



Spectacular Ospreys

by Christina Turtle

Ospreys are a large fish eating raptor with a wing span of five and a half feet (that's my height) who catch their prey by diving into the water from a considerable height. Ospreys fish by sight and can be seen hovering over the water looking for any fish that are lurking near the surface. They then plunge in feet first and grip the fish in their sharp talons which has a reversible 'toe' that can lock the fish into place so they turn it round to fly with the head pointing forwards, to make it more aerodynamic. During the breeding season the male osprey does all the fishing for the female and the chicks when they hatch. It is often possible to see the ospreys fish from reserve viewpoints.

Each year, Ospreys make an incredible journey of 3000 miles; all the way from their wintering territory in West Africa, to come and breed in Britain. They make this journey individually not even in pairs? When chicks are fledged and make this journey for the first time they do it alone, they are not shown where to go, they have to find their way themselves.

Ospreys vanished from Britain in 1916 because in the 1900's Ospreys were persecuted to near extinction. The last breeding pair in the Lake District were recorded in 1678, over 300 years ago.

The first reported Osprey returns were in Scotland in the mid 1950's, (probably from migrating Scandinavian birds) but it was only 10 years ago that they returned to the Lake District after a 160 year absence from England. In 2001 the first breeding pair came to nest on the shores of Bassenthwaite Lake, an ideal location for Ospreys due to the habitat surrounding the lake and the good fish supply. Their nest is in the top of a Scots Pine, using an artificial platform constructed in the late 1990's when Ospreys were first seen around the Lake District to encourage them to breed. To make the nest look established a few sticks were placed on top of it and white paint added to make it look 'used' (looks like bird droppings!)

I work for the RSPB at Dodds Wood on Bassenthwaite Lake. Here there is 24 hour protection on the nest during the breeding season which is carried out solely on a voluntary basis. I am writing this at dawn after a shift of protection, sat in a hut overlooking the nest ensuring that there is no disturbance caused to the birds and enjoying the peacefulness of being in the fells before the day begins.

This year is the tenth year they have come back to nest. So far there have been 19 chicks fledged from the Lake District. This year the female is sitting on three eggs, which should hatch at the end of May or beginning of June. This season the project has received funding from Bassenthwaite Reflections to place satellite trackers on two of the chicks which will enable us to follow them throughout their migration and see which route they take to Africa.

There are now some 200 pairs established in Britain. Most of these are in Scotland and Loch Garten in Caingorm is probably the best known of the Osprey observation sites. In England and Wales only the Lake District Ospreys have returned naturally (from a migrating Scottish pair) so to speed up the spread there have been licenced re-introductions in wide spread locations such as Rutland Water (Midlands), Portmadog (North Wales) and Keilder Water (Northumbria) which are all proving successful. ■

Notes

More Info: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ospreys_in_Britain

The Lake District Osprey Project is a partnership between the RSPB, the Forestry Commission and the National Park. At the viewpoint at Dodd Wood near Keswick, you can get fantastic views along the shores of Bassenthwaite. From the upper viewpoint you are just 400 metres from the nest (which is the size of a double bed, perched right on the top of a tree). There are staff present at the viewpoints in Dodd Wood and at Whinlatter Visitor centre (where the images from the nest camera's are displayed) from April to August from 10am to 5pm daily. The Dodd Wood osprey viewpoint mobile number is 07899818421 for more info.

Author's notes

I grew up on an outdoor centre and have always had an interest in birds, wildlife and generally running around outside. I am currently working for the RSPB in the Lake District and my summers are spent working on the Osprey Project. I did my degree in Outdoor Studies at St Martin's in Ambleside, I worked in Europe for a year after graduating and then really wanted to come back to the UK and get involved with conservation, which I did, through volunteering until I got my current job!. If anyone has a burning desire to get involved with Ospreys (or other birdlife) that is grand: get in touch : Christina Turtle, Lake District, People Engagement Officer, email: christina.turtle@rspb.org.uk

Photos: all by Mike Moor and submitted by the author