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History of Post-Morrow

The Post-Morrow Foundation, Inc. is located in the Hamlet of Brookhaven, Suffolk County, New York. Its principal office is at 16 Bay Road, Brookhaven, NY 11719.

Conceived by Thomas and Elisabeth Post Morrow and established in 1969, the Foundation is dedicated to the preservation of the rural countryside character of the Hamlet and the surrounding areas. Through the acquisition of properties, either by gift or purchase, the Foundation seeks to establish a nature preserve and sanctuary for the benefit and enjoyment of the immediate community. The preservation of Beaver Dam Creek, where the Foundation owns over 100 acres, is a priority.

The Post and Morrow families have had a long tradition of philanthropy in the community. James H. Post purchased the land along Carmans River, now known as Squassux Landing, which was later donated to the Brookhaven Village Association for use as a marina. The land upon which the Brookhaven Free Library is situated was another gift. Elisabeth Post Morrow continued the tradition of her father by donating various gifts to community groups, mostly anonymously. It was the hope of the Morrows that this legacy be continued through the establishment of the Post-Morrow Foundation, Inc.

Post-Morrow Foundation **NEWSLETTER**

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Spring 2003

— THE DENNIS PULESTON OSPREY FUND —

Where Dennis Puleston grew up in England the osprey was never a common bird. When he moved to the Hamlet of Brookhaven after World War II, he was impressed that ospreys nested high in old trees along the Carmans River. Little did he know then that his beloved ospreys would seriously decline in his lifetime only to be restored by his commitment to their well being.

At the request of the Gardiner family, he studied ospreys each year on their island in Gardiners Bay. He discovered that the rate of successfully fledged osprey chicks was dropping dramatically. He brought unhatched eggs for analysis by new scientific techniques conducted by Dr. Charles Wurster at Stony Brook University. High levels of DDT confirmed the warnings of Rachel

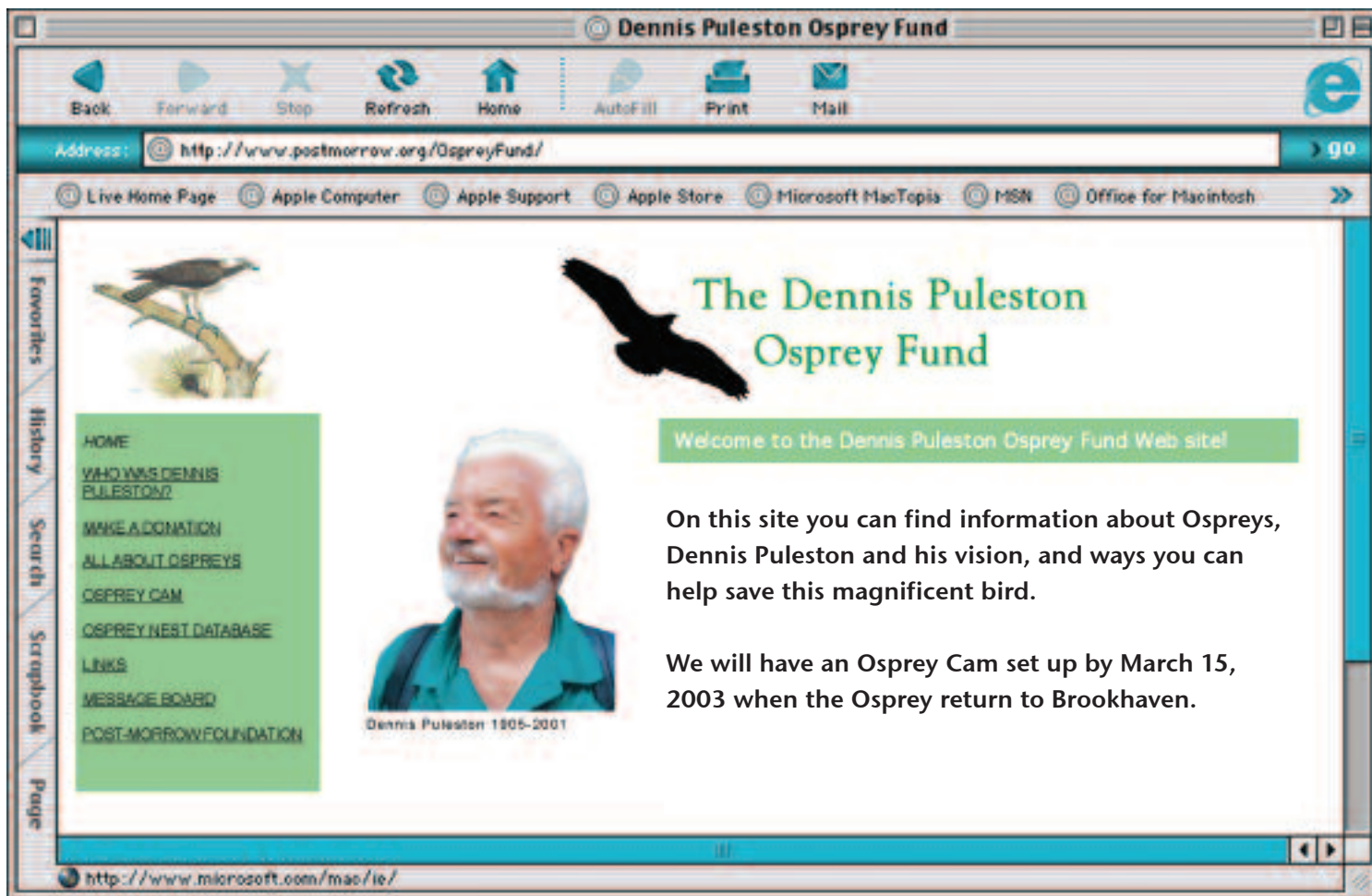
Carson in her 1962 book, Silent Spring, and prompted action to ban DDT.

