



QRWA News

The Newsletter of the Quinnipiac River Watershed Association

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FIRST RECORD OF BALD EAGLES NESTING ON QUINNIPIAC

For the first time in Connecticut state records, a pair of bald eagles has successfully nested along the Quinnipiac River and produced two healthy offspring, a male and a female, to the delight of QRWA.

Mike Horn, volunteer osprey coordinator for QRWA, reported the success of the majestic birds along with a "good year" for ospreys in his 2007 summary of nesting activities to Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (CT DEP). Ospreys along the Quinnipiac also did well, producing 41 fledged birds in 2007, up from 16 in 2001.

Mary Mushinsky, Executive Director of QRWA, said the group's members and other interested birders, who cooperate with CT DEP's Peter Picone to install osprey nesting platforms, quietly observed the nesting pair through spring and summer 2007 after the eagles began carrying large sticks and engaging in courtship behavior in February.

"We did not wish to disturb them in any way—we just hoped they would make it," Mushinsky said. "The successful nesting of bald eagles on the Quinnipiac in 2007 is a watershed event in the history of this urban river."

Horn went public for the first time at QRWA's September annual meeting. "It means all the hard work of volunteers and those who have helped to clean up the river has paid off," Horn said. The birds eat mainly fish.

Horn labeled the nest, which is located in the lower river, as QE1 (Quinnipiac River Eagle Nest #1), and gave the parents suitably regal names of Queen Elizabeth I and Earl of Essex, or Elizabeth and Essex for short. "Keeping that theme, the chicks were named William and Mary", said Horn. "Using the names of kings and queens seems highly appropriate for these most majestic of birds."

In July 2007, a young osprey became entangled in a cell tower in Wallingford, the farthest north the birds have nested along the Quinnipiac, and was brought down from the tower by rescuers. That bird was injured and did not survive. Despite losing that bird, Mushinsky said the ospreys had a very good year, raising 41 chicks from 19 active nests.

The birds have steadily recovered from a dismal low of ten nesting pairs statewide in 1973, after persistent pesticides, which harmed reproduction, were banned and people began to construct nest platforms. "My hunch is that the plentiful osprey nests on our volunteer-built platforms inspired the eagles, who have been wintering along the Q in the past few years. They probably looked at the osprey nests and decided, "Hey-fishing must be good here!"

Photo by Alan Dempsey: Young eagle at Hanover Pond in April 2008



Photo by Alan Dempsey: Young eagles at Hanover Pond in April 2008

Photo of adult male by Pat Horn