Ospreys
(*Pandion haliaetus carolinensis*)

Description: Ospreys weigh 3-4# and are 20-24" tall (the female is larger than the male) Their wingspan is 5-6', the wings bend at the elbow. They have dark brown backs, white on the top of their head, neck and chest. They have large, yellow eyes, white legs and feet with long slender claws.

Females have a pattern of brown feathers across their white chests.

Call: The most familiar call sounds like "cheep-cheep-cheep". Their call can get very loud and repetitious.

Diet: 99% fish. Ospreys eat 1-3 fish per day. They plunge feet first after fish. If fish are not available, they will eat small birds, reptiles or rodents. They eat their fish on a piling or branch in a tree, occasionally on the ground.

Nest: Florida Osprey nest in high trees, on poles and channel markers from November-April (most in January or February) near a body of water. Some nests are 6' high and weigh up to one-half ton. Both the male and female bring sticks to the nest but the female usually arranges the branches along with seaweed, shells, t-shirts, construction fencing, etc. to make a nest. The nest may be used for decades.

Breeding: Ospreys begin breeding at 3 years of age. Mating takes place in the nest. The male sits on top of the female and they copulate every few hours for 4-6 weeks. Ospreys mate for life but if one is killed, they will take another mate.

Eggs: 2-4 eggs, whitish-pink or dark with dark brown blotches about the size of chicken eggs laid in about 36 hour intervals, often in early morning. First egg is the largest. Ospreys brood 1 time/year.

Incubation: About 32-43 days. The eggs hatch at intervals of several days. The male feeds the female during this period.

Chicks: The male brings 6-8 fish to the female each day. The female broods the chicks continuously for 1-14 days. She feeds the chicks regurgitated food for about 40 days.

Fledgings: Ospreys fledge at about 7 weeks. They start by flapping their wings for hours at a time. By this time the chicks are as large or larger than the parents.

Fledgling

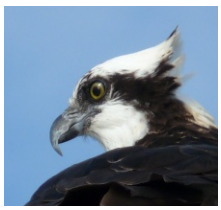
Migration: Ospreys leave for the north in April or May. Females are more likely to leave than males. The males return to Florida first in September or October. Chicks may stay where they were born their first year and return to their area of birth the third year.

Predators: Great horned owls, eagles, raccoons, ravens, & crows all eat Osprey chicks.

Longevity: Ospreys have a high death rate the first 2 years. One chick may fledge each year. An adult may reach 25 years of age but most have a life expectancy of 5-10 years.

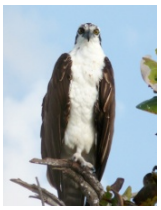
How to distinguish an Osprey from an Eagle

Osprey



Black, hooked beak

White legs and feet



White chest

Eagle

Yellow beak
All white head

Dark chest
Yellow feet

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