As an expert naturalist testifying in a Suffolk County courtroom in 1966, Dennis along with others presented the scientific evidence showing that DDT thinned eggshells. This trial spurred the creation of the Environmental Defense Fund in 1967 with Dennis as its first Chairman. By the time he passed the leadership baton of the Board five years later, William Ruckelshaus, the first administrator of EPA, had banned DDT in the United States.

Because the osprey is so much a symbol of the environmental health of Long Island and is so intimately connected with Dennis, friends and family of Dennis have formed the Dennis Puleston Osprey Fund.

Photo by Pat Meinhold





MISSION STATEMENT

The purpose of the fund will be to encourage research about ospreys on Long Island, to improve the nesting opportunities and to educate the public about these magnificent birds.

www.postmorrow.org/OspreyFund

The new Dennis Puleston Osprey fund Web site is up and running. You can check out the site at the above listed address. There are several areas of the site that you can explore.

- “Who was Dennis Puleston?” This section contains information about the late Dennis Puleston, an important environmentalist for whom the Fund is named.
- “Make a Donation” -Here you can download a donation form to make a tax-deductible donation to help the fund.
- “All About Ospreys” -This section gives some information on the Osprey.
- “Osprey Cam” -The Osprey Cam is a live video of a nest in the South Shore area.
- “Osprey Nest Database” -Users can post observations for the various nest sites in this section.
- “Links” -Contains links to other osprey-related sites.
- “Message Board” -Users can post questions and observations about ospreys here.
- “How to Build a Platform” -This section gives some simple directions about how to erect a safe and appropriate nesting platform for ospreys.



Photo by Marilyn J. Abbey

FROM NEST TO DESKTOP

Tom Shea, Tom Throwe, Rick Mohlman, Tom Ludlam

The journey of the live video and sound of the osprey family starts at the top of a 38-foot pole on the south shore of Long Island. To provide a good view of the nest with minimal disturbance to the birds, the camera and microphone are mounted at the end of a slender arm attached beneath the nest platform. The pole arm is of welded steel with jumper stays to keep it rigid. This places the camera above and about three feet away from the nest. At the very top is a perch to give the osprey a convenient place to rest and, not incidentally, to keep them from landing on the camera. Care was taken in the design to minimize relative motion between the camera mount and the nest and to provide a means of performing maintenance on the camera. The support arm was installed on the pole in February, while the ospreys were at their winter residence in the Bahamas.

