

NEWS

The Osprey Connection

Meet three women, thousands of miles apart, connected by a single species

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Watch on [YouTube](#) and Osprey is perfect—we are Ospreys.

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Published April 11, 2024

Hayley Beal has always been around Ospreys, watching them plunge towards the surface of her grandparents' lake, seeing them perched in beachfront mangroves, even before she knew them by that name.

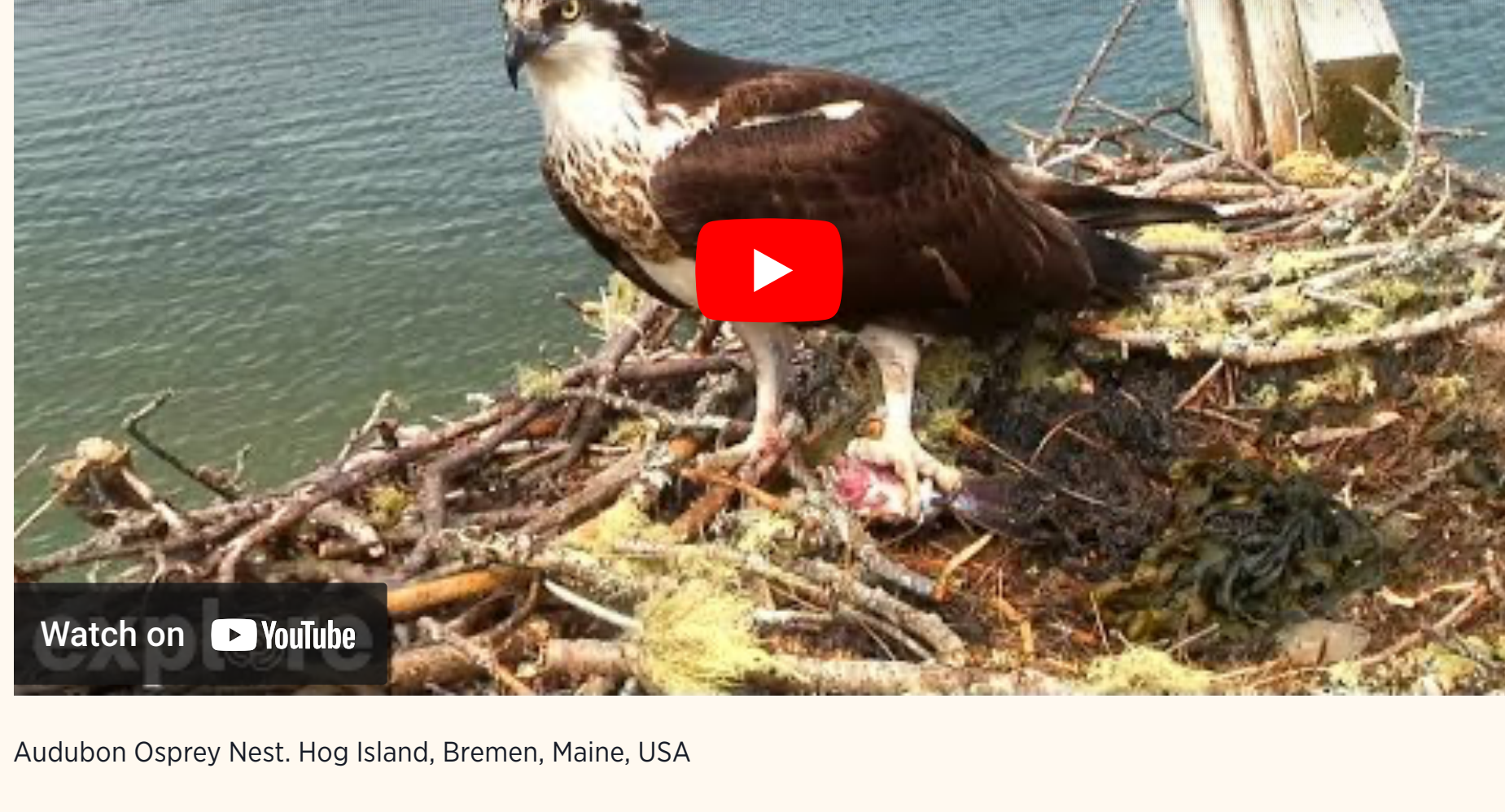
“Growing up in Florida, I’ve always seen them, at the beach, just driving around, they are always there,” she said. “When I was little, I was not aware of what type of bird they were-- I thought they were some type of eagle—but as I grew up my curiosity sent me to Google and I realized they were Osprey.”



