

The Fish Hawk

by P.J. Avenoso

Get my binoculars please, Lynn.

Where are they?

On the helms station.

Here, why didn't you get them?

I'm following an osprey, don't want to miss him.

What's he got?

I don't know. It's small, maybe a field mouse, although they don't usually eat them unless they're having trouble finding fish.

There are always fish; maybe they just like a varied diet.

Maybe. Well, regardless, here he comes, circling the nest to show off his prey to the chicks and mother.

I love trees, but that one obscures our view.

Yeah, but only at low tide, thank goodness. I would love to have a camera at the nest so we could watch the whole process from hatching to flight.

That would be great. I think I read somewhere that an environmental group did just that.

You're right. And right here on Long Island. Do you remember the raft trip we took up and down the Carmens River?

Yeah, we were boating out of Patchogue that year and used to drop the hook at the mouth of the river. Always wondered why no one on the south shore seemed to take advantage of the



beauty of that area, you know, Brookhaven Hamlet and Bellport Bay. Any time we were there we were alone.

Are you complaining?

No, I just don't understand the lack of interest people have in peace, quiet, and nature.

I agree, and on one hand I'm selfishly grateful, because it's like we have it all to ourselves. Yup, it's their loss.

Anyway, as I started to say about the raft trip, the Carmens River's west shore is the

Wertheim National Wildlife Refuge, which is 2400 acres of ecologically sensitive land that was added to the Pine Barrens in 1998. There are a number of osprey nests there, and one of them has a camera attached.

Why didn't we know that?

Well, I did, but I had forgotten about it. As a matter of fact, the camera has been in place and operational for three years now.

Isn't it something, right here in our own backyard are some of the coolest goings on, and we, all of us I mean, don't know about them, or take advantage of them?

It's no different than those Long Islanders who have never been to the Statue of Liberty or Empire State Building. Anyway, back to the nest. I did a little research and found that the camera will be active for another season starting in March and can be found online at <http://puleston.osprey.bnl.org>

What is the Puleston osprey?

Dennis Puleston was the man responsible for re-establishing the osprey population we see today. He figured out that DDT was the cause of thinning eggshells and the decline of the population. Through perseverance and court trials he was successful not only with eliminating DDT but also

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starting the Environmental Defense Fund, which then led to the EPA.

That's right, and over the years he's donated property to conservation organizations to further protect the south shore from development and, therefore, protect the wildlife.

And did you know that his heirs still live in Brookhaven Hamlet and are still true to Dennis's love for nature?

Back to the glorious bird of prey, the osprey. The bird is a raptor, meaning it's a meat-eating bird, but they have no teeth. Do you know why?

No, tell me Mr. Bird Lover.

OK! I will. They have no teeth because teeth would make them too heavy, hindering their ability to soar and curtailing their speed. They chew their food in an area of the stomach called the gizzard, a pouch of strong muscles that grinds the food. And do you know why they soar?

I give up; tell me.

They soar to save energy and also to avoid being spotted by their prey.

It seems like Mother Nature took care of everything for them.

I would have to agree. It amazes me also. I marvel every time I see them with a catch. These 22-inch birds weigh in at around four pounds and have a wing span of about 54 inches. They hunt from as high as 200 feet, too.

That's a pretty big bird, and they have to have good eyesight also to see a fish from those heights.

You're right, there. Their eyes are so big that they can't move them. They have to turn their whole head.

This is more obvious in the owl, which is also a raptor. Another interesting fact about their eyes is they have three eyelids. The third lid is partially transparent so the eye is protected when attacking their prey.

Wow, that's pretty cool. What else can you enlighten me with?

That's about all I know about the fish hawk, but I can tell you that thanks to people like Dennis Puleston, we're able to marvel at one of nature's finest specimens. And think, their salvation happened right here on Long Island. Now let's get dressed and head over to The Red Door for the finest crispy duck on Long Island! ■

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