



Brunswick Wildlife Ospreys

What if your kids asked every day “what’s for dinner” and you replied “fish”? And then the kids jumped up and down for joy and begged for a meal. Pretty far fetched, right? Not if you are an Osprey. Commonly known as the sea hawk or fish hawk, its diet is almost 100 percent fish.

The Osprey has made a dramatic comeback over the past thirty years, recovering from huge declines principally due to reproductive failures. The thinning of egg shells, caused by DDT and other pesticides, resulted in many Osprey eggs being broken during incubation before they could hatch, a fate shared by other raptors notably the Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon.

Today many North American populations are approaching numbers equal to or greater than ever...a result of a cleaner environment, a huge increase in availability of artificial nest sites, and because Ospreys tolerate human activity near their nests. Artificial nest sites include channel markers, man-made towers and utility poles, and nesting platforms constructed especially for Ospreys.

The Osprey is now fairly common in our area...most of the year. They may still be found in winter; however, most overwinter further south along the Southeast and Gulf coasts, in the Caribbean Islands, and in South America.

Ospreys may be easily seen during the summer hovering over Brunswick’s salt marshes, ocean fronts, and lakes. They dive, legs extended forward, feet first into water to take fish. Since they do not plunge-dive head first like other species, they prey on surface-schooling fish or fish in shallow water.

In our area, Ospreys nest along the Intracoastal Waterway and Cape Fear River; around Orton Pond and Sunset Beach’s Twin Lakes; and many other freshwater lakes, rivers, and cypress swamps. Many times adults are seen returning to their nest with a fish in their

talons, with the fish head turned forward in an aerodynamically efficient manner to reduce drag. Almost like the fish is being taken for a ride. Not exactly a joy ride.

Probably the best location for watching Ospreys locally is at Sea Trail in Sunset Beach. To assist the birds, Sea Trail erected nesting platforms which Ospreys readily adapted to. Generally you can see ten or more nests from the parking lot overlooking the small lake, wetlands, and stream just below the clubhouse on Crooked Gulley Circle.

The above pictures were taken at Sea Trail. The picture with the three birds was taken a couple of weeks ago. The two birds on the left are juveniles and the other is their mother. You can tell they are juveniles because they have iPods...no, wait... it's the rows of white scaling on their wings. As I photographed them, the proud father was in a nearby tree protecting his family by screeching at me...or maybe just bragging.

I took the Brunswick Community College bird watching class to Sea Trail in late March. Immediately, we saw several Ospreys that were working on their nests. We also watched an Osprey in a tree holding a fish that was still kicking.

A female was sitting on what looked like a partially finished nest and another Osprey, which turned out to be her mate, was perched in a nearby tree. We got close looks without flushing her until she flew off and returned with a stick for the nest. While watching other birds we kept noticing both Ospreys fly out and back in depositing sticks.

Just before we left, I decided to get a photo of the male in its tree because the lighting was great. The male took off, flew to the female, mated with her, and then returned to his guard post. Wow!

I took photos of the entire sequence. Then I returned in July to take baby pictures. Yep, the two with the iPods!

John Ennis



