



Artwork by Dominic Cant

Osprey

SCIENTIFIC NAME

Pandion haliaetus

DESCRIPTION

The upperparts of the osprey are a deep, glossy brown, while the breast is white and sometimes streaked with brown. The head is white with a dark mask across the eyes, reaching to the sides of the neck. The irises of the eyes are golden to brown, and the transparent nictitating membrane (or third eyelid) is pale blue. The bill is black, with a blue cere (sheath at the base of the beak), and the feet are white with black talons. A short tail and long, narrow, bent wings with four long, finger-like feathers, and a shorter fifth, give it a very distinctive appearance during flight. The sexes appear fairly similar, but the adult male can be distinguished from the female by its slimmer body and narrower wings.

The juvenile Osprey may be identified by buff fringes to the plumage of the upperparts, a buff tone to the underparts, and streaked feathers on the head. During spring, barring on the underwings and flight feathers is a better indicator of a young bird, due to wear on the upperparts.

HABITAT

Ospreys are found in all temperate and tropical regions around the world. As their diet consists mostly of fish, they live close to waterways.

DISTRIBUTION

The osprey inhabits all continents with exception of Antarctica. However in South America it occurs only as a non-breeding migrant.

DIET

Fish make up 99% of the Osprey's diet. They plummet feet first into the water from as far away as forty feet and are particularly well adapted to this diet, with reversible outer toes, sharp spicules on the underside of the toes, closable nostrils to keep out water during dives, and backwards-facing scales on the talons which act as barbs to help hold its catch. Occasionally, the Osprey may prey on rodents, rabbits, hares, amphibians, other birds, and small reptiles.

REPRODUCTION

Generally, Ospreys reach sexual maturity and begin breeding around the age of three to four years. Ospreys usually mate for life as long as breeding is successful. The females choose their mate based on the location and quality of the nest. Large nests are built out of sticks usually on offshore islands. The female lays two to four eggs within a month, and relies on the size of the nest to conserve heat. The eggs are incubated for about 5 weeks to hatching. Juveniles fledge (leave the nest) between 8 and 10 weeks.

STATUS

The Osprey is listed on the IUCN Red List as a species of Least Concern. The population is wide spread over several continents and has a high population of nearly 500,000.

THREATS

Threats against the Osprey include collection of the eggs and hunting of the adults. In the 1950's and 1960's the population showed drastic reduction as a result of the use of DDT insecticide. DDT accumulates up the food chain and causes the thinning of eggshells in birds of prey. The population has since recovered after the banning of DDT.

INTERESTING FACTS

The call is a series of sharp whistles, described as *cheep, cheep* or *yewk, yewk*. If disturbed by activity near the nest, the call is a frenzied *cheereek!*

This species mentioned above is a winter resident in the Bahamas but is known to migrate to North America during the breeding months. A Caribbean sub-species *P. h. ridgwayi* is a common breeding resident in the central and southern Bahamas that does not migrate, these birds have white heads with thin dark line behind the eye which makes the head look whiter. This sub-species i has not been well studied and there are thought to be only 250 breeding pairs of this species.

They are commonly known as the Fish hawk or Fish eagle.