

# Ospreys

From A1

This spring, Cook was happy as a lark when she noticed a little head pop up among the adults, whom she calls Carl and Ellie from the animated movie “Up,” because she thinks they’re an older pair.

The only thing that made her happier was when Joanie Millward, president of the Virginia Osprey Foundation, asked if she’d like to help with Faith’s banding.

“Oh, yes, please,” she said, clasping her hands.

As she held the bird snug enough to keep its wings tucked in but not so tightly that it couldn’t breathe, Ken Smith, a licensed raptor bander, slipped an aluminum ring with an eight-digit number on the chick’s leg. Then he secured it with pliers, tight enough to keep it from falling off, loose enough that it will still fit when the bird is full grown.

Cook smiled from ear to ear during the process.

“This is so cool,” Cook said. “I’m so excited.”

“I thought the bird was shaking,” Smith said. “It’s you.”

On Tuesday, volunteers with the Virginia Osprey Foundation wrapped up their third annual chick banding as a caravan of vehicles and golf carts made its way along the nests dotting the Potomac River.

Data collected from banded birds reveals more than what path they take as the crow flies. It can help researchers track flight patterns as they migrate then return to nests, feeding patterns and longevity, according to a story on the foundation’s website.

“One banding study tracked migratory patterns down the East Coast of the United States,” according to the website. “This data helped keep off-shore wind turbines outside of known migratory routes, in order to prevent injuries to migratory birds.”

The foundation works to foster a sustainable environment where the ospreys can thrive, and during its annual Virginia Osprey Festival in April, distributes maps showing the nesting locations – except for those accessible only by crossing private property.

The banding numbers speak to their success with ospreys, a federally protected species. The group banded three birds from two nests in 2022, six birds last year and four times that many this year. They separated their 2024 work into two days, starting at 7:30 a.m. this week before soaring temperatures stressed the young birds – and the bander.

Smith is a retired lawyer who says his Swedish blood prefers 40-degree weather rather than feels-like temperatures in the triple digits.

“I hate summer,” he said. “And you can quote me on that.”

Even so, he trekked from Prince George’s County, Maryland, to be able to climb into the basket of a Nifty Lift, a self-propelled boom that goes 64 feet into the air. From there, he reached into the nests, re-



PETER CIHELKA PHOTOS, THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Ken Smith, a licensed raptor bander, says the talons of ospreys are fully developed ‘right out of the box,’ or as soon as they’re hatched. The osprey he’s holding is about 6 weeks old and not big enough to fly.



These chicks were not banded because they were bigger and more aggressive. Volunteers feared they’d attempt to fly before they’re ready and possibly meet their demise.

trieved each chick and carefully placed it in a durable tote bag.

Back on land, he showed others how to hold the chicks – and be wary of their sharp beak and talons. Those claws are fully developed “out of the box,” or from the time they’re hatched, Smith said.

Locals often gather to watch the goings-on, shooting videos with their phone cameras or recording images with professional cameras. Robert Lennox, who has a summer place in Colonial Beach, premiered a documentary at this year’s osprey festival about the first five months of a young bird’s life called “Growing Up Osprey.” It’s available on YouTube at GrowingUpOsprey.com.

He happened to meet Millward at an art event, and when she introduced herself as “Lady Osprey,” he referred to himself as “Mr. Osprey.” They got to talking about the decade’s worth of osprey images he’d captured as a professional photographer. She asked what he was waiting for to do a movie, he said he needed someone to kick his butt into action, and she volunteered to do the job.

On Tuesday, Lennox added more images to his collection while others reveled in the magic of the moment of looking into the beady eyes of the birds, up close and personal.

Like Cook, the Newhouse sisters were surprised by the size of a 6-week-old chick. The family was visiting Colonial Beach from Pennsylvania, saw the caravan and checked out what was happening.

Ryla Newhouse, 9, thought they’d be “this big,” she said, holding her hands a few inches apart as if she

were sizing a softball. Rayna Newhouse, 7, noticed the talons like “dinosaur claws” and wondered why the bird parents didn’t use them against those invading their nests.

“Why don’t they attack people?” she asked.

Angry mothers do strafe the volunteers but they’ve never harmed anyone, Millward said. They’re clearly agitated, though, as they let out a combination grunt-chirp to voice their displeasure.

“I feel sorry for the parents because they’re quite anxious,” said Peter Fahrney who lives in Colonial Beach.

Some of the nests are built atop aluminum platforms placed by Dominion Energy, which has worked with the foundation to provide nests that protect the birds, and the town’s electricity by keeping nests off utility poles.

Dominion also sends a bucket truck to help with the banding, but Millward found out Monday night that the operator was sick.

She put out a call for help and connected with Marvin Nies, owner of Nies’ Tree Care Services in King George. He and his son, Dakota, volunteered to bring their truck and lift to the beach for the event.

The father also got to help with the banding. He didn’t quite gush about it the way Cook did, but said helping out a good cause “sure beats trimming a bunch of bushes.”

Holding an osprey chick was pretty cool, too.

“It was nothing like holding a chicken,” Nies said. “This is definitely an experience I’ve never encountered.”

