Osprey Migration: A Complete Guide

Last updated: 31 May 2022
Author

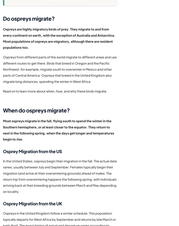
Share this article

Do ospreys migrate in Florida?
Do ospreys come migrate together?
Are all ospreys migratory?
Where do ospreys go in winter?
Do ospreys migrate from the UK?
Do ospreys migrate from the US?
Osprey Migration FAQs

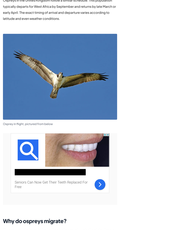
Ospreys (Pandion haliaetus) are cosmopolitan birds of prey that have different migration routes across the globe. They are expert fish hunters that can be found perching up and down rivers and estuaries or hunting over lakes and lochs. Their overwintering grounds are frequently completely different to where their breeding sites are.

Most populations of ospreys are migratory. They breed in the northern hemisphere, travelling south for the winter to escape harsh weather and enjoy rich fishing grounds. In the spring, these remarkable birds usually return to nest in the same place, and with the same partner, year after year.

Ospreys migration is a well-studied and amazing phenomenon that takes place on almost every continent on earth. Read along as we cover the fascinating osprey migration in more detail!



Start Dating Single Women Today



The migration of Ospreys is fascinating to watch

Sign-up for the Birdfact Newsletter
Enjoying our content and want more of it in your inbox? Sign up for our newsletter to get our facts straight to your inbox.
Enter your email address
Subscribe Now
We respect your privacy. Unsubscribe at any time.

Do ospreys migrate?

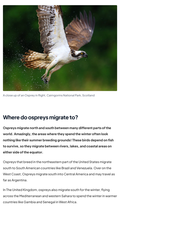
Most ospreys migrate in the fall. Flying south to spend the winter in the Southern hemisphere, or at least closer to the equator. They return to nest in the following spring, when the days get longer and temperatures begin to rise.

Osprey Migration from the US

In the United States, ospreys begin their migration in the fall. The actual date varies, usually between July and September. Females typically begin their migration just arrive at their overwintering grounds ahead of males. The male osprey will overwintering populations in the following month, with individuals arriving back in their breeding grounds between March and May, depending on locality.

Osprey Migration from the UK

Ospreys in the United Kingdom follow a similar schedule. This population typically departs for West Africa by September and returns by late March or early April. The exact timing of arrival and departure varies according to latitude and even weather conditions.



Osprey in flight, you can hear calling

Homes Can Now Get Their Teeth Replaced for Free
Dental Implants | Sponsored Ads

Why do ospreys migrate?

Ospreys migrate to avoid facing the challenges of survival in winter. Long-distance migration comes at a great cost as far as energy is concerned, and is also a risky move with some birds never making their overwintering grounds. Migration is essential for the species, however, to escape freezing conditions and dwindling food resources.

How far do ospreys migrate?

The distances that ospreys migrate vary greatly across the globe. Some of the longest distances travelled are by northern and eastern European populations that overwinter in South Africa.

Ospreys migrating from Sweden, for example, were shown to travel an average distance of 6,700km (4,200mi) on their migration to Africa. One young bird from Rutgers (Massachusetts, USA, travelled 3,400km (2,110 mi) to French Guiana in South America on its first migration.

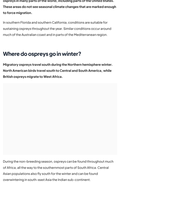
A Osprey at Lake Of Healing Night, Cuyahoga National Park, Scotland

Where do ospreys migrate to?

Ospreys migrate north and south between many different parts of the world. Amazingly, the areas where they spend the winter often look nothing like their summer breeding grounds! These birds depend on fish to survive, so they migrate between rivers, lakes, and coastal areas on either side of the equator.

Ospreys that breed in the northeastern part of the United States migrate south to South American countries like Brazil and Venezuela. Over in the West Coast, Ospreys migrate south into Central America and may travel as far as Argentina.

In the United Kingdom, ospreys also migrate south for the winter. Flying across the Mediterranean and western Sahara to spend the winter in warmer countries like Gambia and Senegal in West Africa.



Ospreys depend on fish for their diets

How long does it take for an osprey to migrate?
Migration times varies between different ospreys because various populations and individuals fly differing distances. Individual ospreys even take different routes. Northern European ospreys can take six weeks to migrate to Southern Africa, but American birds usually complete their migration in less than a week.
23 Freaking Awesome Gadgets You Didn't Know You Needed (Until Today)

Do ospreys fly nonstop?

