



BIRDWALK NEWSLETTER 3.19. 2017

WALK CONDUCTED BY PERRY NUGENT
NEWSLETTER WRITTEN BY JAYNE J. MATNEY
PHOTO ABOVE BY ANGIE BRIDGES

**Happy who for a Season may
Absent themselves on buoyant wing!
The birds that Winter drives away
Will surely come again with Spring.**

**They of our ills will mindful be,
And when at length the storm has passed,
They will return to this same tree
Which has so often felt the blast.**

**Then to our fertile vale will they
A more auspicious presage bring!
The birds that winter drives away
Will surely come again with Spring.**

**Pierre-Jean de Beranger
1780-1857 "The Birds"**

The Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)



Photo by Chuck Fuhrman

Hailed as the ultimate hunter and intimidator of fish it hunts, Shakespeare once referenced this mighty bird in his piece, *Coriolanus* by stating,

*I think he'll be to Rome
As is the osprey to the fish,
Who takes it
By sovereignty of nature.*

Well said. Although, it can be agreed, the fish do not simply go belly-up in a surrender as medieval times once believed. These amazing “fish hawks”, “sea hawks”, “fish eagles” or

“river hawks”, as they have been nicknamed, have many adaptations for their known prowess. According to The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds, its toes are of equal length, have the tarsi which are reticulate, talons rounded rather than grooved, with an outer toe that is reversible allowing it to grasp prey similar to the owls’ abilities. Not only that, but they have rough pads on the bottoms of their feet (spicules on undersides of toes, and backwards facing scales along talons) for extra grip to help hold the slippery fish in place. The wings are especially structured for hovering as they inspect potential prey (most raptors cannot do this), they have the ability to block off their nasal passages when they go underwater to catch the prey, and their feathers are



especially oily to prevent them from getting too waterlogged. The osprey also have very keen eyesight which gives them the type of vision which detects fish just under the surface of the water while they are anywhere from 33 to 131 feet above the water. These special features that they possess enables them to be very successful.

(Photo left by Chuck Fuhrman)

Research has shown that osprey have *up to* a 70% success rate The average time needed for an osprey to locate and capture prey is only about 12 minutes! Ninety-nine percent of the osprey's diet is fish - hence the nicknames. The osprey has a distinct way of hunting and catching. They start their search over water with slow flapping wings and pause in a hover position when deciding about their observed prey.



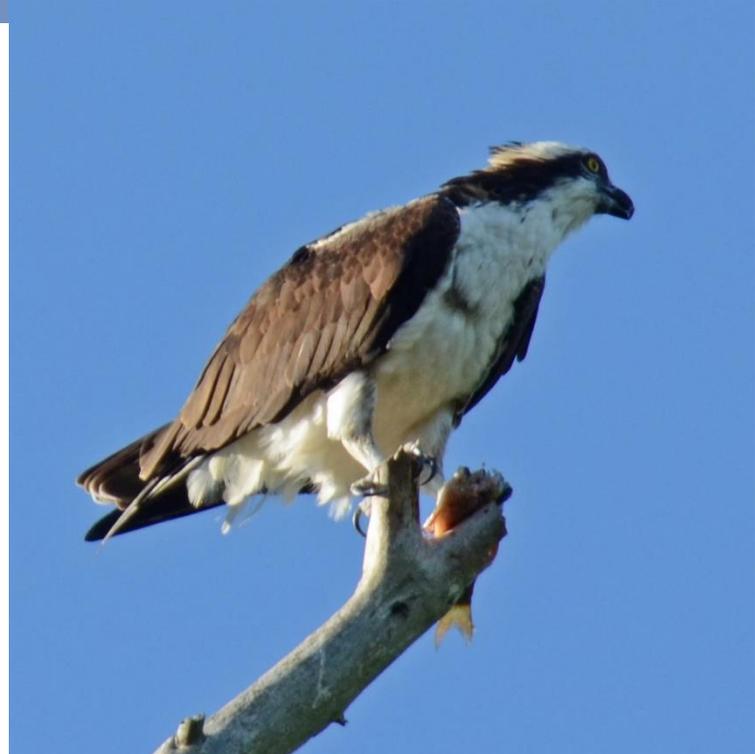
Photo above by Guenter Weber "On the Search"

Photo right top by Chuck Fuhrman

Photo right bottom by Ray Swagerty

Notice both photos show how they feed on fish- head eaten first!

