

# Osprey

Balbusard pêcheur  
*Pandion haliaetus*

Migratory Species



Wingspan: 135 cm to 183 cm



The Osprey is a large bird distributed across the globe, except for in arctic regions where waterbodies remain frozen for excessively long periods of time. In fact, the survival of this species is intimately tied to the presence of running water, since it feeds exclusively on fish. This bird of prey has a white chest and dark brown wings. Its white head is lightly crested. A black band crosses it at the eye.



The female is larger than the male. She also displays more striping of the chest.



The Osprey frequents great expanses of both fresh and salt water: lakes, rivers, coastlines, etc. The individuals living furthest to the north roost near turbulent water to ensure constant access to fish; lakes freeze too soon in these Nordic regions.



The Osprey feeds almost exclusively on pike, walleye, perch and other species according to availability. Since it does not dive very deep, it only catches fish near the surface.



The Osprey lives on average from 15 to 20 years. Some individuals live much longer; a banded individual released into nature survived more than 35 years!



The nest is a massive structure that can be built up to 3 meters high. It is composed of branches and can be seated atop a large tree above the tree line, on an electric pole, or even on a small island or large rock in the middle of a waterway. The female lays 2 to 4 eggs.



Despite the female laying several eggs, only the two oldest chicks survive to attempt their first flight at 7 to 8 weeks. The younger chicks, being smaller and less competitive, often starve to death before this time. The young remain dependant on their parents 10 to 20 days after they take flight.



As with many other birds of prey, the Osprey was greatly affected by the use of pesticides like DDT in the 50s and 60s. Its long lifespan and ability to use human-made structures for its nest allowed the species to survive these difficult years and rebound after the banning of DDT-based pesticides.



The Osprey's feet are very well adapted for fishing. The soles are covered with spicules (tiny spike-like structures) that give an excellent grip on the fish. Also, the external toe, which is very mobile, can be rotated to face backwards, next to the thumb, for a better grip on the fish.