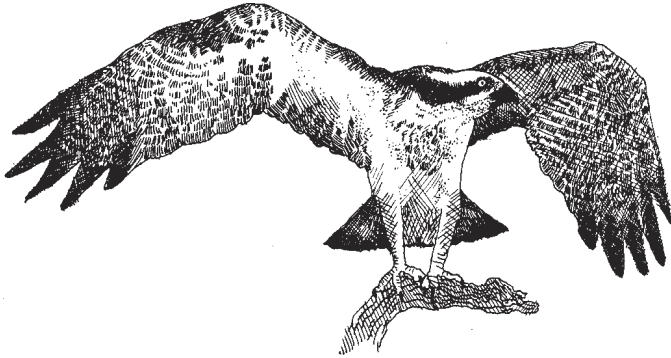


Vermont's Wildlife Heritage

Nongame and Natural Heritage Program

FACTS ABOUT NONGAME WILDLIFE SPECIES



Osprey were removed from Vermont's Endangered and Threatened Species list in April 2005.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

Also known as the "fish-hawk," the osprey is a bird of prey that nests near large areas of water. In Vermont, ospreys can be found along Lake Champlain, Lake Memphremagog, and the Connecticut River and may occasionally be seen fishing on other water bodies.

Recent management efforts to provide safe and sturdy nest sites in the best foraging habitats have contributed to increased breeding success. Due to the sensitivity of these birds to disturbance, people are encouraged to remain at least 300 feet from nesting areas during this period.

DESCRIPTION

The crooked bend of the wings in flight is characteristic of the osprey. A dark line through the eye area is another important identifying feature.

The osprey has a dark brown back. The underside is white with a lightly brown-spotted breast. Spotting may be absent in males. Bright yellow eyes stare from a small, narrow head. Sharp talons, used for hunting, protrude from the end of powerful legs. Juveniles have a speckled back and wings and red eyes. Other characteristics include:

■ **Sounds:** Clear whistles to shrill cries indicate increasing levels of alarm.

■ **Size:** Smaller and more streamlined than eagles, ospreys are approximately 21 to 26 inches in body length. Females are somewhat larger than males. Adult birds have a wingspan of 59 to 67 inches and weigh about 3.5 pounds.

■ **Food:** The primary food is fish that swim close to the surface such as perch, suckers, and bullhead that ospreys capture by plummeting from the air and grabbing with their talons.

HABITAT AND DISTRIBUTION

Ospreys breed near large bodies of water with an abundant supply of fish. In Vermont they nest near lakes and rivers, occasionally in loose colonies.

The nest is a large, bulky pile of sticks, put together on the top of a tall dead tree, a rocky ledge, telephone pole cross arms, or an artificial platform.

Ospreys lay 2 to 4 white or milky-white eggs, heavily marked with brown.

In the eastern U.S., breeding occurs from Maine to Florida. Many ospreys from Vermont are likely to spend their winters as far south as Central America.

REASONS FOR DECLINE

DDT was used as an insecticide until banned in the U.S. in the early 1970s. It widely dispersed throughout the environment where it takes years to break down. Ospreys ingested the DDT when feeding on fish. The result was thinner eggshells that broke during incubation.

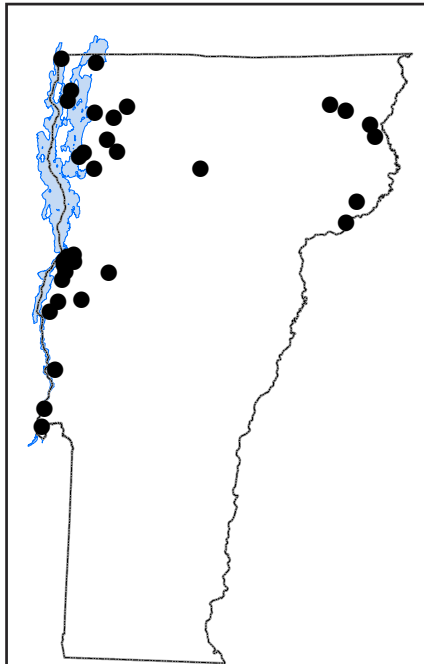
Other circumstances that affect the osprey population include:

■ Ospreys like to nest in tall dead trees, but these trees may fall during the year, resulting in fewer available nesting sites.