Three great pictures in one: Hayley Beal, Hank, and his portrait. Photo: Courtesy of Hayley Beal

Hayley now volunteers every Sunday at Audubon’s [Center for Birds of Prey](#) near Orlando. She works with injured raptors in the trauma clinic and with a resident Osprey named Hank to educate the visitors about the importance of preserving Florida’s waterways, woods, and scrubland as intact habitats for the state’s wildlife. Hayley relishes working with Ospreys. “I admire their resiliency and free spirits. The look of curiosity in their eyes tells me that they are always intrigued by their surroundings. Not to mention they are the ultimate fisherman!”

Ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*) are magnificent birds of prey with a [widespread distribution across the Americas](#). Found near both coastal and inland waterways, Ospreys link residents of watery landscapes from Alaska to Chile, where they are non-breeding migrants. Their populations have rebounded since the mid-20th century, when [the pesticide DDT](#) made its way into water bodies, contaminating fish and causing the shells of Osprey eggs and those of other fish-eating bird species to become too thin to support their weight. This led to reproductive failures and a crash in Osprey populations. The United States banned the chemical in 1972, followed by other countries across the Americas in subsequent decades. [The ban on DDT](#), coupled with habitat protection efforts and conservation initiatives, contributed to the successful recovery of Osprey populations across the Americas, highlighting the resilience of these raptors in the face of environmental challenges.

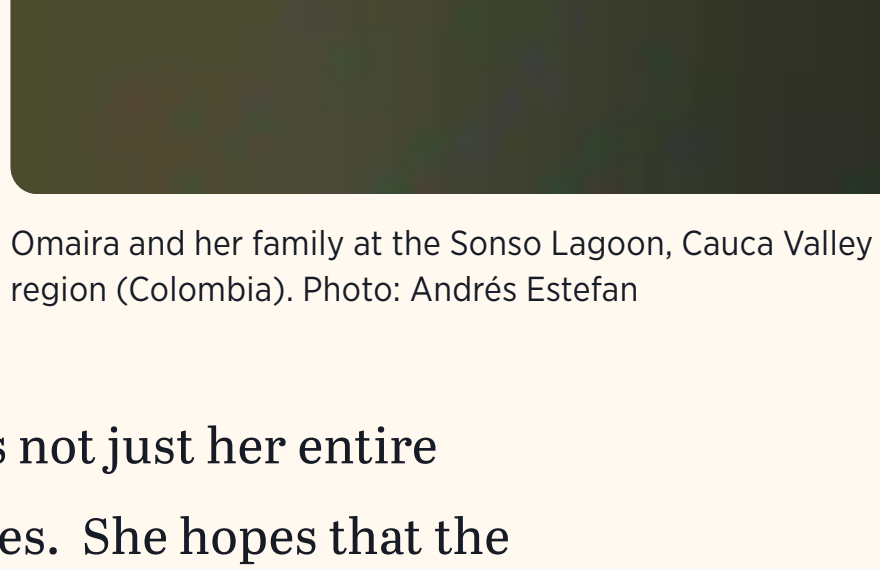


Audubon Osprey Nest, Hog Island, Bremen, Maine, USA

More than 1,700 miles south of Orlando as, say, a migrating Osprey flies, [Omaira Rendón runs the Osprey Ec lodge](#) in Colombia’s lush Laguna de Sonso, about 40 miles outside of Cali. Her to generations of local fishermen, choosing what to call her business was obvious.

“We decided to call it that because it’s what represents us,” she said. “Ospreys are fish eagles and that’s exactly what we are: small-scale fishermen like our ancestors. We looked for a relationship between birds and what we do, and the Osprey was perfect.”

Ecotourism is growing rapidly in Colombia, especially in the Laguna de Sonso, a complex of 24 individual [wetlands in Valle del Cauca](#). Home to 162 bird species and at the nexus of several migration routes, the area was named a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance in 2017.



Omaira and her family at the Sonso Lagoon, Cauca Valley region (Colombia). Photo: Andrés Estefan

Omaira is an avid birder and ecotourism evangelist. Her lodge employs not just her entire family, but local youths she trains as guides. She hopes that the network of local birders she’s creating can connect to others who share a passion for the bird along its long migration as community scientists.

