



Kielder
Osprey watch

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Changing fortunes...



This spectacular and unique bird has always fascinated naturalists. Unfortunately in the 18th and 19th centuries (before photography and light-weight binoculars) studying birds normally meant collecting eggs or examining shot adults.

It was feared that ospreys were depleting fish stocks so persecution, along with collectors demand for eggs and stuffed birds, drove them to extinction in Britain in 1916. Numbers also dropped dramatically throughout the rest of Europe at that time.

In the first half of the 20th century the effects of chemical pollution along with the illegal collection of eggs kept numbers low. However, with the ban of certain pesticides and great efforts to protect nests, numbers started to increase again. In 1959 birds from Scandinavia re-colonised Scotland. Since then the population has grown steadily to over 150 pairs. However, in England, ospreys breeding remained restricted to the Lake District and a reintroduction programme in Rutland Water in 2009.

After becoming extinct in Britain ospreys re-colonised Scotland 50 years ago, but they remain extremely rare south of the border



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Family life...

Pairs separate on migration and spend the winter apart. The male usually returns to the nest a few days before the female performs display flights around the nest.

Once the female arrives both birds start adding nest material to their nest. The female mainly brings grass and moss to line the nest cup. The smaller male carries most of the bigger sticks that form the structure of the nest. Pairs will add to the nest every year, so old nests can grow up to two metres tall.

Once the eggs are laid the female does most of the incubating and the male brings food to the nest. The female stays with the young after they hatch, five to six weeks after the egg is laid.

At first she feeds them fish brought by the male, only later will she leave the young and join the male in hunting away from the nest.

It takes seven to eight weeks from hatching until the young leave the nest and follow the parents to the fishing grounds. At this stage they still rely on the parents to feed them. Over a month after fledging the young learn to fish and fend for themselves. Once the young are independent the family group splits up and the young undertake their first migration alone.

A typical year in the life of a British Osprey

January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Wintering			Migration	Court ship	Eggs	Young in nest	Looking after fledged young	Migration	Wintering		

It takes more than four months from the laying of the egg until a young osprey becomes independent



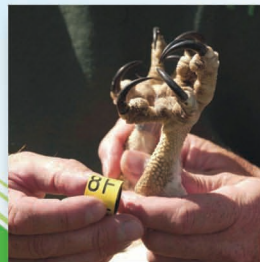
A long way home...

Northern European ospreys are migrants; most spend the winter in West Africa north of the equator.

These birds are strong fliers that can migrate long distances over open sea and deserts. Satellite tracked birds from Britain have been recorded reaching southern Senegal in less than three weeks, flying an average of 244km a day. Where they find good hunting grounds on the way some birds will stop and take longer or spend the winter entirely in the Mediterranean.

Young birds spend their first year entirely in the wintering grounds. When they are two years old or more the males return to the area where they were born. Once they have set up a successful nest of their own, adults return to it year after year. Adult birds also tend to follow the same migration route and use the same fishing spots.

Ringling and satellite studies have uncovered the ospreys migration routes and winter quarters



Ospreys are long distance migrants that regularly cross deserts and the open ocean



Ospreys in Kielder...

As the Scottish osprey population increased, ospreys were more commonly seen passing on migration in Southern Britain.

For many years young non-breeding ospreys used Kielder Water to fish during the summer months. In order to encourage them to stay and nest, the Forestry Commission installed several nest platforms in the forest around Kielder Water.

Young ospreys tend to settle near existing osprey breeding sites. Creating artificial nests will attract them as well as providing them with ready to use nest sites.

Pairs often build 'practice nests' in unsuitable locations and rarely lay eggs in their first year. In 2008 a pair of ospreys finally started to construct a nest in Kielder Water & Forest Park in a very precarious tree. This was a typical first time nest built by a newly formed pair. The following year the birds returned to breed successfully.

Kielder Water is the largest man-made reservoir in northern Europe. It is managed by Northumbrian Water which stocks it with rainbow trout. Native brown trout also inhabit the reservoir and surrounding rivers. Both species provide food for the ospreys and the 600km² of forest surrounding the water offers plenty of remote breeding sites free from human disturbance.



Several artificial nest platforms in Kielder Forest provide ideal nesting places for ospreys



Installing a platform high up a tree takes specially trained staff

A unique bird...

The northern European *osprey pandion haliaetus* is the only species of osprey. Its distant relatives include eagles, buzzards and hawks.

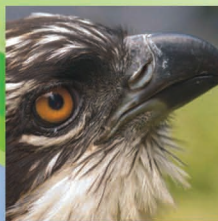
What has separated ospreys from other birds of prey is their extreme adaptation to hunting.

Fish form an important part of the diet of other birds of prey such as sea eagles but none depend on fish as exclusively as the osprey does. It can take fish weighing over one kg – more than half its own body weight.

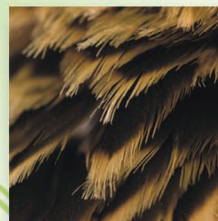
Ospreys dive up to one metre from the surface and will take a wide range of different fish species in both salt and fresh water.

This has made the osprey a very successful species that has spread throughout the world from the edge of the Arctic to the tropics.

The ospreys adaptations to catching fish make it unique amongst birds of prey



Particularly intense preening makes the osprey's plumage highly water repellent



The position of the rough high grip toes allows the osprey to handle wet slippery fish