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# Cellphone

From A1

and the community in order to produce a report.

Cole suggested forming a committee – school staff, students, parents – to help handle the issue.

School Board Chairperson Lorita Daniels (Salem District) suggested starting the conversation with school staff only before including community input.

Guempel noted that cellphone use in schools is a hot topic with support on both sides.

“It’s one of those topics that’s guaranteed to bring up some emotion,” Guempel said, adding that he expects it to draw “some rich discussion.”

Daniels added that tackling issues with cellphone use could lead to improvement with other behavior problems in the county’s schools.

The school board members talked briefly about a timeline for establishing a policy, possibly for the coming school year, but made no commitments.

Courtland District school board representative Carol Medawar said the county can learn from policies recently established by other jurisdictions.

Stafford County instituted a cellphone ban in middle schools last school year, and was the first area locality to establish an overall school personal device policy for the coming school year when the School Board approved the policy in June.

Stafford’s school board cited the disruptions caused by students constantly using the devices during the school day.

This coming school year, Stafford students will not be allowed to use cellphones in school during the instructional portion of the day. All personal electronic devices must be out of sight and either silenced or turned off during the school day.

In Fredericksburg, students will not be allowed to use non-school-provided personal electronic devices – tablets, computers, e-readers, wireless headphones, cellphones or smart watches – during

the instructional part of the day.

The Fredericksburg school system said in a statement that it wants to join the “national education movement that prioritizes student learning by minimizing avoidable distractions in the classroom.”

City students are expected to use school-provided computers for all activities.

The city’s elementary students will not be allowed to have any personal communication devices that haven’t been provided by the school system.

Students in grades 6-12 will be allowed to have personal devices on school property, but the devices must be turned off and stored out of sight, stored in a backpack or similar bag or purse, in teacher-designated areas, lockers or vehicles, according to the policy. Cellphones must be in Yondr pouches, which lock when students enter the building and unlock when they leave.

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# Trial

From A1

A. Brooks, are charged with first-degree murder and using a firearm in the commission of a felony. Their joint trial began Tuesday in Fredericksburg Circuit Court and is scheduled to last three days. Brooks was 16 when the slaying occurred, but is being tried as an adult.

In his opening statement, prosecutor Steve Eubank said Smith was shot in the chest, arm, neck, left hand, right thigh and chin. “Eleven times. That’s how many times Jasiah Smith was shot,” Eubank told the jury.

Eubank added that there was video evidence that showed the slaying, and he said a vehicle registered to

Carter’s mother was seen rushing from the area. Two guns were recovered that prosecutors claim were the weapons used to kill Smith. No reason for the shooting has come out in court, either Tuesday or during earlier hearings.

Defense attorneys Jim Ilijevich and Tara-Beth Coleman said that although there were up to nine people, including Smith, congregated that day, police early on focused on Carter and Brooks. Ilijevich said that “all [the prosecution] has is a belief, not evidence.”

The prosecution evidence shows that a group of young men were together on Chadwick Court for up to 30 minutes that day. Things appeared peaceful up to the end, when the shooting

erupted and people ran off in different directions.

Prosecutors claim that Brooks was seen on video shooting Smith, while Carter has been identified as the person seen dumping two guns in some nearby woods that were recovered five days after the shooting. Those guns have been forensically tied to the bullets that killed Smith.

Both suspects were arrested after initially fleeing to Maryland. Ilijevich suggested that Instagram posts saying “[expletive] Ace and [expletive] Renny” were factors in the decision to leave the area. Ace is a nickname for Carter, while Renny is a nickname for Brooks.

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# Medicaid

From A1

The Senate had set aside a reserve of \$150 million and the House of Delegates \$100 million in their initial budgets for a potential Medicaid cost overrun, but the total came down during negotiations between legislators and Gov. Glenn Youngkin that produced a budget compromise adopted on May 13. The budget deal eliminated a proposal to expand the sales tax to digital services and reduced the amount of revenue available to spend.

“It is a big deal, but it’s not a disaster,” said Sen. Creigh Deeds, D-Charlottesville, who chairs the Senate finance subcommittee on

health and human resources. “Fortunately, we planned for it and saw it coming.”

However, finance committee staff said the shortfall “could have been mitigated, at least in part” if the Department of Medical Assistance Services had acted sooner, according to a memorandum obtained by the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

Michael Tweedy, a legislative fiscal analyst for the committee, who specializes in health and human resources, said in the memo that the Medicaid agency could have used its automated systems to quickly identify people who had not responded in time to requests for information to prove their continued eligibility for program benefits. The agency because using

that tool in March and began dropping more people from the Medicaid rolls.

“However, by that point the higher-than-expected enrollment earlier in the year made the Medicaid budget shortfall unavoidable,” Tweedy said.

Medicaid enrollment has fallen since the end of the pandemic, but not as much as expected. During the public health emergency, the number of Virginians in Medicaid rose by 628,194, exceeding 2.1 million.

Now, the state will have to pay for an additional \$45 million in costs from the last fiscal year in the new budget. Deeds, who is second in seniority on Senate finance, said he expects surplus revenue to make up the difference.

Chris Young .....Aug 24  
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