

Olivia the Osprey



Osprey. Photo by Brian Rivera Jr. / Audubon Photography Awards

Meet Olivia. She's an Osprey. That's a special kind of bird of prey, or raptor. Olivia is a bird who uses powerful, curved claws called talons to catch other animals that she eats. Osprey and other raptors, like eagles, hawks, and owls, to name just a few, use their sharp, hooked beaks to eat their prey. Osprey are sometimes called "fish hawks" because fish are the Osprey's favorite food to eat! Do you like to eat fish?

Now I'm going to tell you a story about Olivia the Osprey. Olivia is your neighbor. Yes, that's right, neighbor! Have you seen her before? She lives at a gorgeous place called Long Island Sound. Long Island Sound is an estuary, or a place where rivers meet the ocean. Freshwater from rivers mixes with saltwater from the ocean in an estuary.

Have you been to Cove Island Park in Stamford? Cove Island Park is on Long Island Sound. It's a place where Olivia sees people enjoying the beach, biking on trails, fishing, boating, or just enjoying being outside by the Sound.



Long Island Sound. Photo by Jennifer Benner

One day, Olivia felt worried about her home. She loved her home and wanted to stay there forever. Well, except for winter, when she flies to South America where it is warmer. But every March she comes back to her favorite spot at Cove Island Park. She started noticing lots of items that people left behind, like plastic bags, plastic soda rings, balloons, fishing line, and so much more trash. Olivia didn't want the trash to harm her, her family, or her neighbors, like fish, crabs, otters, jellies, turtles, birds, and many more animals, who all depend on a healthy Long Island Sound.

Olivia needed to do something to protect her home. She needed help to keep her home safe and healthy. If she spoke up, maybe her voice would be heard. Olivia knew just who to ask for help! Olivia took a short flight to a nearby school to look for students—she thought of the students as superheroes.



Official Schoolyard Habitat Sign.

Olivia landed in the school’s certified Schoolyard Habitat where she often rested while fishing in the Mill River. When searching for superheroes, it is helpful to have eyesight like Olivia’s. As an Osprey, Olivia’s eyes help her see about five times better than a human’s eyesight. With a quick turn of her head, Olivia spotted the two superhero students she needed.

“Excuse me, do you have a moment to help?” asked Olivia.

“You can talk?” screeched Nicholas.

“Wow, you’re incredible!” said Camila in amazement.

“Oh, thank you. But you know what, you two are pretty incredible. I saw you cleaning up trash along Mill River last week. You are the Super Trash Patrol! And I’m Olivia” said their new Osprey friend.

“Super Trash Patrol! Yeah!” shouted Nicholas.

“Yes, our school participated in a clean-up last week. And today, Nicholas and I are cleaning up our schoolyard habitat” said Camila.

“Amazing! Do you know how much that helps?” asked Olivia.

“Helps? Hmm, well, I think we, the Super Trash Patrol, help keep our schoolyard habitat clean, so it looks nice,” said Nicholas.

“Yes, Super Trash Patrol certainly make your schoolyard habitat and Mill River look nice after a clean-up. But, at the same time, you are helping animals like me and lots of others who live in the Long Island Sound, our home,” said Olivia.

“I love animals! But wait—how are we helping animals by picking up garbage?” asked Camila.

“Long Island Sound?” asked Nicholas.

“Follow me and I’ll show you!” said Olivia, as she led the superhero students to her home.

Nicholas and Camila raced to keep up with their Osprey friend. They looked up to follow Olivia’s white underside and dark wingtips. With just a few more footsteps, the students saw Olivia land and stopped racing. What a beautiful sight was around them! Blue water with waves crashing on a sandy beach, gulls flying overhead, plovers wading in the water, and other shorebirds like oystercatchers, killdeer, sandpipers, and terns. There were also people fishing and sunbathing, and lots of different areas to explore. Camila and Nicholas gasped in awe and wonder that such a magical place was a short distance from their school.

“Where are we?” asked Camila.

“Is this the beach?” asked Nicholas.



Superhero students are the Super Trash Patrol.

“Welcome to my home! Here we are at Cove Island Park on the Long Island Sound. Pretty, isn’t it?” said Olivia, proudly.

Camila and Nicholas were curious. “This is Long Island Sound? Your home?” they asked.

“Yes,” replied Olivia, “my favorite place to be! Every March, I return here to fix up my nest and lay eggs. My mate and I hunt for fish in the water and feed our chicks so they can grow into strong Osprey, like me.”

“Olivia, would you mind showing us your nest? I’ve heard that Osprey nests can be pretty big!” exclaimed Camila.

“Sure thing, Super Trash Patrol! My nest is over this way,” said Olivia. The Osprey led the students over to her nest, which was on a very tall platform. With a flurry of magical stardust, Olivia gently lifted Camila and Nicholas by holding on to the back of their shirts with her talons. When she let go, Camila and Nicholas plopped in her nest with a loud thud.

The Super Trash Patrol looked around and saw sticks upon sticks, bones, seaweed, and grass carefully woven together to make an impressive nest. But one thing caught their attention: trash! The Super Trash Patrol spotted plastic bags, plastic soda rings, and even fishing line in the nest.



Osprey fishing. Photo by Loree Niola/Audubon Photography Awards



Osprey in nest with trash.