The video camera is a Panasonic model WV-NP472 with low light capabilities. Coupled with a low power light source, this camera is capable of taking black and white video at night as well as normal color daylight pictures. We can change the zoom on the lens to make it easier to follow the development of the young birds. A stereo microphone provides sound.

A set of cables carry power and control signals to the nest as well as video and sound back to a computer nearby. The sound and picture signals are processed by a “video capture card” appropriately named the “Osprey-210” made by ViewCast Corporation. The “Helix Producer” software from RealNetworks controls the card. The software takes the output of the capture card and converts it



Jen Puleston, Tom Shea, Will Throwe, Tom Throwe documenting the events and bundling the cable.

into streaming media in the “RealMedia” format. Actually, several simultaneous streams are created to accommodate viewers with both broadband and dialup Internet connections.

The aggregate stream of around 400 kilobits per second is uploaded to a computer located at Brookhaven National

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CAN A VIDEO CAMERA AIMED AT AN OSPREY NEST PROVIDE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES?

Starting in mid-March a video camera will be focused on an osprey nest and the images may be seen on the web. Using the most advanced technology, the Dennis Puleston Osprey Fund is providing this unparalleled access to one of Long Island’s most renowned birds.

The images seen over the web of the daily lives of the osprey as they court, mate, lay and incubate their eggs and raise their young will provide a unique opportunity to learn about the daily lives of a bird, observations that can be learned no other way.

Teachers, no doubt, will find many ways to incorporate what their students can see into a daily lesson. Being a frequent and consistent watcher of the daily activities of this nesting bird can help answer many questions and will help stimulate many more.

A few questions might help students get started.

- Can you tell the female from the male?
- Which adult does the incubation? Or do both? Equal time?
- What date are the eggs laid?

- What date do the eggs hatch?
- What behavior do you see when an adult returns to the nest?
- What kind of fish do the ospreys eat?
- What color eyes do they have?
- How do the young behave toward each other?

Since this camera provides the first opportunity to observe continuously day and night the activities in a nest, it is likely that new things will be learned about osprey behavior in a non-intrusive way. This will be the first time that students can watch the reproduction of an osprey from their arrival in mid to late March until the end of breeding in mid August.

We also would like to encourage students and teachers to use the web site to list observations on ospreys around Long Island. Please let us know any ideas you may have about this project. We would like to receive feedback regarding educational projects in order to assist in the preservation of ospreys on Long Island as well as to improve our web site and share information with others.

REMEMBERING DENNIS

By Marilyn Porto Abbey

It is a story I revisit often in my mind. My interest in ospreys was renewed when my husband and I and our two small sons spotted one of these magnificent birds fishing along the Tioga River near our home in upstate New York. The sight transported me back to my childhood where I had watched these fishing experts living along the bays and inlets of my native Long Island. We were surprised to learn that, while rare in our area, ospreys did migrate through in the spring and fall. But that wasn't enough. We had to find out more.

There was only one thing to do.....send a letter (no email at that time) to Long Island to Dennis Puleston, naturalist and father of my Bellport High School classmate, Dennis Edward (Puleston). Within three days, we had an answer. Mr. Puleston not only knew about the biology and behavior of ospreys, he had helped save them from extinction on Long Island. It was through this correspondence and subsequent visits with him in Brookhaven, that we learned what had happened to the ospreys, how they came back and how ospreys could teach us about the health of our environment.

A few years later, we had the privilege of working on the reintroduction of ospreys here at the Tioga/Hammond/Cowanesque Lakes, along the NYS/PA border. The birds had been wiped out completely 40 years earlier because of DDT spraying and hunting in our area. We worked with two biologists, helping to band, weigh/measure, feed, monitor, record progress and release young ospreys during the nesting seasons of 1991-1994. Throughout our involvement in the project, Dennis was a constant inspiration. He coached us and encouraged us to report to him either by letter or in person when we visited my family on Long Island. What I

remember best about our visits with Dennis is that he was always such a warm, interesting, gracious host and teacher, giving us credit for knowing more about ospreys than we really did. That of course, gave us the desire to learn more, so that we would be more prepared for his questions and able to converse more intelligently the next time we met.