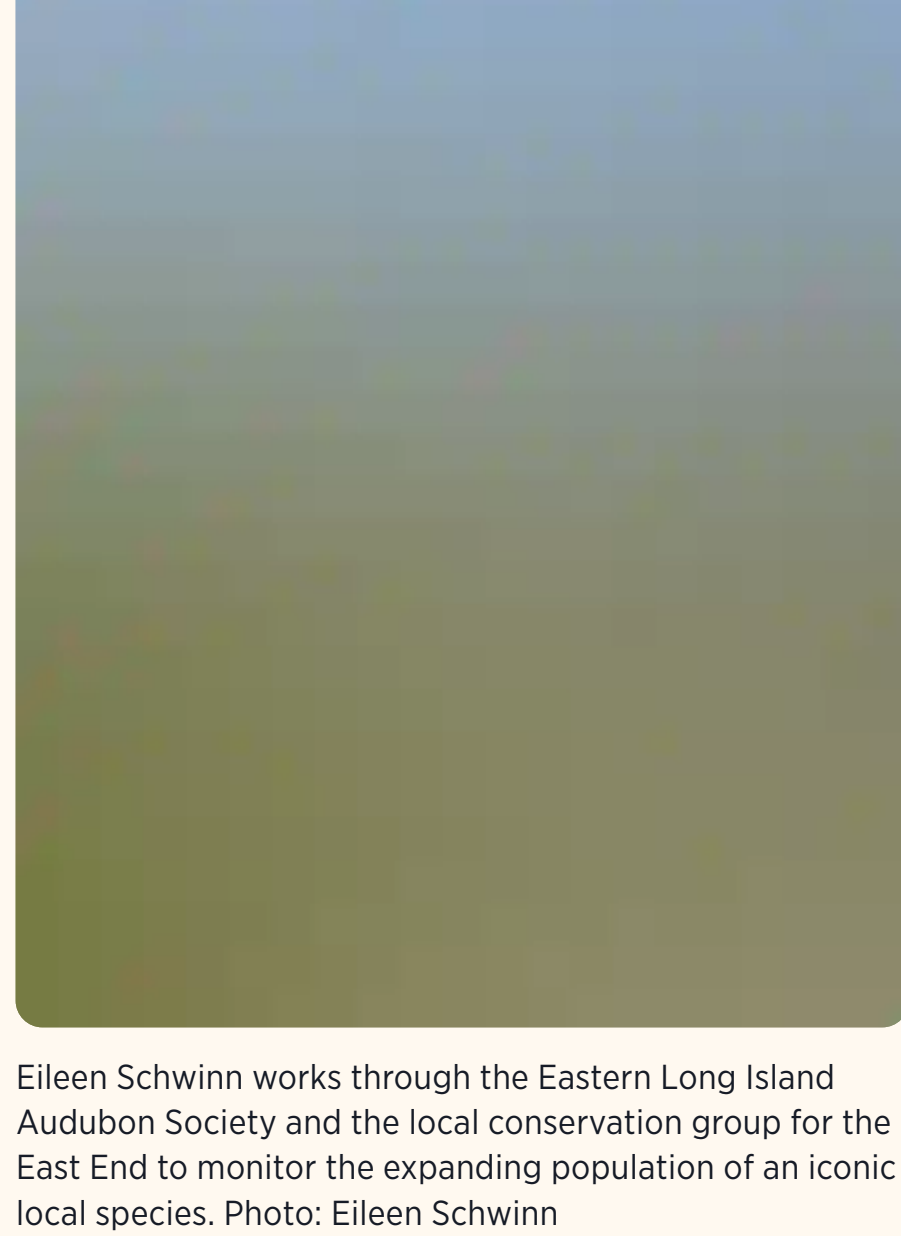
“There are many people around the world, because the Osprey has a wide range and we need to know exactly what these other stories are,” she said. “It would be great if we could join up, even through social media, to find solutions to the threats that exist in each region and find ways to fight them to be able to protect this species—it’s everyone’s responsibility.”



A room at the Osprey Ec lodge in Colombia’s lush Laguna de Sonso. Photo: Andrés Estefan

Two thousand miles north, Eileen Schwinn saw her last Osprey of the season while she and her husband were pulling their boat out of the water on a September afternoon near their home on Long Island. While she waits for the arrival of the Ospreys for the nesting season (they mate for life), she wonders where they go in winter.

“The last hanger-on was in [a nest](#) that was vacant for the last 15 years until last summer,” she said. “There were three chicks and he was the last. They’re following the fish patterns, and it’s always a big deal when the first Osprey is sighted in the springtime. It’s always in the paper – ‘the ospreys have arrived.’”



Eileen Schwinn works through the Eastern Long Island Audubon Society and the local conservation group for the East End to monitor the expanding population of an iconic local species. Photo: Eileen Schwinn

It wasn’t always like that. While she grew up on Long Island, Ospreys were a rare sight during her childhood, their numbers decimated by the use of DDT, beginning in the 1940s. By the time DDT was finally banned in 1972, Ospreys were critically endangered in New York and other states. Thanks in part to the work of Long Island activists who went on to found the [Environmental Defense](#)

[Fund](#), the birds bounced back spectacularly. Eileen now works through the [Eastern Long Island Audubon Society](#) and the local conservation group for the East End to monitor the expanding population of an iconic local species.

Through various efforts—rehabilitation, ecotourism, and local activism—people play a crucial role in preserving these magnificent birds and their habitats. In their migrations across the Western Hemisphere, the Ospreys themselves emphasize our shared responsibility to protect our shared ecosystems.

* Reporting from Colombia by Juliana Londoño.
** We thank the entire Sonso Lagoon community for their support and enthusiasm to achieve this hemispheric connection.

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