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Sound Osprey Found Periled By Chemical

Long Island Sound ospreys have more chemical PCB contamination than any other wildlife in North America, according to a Cornell University study released last week.

A common chocolate-and-white bird of prey, the osprey is found



The Long Island Sound osprey is an endangered species.

throughout the world, but the species' greatest concentration is found in the Long Island Sound area.

"Such levels of PCB in the ospreys are cause for alarm and suggest that Long Island Sound may be more contaminated with that chemical than any other body in North America," said Cornell graduate student Paul R. Spitzer, who conducted the study.

PCB are the initials of polychlorinated biphenyls. It is used in industrial processes to improve rubber, plastics and paper products.

Examined at Berkeley

Spitzer conducted his tests of a two-year period by taking overdue osprey eggs from nests in Gardiner's Island; Old Lyme, Conn.; Westport, Mass., and Avalon, N.J. The eggs were frozen and examined at the laboratory of Spitzer's collaborator, Robert Risebrough of the University of California at Berkeley.

Risebrough, an environmental biochemist, checked the eggs for both PCB and pesticides.

The eggs from Old Lyme had the highest concentration—2,270 parts of PCB per million. That level is three times as much as those that caused massive embryonic deaths in Ring Dove eggs in a study done by another Cornell researcher.

"Although the osprey is not officially designated an endangered species, if this trend continues it will lead to the extinction of the bird. The number of osprey nests has declined 10% a year for the last two years. Unless something happens to reverse this, the handwriting is on the wall for the osprey," Spitzer said.

He said that 20 years ago there were more than 1,300 osprey nests in Eastern Long Island and Southern Connecticut. Today, only 122 remain in the same region.

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