

Osprey

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) has recovered from extinction in the UK to several hundred breeding pairs, mainly in Scotland but also in Wales and England



This large fish-eating raptor dives dramatically into water to catch its prey.

The osprey has a slim body and long narrow angled wings. It is dark above and pale below on the body and wing coverts. The head is white with a broad dark stripe through the eye to the nape.

Length: 55-58cm; wingspan: 145-170cm

Status in UK

148 pairs, increasing; AMBER listed; summer visitor, arriving in late March/April from wintering grounds on the West African coast

Population trends

Ospreys became extinct as a breeding species in Scotland in 1916, having disappeared from England in the 1840s. A pair first nested in Scotland again in 1954. After much publicity and careful protection of nest sites, the species gradually spread, mainly in the Highlands, reaching 100 pairs by the mid-1990s.

Since they became established north of the border, ospreys had regularly visited Rutland Water in the Midlands on passage. In 1996 a translocation project began with young Scottish birds being released there. These birds returned to the reservoir for a number of years and finally bred successfully in 2001. In the same year a pair naturally colonised the Lake District and bred by Bassenthwaite Lake. In 2004 the first pair reared young in Wales; the male had been released at Rutland and the female came from Scotland.

Birds can be viewed in a number of places in Scotland as well as in the Lakes and at Rutland Water.

Habitat and distribution

Ospreys favour well wooded country with lakes, rivers or near the coast with a plentiful supply of fish.

They are found in the eastern Highlands, the Grampians and Perthshire and the Southern Uplands in Scotland; in the Lake District and Rutland in England.

Breeding

Ospreys build a large stick nest in the crown of a tree, often refurbishing an old nest. They will also use artificial platforms. The Hawk and Owl Trust has installed one at Pensthorpe, near Fakenham, North Norfolk but it has yet to be used.

Feeding

Fish are taken in clear, calm water diving from the air. Long talons with spikes on the underside of their toes help them grasp fish. Species caught are dependent on availability; in Scotland they mainly take brown or rainbow trout inland and flounders on the coast.