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Border Ospreys

WHERE DID THE TIME GO?

 By **Rosieshields** on July 22, 2025

Sunrise on a misty July morning

Hello everyone. Thank you for your patience. I hadn't realised that it was quite so long since I'd updated you on the progress at the nest. As you will, I hope, have realised that no news has definitely been good news and the chicks have been thriving with a good supply of fish and attentive parents. They have exploded in size and one of the advantages of still having the infertile egg in the nest is that you can easily compare how they have grown. Chick no 1 (let's call it C1)'s foot is now the same size as the egg. It seems incredible to think that the whole chick fitted inside a similar one only a few weeks ago. The development of the wings has been the most impressive to me. From little stubs they have grown into long, graceful wings that, in a couple of weeks, will bear them up into the sky with powerful strokes as a precursor to their long migration; it's almost unbelievable. Food has been mostly plentiful and both chicks spent a lot of the first few weeks either eating or in a food coma/sleeping it off. They have grown far more active in the last couple of weeks and are now fully into the wing exercising phase. Seeing the chaos that 2 chicks can have on a nest when they are both flapping at the same time, I hate to think how they coped on nests with 4 chicks! There has been very little sibling rivalry

although 2 days of bad weather when Samson was unable to bring as much food as normal did result in a few nasty sessions where C1 gave its sibling a bit of a battering. It looks brutal when they grab the nape of the other's neck and shake them backwards and forwards but, thankfully, it only lasted a couple of days and C2 quickly learned how to shield itself from the worst of the bullying.

A reminder of C1 and C2's sizes 6 weeks ago

C2 showing its wing at just under 6 weeks old

The chicks have also started to feed themselves and have attempted to steal from 500's talons as soon as she has relieved Samson of his catch. She has started to delay taking the fish from Samson, encouraging the chicks to come forward but that can be risky, as Samson will see any delay in exchanging the fish as a sign that he can keep it and will fly off with it. There's an amusing scene when he arrives and the other 3 are looking at each other, working out who's going to make the first move, while he's alert for an opportunity to escape with the prize. He no doubt has memories of previous chicks fighting over fish and grabbing his legs in a frenzy to be first and is trying to prevent a reoccurrence.

When not feeding the chicks, 500 has spent time bringing in sticks (she is still an amateur in comparison with the pair at Loch Arkaig for those of you who follow that nest, but she's bringing in some very weird shapes and sizes of branch) and also talons full of grass to provide a good landing and take off surface on the nest for when the chicks finally fledge.

Goodness only knows where that will fit, Augusta!!

We have an intruding osprey on most days but they stay well away and out of view of the camera so I can't tell how many intrusions are by different birds. Augusta caught a fish, a grayling, on one day when Samson had

been struggling with the weather. The chicks were slow to realise that she had brought something in but then C1 pounced and grabbed the fish for itself. I was a little concerned that C2 had had very little up to that stage in the day but Samson redeemed himself only a few minutes later by bringing in a sizeable trout which Augusta, C2 and then he enjoyed while C1 was struggling with its grayling. The rest of her time is spent on the nest perch or close to the nest but not always in sight of the camera. Samson is spending virtually no time in the nest, only what time he needs to deliver fish but when the family are temporarily all satisfied, he sometimes takes time to sit on the nest perch and look proudly out on his domain.

The family (from left to right: 500 (Augusta), Samson, C1 and C2)

The only downside is that it looks like that we will be unable to get the chicks ringed this year. Our ringer is unable to climb at present and can't find another climber to do this aspect of the work in the timescale required. As I'm sure you'll appreciate, as with so many aspects of osprey life, the window of opportunity for ringing the chicks is very small. They have to be large enough to be able to fit the rings snugly around their ankles without them slipping off or pinching too tightly but young enough to not try and prematurely fledge when the nest is approached; the nest is about 130 ft up from the field. We have now just about reached the latter stage and so ringing will become impractical and dangerous for the chicks. If it doesn't happen and we aren't able to confirm all the data we take at the same time, we also have difficulty in deciding the sex of the birds. Weight and dimensions are the most accurate way we have but I'm going to hazard a guess that C1 is female. She is much bigger than C2, even more so than can be expected with the 4 days' difference in age, and has the thicker ankles and legs that are normally associated with the females. C2 is more difficult to judge but could be a smaller female or a male towards the top end of the range; for the purposes of distinguishing them on here, I will refer to C2 as a male. No doubt, those assumptions are entirely wrong and the birds will have fooled me once again, but I'll stick with it, regardless.

So, the next thing is going to be the fledge of the two chicks. It's always a heart in mouth time. Some launch off, very confident, and others are far more wary. Those of you who have been with me for a while will recall that, 2 years ago, our male did a graceful launch, flight and landing when he fledged. The female, on the other hand, crashed through branches on take off and only just managed to pull away to avoid coming down in the field. She then 'arrived' (I can't call it a landing) on the nest perch with her talons out desperately trying to grip onto anything firm while at the same time dislodging her brother! We have a very benign surrounding area with large fields and no dense plantations of fir trees where chicks can get lost. Nevertheless, it is a worrying time. It's now 10 years since we had to rescue a chick that had come down in a field of tall crops and couldn't see out or get any lift to fly out. Luckily, we saw it and were able to rescue it and it flew back safely to the nest but the danger was clear.

I'll let you know how fledging goes and chat about how the nest and family dynamics change once both birds fledge. See you then. In the meantime, I'll remind you of that crazy first landing by the 2023 female chick.

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