

Osprey Nest Observation Protocol:

Thank you all for your participation in osprey research; your contributions are absolutely essential to our ability to monitor the populations and distributions in the state. As osprey populations increase in PA, you may know about nests that we don't, and your contributions improve our understanding of osprey population health. We are concerned with the location and any information on the number of chicks present in nests as the osprey is currently listed as threatened in Pennsylvania and represents a valuable indicator of habitat quality.



Where to send data to?

You can email the completed data sheets to osprey@pa.gov. If you have any questions let us know and we'll get back to you as soon as possible.

How far should I be from the nest?

Nests should be observed from as far away as possible, preferably more than 300 feet, to minimize any human disturbance at nest sites. We want to limit stress and reduce the chances of predation on chicks. The information we are asking for can be obtained from this range and beyond with binoculars.

Osprey build nests on artificial structures as well as in trees. Power poles, towers, buoys, and tall trees near or over water are great places to look for nests. The birds will tell you when you are too close. If the birds begin to act as if you're disturbing them, move farther away!

Signs that the birds are disturbed:

- Adults standing up over nests and moving away from the nests
- Adults flushing from the nest
- Circling over you and calling loudly while obviously watching you
- In an extreme case the birds will dive at you!

If this happens do not get closer as the next responses are detrimental to chick survival:

- Chicks will hunker down in the nest when they are young, the adults flying off allows them to cool down which can be dangerous
- Chicks regurgitating their stomach contents, these burn and cost the chicks a meal
- Chicks fighting, occasionally resulting in falling from the nest and tree all together causing potential injury and exposing them to greater risk of predation

All of these are avoidable and very dangerous to the chicks.

When Should I be looking for nests?

Osprey return to Pennsylvania late March to early April to nest. Observations should be finished by the end of July or early August, sooner is better as this may be much more difficult once the leaves come out. If you find a new nest after July please still send it in!

What am I looking for?

Osprey nests are made from a lot of sticks. Most nests are large and can get enormous as the birds will return annually and continue adding on. Active nests will usually be stained white with guano and will be near and often over water. The nests can be on artificial structures as well as in tall trees. Osprey often select the tallest structures available, and usually have a large, open field of view. This makes them conspicuous against the skyline. The photo to the right is a typical example from western PA.

Osprey are fairly tolerant of human activities and can often be found in and around public areas such as rivers, lakes, and reservoirs.



What Osprey Activities should I note?

Describe any behavior of adult birds near the nest area, as well as chick behavior in the nest. We are particularly interested in the number of chicks (look closely as they really get down in there), feeding chicks, chicks flapping and learning to fly, and anything else you find interesting. This information will help us get an idea how old the chicks are without having to disturb them.

What Should I Include for Observer Information?

General information about you and how we can contact you if needed:

- Your name
- Address
- Contact phone
- Email address

What should I Include for Nest Location?

Describe specific nest location. We prefer a latitude and longitude GPS position if possible. This information can be obtained using (Google earth which is a free service), a hand held GPS, or even some smart phones. If this is not possible please give a street address as near as possible and some landmarks we can use to locate the nest.

- Lat/Long if possible
- Description of the location including a street address
- The County
- And the nearest water if possible

What should I include in the Nest Structure section?

What type of structure the nest is on and if it is manmade. This is an easy section and works on a check box system.

What should I include for the Survey Results section?

When did you observe the nest and was it being used.

What should I include for the Nest History section?

It is entirely possible that you don't know any history and if that is the case please enter UNKNOWN for our records. If the nest is new, please enter NEW. If you have been watching the nest for a number of years, please enter how long the nest has been there and the years it was used.

Again Thank You All for Your Contributions to Osprey Research!

Send any questions or concerns to osprey@pa.gov. If there is a nest you would like us to look at directly please email and we can set up a visit.