



Osprey protecting nest. Photo by author

## ***You Can't Cancel Spring***

*Memories are heartfelt and wonderful-but new beginnings are pretty special too.*

J. Morton Galetto, CU Maurice River

Last year I wrote about the first arrivals of ospreys (fish hawks) and the history of recovery. This year I thought it would be better to focus on the local enthusiasm for their arrivals, especially in light of the lurking presence of Covid19. I'm selecting fun over informative.

Seasons are determined by the tilt of the earth's axis as it orbits the sun. The vernal equinox in the northern hemisphere takes place about March 20, when the celestial equator, an imaginary line projected into space off the equally imaginary equator, exposes the northern hemisphere to longer days. One might say the northern part

of the globe's axis has tilted into spring or, if you prefer, "spring has sprung." This is easier to see in a diagram. The days are longer and life begins anew, fresh, "vernal." Okay, that was the informative part.

Most years I get a few calls around March 9<sup>th</sup> that people are spotting osprey. But this year the first call I got was with the arrival of spring on March 19<sup>th</sup> (evidently the celestial calendar has some tweaks). Concurrently I received word that I had a new grandnephew, allowing myself to boast that for the 11<sup>th</sup> time I can be "Aunt Jane the Great," better and less annoyingly known in family circles as AJ. But I will answer to either. And in light of the endless horrific news, new beginnings are most welcome.

About three decades ago we put up an osprey platform at *Sweet Meadows*, a property named by the Moore family and later purchased by the Johnsons. Each year Laura Johnson would call me with news of the spring arrival of the osprey on the platform nearest her home. This was more helpful than you might realize, as her platform has traditionally been the first to be occupied on the river. We would get a follow-up call when the first osprey hatched as well. Their property is positioned on a high bluff overlooking a

huge meadow offering a great panorama of about 9 platforms, but the one closest to the house is the "time keeper." Like the celestial equator kicking off spring, our osprey program is propelled into observation mode when these early arrivals show up.

We are concerned with whether our fall repairs made it through the winter, and what platforms are being used and which ones are not. This year we got requests for some new nests in March, but we erected and repaired nests in the fall and that nasty virus made us hesitant to put together any spring work parties. With over 40 nests to manage we want to see ospreys also making use of trees as they did traditionally. Unfortunately they often build where people would prefer they did not, like on docks, chimneys, purple martin houses, a shipyard crane, electric poles, and so on. Bringing back a creature from the brink of extinction has its foibles, but many more pluses.

This year as is often the case I hold my breath just a bit. Did our ospreys get shot, electrocuted, drowned, poisoned, eaten, caught in a storm, or is there a new pesticide that may be impacting them? And when they arrive later than normal I'm a bit apprehensive. Our neighbors and ourselves have a contest as to who will see the first osprey on

the platform. This year we won by about 1 minute as we noticed the arrivals within just moments of one another.

But what about the *Sweet Meadow* call? Sadly, Laura succumbed to cancer in 2019 and new owners had not yet moved into the homestead. And then it happened: a Covid19 miracle, if such a thing exists. Laura Jr. (so to speak) texted (it's an age thing), "The osprey has come back to the nest at Sweet Meadows." It turned out that Laura Jr's family decided to quarantine at the family homestead. Then two days later she reported, "Two osprey on the nest now!" Originally I didn't tell her of her mother's bulletins. Later I relayed how touching her reaching out was to me, without explaining all its significance to the timing of our annual program. Laura's response: "Glad I can follow in her footsteps. Hopefully the new owners will eventually do the same." Hopefully!

Yes, old memories are heartfelt and wonderful. But new beginnings are pretty special too. I shared this story with our membership in a mass email and the responses were numerous. People really like spring and they like the story of the recovery of the osprey, and they really like births. People told me of osprey they too had seen in the

last few days. And one member wrote, in view of all the recent cancellations and reschedulings, "You can't postpone spring - thankfully."



Mirroring osprey platform for eggs in spring Photo by author

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To read more detailed stories about our local osprey colony and osprey recovery [go to this page](#).

or for [more stories](#) that have appeared on osprey in our column and read Ospreys Back from the Brink and Flights of Fancy.

If you want to read more stories about osprey platforms check out *Osprey Anecdotes* [here](#).