Although there is little early information available, the Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) was apparently never a common breeding bird in east Tennessee. Early in this century, Osprey habitat was limited to the larger rivers, a few small natural lakes, and a few small reservoirs in east Tennessee. Nest records from this early period include Ganier’s report of a nest at Mullins Cove on Hales Bar Reservoir (presently part of Nickajack Reservoir) in Marion County (Ganier 1933), a 1937 attempt at Andrew Jackson Lake in Knox County (Walker 1937), and a pair building a nest at Davy Crockett Lake in Greene County in 1940 (White 1956). The Knox County attempt was unsuccessful because local residents tore down two consecutive nests under construction, accusing the birds of eating too many fish (Walker 1937).

Following the construction of the Tennessee Valley Authority reservoirs in the 1930’s and 1940’s, the amount of suitable Osprey habitat in east Tennessee greatly increased. The first published report of Ospreys nesting on the TVA reservoirs was from Watts Bar Reservoir in 1961 (Comstock 1961; Owen 1963). In that year the U.S. Coast Guard presented a nest with a portion of a hatched egg to the Elise Chapin Audubon Sanctuary in Chattanooga. The nest had been removed during repair work on the Euchee light navigation marker, about 10 km above Watts Bar Dam. Ospreys apparently began building on the Euchee light in 1958, and the Coast Guard removed these earlier nests. The success of these nesting attempts is unknown.

The Euchee light continued to be used by Ospreys until the deteriorating structure was dismantled in 1987; the nest was placed on a pole erected at the site. Ospreys continue to nest on the pole, and this site probably has the longest record of continuous use of any Osprey nest site in the state. From 1961 through 1976, nest attempts were monitored by TOS members. Although eggs were laid during several years, no young were fledged. Other Osprey nests were reported on Chickamauga Reservoir near Hiwassee Island in 1967 and 1968, but no fledglings were produced (Dubke 1967, K. Dubke, pers. comm.). A nest was also reported on upper Chickamauga Reservoir on Yellow Creek in 1969. Two nestlings were present in this nest in 1973 and 1975, but they did not successfully fledge. In 1969, a second nest was present on Watts Bar Reservoir in the White’s Creek area; this nest contained two eggs, but it did not fledge young.

Active management of the Osprey population began in 1976. Following the 1976 nesting season, the nest on the Euchee light navigation marker was removed by TVA personnel, and, with the permission of the Coast Guard, replaced in early 1977 on a 1.2 m square elevated wooden platform above the light on the marker. A pair of Ospreys accepted the nest and successfully fledged three young. A partially built nest was also discovered in 1977 on the White’s Creek navigation marker about 8 km upstream of the Euchee nest.
Following the success of the Euchee nest in 1977, management activities increased in 1978. To provide a more secure nest site, an artificial nest was built in the top of a tree on a nearby island. The nest on the White’s Creek light was removed, and the light was modified to discourage the pair from returning. The pair accepted the new nest site and two fledglings were successfully produced. The Euchee light nest was monitored, and two apparently infertile eggs were found and removed. In mid-June, two nestlings were obtained from nests on the Chesapeake Bay, flown to Tennessee, and placed in the Euchee nest. Both foster nestlings successfully fledged.

Based on the success of the fostered young and results of raptor hacking programs elsewhere, hacking of Ospreys began in 1979 (Hammer 1981). Hacking is the process of taking young from a healthy population and rearing them to independence in the recovery area with minimal exposure to humans to avoid imprinting. Once the birds mature, they return to the hacking area to nest. TVA biologists and cooperators placed young Ospreys, taken from nests on the Chesapeake Bay, in artificial nests on Chickamauga and Norris Reservoirs. The four young successfully fledged. In the following years, Ospreys were hacked at additional sites on Chickamauga, Nickajack, Watts Bar, Fort Loudoun, Douglas and Cherokee Reservoirs, and at the lake on Bays Mountain in Sullivan County. A pair of Ospreys attempted nesting on Holston Army Ammunition Plant in Hawkins County in 1987 and successfully nested in 1988. These birds were probably from the hacking project at nearby Bays Mountain. There is no other evidence that east Tennessee hacking efforts resulted in established nesting populations.

Meanwhile, efforts to increase the naturally nesting east Tennessee Osprey population continued. The growth of this population is shown in Figure 1. Two efforts to relocate nests from Watts Bar navigation structures to treetop, artificial nests on large islands were unsuccessful. These treetop nests were below the surrounding tree canopy and had limited visibility. We therefore concentrated on providing elevated nesting platforms with good visibility. Prior to the 1983 nesting season, six navigation structures were modified to provide a secure nest platform mounted on a tripod above the light. This allowed Ospreys to nest on the structures without interfering with their navigation function. Five of the six had active nests during the 1983 season. That same year, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency also placed two pole-mounted platforms on islands within wildlife management areas on Watts Bar; both were used during the 1983 nesting season. Erection of pole-mounted platforms has continued, and all manmade nesting structures have been occupied at one time or another. In recent years, several nests have been discovered in trees along the shoreline. These shoreline habitats were previously considered low quality nesting sites. Their use may indicate a lack of optimum nest sites, which appears to be the only factor limiting the continued growth of the population. Watts Bar has apparently not reached its carrying capacity and we plan to provide more nesting structures.

Ospreys from the Watts Bar population have also expanded to nearby reservoirs. In 1986, a pair built a nest at Hiwassee Island, Chickamauga Reservoir. This area was also used in 1987, but was apparently unsuccessful each year. In 1988, a pair successfully nested on a wood power pole at the upstream end of Melton Hill Reservoir near Clinton in Anderson County. The pair returned in 1989, but nesting was not successful. A dead Osprey, killed by a gunshot, was found late that spring.
a few kilometers from the nest. Nesting structures were built on Melton Hill below Solway, and young fledged from one nest in 1990 and two in 1991. A pair built a nest on a dead tree near the upper end of Tellico Reservoir in 1989, but apparently did not fledge young. This nest was used by Bald Eagles in 1991. Two nests were present in 1991 on Fort Loudoun Reservoir, and one of them fledged young.

I believe the east Tennessee Osprey population will continue its rapid growth (Figure 1) for several years. This growth has shown some fluctuation, and the low numbers in 1989 may have been due to unusually heavy spring and summer rains. The 29 active nests in 1991 fledged an average of 2.3 young, a high rate compared to other populations (Henny 1988). On Watts Bar Reservoir, suitable nest sites appear to be limiting, and TWRA, in cooperation with TVA, intends to continue building more nest structures. We also plan to continue building structures on other reservoirs as their need arises.

LITERATURE CITED

GANIER, A.F. 1933. Two March days at Mullins Cove. Migrant 4:3-4.
WALKER, W.M. 1937. The Ospreys build a nest. Migrant 8:53.

![Figure 1. Growth of the Osprey population in east Tennessee, 1977-1991. The count of fledglings was incomplete in 1982 and 1988. Until 1986, all nests were on Watts Bar Reservoir.](image)