Ospreys are usually not able to complete their migrations in one go. They will make many stops along the way during their migration to hunt and rest, often spending several days at a time at various locations. Studies have shown that they travel 90 - 360 kilometers (56 - 224mi) per day, but they can travel much further in a single flight when necessary.

Sometimes, stopping to rest is just not an option. The Atlantic Ocean separates the continental United States and Brazil, for example, much and considerable distances over the Atlantic ocean. In this case, distances of up to 2,400km (1,491mi) without a single flight of 24 hours have been reported!

An Osprey soaring through the sky

Do ospreys migrate in flocks?

Ospreys usually migrate on their own, although they have been known to hunt in small groups of two to five individuals. In some places like Israel, where migrating birds naturally converge, as many as 40 ospreys have been seen together.

Do osprey pairs migrate together?

Ospreys mate for life and pair with each other in the same nest year after year. The pair arrive at their breeding grounds at different times, however.

A newspaper of Ospreys migrating together in a tree

Are all ospreys migratory?

Not all populations of ospreys are migratory. In fact, you can find resident ospreys in many parts of the world, including parts of the United States. These areas do not see seasonal climate changes that are drastic enough to force migration.

In southern Florida and southern California, conditions are suitable for sustaining ospreys throughout the year. Similar conditions occur around much of the Australian coast and in parts of the Mediterranean region.

Where do ospreys go in winter?

Migratory ospreys spend their winters in warmer regions. Some United States North America birds travel south to Central and South America, while British ospreys migrate to West Africa.

An Osprey diving for fish

During the non-breeding season, ospreys can be found throughout much of Africa, all the way to the southernmost parts of South Africa. Central Asian populations also fly south for the winter and can be found overwintering in south-east Asia the Indian sub-continent.

Where do ospreys go in the summer?

In the northern hemisphere summer, ospreys can be found right across North America, Europe, and Asia. These birds are always found near water where they hunt for fish.

In the USA, ospreys can be found almost anywhere on migration, although they do not breed across much of the interior. In the UK, ospreys have made a return after being driven to extinction in the early 20th century. They are most numerous in Scotland, although reintroduction programs have been successful at establishing breeding pairs in England once more.

Do ospreys migrate from the UK?

All ospreys in the United Kingdom are migratory. The majority of British ospreys migrate south through France, Spain, and across the Mediterranean into Africa. They must then travel across vast expanses of desert over countries like Morocco and Mauritania.

Ospreys are therefore the pick of a fishing pole, looking out for prey

Do ospreys migrate from the US?

Most American ospreys are migratory, although there are resident populations in the south. Ospreys that breed in the west of the USA fly south through Mexico and Central America to spend winter in Central and South America.

cover long distances over the Atlantic ocean and the Caribbean sea to reach the South American mainland.

Osprey taking off with a recently caught fish

Osprey Migration FAQs

Do ospreys migrate at night?

Ospreys typically migrate by day. Occasionally they have to fly overnight when making long-distance ocean crossings because there just aren't any places to perch and rest.

Do ospreys return to the same place each year?

Studies have shown that ospreys return to the same breeding grounds each year. This site fidelity is not limited to their breeding grounds, however. These birds generally return to their overwintering grounds each year as well.

Do ospreys eat during migration?

Ospreys make various stops during their migration to hunt and feed. Interestingly, many ospreys have been observed carrying fish while in flight, indicating that some individuals will feed 'on the go'. The extent of this behavior is not fully known, however.

Do ospreys ever stay through winter?

Ospreys often spend their first winter on their southern non-breeding grounds. They return to the breeding grounds 18 months after first leaving their nest. Adult birds from migratory populations rarely overwinter in their breeding grounds, however.

You may also like

Osprey

IDENTIFICATION

Birds of Prey in the UK (Complete Guide)

FACTS

Are Ospreys Endangered? (Threats, Numbers + FAQs)

Get the best of Birdfact

Brighten up your inbox with our exclusive newsletter, enjoyed by thousands of people from around the world.

Enter your email address... Sign up

ormation will be used in accordance with Birdfact's privacy policy. You may opt out at any time.

Birdfact

Learn all about birds around the world through our growing collection of in-depth expert guides.

QUICK LINKS

- Birds
- Articles
- Newsletter sign up
- Destinations

BIRD BEHAVIOR

- Bird Behavior Overview
- Communication
- Feeding Behaviors
- Mating & Breeding
- Migration
- Social Structures
- Learning and Intelligence
- Human Interaction
- Bathing & Preening

INFORMATION

- About Birdfact
- Contact us

© 2023 - Birdfact. All rights reserved. No part of this site may be reproduced without our written permission.

A RAPTIVE PARTNER SITE

GET A FREE KITCHEN DESIGN CONSULTATION
Book Now