



Rare Wildlife of New Hampshire

Osprey

Pandion haliaetus

NEW HAMPSHIRE: THREATENED
UNITED STATES: NOT LISTED



How does it look and behave?

Often mistaken for a bald eagle, the osprey is larger than most hawks standing 2 feet tall with a wingspan of 6 feet. Females are larger than males.

Appearance: Its head is white with a bright yellow eye and dark eye strip. The wings and back are dark brown, the lower underparts are white while the breast has a faint band, more commonly seen in females. Its wings have a distinct M-shaped crook and black wrist patches, seen in flight. Osprey feathers are dense and oily. Their feet have a pivoting outer toe, unlike other hawks, and there are sharp scales on the bottom of their feet for catching and holding fish.

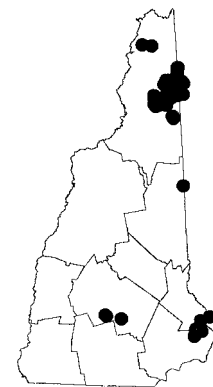
Behavior: Osprey flight is characterized by slow, powerful wing beats followed by a glide. They hover over the water, plunging feet first for fish.

Breeding: Courtship is an acrobatic and noisy display of circling, soaring, chasing, diving and swooping with shrill calls and screams. Male osprey carry sticks and fish high above their territory and vocalize to attract the female and ward off competitors. Osprey pairs return to the same nest each year, adding dead branches and lining the inside with moss, seaweed, or marsh grass.

Where is it found?

Habitat: In late March and continuing through May, osprey return to New Hampshire to breed and feed in large clear water bodies where fish are abundant. Estuaries, lakes, beaver ponds, bogs, rivers, and streams are all suitable habitats.

Nest: Osprey build their nests in the top of dead or open-topped live trees from 60-100 feet high. Nest trees are the tallest in their territory and are close to their feeding areas. In New Hampshire osprey nest primarily in dead or dying white pine. Nests are usually 5 feet in diameter and have been built as deep as 8 feet. Females lay 2-4 eggs during May. Both parents incubate the eggs.



Osprey
● nest sites



Rare Wildlife of New Hampshire

Range: Populations are scattered worldwide with the exceptions of Antarctica and New Zealand. In North America osprey are found during the breeding season from north-western Alaska to Newfoundland except for the tundra and south to Florida. They migrate north through NH in April and May and migrate south through NH in September and October to their wintering grounds in Central and South America. In New Hampshire osprey breed in the Lake Umbagog/Androscoggin River area, on Great Bay in Newmarket and Newington, and near Lake Francis in Pittsburg.

What are the management opportunities?

The availability of suitable nest sites is a critical factor in the future well-being of ospreys in New Hampshire. Foresters, landowners, and other land managers can follow these specific management recommendations:

- Retain suitable nesting trees including tall, dead trees (snags) or partially exposed, large white pines, live or dead, growing in wetland soils or in moist or flooded areas.
- Retain an uncut buffer zone around each Osprey nest tree of 66 feet or 1 chain. Avoid harvesting trees within 330 feet of the nest during the nesting season (May - August).
- Mark and leave 3-6 potential nest trees within a 20 chain (1,320 foot) radius of each existing nest.
- Install and maintain metal predator guards on nest trees.

Construction and proper placement of nesting platforms is a proven technique for increasing nesting opportunities for osprey. The success of platforms is dependent on several factors including adequate foraging areas, availability of natural nest sites, and proximity to existing nesting areas.

What should you do if you see a Osprey?

To report breeding activity or for assistance on evaluating nest platform placement contact NH Fish and Game Department, Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program, 2 Hazen Drive, Concord, NH 03301 (603) 271-2462 or Audubon Society of NH, 3 Silk farm Road, Concord, NH 03301 (603) 224-9909. Artwork by Victor Young ©.



NEW HAMPSHIRE
NATURAL HERITAGE
INVENTORY



"Helping You Put Knowledge and Research To Work"

The University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension is an equal opportunity educator and employer. University of New Hampshire, County Governments, New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development, New Hampshire Fish and Game, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service cooperating.