■ In areas where there are dams and channels, the natural flow of water is altered and the availability of fish may change. In these situations ospreys might then need to move to a new location.

■ Disturbances at nest sites such as predation and human intrusion have had some effects on the osprey population.

The Nongame and Natural Heritage Program (NNHP) is responsible for managing and enhancing Vermont's native plants, natural communities, and animals that are not hunted or fished (nongame species). A unit within the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife, the NNHP's mission includes the preservation of Vermont's rich and varied natural heritage for present and future generations.



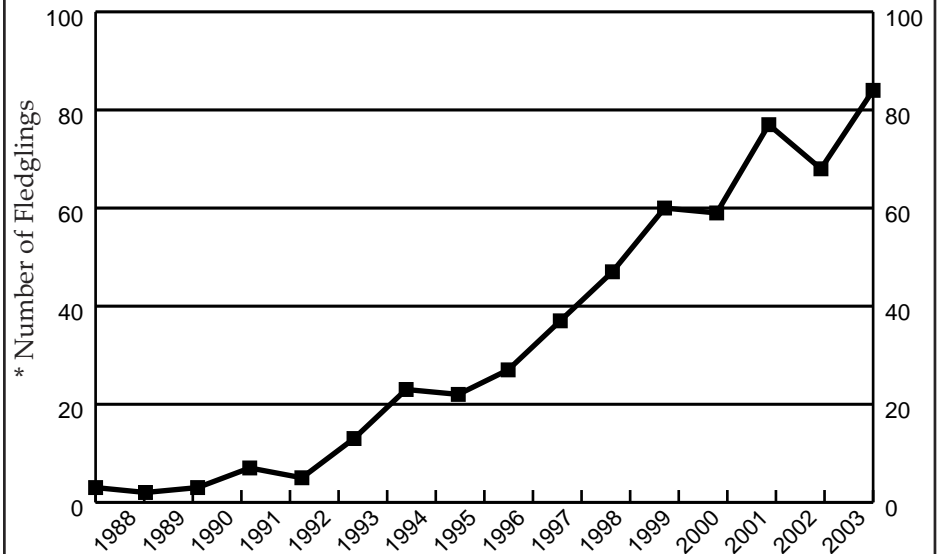
**General Nesting Areas
of Ospreys
in Vermont, 2007**

MANAGEMENT EFFORTS

Higher productivity of ospreys in Vermont in recent years has occurred due to the efforts of many people and organizations including the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Vermont power companies. Management activities include:

- Artificial nesting platforms have been put up in appropriate areas through cooperation with power companies and other landowners. Many have been used by ospreys to build nests and raise young.
- Bands of metal (predator guards) are placed around trees and platform poles where ospreys are nesting to minimize the approach of predators from the ground.
- Nesting areas are monitored so the number of nesting osprey can be tracked and so that disturbances by people can be minimized through placement of warning signs if needed.

Osprey Breeding Status in Vermont 1988-2003**



* Number of fledglings indicates number of chicks that flew from the nest.
** Statewide monitoring for fledglings suspended after 2003.

■ Observations are noted as to where ospreys frequently occur so that nesting platforms can be put up in those areas.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Avoid getting too close to nesting sites during the breeding season. Honor warning signs when posted.
- Maintain a respectful distance from wild animals. Travel with binoculars! If an animal vocalizes when you're near its territory, immediately back off.

■ Observe and report on osprey nesting activities in your area.

■ Report sightings of osprey, especially at natural tree nests, to the Essex District Office at 802-878-1564.

■ Donate any amount to the Nongame Wildlife Fund at the sign of the loon on the Vermont income tax form, on hunting and fishing license applications, or by direct donation. (See box.)

Osprey recovery efforts in Vermont, including this fact sheet, are funded in part by contributions to the Nongame Wildlife Fund. Created by the legislature in 1986, the fund enables people to voluntarily contribute to programs on behalf of Vermont's nongame species. These tax-deductible gifts are used by the Nongame and Natural Heritage Program to manage species and habitats and provide planning assistance and educational programs. Direct gifts are accepted, payable to:

Nongame Wildlife Fund
Vermont Fish and Wildlife Dept.
103 S. Main St., Waterbury, VT 05671-0501
(802) 241-3700

