

# OSPREY

*Pandion haliaetus*



One of the largest birds of prey in North America, the Osprey eats almost exclusively fish. It is one of the most widespread birds in the world, found on all continents except Antarctica. Ospreys are most abundant in the Chesapeake Bay region of the United States.

Ospreys build their nests near water. They choose structures that can support a bulky nest, and that are safe from ground-based predators. Nest sites that are often used include buoys, channel markers, dead trees, artificial nest platforms and radio towers.

Ospreys are large raptors that are about 21-26 inches tall, weighing between 35-62 ounces and a wingspan of 59-72 inches. They have a white breast and belly with black back and wings. Their wings are long, held with wingtips angled slightly backwards. They have a dark eyestripe. They have a white crown and forehead.

Large, black mark at the wrist or bend in the wing and dark speckling on chest. They have yellow eyes and gray legs/feet. Tail and wing feathers finely barred black and gray. They have black beaks. The sexes are similar with female larger and tend to have fuller and darker chest band. Juveniles are similar to adult, but with whitish scaling on back feathers, fewer markings on chest and orange eyes.

Ospreys have several morphological adaptations to their unique fish-eating lifestyle. These adaptations include relatively long legs for a raptor, spiny footpads called spicules, long, sharp, curved claws, and a reversible outer toe to aid in gripping slippery fish. In addition, ospreys have dense oily plumage and efficient nasal valves that prevent water from entering the nostrils when the bird dives to catch a fish.

The Osprey breeding season lasts for approximately 2.5 to 4 months depending on geographic area. It range anywhere from December to May. Ospreys are generally monogamous.

The males and females arrive at the nest site separately, the male often arriving several days earlier than the female. Male ospreys sometimes perform a conspicuous aerial display near the nest site. This display usually occurs during early courtship, and may serve to attract potential mates or to threaten an intruder. Both sexes collect materials for the nest, but the female does most of the arranging of materials at the nest. Osprey Nests are typically constructed of sticks, and lined

with softer materials such as seaweed, kelp, grasses or cardboard. A wide variety of flotsam and jetsam may also be incorporated into the nests, including fishing line, plastic bags and nearly anything else that an osprey might find and can lift.

Osprey pairs use the same nest year after year but must do some repairs or add materials before eggs can be laid. Two to four eggs are laid over a period of several days, each 1 to 2 days apart. Both male and female incubate the egg which hatch in about 35-38 days. Incubation starts when the first egg is laid. When osprey checks hatch they are tanish brown with a white stripe down the middle of their back; resembling a skunk. Osprey chicks fledge between 52-59 days old. After fledgling they learn to hunt but continue to return to the nest to receive food from their parents for 2-8 weeks after fledging. Because Ospreys migrate individually, juveniles must be fully independent of their parents by the time the southward migration begins. Osprey head to South American; the juveniles don't return for approximately two years.

During incubation and the nesting stage the male osprey provides food to the female and the chicks. This entails delivering 60 to 100 g of fish to the nest per daylight hour (3 to 10 fish per day) during the nestling and fledgling stages. When a fish is delivered to the nest, one of the adults rips pieces of flesh from the fish and feeds them to the chicks.



North American Ospreys gained increased recognition during the 1950s-1970s because populations in several key regions crashed. Studies showed high levels of contaminants; especially DDT, in eggs, severe eggshell-thinning and poor hatching success. Mortality of adults also declined. Osprey studies provided key evidence in court to help block continued use of persistent pesticides like DDT. By the year 2000 many U.S. and Canadian populations were approaching historical numbers boosted by a cleaner environment, by increasingly available artificial nest sites, and by bird's ability to tolerate human activity around its nest. Like the Phoenix; the Osprey has arisen from the ashes.

## COOL FACTS

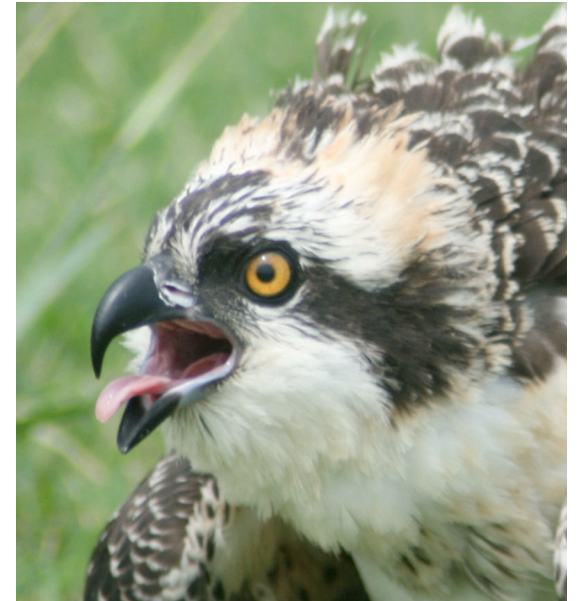
- The Osprey builds its huge nests within a matter of about two weeks.
- Osprey eggs do not hatch all at once. First laid; first hatched.
- The Osprey is a fish-eating specialist, with live fish accounting for about 99% of its diet. Barbed pads on the soles of its feet help its grip slippery fish. When an Osprey takes a large fish to its nest, it carries the fish headfirst to make it as aerodynamic as possible.
- Adult Female has a speckled chest and an Adult Male has a white chest. Both with Yellow eyes. Juveniles have orange/orangish yellow eyes.

**In any State, you can call your local Game & Inland Fisheries, local Veterinarian, or animal shelter and they should have some phone numbers for local Wildlife Rehabilitators.**

**If you have any questions you may call Pearl Beamer, State & Federally licensed Wildlife Rehabilitator within the state of Virginia about wildlife. Pearl specializes in Raptors. 757-855-2922 (7am-7pm)**

## OSPREY

*Pandion haliaetus*



## “KOLA WAKON OF WILDLIFE”

Roughly translated it means “Sacred Friend of Wildlife”. This is what every Wildlife Rehabilitator, every person who rescues wildlife, everyone who transpo and every Veterinarian that works with wildlife are to the wild kingdom.