

## Westbrook Land Conservation Trust

Estuaries, where freshwater meets the sea, are often called “nurseries of the sea.” In our area, estuaries are predominated by salt marsh meadows, which are amongst the most productive environments on earth. Estuaries are fragile ecosystems, sensitive to human activity. The muddy salt marsh grass environment and adjacent mudflats support diverse and unique marine life, from microbial organisms to snails, crabs, reptiles, fish and birds, that feed and reproduce here. Rarer birds include the willet, clapper rail, herons and egrets, salt marsh sparrows, and ospreys. Recent studies show increasing tidal levels in the marshes, perhaps affecting nesting. Investigate current research at [www.tidalmarshbirds.org](http://www.tidalmarshbirds.org). Salt meadows are critical to tangential ecosystems, as they relinquish organic matter and life forms that feed food webs in the rivers and coastal waters.

In 1969, a 0.99 acre salt marsh on Hammock Road was donated to the Land Trust, establishing our first parcel. Since then, the Trust has acquired five more salt marsh parcels. Two have the distinction of osprey platforms - on the Hammock Road piece, built by the Trust, and on the recently acquired 11.47 acre tidal marsh property behind Seaside Avenue.

Adult ospreys migrate here from the south in March. Fledglings leave the nest in late July. Once threatened with extinction by DDT and shore development, ospreys, with the assistance of platforms, have made a noteworthy comeback in Connecticut. In the mid 1970s, there were fewer than 10 nests in the state. In 2021, 622 nests with young were counted. Sadly, entanglement with line or plastic in their nests is considered a current threat. Ospreys are considered an indicator of the health of the natural world. They survive on 99% fish in shallow waters, as they cannot dive more than 3 feet deep - despite soaring to over 100 feet to dive! Research ospreys at [www.allaboutbirds.org](http://www.allaboutbirds.org). Find an osprey nest near you, and follow a pair’s progress in the spring!

The Land Trust owns and monitors 31 land parcels of conserved open space in Westbrook, totaling just under 141 acres, and the conservation rights to 51 acres. If you appreciate the natural areas we preserve, and would like to help, please consider becoming a member, on the website [www.Westbrooklct.org](http://www.Westbrooklct.org), or email us at [Westbrooklct@gmail.com](mailto:Westbrooklct@gmail.com).