

# Bonding through Banding

By Robert S. Michaelson

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By late October, the Ospreys began to arrive at Braunig Lake. By early November, six appeared to be making Braunig their home for the winter. I go to Braunig often to photograph the Ospreys. They are magnificent birds to watch fly and dive for fish. I haven't been able to photograph the moment they transition from a dive to talons out to snag a fish (my ultimate goal), but I have been able to photograph them in flight, diving, and landing. One particular photo got my attention, as I could make out a green band on the right leg with the number 81 over the letter M on the band.



*Photo from November 2 where you can see 81 and M on the band. Photo by Robert S. Michaelson*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has a [website](#) where you can report the date of sighting and the band number. If they can identify it, they send a Certificate of Appreciation, which includes where and when the bird was banded. The Bird Banding Lab [website](#) also contains a wealth of information on the history of banding and the information researchers can obtain by banding birds.

About a month after sending the band information, I received the certificate showing the bird was banded on July 20, 2020 before it could fly, near Billings, Montana, over 1,200 miles from Braunig Lake! Dr. Marco Restani banded the bird as a nestling. The sighting report was also sent to Dr. Restani and we contacted each other about 81/M.

Dr. Restani collaborates with the Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society, whose volunteers monitor about 100 Osprey nests each summer along the Yellowstone River in Montana. Since

2012, he has banded almost 600 nestling Ospreys. In fact, he banded the father of 81/M four years prior and he has been sighted near Veracruz, Mexico. 81/M is special, as it is the first Osprey he banded that is remaining in the interior of Texas during winter. Other Ospreys he has banded have been observed along coastal South Carolina, Florida, Louisiana, Texas, Mexico, and Costa Rica.

I have one other “small world” story regarding Osprey 81/M. One of the volunteer nest monitors in Montana grew up on Donop Road, and Donop/Southton Road is the exit you take from I-37 to get to Braunig Lake! Another of his volunteers, Teus Sterkenburg, photographed 81/M before it left Montana. Dr. Restani now can identify 81/M as a female based on the dark speckling on her upper breast and overall large size. He anticipates she will stay in the area for the next two to three years before returning to Montana to breed.



*81/M before she left Montana. Photo by Teus Sterkenburg*

When Dr. Restani banded 81/M last summer, he discovered that one of her siblings was entangled in baling twine. Baling twine, which is made of very strong polypropylene, is used to secure and store hay or straw. For some reason, Ospreys often incorporate haphazardly discarded twine into their nests, where it becomes a danger to the nestlings and adults. Each year Dr. Restani finds Ospreys that have perished or sustained injuries from entanglement. The Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society has established a baling twine drop center so this material can be removed from the environment and recycled.



*Sibling of 81/M entangled in baling twine on the right leg. Photo by Dr. Marco Restani*

Finding the bird and reporting the sighting has been really exciting, and 81/M has bonded Dr. Restani and me. Now I look for 81/M each time I go to Braunig. I don't see her every time, but when I do I feel I have a responsibility to make sure she is OK and report to Dr. Restani when I see her. I was surprised to learn how many Ospreys banded along the Yellowstone River in Montana winter in Texas. Of the nearly 40 reports Dr. Restani has received of wintering Ospreys he banded as nestlings, 10 have come from Texas. I urge birders and photographers to look for bands.



*A successful hunt for 81/M December 18, 2020. Photo by Robert S. Michaelson*