

Lynde Point Land Trust
Bird Nest Enhancement/Monitoring Project
2024 End of Season Report

Hello Fenwickians!

The **2024 Nesting Season** is now complete with Purple Martins and Osprey headed back to their southern homes, some traveling as far south as South America. It was a wonderfully animated summer with these two species brightening our days with song, calls of excitement, and spectacular ariel displays of flying skills.

Purple Martin Status

After the first nest check of the year, the Purple Martins were found to be at their highest nest count since Fenwick monitoring began in 2016. The season's total count of **85 nests** was spread throughout the 13 locations, hosting **339 eggs** of which **287 hatched** producing **244 fledglings**. The colony enjoyed its most successful year to date.

The house installations that offered more nesting chambers (double houses and gourds) were the leaders in martin production this year, likely the result of less impact by marauding House Sparrows and a few other factors.

Purple Martin Biology

Purple Martin populations tend to fluctuate, with some years seeing particularly high numbers.

The martins are insectivores, mainly feeding on flying insects like dragonflies, moths, and beetles. Good weather conditions, such as a warm, wet spring, can lead to a higher abundance of insects, boosting the food supply and helping martin populations thrive.

Purple Martins rely on man-made structures like martin houses or gourds for nesting. During years when these are well-maintained and abundant, more martins find safe nesting spots, resulting in higher reproductive success.

Mild spring and summer weather conditions, especially during migration and nesting, contribute to better breeding success. Bad weather (like cold spells or excessive rain) can make it hard for martins to find food, impacting their health and ability to raise young.

Purple Martins migrate to South America during the winter and return to North America to breed. Migration is a dangerous journey, so factors like favorable winds, fewer predators, and stable climates along migration routes can impact the population positively.



Purple Martin (male) © Peter Chen

Martin Nests	'16	'17	'18	'19	'20	'21	'22	'23	'24
1. Riggio	3	1	0	3	0	3	9	8	10
2. Ryder Course	3	3	7	5	7	5	9	11	5
3. Keeney	0	2	2	7	6	5	4	5	6
4. Christensen	0	0	0	1	4	3	4	5	2
5. Bulkeley	0	1	3	4	0	6	2	3	5
6. 2nd Fairway W.	3	3	3	4	2	5	2	0	7
7. 2nd Fairway E.	3	3	4	5	5	7	5	5	5
8. Neely	3	2	3	3	2	3	2	6	10
9. Davis	3	3	1	0	5	7	7	3	8
10. 4th Fairway	0	1	4	1	4	6	0	3	4
11. Gay	3	5	4	1	5	5	2	4	8
12. Sequassen	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	3	3
12. Webster	5	6	6	7	7	6	14	10	11
13. Patterson	0	0	0	1	0	5	1	2	1
Total Nests:	26	30	37	42	47	66	61	68	85

Osprey Eggs/Young	'16	'17	'18	'19	'20	'21	'22	'23	'24
1. West End	0	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	2
2. Hepburn	3	3	3	1	0	2	0	2	3
3. Neely	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	0	3
4. Staniford	1	1	3	0	2	2	3	2	0
5. Schmitt	NA	NA	NA	0	0	0	0	0	0
6. Sequassen	4	3	3	0	1	2	0	0	2
7. Hastings	0	0	1	3	3	2	3	1	2
8. Webster I	3	3	2	2	1	2	3	3	0
9. Webster II	NA	0	2	0	1	2	1	3	2
Totals	14	14	18	10	13	16	17	13	14

Purple Martins often face competition from invasive species, like European Starlings and House Sparrows, which take over martin houses. Efforts to control these species in certain areas can make a difference, giving martins more nesting opportunities and reducing predation risk.

For land trusts and government agencies, supporting these birds often means ensuring nesting structures are well-maintained, encouraging local communities to protect habitats, and educating the public on reducing threats, like competition with invasive species.

Osprey Status

For Osprey, this year was not the best with just 14 fledglings, noting the loss of one or both adult birds from **Webster I**, historically one of the best producers. The activity around the nest early on in the season seemed not to be that of the very experienced pair from years past. It'll be interesting to see how this nest does in 2025.

Osprey Biology

Osprey, like Purple Martins, can have fluctuating success in raising their young from year to year. Several environmental and ecological factors influence whether they have a "good" or "bad" year in terms of reproductive success.

Osprey are totally dependent on fish as their food source, so fish abundance has a direct impact on breeding success. In years with plentiful fish (due to favorable water conditions, temperature, and low harvest levels of menhaden), Osprey can more easily provide for their young, which improves survival rates.

