# American Oystercatcher 2019 State and Country Updates

## Connecticut

<u>Audubon Connecticut</u>
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Overall, 2019 was a successful year for breeding American Oystercatchers in Connecticut. We located 101 pairs, 74 of which made nesting attempts and produced 64 fledglings. This is our second highest number of breeding pairs and we met our records from previous seasons for highest number of chicks fledged (2015) and total adults (2018). This season's productivity of 0.86 is the third highest since 2011.
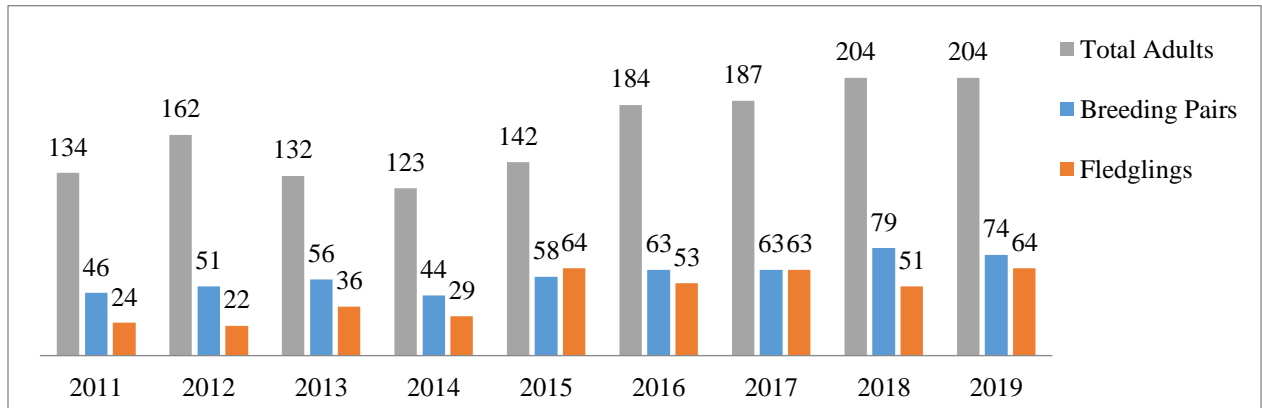


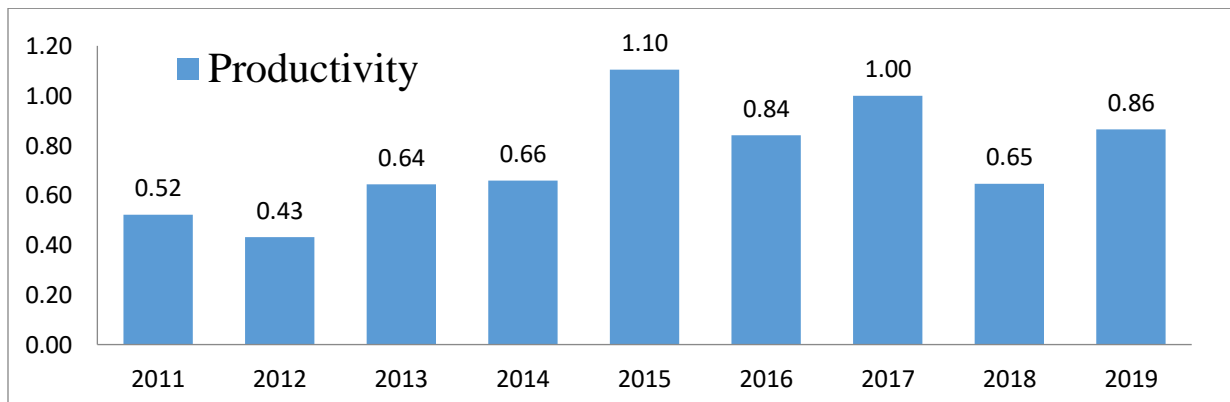Figure 1: AMOY Breeding Season Population from 2011 through 2019



Figure2: AMOY Productivity from 2011 through 2019

The boat, paired with one of our largest crews of field technicians, contributed greatly to our stewardship efforts and monitoring of both the breeding American Oystercatcher and Piping Plover populations this year. The boat allowed us to cover a large amount of ground/water, and we located four new nesting sites and a new staging area in Stamford. We were also able to help the CT DEEP with their tri-annual colonial waterbird breeding survey and local municipalities with the fencing of sensitive island breeding sites. A large field staff enabled us to not only monitor oystercatcher and plover productivity more effectively but also work on new projects and continue our banding efforts.

<u>Using Camera to Document Predation and Disturbance</u>

This season we started a new project to document disturbances impacting American Oystercatcher nesting success using remote cameras. The objective was to assess the variation, frequency, and impact of predation, as well as record severe weather events and human disturbance at different nesting sites. The cameras also enabled us to evaluate possible nest fate misclassification, such as nest failure misclassified based on observations at the nest bowl during regular monitoring intervals or due to the limited accessibility of specific site types.

The remote camera, Stealth Cam DS4K was selected based on a unique set of specifications to maximize data collection while minimizing or eliminating disturbance at the nest site. The DS4K has an extended battery life allowing it to run for 3 -10 months on a single set of batteries, a trigger speed of less than 0.5 seconds, detection range of up to 70 feet, and an infrared, no glow flash. The cameras are also equipped with photo and video capabilities.

Camera placement was deliberately biased to focus on oystercatcher nests. After a confirmed nesting attempt, cameras were placed inside the symbolic string fencing if present, at a distance of 10-20 feet from the nest. Cameras were installed on poles not exceeding a height of two feet in a lock box camouflaged to blend in with the surrounding substrate. The cameras were programmed to take a three photo burst when triggered combined with a capture delay period of half a minute. This configuration maximized data collection when triggered and the number of events captured and stored on the device during a single deployment based on pre-deployment camera testing. Cameras were not accessed during a deployment and only retrieved after the nesting attempt concluded in order to reduce disturbance to the nesting site. Many of the targeted American Oystercatcher nesting sites hosts other vulnerable nesting shorebird species such as Piping Plovers and Least Terns. These sites followed a strict protocol regarding camera deployment and retrieval in order to eliminate potential disturbances to these species.

The six cameras deployed this season collected over 13,000 photos capturing a wide range of events including human disturbance, nest overwash, and various predators. At three different sites the camera captured frequent human disturbance including people inside the string fencing and dogs at sites where they're prohibited during the nesting season. A camera deployed on Cockenoe Island captured an overwash event where the eggs were pushed out of the nest bowl. The adults then resumed incubating the eggs in the new location where they successfully hatched two chicks. One of the other cameras captured evidence of heavy predator activity around one of the nests at Hammonasset, where Fish Crows, Raccoon, Coyote, and Great Horned Owl frequented the nesting area.

Banding American Oystercatchers Continues for 2nd Season
We continued our banding efforts again this season and banded 13 new adults. Trapping methods included the use of a whoosh net and also noose carpets this season, which had the higher capture success rate of the two techniques. One bird banded at Sandy Point in West Haven, CT this June, Yellow N17, was recently been re-sighted in the Gulf of Fonseca off the west coast of Central America, the same wintering grounds that Red F3 (nesting in Darien, CT) goes to every winter. A post to Facebook about YE_N17 was one of our most popular this summer with a number of comments from volunteers who assist with our stewardship efforts at Sandy Point. We will continue our banding efforts next season and are looking into the possibility of fitting one of the Central American birds with GPS if technology and funding allow.