

Sandy Hook Plants and Wildlife Series

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Gateway National Recreation Area



Osprey



Osprey Nests

The Osprey, also known as the fish-hawk, is a seasonal visitor to Sandy Hook, often nesting high above the ground on platforms, buildings, or in tall dead trees. Osprey nests are distinctive in appearance: they are large and made of sticks and twigs. During their

stay at Sandy Hook, both female and male adult Ospreys are often found at their nest, keeping eggs warm in the early spring and feeding and shading their babies during the summer. The male Ospreys will also hunt for food.

Fishing and Hunting Techniques

With its 72 inch wingspan, the brown and white Osprey can be seen soaring above the bay looking for fish. Ospreys have extremely good vision. When it spots a fish, the Osprey folds its wings and dives into the water entering feet-first, grabbing the fish with its powerful claws or talons that help them hold onto the wet, slippery fish. They also have a strong hooked beak for tearing fish into bite-sized pieces. Their plumage is compact to keep them

dry when they splash into the water. Ospreys have a dark brown stripe across their eyes and dark bands on the underside of their tails. Their backs and long-arched wings are brown. White feathers cover their breasts and upper legs. Female Ospreys are larger than the males and have a dark brown breast band of feathers around their necks. When they fly, Ospreys have an M-shaped crook in their wings.

Offspring

After wintering in Latin America, Ospreys return to their summer nesting sites, including Sandy Hook, during the third week of March. The female Osprey lays two to three mottled brown eggs, usually by late April. Ospreys incubate their eggs for about

five weeks. In late July the young Osprey fledglings can be seen practicing flapping their wings, preparing to fly. When they are ready to fly, the mother often drops a fish just beyond the nest to encourage them to jump out and fly.



Protecting the Osprey

Ospreys faced extinction in the 1970s due to the use of the pesticide DDT, which made the eggs too fragile to survive. The population is slowly recovering.

Visitors to Sandy Hook should not approach the Osprey nests or make too much noise nearby. Kite flying, boating, or fishing are prohibited near Osprey nests. Fishing line is a persistent danger to the Osprey because it does not decompose if left

behind in the water or on the beach. Their talons are easily tangled in old fishing line, and this causes infections that kill them.

The National Park Service works actively to protect Ospreys and bands the young birds each year. It is best to use binoculars to see Ospreys at Sandy Hook. You can see inside of a nest, by viewing an Osprey web cam on the Internet. <http://www.fws.gov/blackwater/>

Fast Facts:

Scientific Name:	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
Size:	Body length about two feet. Wingspread of five feet.
Identification:	Its back and long arched wings are brown, and white plumage covers its breast and upper legs. The characteristic M-shaped crook in its wings, its wrist patches, dark brown stripes across the eyes and the dark bands on the underside of the tail identify an osprey in flight.
Breeding:	Females lay two to three eggs by late April. A female that retains its mate from a previous season will reproduce more successfully than those with a new mate.
Eggs:	The eggs are approximately the size of very large chicken eggs, mottled and the color of cinnamon.
Incubation period:	Five weeks. After hatching, the 2-ounce chick flies within eight weeks.
Habitat:	Fresh and salt water, shallow water estuaries, lakes, and rivers. Nest on platforms, buoys, chimneys, and dead trees.
Food:	Live fish – menhaden, striped bass, alewife, perch, and eel
Lifespan:	18 years or more.
Range:	North American Ospreys are migratory, over-wintering in Latin America. Populations in Florida and Mexico are year-round residents.
Management needs:	Survival depends on the adjustment to changing habitat and disturbance by humans. Success is due to providing them with nest sites and a stable food source.

For More Information

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