“Olivia,” said Nicholas, a bit confused, “why is there trash in your nest? Don’t you like your home clean and tidy like we Super Trash Patrol like to keep our schoolyard habitat?”

“I do like my home clean and tidy. However, when I fix up my nest, I look for anything to add to it. Sometimes I pick up what people leave behind, like plastic soda rings or fishing line. Last year, one of my chicks was nearly tangled in the fishing line! I did not know it could be so dangerous,” explained Olivia.

“But how did the trash get here to Long Island Sound in the first place?” asked Camila.

“My nest is pretty high, and we have a great view of how the nearby water flows. But let’s fly a little higher to get a better view of how trash gets here,” said Olivia. And with a flurry of magical stardust, Olivia lifted the superheroes high above the water.

Above the water, the students could see the rivers and streams all flowing down, right into Long Island Sound.

“When trash ends up on the ground at school or at home, it may end up in a storm drain. The water in that storm drain flows into nearby water, like your local river, and continues to flow downstream,” explained Olivia.

“But all of the water is flowing from the schoolyard downstream right into your home, here on Long Island Sound!” exclaimed Nicholas, a little surprised and upset.



Long Island Sound. Photo by John Huba



Storm drain.

“So any trash that ends up on the ground eventually makes its way into the Sound,” realized Camila. “If it goes on the ground, it goes in the Sound.”

“Exactly, Super Trash Patrol! If there is less trash on the ground, the Sound stays cleaner and healthier. For me and my family, my animal neighbors, and people, too,” said Olivia, carefully returning the superheroes back to the nest with a flurry of magical stardust. “So every time you pick up trash, or organize a community clean-up, you are helping to keep Long Island Sound safe and healthy.”

“Super Trash Patrol to the rescue! Let’s organize another clean-up at school, Nicholas!” shouted Camila.

“Yes, I can’t wait! Are there other things we can do to help, Olivia?” asked Nicholas.

Olivia’s eyes widened with happiness and gratitude. She fluffed her feathers a bit and said, “Yes, there are lots of simple things you and your family can do to help me, my Osprey family, my animal neighbors, and all people who live near Long Island Sound.”

Olivia then told her friends everything they could do to make a difference. Some of the things were quite simple, like placing trash in the right bin or cleaning up after your pet goes to the bathroom when on a walk outside. Olivia also mentioned that using less plastic could help a lot, so Nicholas and Camila promised to use their reusable water bottles and grocery bags. The students learned that they could turn off the water when brushing their teeth and save a whole lot of water, which helps the environment.

They could plant native plants at home and at school, which act like sponges and filters for groundwater that runs off into the Sound. Since Nicholas and Camila’s school had a certified Schoolyard Habitat, this was something they



People picking up trash to take action for the environment.

were already doing to help! A healthy habitat includes things you put in, like native plants, as well as things you remove, like trash or non-native plants.

Nicholas and Camila could also urge their parents to bring their family car to the car wash instead of washing their car at home. At the car wash, they use less water and properly dispose of dirty water. The Super Trash Patrol could even urge their grown-ups not to use pesticides or chemical fertilizers, which can make their way into our waterways and harm wildlife.

“And finally,” said Olivia, “you can be an Osprey Nest Cam Monitor! I heard that my Osprey cousins in Greenwich and New Haven are lucky enough to have a super cool camera over their nest. People can keep an eye on the nest and watch what happens in the nest from the internet! You can report what you see to scientists to help keep good care of the Ospreys.”

“When you get back to school or at home, visit <http://ct.audubon.org/schoolyard2sound-2018> to enter the Schoolyard to Sound Challenge and make a difference for Ospreys, other animals, and people,” said Olivia.

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Schoolyard to Sound Challenge

Beginning March 5 through May 5, 2018, take part in the challenge and become a Long Island Sound champion!

Attention students (and families and teachers) in New Haven and Fairfield County, Connecticut—we need your help to create a healthy Long Island Sound, a critical part of the Connecticut landscape. By taking action right in your own schoolyard or backyard, you can make a difference for the local environment and Long Island Sound!

Schoolyard to Sound Challenge page: <http://ct.audubon.org/schoolyard2sound-2018>

Olivia thanked her superhero friends for caring about nature and taking simple actions to help. As she led Nicholas and Camila back to school, Camila stopped. Camila walked over to a person hanging out at the beach. She said, “Excuse me, please remember to clean up your trash. There is a bin over there on that path.”

The beachgoer said, “Oh my! I didn’t realize my plastic bag fell to the ground. Thank you for telling me. I’ll be sure to clean up.”

Camila said proudly, “No, thank YOU! What goes on the ground goes in the Sound. You’re helping to keep this place safe and healthy!”

The beachgoer said, “On the ground, in the Sound...clever and true!”

With that, Olivia smiled and said goodbye to her superhero friends. She was confident that their actions would make a huge difference.

Camila and Nicholas set out to help nature around them. They chanted as they headed back to school:

Join the Trash Patrol

Earth's safer with trash under control

Pick up trash from the ground

From the schoolyard to the Sound!

Use less plastic and save energy

Plant native plants to attract bumblebees

Use reusable bags at the store

Take action to help nature even more!

They pledged to be not only Super Trash Patrol, but Super Schoolyard-to-Sound Protectors. And you can, too! Visit <http://ct.audubon.org/schoolyard2sound-2018>.