



Osprey

Pandion haliaetus

Status

Red listed: HD, BR, SPEC 3 (R)
Schedule 1 of WCA 1981
Annex I of EC Wild Birds Directive

National monitoring

Monitored annually by the Scottish Osprey Study Group (amateur and RSPB observers; results collated by Roy Dennis).

Population and distribution

Historically, ospreys bred throughout the British Isles, but due to long-term persecution over many centuries the species became extinct in England in 1847 and in Scotland in 1918. Successful recolonisation occurred in Scotland in 1954 (Dennis 1995) at Loch Garten, and the population has slowly increased to 111 pairs in 1997 (Dennis 1997).

Ecology

In Scotland, ospreys breed in a wide variety of wooded landscapes, including native Scots pine forests, and by freshwater lochs and rivers, which provide nesting and feeding sites. Ospreys also feed along estuaries. The nest is a bulky platform of sticks, typically in the crown of a live or dead Scots pine or other coniferous tree, rarely a deciduous tree; artificial platforms are also used. A clutch of usually three eggs is laid mid-April to mid-May, and the young fledge between mid-July and August.

Breeding season survey – population

At present all known sites are regularly monitored by the Scottish Osprey Study Group and their contacts.

Information required

- number of occupied eyries
- map showing the boundary of the survey area and all osprey registrations.

Number and timing of visits

As many visits during April and May as are required to confirm eyrie occupancy.

Time of day

Any time of day.

Sites/areas to visit

All known sites, artificial nests and suitable areas should be visited.

Equipment

- 1:25,000 map of the survey area
- Schedule 1 licence
- prepared field maps
- telescope.

Safety reminders

Ensure someone knows where you are and when you are due back.

Disturbance

Do not make unnecessary visits to nest-sites. During the laying or brooding period, disturbance should be kept to an absolute minimum. If visits are made during this time then observe the nest-site from a discreet distance. Disturbance distances vary from 100 to 500 m. No visits to nests are necessary to confirm occupancy.

Egg-collectors are a threat to this species. Keep site information confidential, carry minimal site information with you, and be alert to any suspicious activity.

Methods

Ospreys are generally faithful to successful nest-sites, so most of the annual monitoring involves visits to known sites. Finding new sites is more difficult and involves cold searching, following birds with fish and using local information.



Mark the boundary of the survey area on a map. Make one or more initial visits in early April, to find all those areas which could hold potential nest-sites and mark them on the map. Also mark any vantage points which overlook suitable feeding habitat. Any other areas not suitable as nesting or feeding sites can be excluded from the survey and marked as such on the survey map. Search for osprey activity.

For subsequent visits (until the end of May) work out a route which ensures that all potential nest-sites are visited (scanned with binoculars or telescope) and that all suitable feeding habitat is watched from vantage points. Ensure that you get to within 500 m of all points in suitable habitats. Record all osprey observations and attempt to confirm occupancy (without visiting nests) at all potential nesting sites.

Proof of occupancy by a pair requires that either (a) two ospreys are seen together at an eyrie on more than one occasion separated by a week or (b) incubation by one of the adults is witnessed or parents are seen feeding chicks. If occupancy is not thus proven by the presence of two adults by the end of April, revisit potential eyries in May in order to check for incubating birds or parents feeding chicks. Approach these areas with caution at this time and only watch from a discreet distance so that ospreys are not flushed early in incubation. There is no need to revisit eyries where occupancy has been confirmed.

Record all osprey activity on to a new map for each visit using standard BTO notation (Appendix 1).

Report the following:

1. The number and location of eyries with a pair present for more than a week.
2. Any incubating birds present (or parents feeding chicks).
3. Any pairs present for less than one week.
4. Any single birds present.

5. The identity of adults (rings seen or plumage characteristics noted, particularly on the head).

Provide a summary map of the survey area showing all osprey registrations. The number of occupied eyries is the sum of 1 and 2 above.

Breeding season survey – breeding success and productivity

The Scottish Osprey Study Group also collects valuable information on clutch size, the number of chicks hatched, the numbers of chicks ringed, the numbers of chicks fledged and the causes of any failures. Please contact the group or the RSPB for further instructions on how to gather this information safely.

As part of a long-term study of osprey breeding biology, most young ospreys are ringed with coloured plastic leg rings. Please use a telescope to check for these on migrating ospreys. Note which leg is colour-ringed, the colour, and the repeated inscription on the ring. Please report this to the Study Group.

Osprey Study Group contacts: Roy Dennis, Inchdryne, Nethybridge, Inverness-shire; RSPB Offices for South and West Scotland, East Scotland and North Scotland (see *Useful addresses* in the *Introduction*)

Contributed by Roy Dennis

References

- Dennis, R (1995) Ospreys *Pandion haliaetus* in Scotland – a study of recolonization. *Vogelwelt* 116: 193–195.
Dennis, R (1997) *Osprey News 1997*. Unpublished newsletter.