Today, there are seven active osprey nests at the T-H-C Lake area and we have our own nesting platform on our land along the Tioga River. Dennis is the reason that we have experienced the joy of helping save life and watching it respond and flourish with proper care. Hopefully the birds are on their way to recovery here and we are a little smarter about harmful pollutants and paying attention to the creatures who share this planet. Every spring, we delight in sharing with our family members and neighbors the sight of ospreys returning. We treasure all we learned from Dennis and believe the promise that life begins anew with a little help from friends.



Photo by Marilyn J. Abbey

CAN ECOSYSTEMS FULLY RECOVER?

By Art Cooley

After EPA Administrator William Ruckelshaus banned DDT in 1972, ambient levels of this persistent pesticide diminished and ospreys among other species began to restore their numbers. Now thirty years later, it is not clear whether the ospreys on Gardiner's Island, where the largest nesting colony of hawks in the world occurred, will fully recover.

During World War II, DDT was rediscovered and was widely used in the military where it effectively controlled insects. It was a god-send for the men in the trenches. After the war the extensive use of DDT especially over salt marshes contaminated the food chain. The top predators like ospreys suffered from lower hatching rates as the eggs they laid became thinner. Thinner shells caused lower productivity due to breakage and dehydration. But ospreys were not the only species affected. Brown pelicans suffered and peregrine falcons became an extinct breeder in the Northeast. Bald eagles, our national symbol, suffered precipitous declines.

By banning DDT in 1972 it was hoped that a major obstacle to recovery had been removed. The fledgling rate for ospreys in the 1960s was about one young per hundred nests. Today, the rate is just over one per nest for Long Island, a considerable improvement. Elsewhere, in the Chesapeake for example, the rates, however, are closer to two young raised per nest.

In the years since the ban, Mike Scheibel of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation has flown over the nests on Long Island recording the fledglings from each nest. During the last five years the nests on average have produced about one young per nest. Encouragingly, the nests in the Town of Brookhaven and the rest of Long Island to the west produce about 1.5 young per nest. Disturbingly those nests east of the Town of Brookhaven including the once bastion of osprey nesting, Gardiner's Island, are producing only 0.8 young per nest. This latter rate is just equal to the replacement rate precluding any increases. So birds on the East End seem to have reached a threshold.

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BIRD-BANDING WITH DENNIS

by Anthony Graves



I can't recall the precise year, but it must have been somewhere around 1973 or '74 when I was 13 or 14. My father new that Dennis banded birds in fall and he would drop me off, tentively to help Dennis. A lot of banders would mist net birds in the spring, but Dennis didn't like to do that because it might interfere with their breeding migration. So he netted during the fall migration, early on September and October mornings. I would arrive in the dark, but I never got there earlier than Dennis so I don't know exactly what he did to set up. I remember the banding station that had a table. On the table were bands in their little bins, different sizes, silver and all numbered with an individual number. And there were special pliers that just closed the band without touching or hurting the bird's leg. We never dared to touch those tools or bands.

It was often cold, sometimes with a hard frost adding silver coloring to the gold of the marsh at dawn. You could see your breath in the still darkness and sometimes my feet would get very cold. The nets were strung along narrow lanes cut through the high tide bush at the landward edge of the marsh. Dennis liked the marsh/woods interface and the birds liked it too. There wasn't much talk and what talk there was happened in low tones and with a minimum of words. It seemed like to talk would not only scare the birds we were trying to catch but also shatter the beauty dawn on the marsh invariably produced.

We'd go along the path at the end of the lanes, stopping at each net to raise the net from its bunched position. When a net was unbunched and spread out vertically on its poles it was invisible. I don't know how Dennis figured out what mesh to use, but it was pretty small – about the diameter of a man's finger. Those nets would catch anything that touched them, to this day I have never encountered any net that could entangle like a mist-net. The lanes were narrow so that birds would fly across them from one side to the other. If you walked too close to the net, as you were likely to do because of the narrowness of the lane, invariably your jacket or sleeve or watch would get caught and it would be minutes of untangling before you were free.

