

A Short Summary of the Michigan DNR (MDNR) Osprey Reintroduction Program of Southern Michigan

**Written by: Jim Kortge
for
Osprey Watch of Southeast Michigan (OWSEM)
March 28, 2011**

Executive Summary

This document represents the authors observations and data collected by OWSEM volunteers (and others) during the period from 1998 through 2010. From 1998 through 2007, Osprey hacking programs took place at four Southern Michigan locations. Of these, the one undertaken at Kensington Metropark, near Milford, MI from 1998-2002 was the most successful and productive, based on the number of verified returning birds and their success in nesting.

MDNR Osprey Reintroduction Program – Goal

The goal of the MDNR Osprey Reintroduction Program was to achieve 30 nesting Osprey pairs by the year 2020.

MDNR Osprey Reintroduction Program – Operations

Parallel Osprey hacking programs were conducted at Maple River State Game Area (SGA), North of Lansing, MI and Kensington Metropark. At the Maple River facility, the program ran from 1998 through 2000. A total of 15 Osprey chicks were released. At the Kensington facility, the program ran from 1998 through 2002, where a total of 24 Osprey chicks were released, but only 23 fledged successfully. It was later determined that the unsuccessful chick had an enlarged heart and was incapable of sustained flight. He was eventually sent to the Busch Wildlife Sanctuary in Jupiter, FL, to serve as an educational raptor.

Returning Ospreys from the Maple River program could be best described as “limited”, due to the fact that minimal effort took place to locate and identify them. The fact that there are Ospreys nesting in the Maple River area suggests that one or more of that program's chicks may have returned to that area to breed. One of the Maple River chicks, banded as C20 (a female) and released in 1999, has been breeding in Northern Michigan since 2004. C30 from the 2000 release was discovered in Minnesota and nested there from 2004 through 2007.

With the Kensington Metropark program, 5 chicks found their way back to Southeast Michigan. They were all located and identified by volunteers who helped with the hacking effort. The first returning chick, C05, who was released in 1998 and returned in 2001 and in the subsequent two years, was not known to have nested. C09, released in 1999, returned in 2002 to Kensington Metropark, where he successfully nested and produced the first program offspring. He has returned every year since then and successfully nested except for 2010, when his mate unexpectedly left the nest and did not return. C13, released in 1999 was discovered in Wisconsin in 2003. C22, a 2000 release returned in 2003 and has successfully nested each year since then. C33 and C37 from the 2001 class returned in 2007 and 2005 respectively and have been successfully nesting each year since then.

The Stony Creek Metropark (Rochester, MI area) hacking program ran from 2003 through 2007. That program released 18 chicks. No chicks are known to have returned from the program as of the fall of 2010. Interestingly though, ospreys are being reported and are nesting in that area, where none were present in the preceding decades.

A fourth hacking program was conducted in Barry County from 2003 through 2007. That program released 10 chicks. No chicks from that program are known to have returned as of the fall of 2010.

MDNR Osprey Reintroduction Program – Conclusions

In the preceding decades before the advent of the MDNR Osprey Reintroduction Program, no Ospreys were known to be nesting in Southern Michigan. With the first successful nest and single chick from the C09 nest in 2002, the osprey population in Southeast Michigan has sustained spectacular growth. This area has gone from 1 nest and one chick in 2002 to 22 nests and 43 chicks in 2010. Also during that period of time, a known total of 176 Osprey chicks have successfully fledged. Adding in the remainder of Southern Michigan brings the total active nests in 2010 to 37 and the fledged chicks for that year to 53. The DNR goal of 30 nesting Osprey pairs by 2020 was achieved in 2009, some 11 years ahead of expectations!

Note: An important key to a successful Osprey reintroduction program is to be diligent in selecting male chicks. Their propensity to return to the release area can spell the difference between “success” and “failure” for a program. Accurately sexing 4-5 week old chicks is very difficult, even for experts. That said, we believe that the chicks used in the Michigan Reintroduction Program were at least 90% males.