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Osprey

An osprey, or fish hawk, senses danger and beckons to its young in a piercing staccato of endless chirps, the alarm call to “crouch,” the human equivalent of “playing dead.”

But the real threat to the young was a silent killer an insecticide known as DDT, used to kill disease-carrying mosquitoes.

The 1962 book *Silent Spring*, by Rachel Carson, detailed the harmful nature of this chemical: each animal within a food web multiplies the toxicity or exposure to animals at the top of the food pyramid in a process, known as ‘biomagnification.’ Creatures like osprey, eagles, and humans are prime candidates for negative impacts.

The lives of osprey bear witness: Having ingested creatures that were heavily laced with DDT, the shells of Ospreys’ eggs became thinner – so that they were ultimately crushed by the weight of the incubating female. As a result, the osprey population was decimated: in New Jersey, the population of osprey, estimated at 500 pair in the 50s and 60s, declined to a mere 50 pair by the 70s.

DDT was finally banned in 1972, and the population of osprey has taken nearly 40 years to recover. However, danger to wildlife and humans has not been eliminated: DDE, a residual of DDT, persists to this day, in the Delaware Bayshore.

When you see an osprey and hear its call, think of the warning it unknowingly gave us of a chemical threat to our children and grandchildren.