

# Osprey

**Scientific name**

*Pandion Haliaetus*



## Description

The osprey is considered to be moderately common in Australia although the species is considered rare to uncommon in southern Western Australia. It can be distinguished by their dark-brown to blackish-brown above and white below with a white head and neck. The osprey is commonly confused with the bald eagle but is identified by their white under parts and distinctive dark eye stripe on the side of the face. The osprey is a very efficient hunter with the ability to dive in to the water's surface 9 to 30 metres deep. They also have special gripping pads on their feet and curved claws that enable them to catch fish from the water and carry them for long distances whilst adjusting the fish headfirst to ease wind resistance.

## Social Life

The osprey is generally more of a solitary than social bird although during breeding season colonies of 3 to 10 birds can be seen within close proximity of various nests. A female osprey typically lays 3 eggs which both parents help to incubate. The young osprey generally takes first flight at 50-65 days old and also begins feeding independently.

## Diet & Habitat

ospreys are superb at fishing and due to this they eat little else with fish making up some 99 percent of their diet. They also consume crustaceans, molluscs, insects, reptiles, birds and mammals. The osprey searches for prey by soaring, quartering or circling above a body of water and scanning below for fish. Once the prey is located they hover briefly before diving down and snatching the prey. Due to this appetite, the osprey reside in coastal regions and terrestrial wetlands of tropical and temperate Australia and offshore islands. They frequent a variety of wetland habitats including inshore waters, reefs, bays, coastal cliffs, beaches, estuaries, mangrove swamps, broad rivers, reservoirs and large lakes and waterholes.

## Threats

Currently the biggest threat to osprey within Australia is loss, degradation or alteration of habitat for urban or tourism development. This human disturbance of habitat has forced some osprey to nest on the ground due to the lack of trees which creates a threat from land based animals. Pollutants such as inappropriately discarded fishing materials, pesticides and reduced water quality are also threats to these birds. Various strategies have been put in place to conserve the osprey. This includes the development of substitute artificial nesting platforms using tall poles with nests to relocate these birds to safer locations. These are away from human interference to re-establish and protect the species.

## **Did you know?**

When osprey catch fish they immediately return to the shore where they de-scale the fish and proceed to consume it.

