

Osprey

Pandion haliaetus

Unique among North American raptors for its diet of live fish and ability to dive into water to catch them, Ospreys are common sights soaring over shorelines, patrolling waterways, and standing on their huge stick nests, white heads gleaming. These large, rangy hawks do well around humans and have rebounded in numbers following the ban on the pesticide DDT. Hunting Ospreys are a picture of concentration, diving with feet outstretched and yellow eyes sighting straight along their talons.

Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

Ospreys are very large, distinctively shaped hawks. Despite their size, their bodies are slender, with long, narrow wings and long legs. Ospreys fly with a marked kink in their wings, making an M-shape when seen from below.

Color Pattern

Ospreys are brown above and white below, and overall they are whiter than most raptors. From below, the wings are mostly white with a prominent dark patch at the wrists. The head is white with a broad brown stripe through the eye. Juveniles have white spots on the back and buffy shading on the breast.

Behavior

Ospreys search for fish by flying on steady wingbeats and bowed wings or circling high in the sky over relatively shallow water. They often hover briefly before diving, feet first, to grab a fish. You can often clearly see an Osprey's catch in its talons as the bird carries it back to a nest or perch.

Habitat

Look for Ospreys around nearly any body of water: saltmarshes, rivers, ponds, reservoirs, estuaries, and even coral reefs. Their conspicuous stick nests are placed in the open on poles, channel markers, and dead trees, often over water

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 21.3 - 22.8 inches
- Wingspan - 59.1 - 70.9 inches
- Weight - 49.4 - 70.5 ounces



Cool Facts

- An Osprey may log more than 160,000 migration miles during its 15-to-20-year lifetime.
- Ospreys are unusual among hawks in possessing a reversible outer toe that allows them to grasp with two toes in front and two behind. Barbed pads on the soles of the birds' feet help them grip slippery fish. When flying with prey, an Osprey lines up its catch head first for less wind resistance.
- The name "Osprey" made its first appearance around 1460, via the Medieval Latin phrase for "bird of prey" (avis prede). Some wordsmiths trace the name even further back, to the Latin for "bone-breaker"—ossifragus.