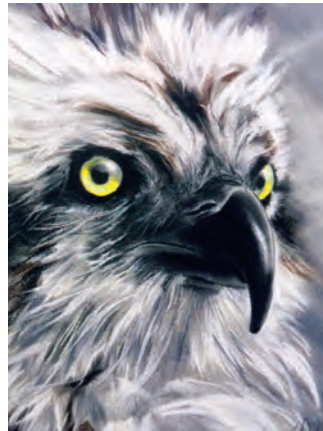


# OSPREY OF SAN FRANCISCO BAY: A 2018 UPDATE

*Anthony J. Brake*

The last decade has seen a rapid expansion of Osprey nesting along San Francisco Bay, after initially being established along the Mare Island Strait in Vallejo in the early 1990s. Almost all the nests are built on anthropogenic structures such as cranes, light towers, utility poles, and channel markers. This presents a conservation challenge in accommodating this highly productive population, but one that can be easily resolved by providing nest platforms to divert Osprey pairs from problematic structures.



The Osprey's yellow eyes stand out as the species lacks the bony supraorbital brow that other raptors have. Illustration: Chris Grogan

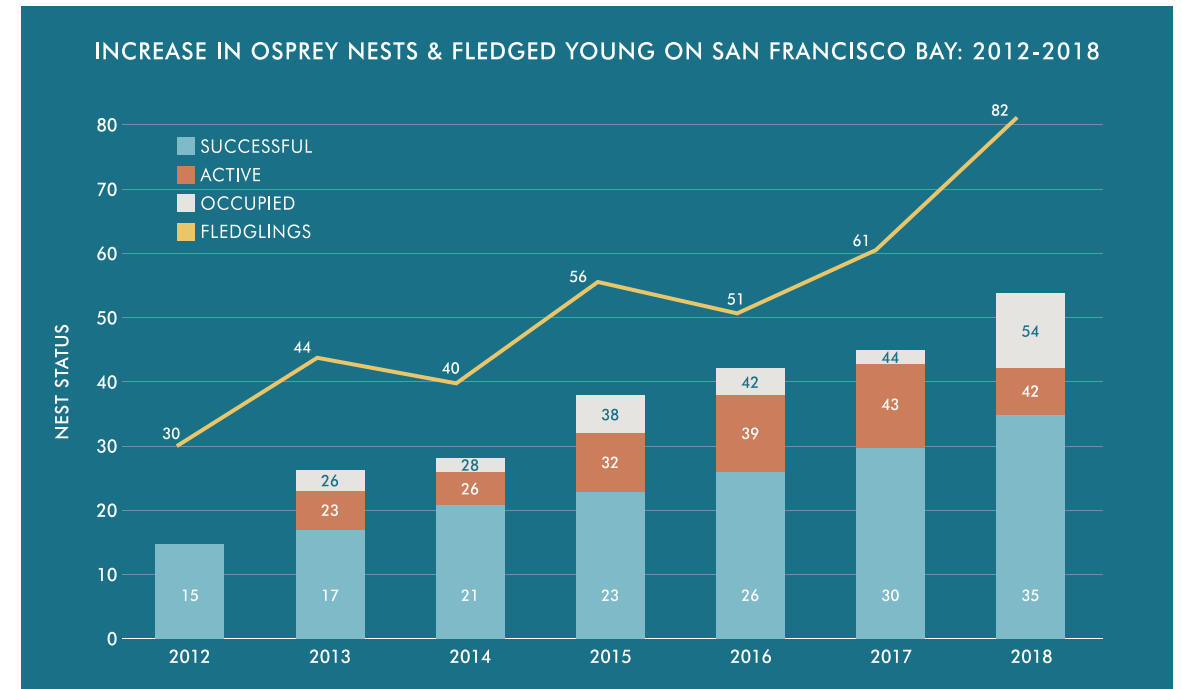
pairs, who can be expected to be successful in subsequent years.

I also predict that, as more Ospreys recognize channel markers as good nest substrates, their utilization could further facilitate expansion. In 2018, there were three successful nests on such markers, and a couple more are in use this year. Thousands of nests can be found on such markers in Chesapeake Bay, in Oregon, etc., though it may take some advocacy with the US Coast Guard (USCG) and harbor masters to allow this. It

The steady rise in nesting Osprey pairs continued in 2018. The number of successful nests increased to thirty-five from thirty in 2017. This amounts to a doubling of nests in only five years, from 2013 to 2018. There are currently high densities of nesting Ospreys both along the Mare Island Strait and along the Richmond shoreline, with fifteen active nests in each area. There is also a nexus currently developing in the Oakland-Alameda area. Expansion of Osprey nesting usually develops in clusters, so I expect further increases in the areas only recently populated, such as San Francisco, the Marin shoreline, and the South Bay. A number of new pairs were observed to make late nesting attempts in 2018—typical of inexperienced

used to be standard operating procedure for the USCG to remove Osprey nests along the Atlantic coast, but now they often leave them or make modifications to mitigate problems with navigation. Nest material was removed from two 2017 nests, but the Ospreys unsurprisingly rebuilt this season. It is encouraging that, in one case, USCG delayed servicing one of those markers to avoid nest disturbance. I hope we can work with USCG to coordinate the timing of navigation aid maintenance with Osprey nesting phenology specific to our local population, which is different from the Atlantic Osprey population, where there is the most experience. ●

**ANTHONY BRAKE** worked as a nest-finder for GGRO's Berkeley Cooper's Hawk study in the 1990s. In the early 2000's, he turned his attention to Ospreys. Tony saw more and more Ospreys near his home in Point Richmond, so in 2013, he gathered up a few key GGRO volunteers, and started tracing the Bay's edge, by foot, car, and boat looking for Osprey nests.



Osprey nest on channel marker in San Pablo Bay; this marker holds a foghorn operating between October and April. The US Coast Guard refrained from deactivating the foghorn in April 2018 as this Osprey pair was already actively nesting. As a result, the pair proceeded to successfully breed with the horn sounding every 10 seconds! Photo: Anthony Brake



Osprey nest on a power pole at the Chevron refinery facility in Richmond; Note in the lower image that the pole has been modified to accommodate this nest by adding a lower set of crossbars and relocating the wires. This nest has been in use since 2015. Photos: Anthony Brake



Osprey nest on power pole in Rodeo; This nest was seen to have collapsed on June 11, 2013 (upper photo). Pacific Gas & Electric workers added an artificial nest structure and modified the wiring later that year. In each subsequent year, it has hosted an active Osprey nest. Photos: Anthony Brake

