

A Review of the 2004 Season

Now that the juvenile Ospreys are out of the nest and spend most of their time off-camera, I will offer a look back at the 2004 season, with the help of over 3300 observations through August 5, 2004. Thanks to the many contributors to the Observations database and the splendid information shared in the Messages database, I have learned a great deal more about Ospreys than I thought possible! The information exchange and the enthusiasm exhibited by our guests have shown that the camera continues to be a success. I hope to be able to participate again next year. And keep watching the Ospreys, last year one was reported on Long Island as late as December.

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The Summary:

The adult birds returned to the nest on March 15 this year. They spent the first three weeks fixing up the nest and courting, settling into the ritual of he feeds her and she submits to copulation, they both build the nest up.

The first egg is laid April 5, second April 8, third April 11, fourth and last on April 14. Both adults take turns sitting on the eggs.

The first chick hatched on May 13 at approximately 4:53 AM. The male now assumes the role of sole provider to the female as she assumes full time incubating and feeding duty. The second chick hatched on May 15 at approximately 9:12 AM, the third hatched May 17 around 3:40 AM and the fourth on May 20 at approximately 11:10 AM.

On May 16 the older chick began it's aggression against the younger chick. It would peck the chick until it laid down in submission and then the aggressor would return to feeding. The pecking behavior continues among the other chicks as they hatch and begin to move around the nest, however, it is not as frequent or as violent as it was last year, and there doesn't seem to be as much of the "herding" or shoving that occurred last year.

By the end of May, the fourth chick is regularly kept from feeding and is much smaller than the three older chicks. The pecking and pushing it receives are more severe and it is forced to lie still while the others feed. If there is anything left when the older chicks are done, the female feeds it to the fourth chick.

June 1, the fourth chick is not getting any fish, or fed very little and it dies sometime early in the morning on June 2. Later that afternoon, in rarely reported behavior, the camera records the chick's carcass being fed to the chicks by the adult female.

By June 5, one of the chicks begins the exercise routine of flapping and stretching its wings and hopping on one foot. The three chicks are all getting fed (though not always at the same time) and the amount of conflict between them seems much less than last year.

In the morning on June 7 the male dropped off a fish and the female began feeding one of the chicks (the dominant one). After twenty minutes the male returned and flew off with the fish, much to the dismay of the female who proceeded to let him know they weren't finished yet. The provider must eat as well, and apparently, more fish was delivered less than an hour later.

For the rest of June and into July the chicks continue to grow. They spend their time preening, hopping around, flapping, eating, sleeping and calling for food. By the end of June the chicks are about as large as the adults and becoming very vocal. They spend their days practicing flapping and hopping for much longer periods and they frequently "catch a little air". It is during this time that the observers make frequent mention of the three different "personalities" and physical differences of the young birds.

July 5, the first chick leaves the nest. The young male chick takes a few practice liftoffs and then flies up to the camera perch while the other two watch from the nest. The next chick fledged on July 12, the third on July 14.

July 14, 4:40 PM. The three siblings are all in the nest making quite a racket when suddenly an adult Osprey flies off the perch and begins to taunt the chicks. The taunting and buzzing of the nest goes on for close to 15 minutes. Is it one of the parent birds trying to get the chicks to leave the nest? Does the adult have a small treat that it is using as a lure? Is it a hostile event by a non family member?

For the rest of July, the competition for the fish the adult male delivers is fierce and sometimes violent as the young birds and the adult female (if present) all go for it. The young then try to steal the fish away from each other, tugging and screeching or by trying to snatch it away when the holder isn't looking. The juveniles are spending more and time away from the nest but do return for feedings. Later in the month both adults will bring a fish and leave it for the young birds which then compete for it. Usually, the one that gets the meal will finish it without the others getting any, but they all seem to get their share over the course of the day.

Early August, the juveniles continue to spend a lot of time away from the nest but still do return for feedings. The young birds are much better at flying and landing, even on the perch. Their adult colors are filling in and they have lost most of their downy chick feathers. The juveniles all spend a lot of time flying with the adults and learning how to survive outside the nest, getting ready for their long trip south.