

OBSERVATIONS OF THE OSPREY

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On 25 and 26 May 1990, at Grand Marais (on the south basin of Lake Winnipeg) I observed my first Osprey nest. It was atop an outside pole of a hydro substation (see photo) and was about 12 m (40 ft.) from the ground. The nest was at least 1 m (3 ft.) in diameter. Frequently Ospreys nest in a small group or scattered colonies, but this particular nest appeared to be the only one in this entire lakeside area.^{5,6}

The hydro substation is located near a main road with a cutoff, and cars are not permitted to park too close to the nest site. This is the third year that the same nest has been occupied. Some Osprey nests have been known to last 30 to 40 years.² Contrary to some previous reports, the sitting female seemed to be very sensitive to humans and I understand that the R.C.M.P. stationed nearby keep a close watch to see that the nest is not disturbed.³

On a later visit, 22 June, I noticed that only the head and neck of the female could be seen above the nest. Incubation by the female of the two to four eggs takes anywhere from 28 to 33 days.^{2,4} The morning of 23 June I observed the male fly from the top of a tall "perching" tree which was located in a spruce and tamarack stand several hundred feet behind the nest site. He had a piece of fish in his talons. The Osprey lives on fish, hence the name "fish hawk."^{2,4} As he circled above (and

not far from the nest) there were many loud calls from the female. I was quite surprised to see a pair of Eastern Kingbirds try to attack the male, but the Osprey made no attempt to attack the kingbirds. Later that day I observed the male fly to the nest with another piece of fish and the female ate it.

Before noon 24 June I noticed the male perched on the edge of the nest; the female was sitting restlessly. Bent mentions that the male feeds the female bits of fish at the nest while she is incubating but "she sometimes leaves the nest for exercise or to fish for herself."² The young do not fledge until they are eight weeks old but at five or six weeks they can feed themselves with the fish dropped into the nest.²

As the Osprey is not a deep diver, it catches fish which are close to the surface.² In Fort Myers, Florida, February 1983, I observed an Osprey hovering 15 m (50 ft.) above a lagoon, plunge downward in a spectacular manner, with half-closed wings to catch a fish in its powerful claws.¹ The fish was carried head first, as is the usual manner.⁴ As this species has keen eyes, when in flight it can locate a fish from a height of 330 to 660 m (100 to 200 ft.).²

On 16 July a resident at Grand Marais informed me there were two young ones; on 12 August it was noted there were three young being



Osprey nest on power pole.

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fed by the female. On 26 August the same resident observed the Osprey family flying above the lake, not far from the cottages.

On 25 May 1991, I visited this same nesting site and noticed that the female Osprey was sitting. The male was perched about 13 m (45 ft.) away on one of the hydro poles which was part of the substation. The next day I observed the female fly off the nest and circle above the nesting area; her vociferous calls ended with a shrill angry scream. She then flew back on the nest; there was no sign of the male at that time.

It is believed that the Osprey mates for life.² As this is the fourth successive year this nest has been occupied, it is probably the same pair which have been returning.

The North American race of the Osprey winters from southern United States south to the West Indies,

northern Argentina, Paraguay and Peru.⁴ I am looking forward with great anticipation to the return of the Ospreys to the Grand Marais nesting site for the season of 1992.

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