

## American Oystercatchers in Delaware

### Season summary

On average, Delaware has recorded 5 breeding pairs annually since 2010 (range = 0–12). In 2020, Delaware Division of Fish & Wildlife and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge monitored 4 breeding pairs of American oystercatchers at 2 sites in the State (Table 1). The first nest was found at Cape Henlopen State Park on 04/28/2020. Some adults were never confirmed as breeding pairs, as no nest was found, but held territories and displayed breeding behaviors (Table 1). In 2020, none of the nests we monitored hatched or fledged chicks (Table 1). Nest lost was associated with mammalian predation and poor weather or flooding events.

We resighted five uniquely marked adults. We observed three marked adults at CHSP (orange “YL7”, green “C84”, and black “PM”), and two marked adults at DSSP (green “AAP” and “ACE”). One marked breeding adult (green “ACE”) attempted to nest on the ocean beach at DSSP which failed but the adult was later seen in the marsh habitat of DSSP where we believe it may have attempted to reneest. We suspect more breeding pairs are using the marsh habitat in Delaware’s Inland Bays, and we hope to increase coverage in the coming year to capture this data.

Table 1. The distribution and nest outcomes from sites in Delaware, 2020. We present the number of confirmed breeding pairs (where a nest was found) and unconfirmed breeding pairs (where two adults were seen behaving territorially but no nest was ever found).

Delaware Site	Confirmed breeding pairs	Unconfirmed breeding pairs	Number of nests	Number of chicks	Successful fledglings
Cape Henlopen State Park (CHSP)	2	1	6	0	0
Delaware Seashore State Park (DSSP)	2	0	2	0	0
Mispillion Harbor (MH)	0	1	0	0	0
Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge (PHNWR)*	0	1	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

\*Data gleaned from weekly site reports. For more information contact Susan Guiteras ([susan\\_guiteras@fws.gov](mailto:susan_guiteras@fws.gov)).

### Challenges

- No productivity in 2020.
- Poor hatching success on beach habitats in recent years is likely due to nest predation and flooding.
- COVID impacts in 2020,
  - o No volunteers to assist with enforcing beach closures and public outreach.
  - o Restrictions to surveyors such as no equipment or vehicle sharing.

### Looking ahead

- Increase monitoring in marsh habitats of Delaware’s Inland Bays by engaging with Delaware’s Division of Parks & Recreation to collect AMOY presence data using Survey 123.