

Banding of the Osprey

By Bruce Julian

In the 80's and 90's the Osprey were on the in danger specie list. As I began to volunteer at False Cape State Park in the early 90's Reese Lukei had already started trying to help bring the bird population back. He had helped by having volunteers build platform and place in and around Back Bay. Another way was to go out to nest after the birds had gone back south for the winter and check to see how many eggs were lay and how many hatched. He had found out that more had not hatch than did, and these most of the time were thin shell and had cracks in them, so he started checking into this to try and found out Why!

Another thing he did was to band the young birds each year before they were old enough to fly away from the nest. By doing this he could keep track of them and see how far they flew each year and where they travel too. This is where my story begin, it was on a day in 1997 that he asked me if I wanted to go out with him and Chuck Butler and band some of the birds. I jumped at the chance to work with Reese, because he is so knowledgeable about all birds. We met at the shop area around 8:00 A.M. where we ready the boat for are trip that would take about 6 hours. Along with the bands, pliers, and a step ladder, we took water and food for our lunch. This year he was running a little late on banding and was afraid some of the birds may have left the nest.

We started north from Wash Woods and we had only gone about one mile when we stopped at the first platform. As Chuck maneuvered the boat up under the platform I would wrap the bow line around the pole, then Chuck and I would steady the boat while Reese would place the ladder in the front of the boat up to the nest. I had never been this close to a nest which had birds in it, and was not sure what the parents would do when Reese looked into their home and took one of their young. Reese had done this for years and he did not hesitate to climb the ladder and with the birds flying over head and diving down at him, took one of the young out and brought it into the boat. Now it was time to band the bird as fast as we could in order to not upset the bird anymore than we had too. This being my first time doing this I watched and tried to learn how to do it the right way, but Reese had done of that, telling me to put the band around the talon and while he held the bird to clamp it with the pliers, which I did. This was on the job training !

Moving on to the next platform which was about two miles across the bay to the west we came up to a duck bind with a platform which was about 30 feet from it. Once again we tide up to the pole and Reese place the ladder and climbed up. This time there were two young birds in the nest with the parents flying over head and as Reese reached the top of the nest the young birds open their wings out trying to fly away. Well, the wind was blowing enough to pick up one of the birds with the out streaked wings and blow it off the nest. As we watch this young bird, not knowing how to fly, being blown backwards for about 300 feet just above the water line there was not much we could do. I saw where he went down in the Black Needle Grass and tried to remember that spot while we hurried to band the other bird. This only took about 15 minutes and we untied the rope and headed for the other young bird. When we reached the spot where the bird had gone out of sight, there in the grass he was tangle up in the grasses so bad he could not get loose. I thought Reese would get out and retrieve the bird but as I tide the boat to a small bush he motion for me to go get the bird. As I tried to walk through the tall, wet, Needle Grass, I was not sure what to expect when I reached for him. Not sure which one of us was the most frighten, me or the bird, but as I reach for him he quitted down and looked glad that I was untangling him from the grass. We put a band on his leg and carry him back to his nest, where his family was glad to see him. We continue on and on this day we coved about 10 miles of the bay and checked on 12 or 13 nest. The sad part was we only found five young birds out of about 25 eggs.

Over the years people like Reese has learn how to help the birds and today they are no longer on the in danger list. I am not sure how long this will last because I have seen less and less birds in the past 3 years. In 2005 we stopped building the platforms and the winds and ice have taken a toll on the ones that we had up before then. I hope the day never comes that we no longer have an Osprey flying over head, here in the park.



(Photo by Greg Hodges)