



WILDLIFE FACTFILE: Osprey

This Wildlife Factfile is all about the Osprey, *Pandion haliaetus*. The Osprey is a bird of prey usually seen over water as it searches for fish. They are huge birds with white plumage below, a dark brown back and a white head with distinctive black 'bandit mask' across the eyes. They're impressive enough just doing a fly past, but if you see them fishing, that is truly spectacular. Starting from up to 30 m above the water they tuck their wings in and dive, head lined up behind their massive talons, and plunge into the water to grab an unsuspecting fish. They bring it to the surface, then take off, no easy feat from a floating start. Once airborne they shake themselves like a wet dog to dry off. Then they carefully turn the fish around in their talons so it faces head first. This makes it more aerodynamic and keeps the flapping tail out of their faces.

Ospreys became extinct as a breeding bird in England due to persecution in the 1840s but came back to nest again for the first time in Cumbria in 2001. Since then they have steadily been expanding their range and last year Cumbria had 8 active nests from which 17 young fledged. There are now about 30 breeding pairs in England and Wales, so progress is slow but steady.

It is best to look out for them in April-May and September, when migrating. Many of them cross the Sahara Desert, which doesn't have many fish to eat, so they need to put on some weight first. This means they usually spend a few days at a favourite spot, often near the River Ribble or River Wyre, to feed themselves up for the journey. We can all help ospreys to thrive again by protecting the areas crucial to their survival, such as the freshwater and wetland habitats they feed in.

DID YOU KNOW?

Ospreys migrate to West Africa during winter and have been known to fly up to 430 km in just one day!



Average length: 60 cm
Wingspan: 150-180 cm
Weight: 1500 – 1900 g
Average lifespan: 12 years

