Owls, New Jersey listed the owls as endangered in 1974, and recovery began not only on the ban on DDT, but because “biologists coordinated efforts to supply man-made nest platforms for the birds. These new artificial nest platforms replaced the snags and trees that more than as the barrier islands became more developed.”

By 1986, the state’s owls’ population surpassed 100 pairs, and the species’ status was changed from threatened. Since then, the Department of Environmental Protection Division of Fish and Wildlife’s Endangered and Nongame Species Program staff has monitored and managed the population, helping the number reach a new post-DDT record of just less than 400 active nests in 2005.

Growing up in Marlborough, Wurts noted, “I didn’t really know what owls were.” Years later, for his job with Fish and Wildlife, he was assigned to the owls program. When he subsequently moved on the Conservancy Wildlife Foundation, he realized that a nonprofit organization can more easily receive donations and raise funds as a means to more extensive programs and education for the public.

He saw an open door,” he explained. “We can be doing more.”

He was particularly concerned that “we do everything we can here” because owls often winter in northern South America, where DDT is still in use, and measures to protect the birds from harm are lacking.

Wurts has conducted more than 100 nesting platforms since he began work with Conservancy Wildlife in 2004. He also sends young birds and monitors the state’s total population each year, either by boat or by air. In 2009, the population of the owls continued to show a decrease with a reported 483 nesting pairs, and last year 600 young owls hatched. The organization is close to its goal of seeing the population recover to 500 nesting pairs.

Currently, Wurts has a number of additional owl conservation efforts. He is planning a series of presentations, hopes to upload videos of platforms installed to YouTube, and wants to develop a working group to coordinate preservation efforts throughout the state. He would also like to eventually broadcast live from a camera on one of the platforms.

For now, the owls pair at the Barnegat Bay platform off Cedar’s named Paul and Tomo, and Paul and Fuzzy – can be seen only by boat or helicopter. The couple was active on Monday in their irritation at the terms, and in protecting their nest, which should soon be the cradle to hatchlings.

To learn more about the NJ Owl Project, visit conservetvildfnej.org/protecting/projects/owl or facebook.com/njowlproject. Check out additional Conservancy Wildlife projects at conservetvildfnej.org.

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Kay West Retiring As Barnegat Clerk

Barnegat Township Clerk Kathleen "Kay" West will be retiring on June 24 after 20 years of service to the municipality.

She joined the workforce in 1991 with a job in the township clerk’s office. A year later, she was named deputy clerk when Veronica Iurino was named township clerk. West succeeded Iurino when she retired in 2006.

The current deputy clerk, Sharon Auer, was named acting clerk by the township committee at its meeting Monday night.

"I’ve got a big list of things to do when I’m done here,” said West. “I hope to be free to travel, work on my yard and see my nine grandchildren."

Mayor Jeff Melchiondo said he hopes to have a reception for her during a committee meeting in July.

"It’s hard for me to say how much she has meant to us,” said Melchiondo. “I want to send her off in grand fashion.”

"When I first interviewed the administration, Kay’s name was the first one I met,” said Township Administrator David Breed. “And when I got the job, she was there to help me get familiar with Barnegat.”

Committeeman Martin Lissel added, "She was there to help me when I got on board. I know we’ll all miss her.” — E.E.