

Utilities powering birds' comeback

Utility companies often get a bad rap. They are usually in the news when their rates rise or when people think they don't respond to downed wires quickly enough.

And don't get me started on the Department of Transportation. Most people don't know much about the DOT, but they know they don't like it.

But did you know that some utility companies and the DOT are playing a role in the comeback of some birds of prey species that were once nearly eliminated from the area?



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FOR THE BIRDS

Take the Third Taxing District, for instance. TTD is the municipal utility company serving East Norwalk.

Remember that new Osprey nest in Veterans Park I wrote about last week? Well, the Third Taxing District knew about it before I did and took steps to make the nest safer for the birds. According to Jim Smith, general manager of TTD, the folks at the utility decided not to energize that section of the line. They also removed the transformers and other potentially dangerous obstacles around the nest. The line will likely be energized after any young birds have fledged. That will be long before the Norwalk Seaport Association Oyster Festival in September.

Also, TTD employees have been instructed not to disturb the nest.

"We would like to do our part to ensure the continued comeback of these beautiful birds to the area," Smith wrote in an email to me.

Another example of utilities helping out the local Osprey population may be found at Manresa Island. Both NRG and CL&P (now Eversource) have played roles in attracting and welcoming Osprey to nest in the area surrounding the now decommissioned power plant. CL&P, which leased land on the island, installed platforms on which the large birds of prey could build nests. They have installed platforms in other parts of the state as well. NRG supported the efforts and now the island boasts about half a dozen Osprey nests.

With the Osprey population exploding in the area and new nests



Photo by Chris Bosak

An Osprey pair copulates in their nest atop a utility pole in Veterans Park in East Norwalk last week.

popping up every year, the "fish hawks" are increasingly turning to utility-owned property on which to build their large nests of sticks and other debris. Light poles, telephone pole, cell towers ... all prime targets for an Osprey nest.

Just two examples of this are first-year nests near the Longshore neighborhood in Norwalk (on utility pole) and atop the cell tower near the Darien transfer station.

Now, what about the DOT?

A few weeks ago DOT workers were making preparations to remove the towers that are part of the railroad bridge in South Norwalk near the Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk. The towers will be removed as part of the project to replace the Walk Bridge that spans the Norwalk River. The workers came across a Peregrine Falcon

nest with the female sitting on eggs.

Instead of simply moving forward with their day's duties, the workers reported the nest. That particular part of the project has been put on hold until the birds are done with the nesting season. According to a biologist with the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, the DOT will include a box or some other nesting structure when the bridge is replaced.

It's nice to know these big utilities and state departments have the birds' best interest in mind.

For the Birds runs Thursdays in The Hour. Chris Bosak can be reached at bozclark@earthlink.net. Visit his website at birdsofnewengland.com.