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Birds of the Great Plains: Family Pandionidae (Ospreys)

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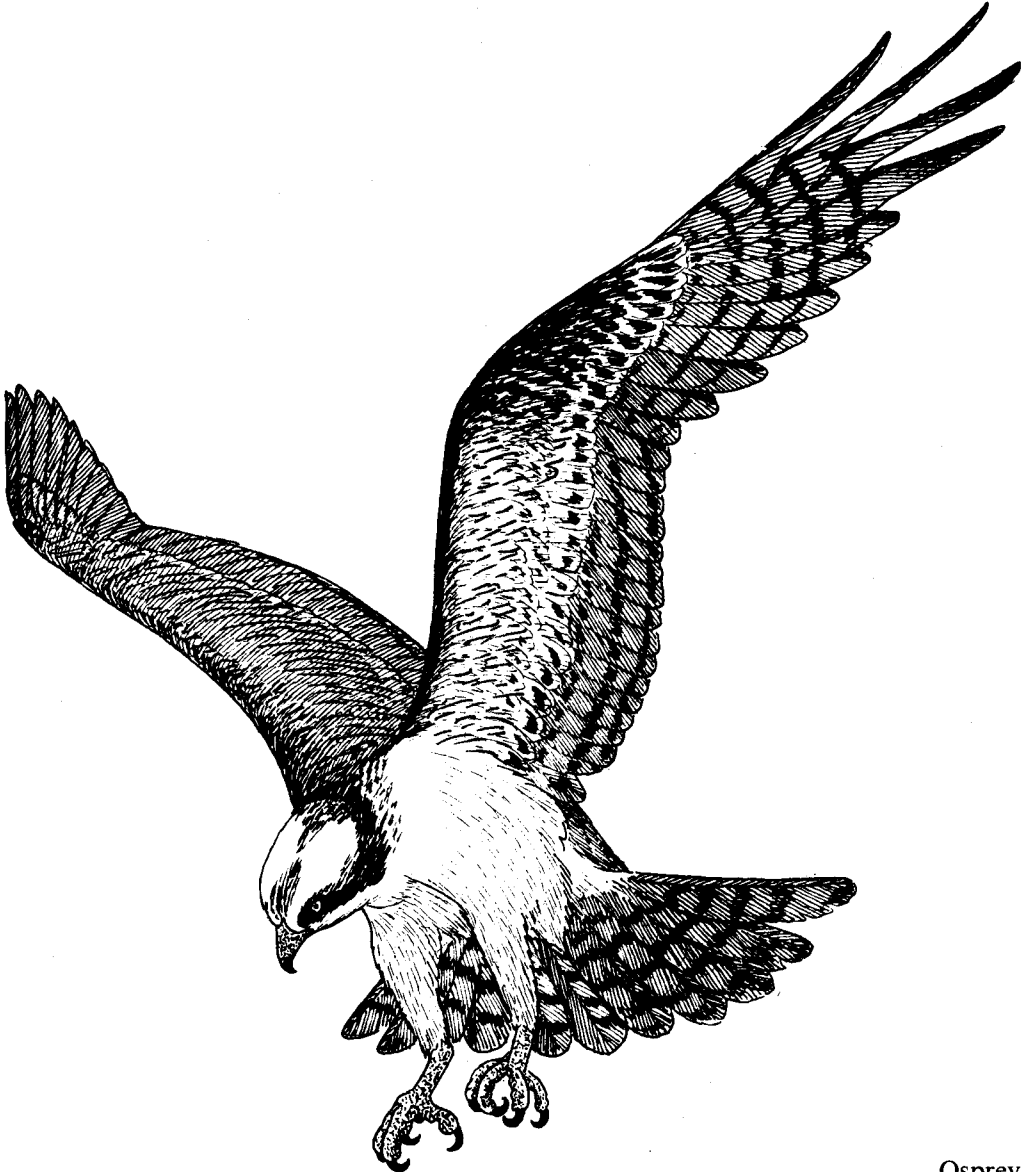
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FAMILY PANDIONIDAE
(OSPREYS)



Osprey

Osprey

Pandion haliaetus

Breeding Status: Restricted as a breeding species to northwestern Minnesota, with nesting records for Becker and Clearwater counties. There is also a 1973 record of attempted nesting in McLean County, North Dakota, and an old nesting record for Cass County, Nebraska. Previously ospreys had a wider nesting distribution in Minnesota, including most or all of the state.

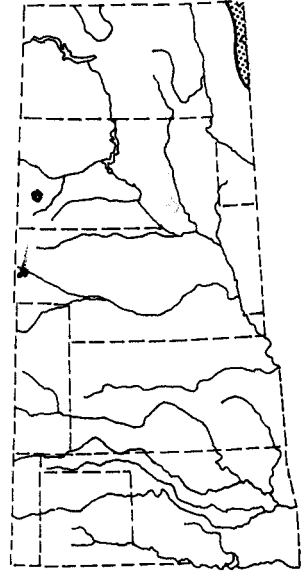
Breeding Habitat: Ospreys are associated with clear rivers and lakes in forested areas of our region but also occur along coastlines throughout much of the world.

Nest Location: In Minnesota, nests are 30-90 feet above the ground, usually at the tops of dead or partially dead lowland conifers, but sometimes on artificial structures such as powerline poles. They consist mostly of dead sticks and branches. Unlike eagle nests in the region, they are usually rounded rather than cone-shaped and are generally smaller; the cup is typically lined with lichens.

Clutch Size and Incubation Period: From 1 to 4 eggs, usually 3. Eggs are white with grayish and bright brown markings. They are laid at intervals of 1-3 days. Incubation begins with the first egg; its duration averages about 37 days. Single-brooded.

Time of Breeding: In Minnesota, eggs are laid between May 6 and 15, hatching occurs about June 15, and young are present in the nest until the middle of August.

Breeding Biology: In Minnesota, ospreys arrive in late April as the ice is melting from their nesting grounds, and males soon begin courtship flights. These swooping and soaring flights may serve to attract females but also continue for a time after pair bonds are established or reestablished. Nest-building or repair of the old nest starts very soon, the male bringing most of the larger sticks and the female bringing in the lining materials as well as doing the final shaping of the nest. From the time she arrives until the young are nearly fledged, the female catches few if any fish and thus relies on the male for virtually all her food. Mating occurs on the nest site or a nearby branch and continues during the egg-laying period. Both sexes incubate, but the female undertakes most of the responsibility and does all the nighttime incubation. The eggs hatch at intervals of up to 5 days, which results in considerable differences in the sizes of the young. For the first month of brooding the female rarely leaves the nest, and the male does all the hunting. As the young approach fledging at about 55 days of age, the female may also help in hunting. After fledging the young continue to use the nest for roosting and as a feeding platform, but they soon attempt to catch fish on their own. They do not mature sexually until they are three years old.



Suggested Reading: Green 1976; Dunstan 1973.