Weather can greatly impact Osprey. Heavy rain, prolonged cold spells, or storms during the breeding season can lower the survival of both eggs and young chicks. Cold, rainy conditions can reduce foraging success, as it becomes harder for Osprey to spot and catch fish, limiting the food supply to chicks.

Pollutants, particularly pesticides and heavy metals, can affect the health of both Osprey and their prey. Historically, DDT led to weakened eggshells, reducing Osprey populations. Today, water pollution from industrial, agricultural, or urban sources can still impact fish populations and health, thereby affecting Osprey reproductive success.

Osprey nest near bodies of water, often on man-made structures like platforms, cell towers, or power poles. In areas with numerous safe nesting sites (platforms), Osprey show higher nesting success rates. Conversely,



Purple Martin hatchlings © Oakley Originals



Purple Martin © Iwolfartist



Osprey © Mino Zig

disturbances, particularly from human and predator activity at nesting areas, can deter breeding and reduce productivity.

Osprey nests can be at risk from gulls, raccoons, Great Horned Owl, or even eagles that may attempt to prey on adult Osprey, chicks, or eggs. Additionally, Bald Eagles sometimes harass Osprey to steal their fish, which can lead to energy loss and increased stress for the Osprey parents.

For land trusts and government agencies, supporting Osprey means protecting fish populations, improving water quality, and promoting stable nesting sites—often by installing nesting platforms in safe, undisturbed areas as the borough and LPLT have done. Managing these factors can help Osprey have more “good” years raising their young.

Birds in the Borough

The **Brown Creeper** (*Certhia americana*) is a small, cryptic songbird found in North America, known for its unique behavior and appearance that allow it to blend seamlessly with tree bark. One was recently seen on one of the trees along the Seventh Fairway.

Brown Creepers are small, slender birds about 5 inches (13 cm) long with a thin, decurved (downward-curving) bill ideal for probing into bark crevices.

Their plumage is a mix of brown, tan, and white with streaks that make them look like tree bark, helping them stay camouflaged against tree trunks. Their underparts are pale, usually white or buff.

Brown Creepers are known for their distinctive spiraling climb up tree trunks. They start near the bottom of a tree, spiraling upwards in search of insects in the bark, then fly down to the base of another tree to repeat the process.

Their song is a high-pitched, thin, and slightly trembling series of notes, while their call is a soft, faint "tseep."

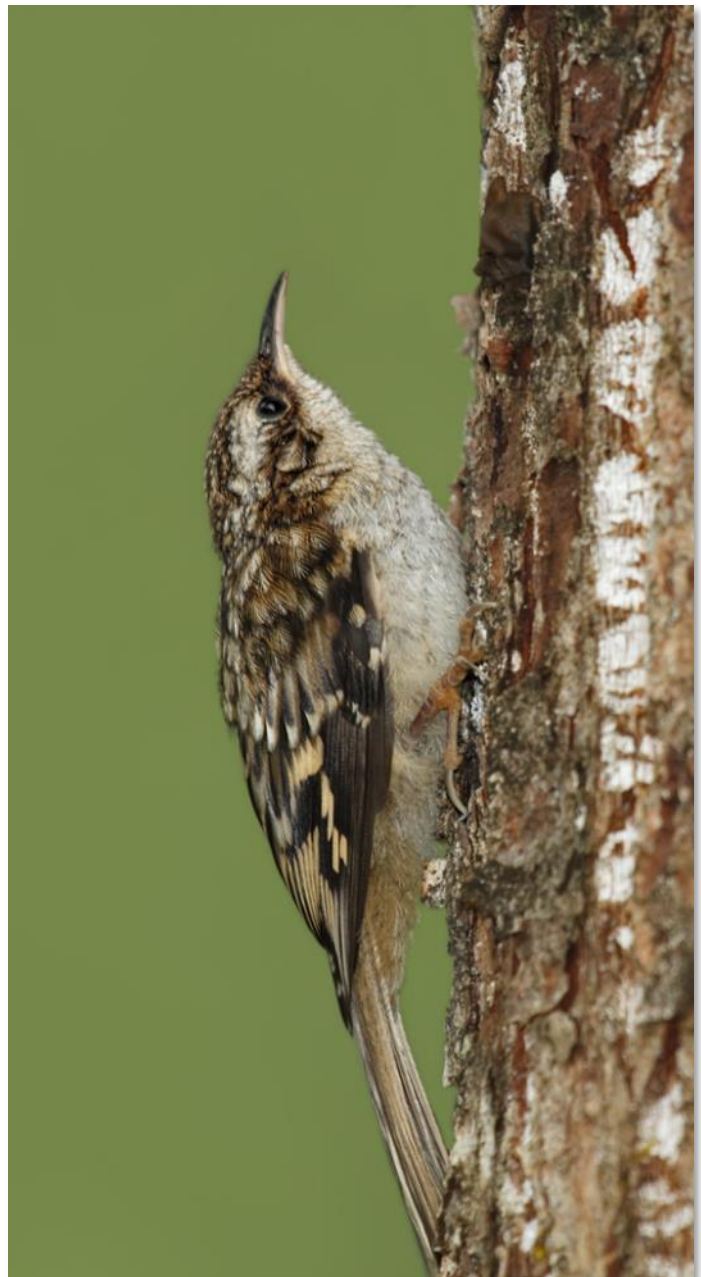
Brown Creepers are typically found in mature forests, both coniferous and mixed woods, as they rely on large trees with textured bark for foraging.

