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Contact: Ilana DeBare, idebare@goldengateaudubon.org or (510) 301-5573

Local Osprey Celebrities are now “Empty Nesters”

To every Bay Area parent feeling a little lonely because the kid has just gone off to college... you've got company!

Rosie and Richmond, the Osprey celebrities at the center of the Bay Area's first live Osprey nest cam, are also empty nesters now, literally. Their younger chick, Rivet, fledged successfully in early July and hasn't been seen back at the nest since about August 20.

It's normal for Osprey parents and their chicks to return to the nest sporadically for a period of several weeks following fledging, but once the young are fully independent, the nest is no longer the center of their world.

“This has been an awe-inspiring experience,” said Cindy Margulis, Executive Director of Golden Gate Audubon Society. “Tens of thousands of people enjoyed an unprecedented intimate view of this magnificent Osprey family in all its marvels and drama. Many of the Ospreys' human fans bonded online in an educational and supportive social community on the site's very active LiveChat. And Rosie and Richmond successfully fledged Rivet, whom we assume is now foraging for herself and exploring a much wider area in her independence.”

Since Golden Gate Audubon launched this inaugural nest cam season in late March, over 70,000 people have watched this Osprey family via the two HD cameras on the shoreline of the City of Richmond. The website, SFBayOspreys.org, had nearly 700,000 page views during the

GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY

2530 San Pablo Avenue, Suite G, Berkeley, CA 94702

phone 510.843.2222 web www.goldengateaudubon.org email ggas@goldengateaudubon.org

season, with site visitors learning more about Ospreys, how to help them thrive in the Bay Area, and even buying Osprey souvenirs.

Secondary school teachers from all over the region (and the nation) downloaded the free STEM science lesson plans for students in grades 5-12 related to these remarkable birds. And followers of the online live chat organized two gatherings at the nearby Riggers Loft Wine Co., where they shared stories, jokes, art, and even original music and poetry sparked by these incredible birds.

“We knew people would be captivated by the Ospreys, but we couldn’t have imagined the depth of their fascination -- and love!” said Margulis.

The nesting season had plenty of drama. Viewers entered a contest to guess when Rosie and Richmond’s two eggs would hatch, and the second chick hatched on Mother’s Day! Fans also voted on names for the chicks, ultimately choosing names with local historical significance: Whirley, for the Whirley Crane site of the nest, and Rivet, in a nod to the nearby Rosie-the-Riveter National Historical Park.

Viewers cheered as the older chick, Whirley, took her first flight in early July. But the cheers turned to worry and then tears when she was found by a nearby barge crew, catastrophically injured during one of her first forays out into the Bay. Sadly, Whirley ultimately succumbed to those injuries.

But Osprey fans rallied and channeled their passion into following the progress of the younger chick, Rivet, who took a more cautious approach to life. Rivet started spending more and more time away from the nest during July, but would return periodically for free food from her parents as she became increasingly independent.

Rivet is not wearing geo-tracking telemetry so we can't know for sure, but we believe she's likely to be fishing for herself by now and exploring further afield. Because Golden Gate Audubon had arranged for Rivet to be banded by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service biologists, we may learn about her future movements if people report an Osprey with her blue-colored leg band, marked with a Z over an R, to the USGS Bird Banding Laboratory.

Meanwhile, Rosie and Richmond have each stopped by the nest to spend time together and do nest maintenance before migrating away for the winter.

Golden Gate Audubon is now shutting down the live chat feature of the web site for the fall/winter and will reactivate it next March, when the 2018 nesting season begins. The two HD live cameras at the nesting site will remain in operation through the winter – offering gorgeous views of the Bay, of other birds such as crows and gulls that may visit the nest site, and possibly of “our” Ospreys or other Ospreys checking out the nest site as most migrate south for the winter.

“Many thanks to everyone who helped launch the web cam and make the season such a success, especially the City and Port of Richmond, the Red Oak Victory Ship, and our allies at Rosie the Riveter National Historical Park,” Margulis said. “If you have become an Osprey fan, we invite you to volunteer at one of our habitat restoration events every month, to help keep our Bay safe, beautiful, and healthy for wildlife, including Ospreys. You can find a volunteer opportunity near you at goldengateaudubon.org/volunteer.”

NOTE: Photos of the Osprey parents and chicks from the 2017 nest cam video feed are available for media use at http://goldengateaudubon.org/ospreys2017_highlights (a Dropbox folder). Or contact Ilana at idebare@goldengateaudubon.org.

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