Patrolling the lanes and nets was the work of volunteers like me. Dennis would be mostly at the banding station, and we would bring the birds to him. It was a balance of not going too often along the paths, because that would scare the birds and going often enough so that when a bird hit the net and was caught you got to it before it got itself so tangled up that it looked like a big black ball of netting. Those really tangled ones were often the birds we called Dennis for. One of us staying with the bird to keep it warm and try to keep it from struggling, and the other to go get Dennis. He would finish with the bird he was banding, and come along. I remember being cold, but he never had gloves on. He would rarely say much, but would approach the tangle and take it from you. With a patience that seemed impossible to a

child he would untangle the bird, always much faster than you expected. The great thing was to know from which side of the net the bird had hit, because that was the side you wanted to be standing on and it was the side that the bird had to come out on. Invariably Dennis was on the correct side of the net.

We captured many kinds of birds. Swamp Sparrows, Cardinals, Blue Jays, Chickadees...and Warblers. It is mostly the Cardinals and the Warblers that I remember. The Cardinals because of their large bills were perfectly adapted to crushing. They could crush a child's finger or a sunflower seed equally well. I don't remember seeing Dennis ever get crushed by a Cardinal. Either he was too good to let them get ahold of him, or too stoic to acknowledge the pain they inflicted. The warblers I remember because even in their dull fall colors they were like jewels. Their eyes bright, their movements quick and their plumage beautiful. They seemed to be living life much faster than we humans. I remember seeing Dennis holding a Yellow Warbler. His hand was closed about the bird, only its head protruding. I know it was a warm morning because a mosquito landed on the hand Dennis was using to hold the Yellow Warbler. And it was after dawn because the warbler was a brilliant yellow in the early morning sun. The mosquito on Dennis's hand began searching for a place to bite, catching the eye of the Warbler. In an instant the Yellow Warbler had turned its head and eaten the mosquito. It was inconceivable to me that a tiny bird grasped within the fist of a man could so forget its predicament to the point that it would eat. I saw it as statement of both the need for fuel that the bird had after who knows how many hours of flight high in the night sky, and the calm and quiet that Dennis brought to the way he handled the birds while he briefly interrupted their journey south.

Paintings by Dennis Puleston, *A Nature Journal*, 1992



A CAPE CODDER THANKS LONG ISLAND

by David Gessner

Though it is hard to imagine in this time of bitter cold, our Cape Cod ospreys will be heading north soon, making the 4000-mile trip to our shores and marshes from their winter grounds in South America. Ospreys have now been nesting in my neighborhood here on the Cape for the better part of a decade. My life and work have been firmly rooted in this small patch of earth, but as I watched the birds over the last few summers I often found myself thinking of another place. Long Island, with which we share a glacier-scraped geography, is rarely talked about in positive terms by Cape Codders, who see its overdevelopment as a harbinger of their own future. But it is thanks to Long Island, or at least to specific Long Islanders, that we have ospreys nesting on Cape Cod today.

Several years ago, when I began researching the ospreys' return, I learned the story of an extraordinary man, Dennis Puleston. I learned that Dennis was one of the first to miss the ospreys when they suddenly stopped appearing, and one of the first to understand what was happening to them. In 1948 Dennis began carefully observing and sketching the resident ospreys on Gardiners Island. While growing up in England, he had never seen an osprey in the wild, the birds having been wiped out there, and moving to Long Island after World War II, he looked forward to living close to what he considered a "somewhat mythical bird." Not long after his move he began his studies at Gardiners Island. When he first observed the ospreys, there were hundreds of active nests, but over the years he noticed great changes. "I began keeping records of each nest and its reproductive history. In 1948, an average of more than two chicks fledged from each nest...By 1966, active nests on Gardiners Island had dwindled from over 300 in 1948 to under 50, and in these we could find only four chicks. Ornithologists predicted the end of the osprey as a breeding bird in the Northeast."

