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## ELEVATED CONCERN

Threats remain for ospreys, recently removed from NJ endangered list

Jim Walsh Cherry Hill Courier-Post | USA TODAY NETWORK – NEW JERSEY

Conservationists cheered when ospreys flew off New Jersey’s list of threatened species earlier this year. ● But that celebration’s now tempered by concern for the predatory birds, also known as fish hawks. ● “We’ve been seeing early signs of food stress, with more nests failing to produce young,” said Ben Wurst, who monitors ospreys for the Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey. ● “It’s hopefully more of an isolated event that won’t continue.” ● Ospreys have made a remarkable comeback in New Jersey, going from approximately 50 nests in the 1970s to a record 800 in 2023, according to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

But preliminary nest surveys this year have showed instability, said Melanie Schroer, a Stockton University biology instructor.

“Nobody can really point a finger and say it’s definitely one thing or the other at this point,” said Schroer. The educator, assisted by Stockton students, monitors nests in marshes along the Mullica River for a statewide volunteer project led by Wurst.

“Many of the outcomes point to food availability as the primary culprit, but we need to investigate more,” Schroer added, noting “reproductive outcomes are influenced by so many variables that interact in complex ways.”

Schroer, assisted by Stockton student volunteers, surveyed 20 nests in late June. Half had no eggs or chicks, and seven had failed since an earlier survey in May.

“It was sad and disheartening to see so many empty nests that were previously documented as having chicks or eggs,” said Stockton senior Breanna Hawkins, according to an account from the university.

But the survey team also rescued two osprey chicks that had fallen from a storm-damaged nest.

Schroer and Wurst found the chicks in thick cordgrass beneath a nesting platform. Students helped to rebuild the nest with reeds.

The Stockton students “held the fragile birds and noticed all the details up close — an egg tooth used to break out of the shell on the tip of the beak, little nostrils and blood orange eyes that mostly wanted to stay shut,” said the account.

Wurst returned the chicks to the restored nest and left two fish for their next feeding.

With luck, the chicks will grow into birds that are almost 2 feet long, and have a wingspan of 4½ to 6 feet, according to the DEP.

Ospreys, listed as an endangered species in 1974, have benefitted from conservation measures taken about that time.

An insecticide, DDT, that weakened the birds’ eggs and thwarted reproduction was banned



ABOVE: Students from Stockton University volunteer in a seasonal survey of osprey nests in platforms along the Mullica River. The New Jersey Osprey Project currently monitors approximately 30 nests along the Pinelands stream.

TOP: An osprey soars over the Mullica River in South Jersey’s Pinelands.

PHOTOS BY SUSAN ALLEN/STOCKTON UNIVERSITY

nationwide in 1972. And state biologists in that decade placed chicks and eggs from nests where DDT was less heavily used into nests that had failed to produce young.

Also, man-made platforms have been erected to hold ospreys’ elevated nests, replacing the trees lost to coastal development.

Ospreys are most common along the Atlantic Coast, but are increasingly nesting atop communications and power-transmission towers along the Delaware River and its upper bay, the DEP said.

The birds are reproducing above the rate needed to sustain their population, said Wurst, who assesses the species’ health through the New Jersey Osprey Project.

Still, they face many challenges.

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## A vision for the arts in Camden

Theater company moving, expanding in Camden

Kaitlyn McCormick  
Cherry Hill Courier-Post | USA TODAY NETWORK – NEW JERSEY

Desi P. Shelton knew Camden’s Mechanic Street was special.

There’s a reason she’s stayed in the area so long, first as a resident, then as the artistic director of Camden Repertory Theater, housed at the 445 Mechanic St. address once neighboring her own.

Shelton’s vision for the arts in Camden is, at its core, simple: Everyone should have access to theater.

A director, playwright and actress, Shelton started the nonprofit as a means to provide local residents with opportunities to experience the arts and see their stories reflected back to them.

“All I saw was — Camden needed a theater company,” Shelton said.

Now, that company is growing.

Across from the United House of Prayer, right along Broadway, a former Lamboy Furniture Company showroom is to be the new home of the Camden Repertory Theater, made possible through grant funding and recognition from national theater coalitions.

In January, Camden Rep was acknowledged as a 2024 National Theatre Company Grant recipient, receiving \$100,000 from the American Theatre Wing.

See THEATER, Page 2A



Desi P. Shelton left, the executive artistic director of Camden Repertory Theater, and theater’s artist in residency India Marie Cross stand in front of the future home of Camden Repertory Theater, located at 918 Broadway in Camden.

CHRIS LACHALL/USA TODAY NETWORK ATLANTIC GROUP

## Pitman residents to vote on light rail referendum

Joseph P. Smith  
Cherry Hill Courier-Post | USA TODAY NETWORK – NEW JERSEY

Pitman Borough residents are to weigh in this Election Day on the idea of running a light rail passenger service through town on its way to its final stops in Glassboro.

This is a ballot question that borough council members narrowly approved at their meeting July 28. The initiative went out this week to the Gloucester County Clerk’s Office for processing.

Aug. 8 is the last day under state law for municipal and county government officials to submit non-binding ballot questions ahead of a general election.

See REFERENDUM, Page 2A

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