

Facts about Threats to Ospreys

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Fact 81

In the middle ages ospreys suffered because of religion. Back then Britain was a Roman catholic country and no meat could be eaten on Fridays, it was illegal. So, people ate fish instead and fishponds and 'stewponds' became a commodity. Ospreys eat fish on a Friday too so they were hunted to protect the weekly catch.

Fact 82

In the past there were financial incentives for people to kill ospreys. Ospreys, along with other birds of prey, were classed as vermin during the middle ages in Britain and a bounty was placed upon their head. Fish eating birds fared worst and the osprey had the highest 'cash-for-corpse' reward of all - 4 pence.

Fact 83

Egg Collectors had a huge impact on the osprey population. Egg collecting was a favourite 'pastime' of British men from the 18th century onwards, sadly it still goes on today, illegally. In 2012 an attempt was made at the Threave Castle nest in Scotland where Black 80, the 2006 Glaslyn osprey was breeding. Thankfully, this attempt was thwarted by a canoeist and the first of the eggs hatched a few days later.

Fact 84

By 1916 the last osprey had been persecuted to extinction in the UK, the last pair lost their final battle at their nest site in Loch Loyne, Inverness. A naturalist of the day, Mr William Dunbar wrote in a letter to egg collector John Wolley in 1916, 'I am afraid that Mr St John, yourself and your humble servant, have finally done for the Ospreys'.

Fact 85

Shooting is a serious threat to ospreys and it still goes on around the world including Britain. One of the most unfortunate osprey casualties was a juvenile nicknamed Ossie in 2004. He was found shot by a Wiltshire river keeper in early September and taken to the Hawk Conservancy Trust for rehabilitation. After a few weeks he was released, complete with satellite transmitter. In early October he was shot again in Spain, this time fatally, on the first day of the hunting season.

Fact 86

Ospreys, like all wildlife, are susceptible to any chemical that is released into the environment and finds its way into the food chain. Those animals at the top of the food chain suffer the most. In the 1960's and 70's in the USA, DDT - a pesticide widely used in agricultural and forest production, caused osprey eggshells to thin and eventually crush under the weight of an incubating female. DDT interferes with calcium production necessary for eggshell strength and is now banned, although not everywhere. Osprey populations in the US plummeted at the same time.

Fact 87

Habitat Loss played a significant role in the decline of osprey populations. Big birds of prey like the osprey like to inherit nests or displace other birds to acquire nests rather than build their own. Osprey nests are sometimes many decades old or even older. Due to their persecution and extinction in many parts of the world, the old ancestral nests have been destroyed or developed over. That's why we built a nest platform on Cors Dyfi in 2007 - they replicate ancestral nests of ospreys that have now long gone.

Fact 88

Baler twine, the type of string used widely in agriculture, is a serious threat to ospreys as they will collect it as nesting material and become entangled in it. Ospreys die each year in the UK and around the world after getting caught up in baler twine. Roy Dennis had to cut one of his favourite ospreys free from it in 1982, Red Z. Thankfully, she survived and continued to breed until 1997.

Fact 89

Ospreys can die as a result of swallowing fishing line, fishing hooks and floats. Nylon line around a foot can cause blood flow to be cut off and the foot to become useless. The female at Loch Garten in 1993 was lost mid-season when she was last seen trailing a big ball of fishing line. Her mate Ollie was forced to raise their two young chicks alone, and he succeeded! Our own Ceulan died in fishing nets of course.

Fact 90

Complacency is arguably now the greatest of all threats to Ospreys in the UK; we must not take our eye off the ball.

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