

HISTORIC NOTE ON GARDINER'S ISLAND AND ITS OSPREYS

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Members of the Linnaean Society of New York were recently (14 Dec. 1971) privileged, though disheartened, to hear Dennis Puleston's account of the status of Ospreys on Gardiner's Island. The island, in eastern Long Island sound, has held what may be the world's largest aggregation of nesting ospreys. The decline in the fortune of osprey populations is now well known, and Ames (J. Appl. Ecol. 3 (suppl.):87-97, 1966) discussed the relationship between the decline of the Osprey and the concentration of chlorinated hydrocarbons in their eggs. This relationship is now all too familiar. Recently a hopeful note has been sounded by reports that certain Osprey populations, particularly those in Florida, appear to have stabilized (Henny & Ogden, J. Wldlf. Mgmt., 34:214-217, 1970), and also that certain populations of peregrines may be gradually recovering (Ratcliffe, B.T.O. News, no. 49, p. 1, 1972).

Unfortunately there is another threat to Ospreys and all our wildlife, which is the threat of habitat destruction. Ironically, this threat is posed to the birds of Gardiner's Island, by a proposal to make that island a National Park. At the end of the last century the proposal for a National Park in northern Wyoming (Yellowstone) assured the survival of certain game animals, particularly the bison. At present, however, when pressures for recreational use of park land exceed pressures for wildlife conservation, such a proposal for Gardiner's Island, must be viewed as a threat to the Ospreys. In view of the continuing interest in Ospreys, I am presenting below part of a letter written in 1810 by Mr. John L. Gardiner to the ornithologist Alexander Wilson. The information was incorporated in Wilson's work on *American Ornithology*. The letter sheds some light on one of the early Gardiners and on the life of the Osprey 150 years ago. The entire text of the letter has been published elsewhere (Auk 12:359-362, 1895) and I cite here only a few paragraphs from this intriguing document.

Gardiner's Island, April 30th 1810

Mr. Alexander Willson. (sic)

I have received so much instruction & amusement from reading your first and second volume of Ornithology and as a real American am so well pleased with the execution of the work particularly the 2d vol. — as to the plates — that I cannot omit giving you the trouble of hearing how much pleasure you have given a plain farmer — in publishing your works, — which as to its execution of every kind has not been exceeded in America —. . . If it will not be deemed impertinent

I will suggest to you how pleasing it will be to me & others that you add specimens of the eggs of the birds as far as you can. . . . Instead of small parts of dry limbs of trees sometimes perhaps you could place the birds on living trees or shrubs or bushes, which would have a tendency of making the birds themselves look more lively & natural — or at least my fancy suggests this. . . . Where the male and female can be placed near each other it seems more pleasing at least to the courting or married pair.

I live on an Island of 3000 acres of land at the eastern extremity of Long Island. . . . The common birds are not here interrupted by school boys & are plenty. . . .

If ten volumes will not well contain our American Birds I hope you will add volumes enough to contain the whole. It is a work in which our national character is interested and I am anxious it should be a work of as much celebrity as any European publication. . . .

With much respect & esteem I am your friend.

John L. Gardiner

Facts as to the Fish Hawk on Gardiner's Island.

1. They are regular in arriving on the 21 March & in leaving the place on 21 Sept. . . .
3. They lay generally three eggs — hatch about 1 July. . . .
4. As soon as they arrive they wage war on the Eagle & by numbers and perseverance drive him off. . . .
10. Are so voracious that I presume when they have young they devour in 300 nests — two or three fish a day of 2 or 3 lbs. each fish —. . . .

Facts communicated by John L. Gardiner.

The above account is offered as a tribute to the Gardiners and the island they have managed to protect.

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