Their diet consists mainly of insects, spiders, and other small arthropods. They use their long bills to probe into bark crevices to find food, often feeding on larvae and pupae hidden within.

They build nests behind loose bark on dead or dying trees, creating a concealed and protected environment



Osprey © Rodney Campbell



Brown Creeper © Alan Vernon

for their young. Nests are cup-shaped and made with materials like bark, moss, and spider silk.

Brown Creepers are year-round residents in much of the western and northern United States, as well as Canada. However, some populations in northern regions may migrate south during colder months.

While the Brown Creeper is not currently considered threatened, it is sensitive to habitat loss, especially due to logging and forest fragmentation. Its reliance on mature forests makes it a good indicator species for forest health.

The **Snowy Owl** (*Bubo scandiacus*) is a rare but striking visitor to the borough in some winters. These large, white owls with piercing yellow eyes are native to the Arctic tundra, but they sometimes migrate southward, reaching as far as the north-eastern United States when food sources, primarily lemmings, explode in their northern breeding grounds producing an abundance of young birds which move south. This periodic movement south is known as an "irruption," and can bring Snowy Owls to coastal areas, open fields, beach dunes, and other expansive, open landscapes like those found in the borough.

Snowy Owls are not annual residents in New England but appear in the region most often between late fall and early spring. The frequency and scale of owl irruptions vary widely from year to year. Some winters see only a handful of sightings, while others, particularly during high irruption years, may involve dozens or even hundreds of owls across New England.

New England coastal areas, airports, beach dunes, and large open fields tend to be popular Snowy Owl habitats because these areas resemble the wide, flat, treeless landscapes of the tundra. Conservation efforts and land trust initiatives often include monitoring and protecting Snowy Owl habitats to minimize human disturbance, as these owls are susceptible to stress from close human interactions.

Snowy Owls are one of the largest owl species, with females often being slightly larger than males. They have dense, white plumage adapted for life in cold climates, and their coloration helps them blend into snowy environments camouflaging themselves for both hunting and against predators. Although mainly carnivorous, their diet can vary slightly based on availability. During irrup-



Brown Creeper © VJ Anderson



Snowy Owl © David Syzdek



Snowy Owl © Frank Vassen

tive years, Snowy Owls may hunt small mammals like voles and rabbits in New England, as well as birds such as ducks and geese.

Snowy Owls are primarily diurnal (active during the day) or crepuscular (active during twilight hours), a trait that sets them apart from many other owl species. This behavior aligns with their adaptation to the Arctic's long daylight hours. When they arrive in New England, they maintain this diurnal tendency, making them relatively easy for birdwatchers to observe during daylight hours.

While Snowy Owls are not currently considered endangered, their populations are impacted by habitat loss, climate change, and human disturbances. Monitoring their irruptions and movements helps conservationists understand their population dynamics and environmental stressors. In New England, agencies and land trusts often work to protect areas these owls frequent during irruption years, enforcing restrictions on human access in sensitive habitats, thus giving these visitors safe, undisturbed spaces to hunt and rest.

Overall, Snowy Owls are a captivating seasonal visitor in New England, and their presence provides important insights into both Arctic and New England ecosystems. Conservation efforts and research partnerships support their health and long-term viability.

Enjoy your wonderful bird garden!

Cheers,

Andy

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Snowy Owl © Andrew C.