

[From Fall 2004]

Osprey Nest a Hit

On March 3, 2004, the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge began broadcasting the activities of a local osprey nest to a monitor in the Visitors Center. This family, which now includes two adults and three chicks, has quickly become our biggest attraction.

Visitors delight in watching the adults return to the nest with large fish, feed and care for the chicks. Afterwards visitors can record their observations in our log. (One group of visitors saw an adult take off from the nest to defend the chicks from what it saw as an impending threat, which turned out to be a turkey vulture circling overhead.) Often, after viewing the broadcast, visitors bombard staff with questions. "How old are the chicks?" "What do they eat?" "How long will they stay in the nest?" Such interactions often result in a crash course on the natural history of these birds.

The chicks now almost equal their parents in size. Everyday they stretch and flap their wings as if preparing for takeoff. Right now, however, they are only thrown off balance and pitch face-first into the nest instead. But they will be leaving soon, and the osprey-cam broadcast will end for this season, and something new will take its place. The osprey-cam experiment was so successful that the Refuge is in the process of installing a tern-cam in the royal tern colony on Fisherman's Island.

Kelly Register, ESVNWR Intern

Follow-up Note from Yvonne Schultz - "All three youngsters successfully fledged mid-month but are still in the area, crying to their parents for guidance and periodically revisiting the nest as a safe resting point. The royal tern camera has been delayed due to technical difficulties and will be the featured item in 2005. It is as much a biological project as it is a public use enjoyment activity, since the camera will monitor day and night activity, helping the biologist to gain a better understanding of tern behavior and elements that are affecting their fledging success."