

Reminders Issued About Nests After Hotel Fined For Clearing

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OCEAN CITY – After a resort hotel was fined late last month by the Maryland Natural Resources Police (NRP) for having employees remove nests and gather over 40 eggs of protected bird species, the Maryland Coastal Bays Program (MCBP) is issuing reminders most of the 300 species of birds that call the watershed are federally protected and tampering with nests is illegal.

According to NRP spokesperson Candy Thomson, the NRP received a call from Ocean City Animal Control shortly after noon on May 27 that the manager of the Comfort Inn on the Boardwalk had directed staff to clear any nests or bird eggs from the facility's roof. The staff followed instructions and cleared the nests and put the eggs, some of which were just starting to hatch, in plastic bags.

Ocean City Animal Control took the eggs to a rehabilitator to see if they could be saved, according to Thomson. As a result, the hotel was fined \$450 by the NRP for removing the nests, and while it might have been too late for those nests and eggs, the MCBP is reminding residents and property owners tampering with nests and eggs is illegal, especially with a critical nesting period for the endangered least tern getting underway. During the next few weeks, the least tern will start building nests on rooftops in Ocean City. The least tern is on the Maryland threatened species list and is federally protected as well, so the penalty for tampering with the species is significant, according to MCBP spokesperson Sandi Smith.

"So many property management companies and residents illegally move nests yearly as they view them as nuisances and don't understand the fragile balance of our environment," she said. "Basically, birds are seeking secure nesting habitats. As Ocean City is a coastal town which

has developed the majority of its natural environment, colonial birds, or birds that typically nest on flat, sandy or gravel-like areas, have learned to look at rooftops as islands in the sky surrounded by a sea of humanity."

Smith said rooftops provide safe havens for the protected species to nest and lay eggs, and while they might create a nuisance for residents and property owners, tampering with the nests remains a big no-no.

"These islands have no predators that can reach their eggs, so our rooftops have become appealing nesting areas for gulls and, unfortunately, the threatened least tern," she said. "We at the Maryland Coastal Bays Program understand that to many people, the mess of birds and nests is considered a nuisance, but we'd like to educate the public that our wildlife is protected and there are professional wildlife agencies that are here to provide solutions to what some feel are nuisances as other understand that every species brings balance to our environment. It is important to respect and understand that birds are federally protected."

Anyone with questions about the eggs or the nests on their property is urged to contact the MCBP or Ocean City Animal Control should the event be in the resort before taking any action. In addition, the U.S. Department of Agriculture wildlife management services are allowed to destroy a certain number of eggs and nests each year of certain species such as herring and black back gulls. The USDA will send a biologist to a property to assess the situation and remove eggs and nests based on a specific formula. The number of the USDA program is 1-877-463-6497.

Anyone with questions or concerns regarding local wildlife is urged to contact Smith at sandis@mdcoastalbays.com or 410-213-2297, extension 106, and she will connect individuals to the correct organization to address the concerns.