Puleston had great respect for Rachel Carson, whom he called "that splendid woman": "Knowing of her work, we collected overdue osprey eggs and took them to the laboratory for analysis by gas chromatography. As we anticipated, residues of DDT were present." Dennis wasn't the first to tie the osprey's decline to the use of pesticides, but it was his careful observations that would help convert this conclusion into political action. The story of what happened next is a familiar one to most of the readers of this publication, but it is a story worth telling quickly again. How Dennis and the other members of the Brookhaven Town Natural Resources Committee objected to the repeated bombing of their island with DDT and how they began to fight against the chemical's use by the Long Island Mosquito Control Commission. How the group finally took the case to court and, for the first time, wed science to law to gain environmental results, finally stopping the spraying and giving birth to what is now known as environmental law. How the group eventually

became the Environmental Defense Fund, and how, in 1972, thanks in large part to the groups efforts, DDT use was permanently banned in the United States.

I never knew Dennis Puleston personally and my only connection to him was through his story. But it is a story that has taken deep root in my imagination. Ospreys, of course, were exhibit A during that first trial and it was Dennis who provided the beautiful illustrations of the bird. When I picture him I see him out there on the marshes studying and sketching the ospreys; I picture a man absorbed in the life around him, focusing on something greater than himself. During the years I worked on my osprey book I felt gratitude toward Dennis, not only because the birds were back, but because for me he fulfilled a nearly forgotten role in our society: that of an elder. As I began to spend more and more time out on the marshes watching birds I began to understand that this man I had never met was providing me with glimpses of nothing short of a new way to be. Glimpses of a different, more fulfilling sort of life, a life in unison with a world beyond the human.



These are dark environmental times and it is nice to occasionally have a reason to be hopeful. In the face of the usual litany for pessimism—thinning ozone, depleted resources, acid rain, extinction, the intractable crush of population—it is easy to curl into a kind of mental fetal position, to begin to believe that we are helpless and nothing can be done. While I'm a skeptic by nature, maybe once in a while we need to focus on our victories, not our losses. By looking toward Dennis and the ospreys we can see a little light. We can see what can

occur if we are able to exercise restraint. Can see something truly hopeful in the miracle of what we managed not to do.

And now the practical result is undeniable. Thanks to the actions of Dennis and those like him, we have ospreys nesting not just on Long Island but on Cape Cod and throughout New England. Statues and monuments are nice reminders of the dead, but as legacies go, this seems both better and more fitting for Dennis Puleston. How many people can say they impacted the world in such a way? By the time this essay is printed the ospreys will already be on their way back north. I look forward to their return as I do every year. For me the birds exemplify the thrill of a comeback: hope renewed improbably after it had been seemingly, finally, extinguished, the birds filling old ecological nooks they had once disappeared from. This year when I see my first osprey I will think of Dennis Puleston. What better legacy than the resounding of high-pitched cries and the beating of wings?

David Gessner is the author of Return of the Osprey. He currently teaches environmental writing at Harvard.

Painting by Dennis Puleston, A Nature Journal, 1992

THE DENNIS PULESTON OSPREY FUND COMMITTEE

This opportunity to observe the daily lives of an osprey family has been made possible by a group of hard working people who care a great deal about the future of the osprey and knew and loved Dennis Puleston. (*indicates committee members in the photograph)

*Betty Puleston** – provided complete support for the project through her love for Dennis.

Jen and Pete Clement and Peter Puleston* – carry on the tradition of Dennis' family and their love for the osprey and gave information and great assistance to the project.

*Art Cooley** – A Board member of Environmental Defense and the visionary who pulled the team together and gave direction to the Fund.

Pat Martinkovic – The Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Long Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex and her staff gave great assistance to this project.

*Tom and Regina Shea** – researched the equipment for the nest site and coordinated the technical aspects of the project.

*Tom Thrope** – developed the architecture for the computers and software. Tom's kids volunteered their bedroom as a test site for the first osprey cam broadcasts.

*Rick Mohlman** – built and installed the welded steel support arm.

Ben Moger-Williams – provides the maintenance and design of the web site.

