

General

Where can I see an Osprey at the marsh?

Look for Osprey flying and fishing over the San Diego Creek and SJWS ponds. Also look for them eating fish on top of the wooden raptor poles around the ponds. Listen for their thin high-pitched whistle.

What does an Osprey eat? How does it catch its food?

The Osprey eats mainly fish. At the marsh, visitors report Osprey catching large carp, a non-native fish. The Osprey hunts for fish by flying over water while looking down. When it spots one, the Osprey beats its wings to hover above the water and then dives down feet first to grab the fish. The Osprey carries the fish head-forward in its talons for best aerodynamics.

Is the Osprey here all year?

Yes. Most Ospreys migrate to Central and South America for the winter, but some stay all year in Southern California and Florida. They migrate alone instead of in flocks.

Is the Osprey currently endangered?

No. However, it was seriously endangered in the mid-20th century because of pesticides like DDT which caused thin-shelled or infertile eggs. These pesticides were banned in 1972, and the Osprey has since made a strong comeback.

Nesting



Scott Thomas bands Osprey chick at SJWS in 2010

What is so special about nesting Osprey?

Because Ospreys did not nest in Orange County for most of the 1900's, everyone was excited when a pair nested at Upper Newport Bay in 2006. An Osprey pair first nested here at the San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary in 2010 and successfully raised one chick. Silver bands on the female's legs revealed that she was born at Upper Newport Bay in 2008, so she raised a chick when only two years old (most Osprey start breeding at age three).

Where do Ospreys nest at the marsh?

The Osprey nest is on a tall, wooden nest platform behind Pond C that was installed by the Irvine Ranch Water District.

Where do Ospreys nest when they don't have a man-made platform?

An Osprey will nest on top of a large tree, a utility pole, or a cliff. It also nests on the ground on small islands, and in western Mexico it might nest on a cactus!

Nesting cont.

How do I know if a pair is nesting?

Look for Osprey carrying sticks to the nest platform in late winter. If the female laid eggs, she will incubate them while lying low in the nest with only her white head visible.

How long will the female incubate eggs?

A little over a month (about 38 days.)

How can I tell if a chick is in the nest?

Because the nest is deep, a chick may not be visible until it is old enough to stand up. If you see a small white head, it might be the mother's! Look for adults making feeding motions. A chick may be visible early May.

How long until the chick can fly?

Chicks will fly ("fledge") about a month and a half after they hatch (51-54 days.)

Does the male help during nesting?

Yes. Both male and female build the nest. The female does most of the incubation, but the male will help 30% of the time. Look for the male bringing fish to the female during incubation and after the chicks hatch. Ospreys usually mate for life!



Identification

What is an Osprey?

The Osprey is a large bird of prey. Like all raptors, it has large eyes to see prey, sharp talons to catch prey, and curved beak to tear apart prey. The Osprey has a white body, dark brown wings, and a dark stripe through its eye. When it flies, it can be identified by a white belly and dark brown bars on its flight feathers and tail.



What other birds might I confuse it with?

It might be confused with a Bald Eagle, but a Bald Eagle has an all-white head and a dark chest and belly. You might think a large gull in flight is an Osprey, but gulls have pointed wingtips and larger heads.



Bald Eagle
USFWS/Dave Menke



Osprey

Record your observations here

The Osprey Family of the San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary

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You can help protect nesting Osprey.
Obey all trail closure signs and keep
your distance from Osprey on poles.

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