

Osprey - Return of the Fish Hawk

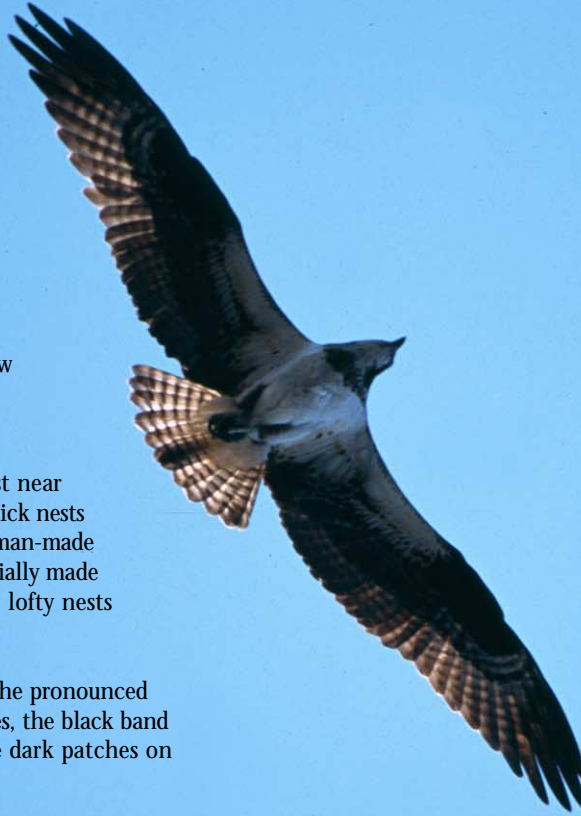


The great white-breasted bird hovers over the water, crooked wings beating fast. It tilts and plunges, long legs outstretched, and splashes feet first into the shallows. It labors out of the water, small pike tight in its talons, and returns to its high nest where gangly young wait open-mouthed.

If you're here between April and late September, you have a good chance of witnessing this spectacular scene. Shallow waters, like those here at Sandbar State Park, make ideal hunting grounds.

Because Ospreys eat only fish, they nest near water. While Ospreys often build their stick nests in dead trees, they'll also make use of human-made structures—power poles, buoys, and specially made nesting platforms. Have you seen these lofty nests on your travels here?

Ospreys are easy to recognize: Look for the pronounced crook in the Osprey's long wings as it flies, the black band across its eyes, its white breast, and the dark patches on the underside of its wings.



Toxic Lunch

DDT, a pesticide used widely in the 1950s and 1960s, caused Ospreys to lay thin-shelled eggs that often broke during incubation. The Osprey was listed as endangered in Vermont in 1972, the same year the US banned DDT use. In 1988, Ospreys built just 3 nests and raised 3 young in Vermont. By 2002, those numbers had increased to 39 nests and 68 young. (Courtesy of the USFWS.)



Nesting Platforms

Nests made on artificial platforms last longer, as metal shields protect them from climbing predators such as raccoons. They are also less often damaged or lost due to trees falling. (Courtesy of the VDFW, credit Diane Pence.)

(Photograph courtesy of Jeff Nadler.)