If they like what they see, they will plunge downward grasping prey feet first with their talons and fly away with their catch. Once caught, the fish are flown to a nearby branch for consumption or to the nest for sharing with young. Osprey are known for eating the head of the fish first. Interestingly enough, the Osprey tend to very particular about their aerodynamics in flight, so they always fly with the fish positioned head first. If this is not how it was caught, the osprey will rise up high in the sky out of the water and



Toss the fish up in the air and re-catch it in the correct position. Crows and eagles, which reside in the same areas, have been known to try to scalp fish from the osprey.

The naming of the osprey:

The term “osprey” was first seen around 1460 according to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The medieval/Latin phrase, *avis prede*, distinguished the “bird of prey” concept. However, some believe it traces back even further with the Latin term for “bone-breaker” which is *ossifragus*. Carl Linnaeus, the father of taxonomy, recognized this bird and named it *Falco haliaetus*. Today, this bird is separated out from the falcons with its own family, *Pandionidae*, with only one genus, *Pandion* because of its unique qualities and abilities. Therefore, it is recognized today as *Pandion haliaetus*. Depending upon who you talk to, there are 4 subspecies of osprey, but one of these has been validated by some as its own species status. The genus, *Pandion*, may be derived from the mythical Greek King Pandion. The species name comes from the ancient translation of “sea eagle.” “Ospret” is an Anglo-French derivative.



Photo by Chuck Fuhrman

To identify an adult osprey, it really isn't very difficult once you know what to look for. They are large, distinct hawks with slender bodies (24 inches in length and 71 inches wing tip to wing tip) with long legs, large feet, and narrow wings. The color pattern is a great way to identify them because they are hawks that have white under bodies, and brown with greys on the top of the body. Even the underwings are white with a dark patch at the wrists. The head is also white with an expressive dark streak across the eye and side of the head. There are few differences between the genders. The breast band is more muted or non-existent with the male. Contrarily, the adult females do have a breast band that is distinct.



Photo By Chuck Fuhrman

Behaviors of osprey:

According to most sources, the osprey vocalizations have a series of sharp whistles with a *cheep cheep* or *yewk yewk*. If disturbed by something, this call can escalate to a *cheereek*. However, the osprey usually don't defend a large perimeter. They keep their territories fairly small and efficient to defend. They reach sexual maturity after 3 or 4 years in the less crowded areas and even later where they are heavily populated. They are monogamous, and each year begin their pairing up for a 5 month partnership of mating and raising young. Courtship consists of acrobatics and "skydancing" and impressing the female with fish catches and screeches to call her to him. Like eagles and other hawks, the nests are built on the tops of trees, and cliffs for good open air views for warding off predators. The males generally find a sight or get to a returning site prior to the female's arrival. Being highly adaptive to human structures and activity, the osprey make use of high structures such as telephone poles, river channel markers, and the tops of deer and duck blinds.

Because of this, conservationists have used this tendency to attract them by setting out tall poles with platforms on them which can hold these large nests if the osprey cares to build there.



The nests become a large, bulky combination of mostly sticks, leaves, and moss which are added to each year. There needs to be an adequate supply of fish, so these nests can be found near rivers, lakes, and swamps.

The eggs of an osprey are creamy white with brown blotches. They usually lay 3 eggs.

Like the Red-shouldered



Hawk, the eggs do not hatch all at once. So the first to hatch may have an advantage over the other nestlings. The older sibling has a better chance if there becomes a competition for the food source if fish are scarce. Both of the parents take care of the eggs and the young. The female stays close to the nest to shelter them and to distribute the food that the male provides. It takes approximately 55 days for the brood to mature enough for their first flight.