*Tom Williams** – on the board of the Post-Morrow Foundation designed and edited the Newsletter.

*Ken Budny** – facilities manager for Post-Morrow Foundation and responsible for providing information about building nest platforms.

*David Shore** – a vital member of the committee from the beginning
*Anne Meinhold** – oversaw the archaeological survey necessary to get clearance for the project.

*Tom and Connie Ludlam** – Tom, a member of the Post-Morrow Foundation Board and Connie provided leadership and continuity to the committee as well as seeking assistance from CableVision and Brookhaven National Laboratory.



Anthony Graves and Sharon Wolgemuth – work in the Town of Brookhaven Department of Environmental Protection and provided assistance with mapping.

Karen and Keith Rowley – provided assistance in researching and reviewing documents listed on the web-site regarding Dennis' articles and research on ospreys.

Mike Scheibel – of the Nature Conservancy who provided ornithological advice on the osprey.

We are grateful to the authors of the various articles appearing in this newsletter, David Gessner, Anthony Graves, Art Cooley, Marilyn Abbey and Tom Shea et al.

We also would like to acknowledge the following companies and individuals for their assistance to the project. *Doug Romeo and Optimum Online* that carries the signal from the nest site to the server, *Brookhaven National Laboratory* which hosts the server computer, *KC Electronics Distributors Inc.* in East Setauket supplied the underground cable to the nest pole and contributed part of the order, *Bob Sack* who supplied the super long ladder that allowed us to install the steel camera arm and *John Maloof* who loaned the block and fall to hoist the arm up and down on its hinge.

— CONTRIBUTORS TO THE DENNIS PULESTON OSPREY FUND

We are deeply grateful for those who have supported the Dennis Puleston Osprey Fund. The following list of individuals and organizations is hopefully complete. If we have omitted anyone we apologize. The people who have remembered Dennis through this fund have contributed greatly to his legacy of protecting the osprey and we thank them for their contribution.

Marilyn Abbey & Family
Isabel Beadleston
Jane Belzak
Russell & Judith Bird
Henry Borntraeger
Brookhaven Village Association
Ed Call
Robert & Judith Chernaik
Elizabeth Coffin
The Community Foundation
Art & Nancy Cooley
Farrell Decker
Nicholas & Annette Delihias
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Tom Stock
Francesca Stoner
Robert & Paul Stoutenburgh
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Evan Williams
Owen Williams
Richard & Ann Wiswall
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FROM NEST TO DESKTOP —

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Laboratory using the local Optimum Online service of Cablevision. This second machine acts as the video server to make the live streams from the computer at the nest site available to multiple users at once. It runs the Helix Universal Server software, also from RealNetworks. An interested bird watcher's RealPlayer or RealOne player will automatically select the appropriate stream for their Internet connection to view the live video and audio. The server software also archives the streams so that individual files of highlights of the ospreys can be made.



Rick Mohlman attaching the arm (in the down position) to the pole

So go to the web site www.postmorrow.org/OspreyFund/ and watch the development of a new family of these spectacular birds.

ECOSYSTEMS...

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Two suggestions have been offered to explain the poor rates of the eastern population of ospreys. The first involve the recent nesting of cormorants on Gardiner's Island. Today, there are about 1,200 pairs nesting there while in the 1960s there were none. Competition for food, therefore, could be one explanation. The second suggestion is based on the disappearance of menhaden, locally called bunkers. Menhaden are fish that swim close to the surface in dense schools. They are easy prey for an osprey and a quick source of food when the nestlings are biggest. Unfortunately there has been a precipitous decline in landings of menhaden. Once a fish that provided more than 40,000 tons of fish a year in New York State now provides only two tons a year according to data kept by the National Marine Fishery Service.

While we all are encouraged by the spread of the osprey to the west and its good reproductive rate, the full recovery may depend upon the full restoration of another species that has been depressed for different reasons. So, as my grandmother used to say "if it isn't one thing it's another." The lesson may be that the osprey has returned to an ecosystem that has been altered in other ways while it was struggling to overcome the DDT challenge.