

Ospreys at Jug Bay



Photograph courtesy of Matt Felperin

The Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) is a fish-eating, migratory bird of prey. It is a large raptor reaching more than 24 inches in length and with a 71 inch wingspan. A population of these birds return to the Jug Bay area each year around the beginning of March to breed. They lay 2-3 eggs per nest and the chicks hatch in 8-10 weeks. Although the chicks can fly at 8 weeks, they still rely on their parents for food until they become proficient hunters. In late August, Ospreys begin migrating as far as South America for the winter. Juveniles will spend two years in the tropics before returning as adults to breed in the same area they hatched.



Photograph courtesy of Greg Kearns



Photograph courtesy of Matt Felperin

During the 1950's and 60's, Osprey populations declined drastically due in part to toxic effects of pesticides such as DDT. Because of excessive use, DDT would eventually bioaccumulate in fish tissue at high levels and when consumed interfered with an Osprey's calcium production. As a result, birds became infertile or laid eggs that were thin-shelled and easily broken when incubated. The United States banned DDT in 1972 and the Osprey population slowly began to recover.

In 1977, Patuxent River Park began installing man-made nesting towers in Jug Bay to help with recovery efforts. Presently, the park now monitors over 60 towers in the greater Jug Bay area. Starting in 1983, park staff began placing leg bands on chicks to study Osprey ecology and migration patterns. Installation of nest towers and banding soon expanded to cover much of the Patuxent River.



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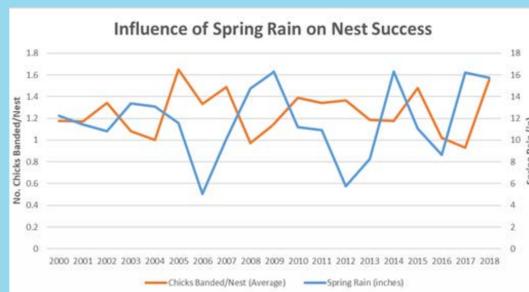
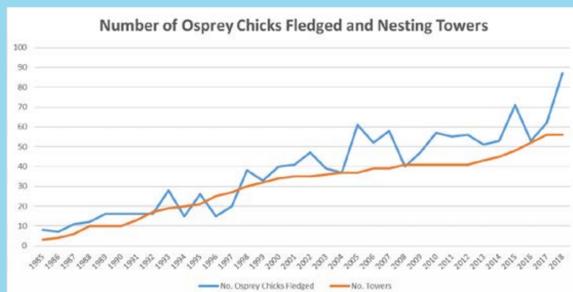
The story of the Osprey is one of success. Today, the Osprey population has fully recovered. Though no longer in decline, the Osprey conservation program continues to manage over nest towers with the goal of stewardship, education, and population monitoring. As of 2018, Patuxent River Park staff and volunteers have banded 1,174 Ospreys in Jug Bay and over 4,000 total ospreys on the Patuxent River. Over 75 of these banded osprey have been re-encountered later on in their life, revealing information on their movements. One banded nestling has continued to return Jug Bay to produce her own young for the past 20 years!



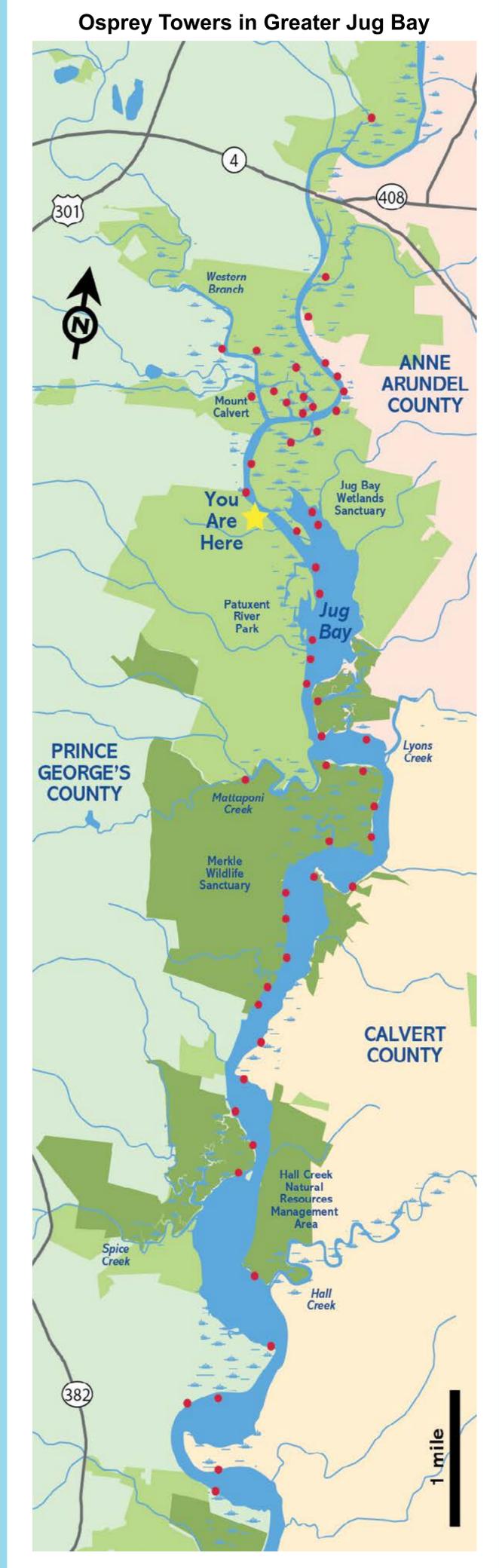
Recovery Locations of Patuxent River Park's Banded Osprey

Map provided by Google Maps, data provided by Greg Kearns

Since 1985, over 1,100 Ospreys have been banded in the Greater Jug Bay area. Osprey data provided by Greg Kearns



Inclement weather such as rain totals can have a significant impact on a chick's survival. Weather data provided by weather.gov and osprey data provided by Greg Kearns



Photograph courtesy of Matt Felperin



Photograph courtesy of Barbara Statas