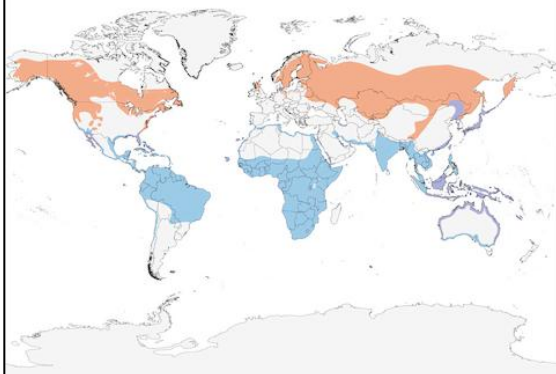


Osprey



Classification

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Aves
Order: Accipitriformes
Family: Pandionidae
Genus: *Pandion*
Species: *halieatus*



Range, Habitat, Conservation Status

- **Range:** Every continent except Antarctica. In the United States, they are found year-round in Florida and along the Gulf Coast. Individuals that breed in Canada and the northern United States migrate to the southern United States, Central and South America for the winter.
- **Habitat:** Prefer shallow water with substantial amounts of fish. They often build nests along rivers, lakes, wetlands, and coastal marshes on structures over the water or on small islands where it is difficult for predators to reach. Man made structures, such as telephone poles, channel makers, and pilings are also common nesting sites.
- **Conservation Status:** Least Concern. Ospreys are no longer endangered, and their numbers are rising after the widespread ban on DDT use and the implementation of legal protection by conservation bodies.

Physical Characteristics

- **Body Length:** 21.3 to 22.8 inches (54-58 cm)
- **Wingspan:** 59.1 to 70.9 inches (150-180 cm)
- **Weight:** 2.5 to 4.5 pounds (1.1-2.0 kg)
- **Lifespan:** Up to 25 years, but 15 to 20 years on average in the wild.
- **Identifying Traits:** Long crooked wings, darkly barred wings and tail, black bill, and bluish-gray lower legs. The underside of the body and wings are white, while the top is brown in coloration. The head is white with a brown stripe through the eye and a dark cheek patch. Females are slightly larger than males and are occasionally distinguishable by a more distinct "necklace" of dark feathers on their upper breast.

Behaviors

- **Feeding:** Almost exclusively fish.

- **Breeding:** Takes place from January through May. Males perform an ariel display, sometimes called “fish-flight” where they alternate periods of hovering and slow, shallow swoops while grasping a fish or nesting material in their feet. This display can last for over 10 minutes and includes repeated screaming calls as the male slowly descends in an undulating pattern towards the nest.
- **Nesting:** Collect sticks and other nesting materials together and build nests on cliffs, human made structures, and dead trees near the water. The female typically arranges the large and bulky nest. Pairs will often use the same nest each year. Human made platforms have been a crucial tool in reestablishing Osprey populations in areas where they disappeared. They lay 1 to 4 eggs, which take 32 to 46 days to hatch.
- **Migration:** Resident to long-distance migrants. See *range* for more details.
- **Call:** High-pitched, whistling call. Can be done as a slow succession of chirps during flight or as an alarm call. Can be strung together into a series rising in intensity and then falling away, sounding like a whistling kettle being taken rapidly off a stove. This call is generally given when an unfamiliar Osprey approaches the nest.

Fun Facts!

- Ospreys are unusual among hawks as they have a reversible outer toe, which makes them able to grasp with two toes in front and two in the back. They also have barbed pads on the soles of their feet to help grip slippery fish.
- Several studies have shown that an Osprey will catch a fish on at least 1 out of every 4 dives. Their success rate in catching fish is as high as 70%.
- They are unable to dive more than three feet below the water’s surface, thus they prefer to hunt in shallower water and where schools of fish are near the surface of the water.
- To reduce aerodynamic drag while flying, they will reposition a fish, so the head faces forward.
- Ospreys can completely submerge themselves underwater while catching a fish. They are still able to fly away with their prey afterwards unlike most other fish-eating raptors, which pluck fish from the surface of the water as they fly by.
- Over their lifetime an osprey may travel more than 160,000 miles in total while migrating.



Importance

- Ospreys are top predators and important for biodiversity. Biodiversity is essential for all life on Earth, including humans. The air we breathe and food we eat depend on healthy ecosystems, which require a wide range of animals, plants, and microorganisms.

Sources

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