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Growing More Complex

It's good to know two major birds of prey, eagles and ospreys, are staging a strong comeback in the Chesapeake Bay area. Aerial surveys confirm more than a dozen pairs of eagles this year have produced offspring in the Blackwater River area. Ospreys are reported nesting in good numbers in Dorchester County.

DDT is usually blamed for the failure of breeding birds to reproduce in the 1950s and 1960s. The nationwide ban on the pesticide is credited with the good showing made this spring by Dorchester's bald eagles. Yet the Chesapeake populations were never as badly threatened as were birds in other parts of the country and biologists successfully moved osprey eggs from the Chesapeake to Long Island Sound and eagle eggs from Maryland to Maine where reproduction had fallen almost to zero.

Yet all the blame can't be put on DDT alone. Ornithologist Jan Reese of St. Michaels, a man who is more knowledgeable about bay ospreys than anyone else in Maryland noted that the big birds do better in the Choptank than in Eastern Bay. Waterfront development, heavier water travel and other factors may be responsible for the Eastern Bay situation, Reese told the Dorchester Bird Club recently.

His statement that the polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB) materials used widely by industry for

their insulating and solvent properties, may be a significant threat to wildlife is borne out in a recent article in *Oceanus*, a publication of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. Researchers have found a number of significant things. "DDT is not as persistent as once believed and is confined fairly close to the point of its introduction." The food chain magnification concept, popularized by Rachel Carson, which said chlorinated hydrocarbons are concentrated in the higher organisms, works for air-breathing animals but not water-breathing animals. And the ocean sediments close to shore show the ability to absorb heavy quantities of DDT and PCB in areas where the chemical and marine life concentrations are greatest.

These preliminary findings suggest that the question of environmental pollution is extremely complex. While there is hope in the discovery that the oceans of water and air seem to possess self-healing qualities, the ban on DDT did not end the pollution problem. PCB and other chemicals not yet identified may well be time bombs. Analysis of the Choptank and other waters by the state this year is scheduled to be carried out this year. Until that is done, we cannot know how much of a burden our local waterways are carrying. The findings could have a bearing on men as well as oysters, ospreys and rockfish.