Above photos by Ed Blich

Fun Facts!

- Because eagles and osprey build on the same nests year after year, the osprey nests have gotten to be 10-13 feet deep and 3-6 feet in diameter! This is big enough and sturdy enough to hold a human!
- Osprey have been known to log high mileage for migratory reasons. With use of transmitters, scientists have clocked osprey travelling more than

160,000 miles according to Cornell Lab of Ornithology. One of them was recorded to have travelled from Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts to French Guiana, South America in 13 days - 2,700 miles total.



Photo by Guenter Weber

- Many team mascots are named after this fearless bird such as the Welch Rugby Team, North Florida Team, Missoula, Seattle Seahawks, Wagner Seahawks, and many high school teams that cannot all be listed here.
- Migrating osprey are even seen flying over desert areas of the country away from their water resources.
- The oldest known Osprey was 25+ years living in Virginia. Being a wild Osprey, this character was banded in 1973 and later recovered in 1998.
- The image of the Osprey has been gracing more than 50 international stamps!
- Osprey is the “official bird” for Nova Scotia and for Sodermanland, Sweden.

- There are two extinct species from the fossil records. On a more personal note, South Carolina and Florida had claws of these fossils found from the Pliocene and Pleistocene Epochs.
- Osprey are the second most widely distributed raptor, second only to the Peregrine Falcon, and is found everywhere except Antarctica.

According to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Partners in Flight estimates a population of approximately 500,000 globally. In the 1800's and early 1900's, the main threats to these birds were the egg collecting and the hunting of

adults for feathers. In the mid-1900's, pesticides caused a decline in the osprey populations just as most raptors and shorebirds suffered, but once the pesticide bans were in place, they soon began to recover. Any declines seem to be more of a state or regional issue. In some areas, they are "listed endangered or threatened" regionally. Most of these regions are inland regions. What harms their numbers today?

Regional tree removal due to development, and acreage usage and recreation activity near coastal areas are the main causes for osprey decline today. IN general, the predators that cause nest poaching are the raccoons that get to the nests and trematode parasites that may infest the nest.

Photos below by Guenter Weber



As mentioned earlier, platforms have been used to encourage and expedite an increase in the population for areas welcoming more.



The first widespread design was developed by Citizens United to Protect the Maurice River and Its Tributaries, Inc. for the State of New Jersey. Their plans can be downloaded with a materials list included. If you are interested in joining a group that is currently mapping osprey nesting and activity, Osprey-watching.org is one place you can go to inquire about this. **Information collected for this article were from: The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Oxford English Dictionary, Audubon .org, National Geographic.com, and Wikipedia.**

Well, the groundhog knew what he was dodging when he went back under for a few more weeks! We all thought he was wrong, but once again, nature proves *us* wrong. The plantation has had some definite nip to the air during the week. Lows in the 30's and highs in the 50's and 60's. Not what we have been getting used to this mild winter. Hopefully, this cold spell will keep the migrating sparrows and warblers here for a little bit longer.

Birds seen on 3.19.2017 were:
 Wood Duck, Gadwall, Blue-winged Teal, Green-winged Teal, Pied-billed Grebe, Double Crested Cormorants, Anhinga, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Little Blue Heron, Black-crowned Heron, White Ibis, Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle, Red-shouldered Hawk, Common Gallinule, Wilson's Snipe, Laughing Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Mourning Dove, Belted Kingfisher,



Photo by Jo Frkovich



Photo by Norma Armstrong

Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Downy Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, White-eyed Vireo, Blue Jay, American Crow, Fish Crow, Tree Swallow, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Marsh Wren, Carolina Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Brown Thrasher, Black-and-white Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Northern Parula, Pine Warbler, Yellow-rumped

Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, White-throated Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, Boat-tailed Grackle, and last but not least, the American Finch. There were 57 species in all.