald Eagles are veritable 'stay-at-homes' compared to Peregrine Falcons and Ospreys, occurring only in North America but this fact does not detract from their beauty, majesty or skill as fishermen. Viewing for the first time, a picture Dennis had taken in Alaska of an eagle swimming ashore with a salmon in one talon, I looked on in disbelief. Surely, the bird would drown. Not only did the bird swim to shore; it climbed onto a large rock where it dined on freshly caught salmon. Years later, privileged to see the same event in Alaska, I was no less amazed by the swimming ability of a Bald Eagle.

In the early nineties, Dennis called some friends to report a young eagle at Howell's Point in Bellport, NY. A group met, as so often happened when Dennis was home, to find the eagle. It was not hard; the eagle was sitting on the shoreline and a mockingbird, ever attentive to intruders into its territory, initiated a ruckus. Indeed, the small, confident songbird flew repeatedly into the back of the eagle trying to drive it away. The eagle barely noticed. One of our group 'sensed' that the eagle looked hungry; how that was possible remains a mystery. One of our group went off to the local market for chicken and, when she returned, Dennis volunteered to toss the chicken parts in front of the eagle. Within minutes, the majestic eagle hopped to one of the chicken chunks, grasped it in its talon and flew off to a nearby tree for a late breakfast. Startled, we observed nature in progress.

In 1970, the *Texas Parks and Wildlife* magazine declared, "Saving the Bald Eagle may be beyond our powers." In 1963 in the lower 48 states there were less than 562 nesting eagle pairs. By 1999, an equal number existed in the Chesapeake Bay; in 2003 there were 760 pairs. Nationwide, in the lower 48, in 1998, there were 5,787 pairs; by 2003 there were 7,678, a 33% increase in just 5 years. In 33 years, since Texas prophesized their demise, the eagles were not only saved but came back gloriously. Data provided by Environmental Defense seeks to remove the Bald Eagle from the threatened list and to focus attention on more endangered species occurring on privately-owned lands. This program, "Back from the Brink," can be found on the web.

This week, the Associated Press reports that 10 Bald Eagles have been released on Santa Cruz Island in the Channel Islands, off California, where they had originally occurred until high DDT levels decimated their population. It is hoped that the Bald Eagles will deter Golden Eagles that are feeding on an endangered native fox. Ironically, the money that is funding this project was provided by a chemical company, in 2000, that had polluted the waters off Los Angeles with DDT; a company that EDF had successfully sued to stop dumping DDT into the ocean in the 1970s.

Dennis, the Founding Chair of Environmental Defense Fund, was proud of the effort to remove DDT from the environment. He lived a long and productive life, and he lived long enough to see the restoration of three of the most

magnificent species in the world. His legacy continues as each of these species continues to flourish. It is in recognition of his love of wildlife that we share the Dennis Puleston Osprey Fund website with anyone interested in nature.

Is it too soon to uncork the bottle of wine in celebration, because so many bird species are continually threatened by the actions of humans, the only species in the history of the world capable of changing entire ecosystems? Or shall we offer a small toast to our successes...and to future successes? In the United States, two of the most magnificent raptors with the widest possible worldwide distribution are increasing and our national symbol is on the road to recovery. Yes, there *is* cause to celebrate. Cheers!

Art Cooley, Trustee, Environmental Defense