

# PERSPECTIVE

## The state of the

# OSPREY

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**A** DECLINE THIS YEAR in the number of fledgling ospreys — the graceful, soaring raptor decimated by pesticides in the mid-1900s — is raising eyebrows among conservationists, though experts in Connecticut says it's too early to draw any conclusions.

In its annual Osprey Nation Report, the Connecticut Audubon Society said the number of confirmed fledglings fell for the first time since the census began in 2014. The 2022 count, compiled by volun-

teers, reported 835 osprey fledglings in the state, down 2.6% from 2021.

Fledglings, young birds with wing feathers large enough to fly, are an important gauge of the health of the state's osprey population. The osprey nesting season runs from April through August.

This year's decline came with an asterisk. The Audubon report said fledgling osprey were likely undercounted because data on several nests was inconclusive or incomplete. Fledging must be explicitly confirmed.

If the findings represent an actual decline, additional years of data will be needed to figure out why. Reasons could include random fluctuation, or the possibility the osprey habitat in Connecticut has reached "carrying capacity," the report said.

In 2022, volunteers compiled data on 827 nests; eggs were laid or hatched in 606 of those. Four hundred and thirteen of the active nests fledged 835 young.

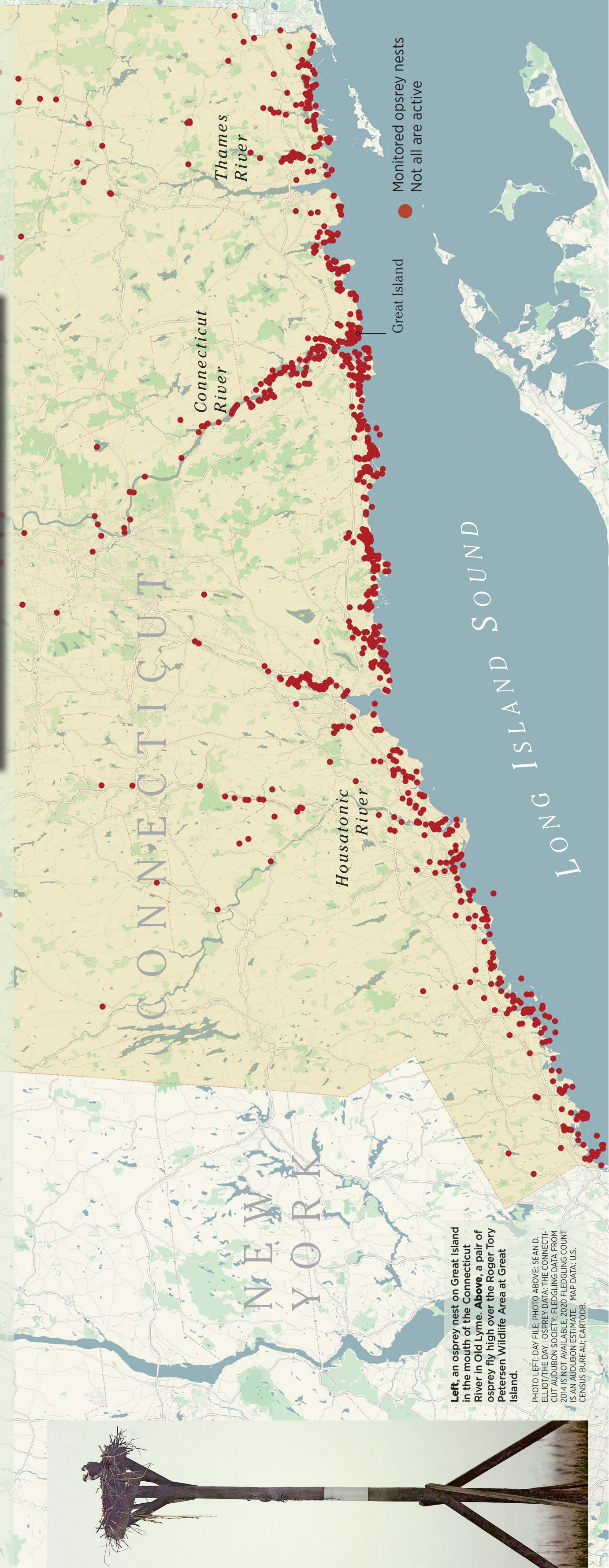
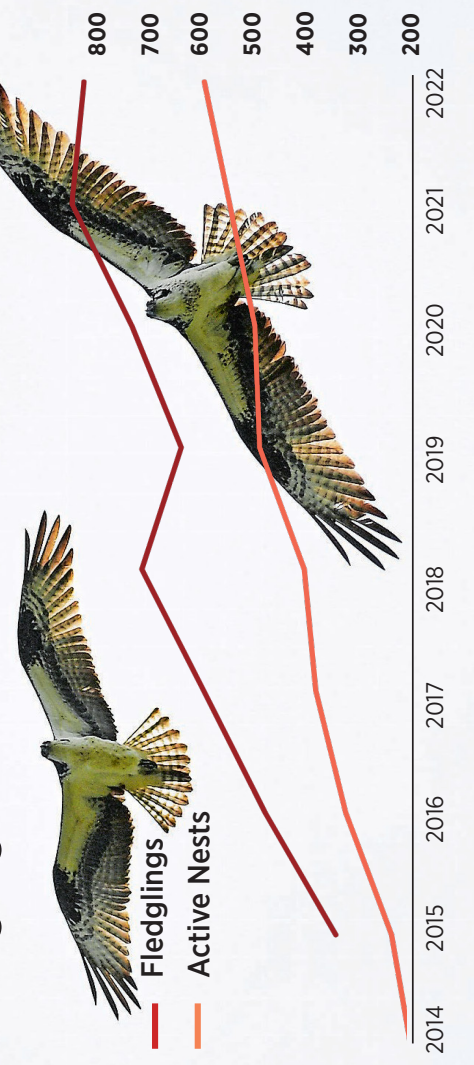
The annual Audubon report serves as something of an early warning system should environmental issues — like the harmful use of pesticides — arise. "There is no indication in 2022 that that is the case," the conservation group said.

Ospreys were among several species pushed to the point of extinction 50 years ago by the use of DDT and related pesticides. Among other things, the chemicals caused eggshell thinning, which meant eggs were often crushed in the nest. Osprey pairs declined 90% in Long Island Sound between 1950 and 1970.

DDT and its cousins were banned in the U.S. in 1972. The osprey population quickly bounced back, but is still tracked carefully by scientists and conservationists.

In Connecticut, most ospreys nest along the coast or waterways like the Thames and Connecticut rivers. The greatest concentration in the state is on Great Island in Old Lyme, at the mouth of the Connecticut River.

### Taking flight



**Left**, an osprey nest on Great Island in the mouth of the Connecticut River in Old Lyme. **Above**, a pair of osprey fly high over the Roger Tory Petersen Wildlife Area at Great Island.

PHOTO LEFT: DAY FILE; PHOTO ABOVE: SEAN D. ELLIOTT/THE DAY | OSPREY DATA: THE CONNECTICUT AUDUBON SOCIETY; FLEDGLING DATA FROM 2014 IS NOT AVAILABLE. 2020 FLEDGLING COUNT IS AN AUDUBON ESTIMATE. | MAP DATA: US CENSUS BUREAU; CARTODB.