

Osprey Conanicus expected to return to island

By Sam Bari

Chris Powell, scientist at the Wildlife and Fisheries Division of the state Department of Environmental Management, reports that the osprey news is for the most part good. Two Jamestown families have sponsored osprey-nesting poles that will be erected on their properties in the Ft. Getty area.

Also, Conanicus, one of the first birds hatched at the Great Creek osprey nest on North Main Road in 2005, is alive and well in an excellent osprey habitat in the Zapata swamps of southwest Cuba, Powell said. Conanicus has been gone almost two years and is expected to return to Jamestown this spring. If all goes well, he will find a mate and breed more raptors.

"Unfortunately, we have lost touch with Comet (Metacommet), Conanicus' sibling hatched in 2006 in the nest at the Great Creek marsh," Powell said. This means that the transmitter could have malfunctioned, fallen off, or not received enough sun to recharge and transmit. There is also a chance that the bird has perished, he added. Comet had an excellent journey south, where he stopped at the Zapata swamp in Cuba where his older brother is staying. After a few days, he moved on to South America, the biologist said.

Each bird was fitted with a miniature satellite transmitter by Dr. Rob Bierregaard of the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, who has studied ospreys and other raptors for more than 30 years. The birds' positions are downloaded by ARGOS and plotted on maps, enabling anyone with Internet access to track their migrations via the World Wide Web.

Once in South America, Comet winged his way to the Choco region west of the Andes and joined the flyway taken by many ospreys from the Midwest. By mid-October he had settled down in the Cordillera Occidental, on the western slope of the Andes. Although far from the sea, this is one of the wettest corners of the planet, receiving



An osprey and chick in the nest at Great Creek. Jamestown Press file photo

up to 480 inches of rain annually, Powell said.

In addition to Powell's report on the Jamestown birds, Dr. Bierregaard sent information about other birds from the New England area and included topics of interest to osprey enthusiasts.

He said that Moshup, the Martha's Vineyard bird from this year, is alive. The bad news is that he was shot and brought in to someone who is caring for him in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic. Bierregaard does not hold out much hope for Moshup, as ospreys are notoriously difficult to rehabilitate. "They're just too nervous in captivity to calm down enough to eat," he said. He finds that ironic in a bird that so easily acclimates to nesting on light towers over shopping mall parking lots. "I guess their personal space is narrowly defined and very important to them. The person who has the bird is not experienced in dealing with injured birds, but took the initiative to call me (His phone number is on the transmitter)," Bierregaard added.

Within a couple of hours of getting the call from Antonio, Moshup's current caretaker, Bierregaard said that he found the e-mail address of a conservation biologist who works on Hispaniola and got the name and phone number of someone at the zoo in Santo Domingo. He is trying to get the bird over to the zoo, where they'll have a better chance of helping Moshup out than Antonio does, Bierregaard said.

Not too many years ago, it would have been mind boggling to have made those connections so fast. "Now, we sort of expect that the world is that small," Bierregaard added. "I don't suppose the folks who put the Internet together could have predicted that their concoction would help someone care for an injured osprey from a thousand miles away, but that's how it worked out," he said.

While Moshup's chances probably aren't good, given ospreys' nature in such situations, we did get the transmitter back, and that's a \$3,000 windfall, Bierregaard noted.

He also mentioned that David Gessner, author of "The Return of the Osprey," a must read for ospreyphiles, and the soon to be released "Soaring With Fidel", has put together a great Web site devoted to ospreys, <http://www.ospreyworld.com>. He said that the site offers lots of fascinating info on ospreys, including a guest essay by Alan Poole on the state of ospreys around the world and the latest research into their biology. "I'll write the next guest essay on migration," Bierregaard said.

Bierregaard added that "David's upcoming book, "Soaring with Fidel," chronicles his travels as he followed the birds we tagged in '04 and the BBC crew filming their documentary. "Fidel," I believe is our own Bluebeard (the adult male from the Outermost Inn nest over the Gay Head cliffs), whom David renamed with appropriate poetic license, to recognize the temporary Cuban citizenship that most east-coast Ospreys enjoy twice a year."

Bierregaard also announced that the BBC documentary will air on the Animal Planet at 8 p.m. on the East Coast next Monday, Feb. 26. It has already been aired in the UK and South America. He encouraged enthusiasts to watch it live and relive the '04 migration. "Jaws, Homer, and Conanicus should be heading north sometime soon. Stay tuned for new maps," he added.



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