

Observations of Breeding Ospreys *Pandion haliaetus* at the Loch of the Lowes, 1995

Tristan Reid, S.W.T. Visistor's Centre, Loch of the Lowes, Dunkeld, Perthshire, PH8 0HH

The first sighting in 1995 was of a single Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* on the morning of 24 March. This bird remained briefly at the loch before moving on and was almost certainly an adult passing through to a territory elsewhere.

A further sighting of a single Osprey was recorded on 27 March at 1100 Hrs. On this occasion the bird was being mobbed by a Buzzard *Buteo buteo*. Later that same day, at 1310 Hrs., a single bird was seen carrying a fish and at 1600 Hrs. an Osprey was observed eating a fish at the lochside while a second bird was seen in the distance at the same time. These sightings subsequently proved to be Ospreys on passage.

The arrival of the breeding pair at the Lowes occurred on 1 April when at 0910 Hrs. a female Osprey was sighted at the loch for a brief moment. At 1120 Hrs. the female was seen again, circling round the traditional eyrie giving territorial calls. Later she was seen feeding, perched on the dead tree to the left of the eyrie. On April 2 the female was still present and was now accompanied by a male Osprey. During that same day nest renovation was begun and both male and female Ospreys were observed bringing sticks to the eyrie site. This is the shortest recorded interval at Loch of the Lowes between arrival and nest renovation. Observations at dusk in 1995 revealed that the adults did not roost in the immediate vicinity of the eyrie in the pre-incubation period.

These two adults were identified as being the same birds, which had bred at the site in the previous four years. This was on account of the facts that they had arrived around the same date as in previous breeding seasons and their extremely quickstart to nest building strongly suggested previous pair bonding. Also, recognisable markings and the size difference between the pair were similar to the birds that had bred at the Lowes in the last four years.

The first egg is believed to have been laid on 17 April as on that day the female was observed to be sitting very low in the nest and when she moved around in the nest she did so very carefully. The incubation period lasted 40 days. This was two days longer than in 1994. The male bird was seen to take an almost equal share in incubating the eggs. This contrasts with previous years when the female was noted to do the major part of incubation.

The first chick hatched on 26 May and there was a significant change in the behaviour of the adult birds. The male brought a fish to the rim of the eyrie, he then fed the female which then turned and gently dipped her head into the nest bowl to feed the chick. Up to this stage when the male brought a fish to the nest it would be accepted by the female and she would immediately vacate the nest to feed on a perch nearby while the male took over incubation of the eggs. The dates of hatching for the second and third chicks are not known exactly but it is thought that all three chicks were hatched within a week of the first chick.

The first chick was sighted by observers within ten days of hatching and a simultaneous sighting of all three chicks was first made four weeks after the first chick hatching. On 29 June Bradly Yule of the Tay Ringing Group ringed the three chicks using a combination of coloured darvic (plastic) rings and a conventional B.T.O. metal ring. All three chicks were in good health although there were substantial size differences amongst them.

Fledging began on 18 July when the oldest chick was seen flying for the first time. The second bird fledged on 21 July and the third Osprey chick a week later on 28 July. After fledging it was noticed that the chicks appeared to eat more food. This was presumably necessitated by the energetic demands of their flying activities. By the second week in August the young birds were attempting to catch fish, if somewhat unsuccessfully at first. However, towards the end of August all three birds had perfected the skills needed to successfully catch fish.

The departure of young Ospreys from the Loch of the Lowes in previous years has tended to occur over a period of days or weeks and the young have left separately. However, in 1995 the three young Ospreys were last seen on 28 August. The adult female was last recorded as present on 3 September and the male on 5 September.

The Loch of the Lowes breeding pair were one of the few Osprey pairs to successfully fledge three young in 1995. A total of 33 Ospreys have now been fledged at the Lowes since the return of this species in 1969 and it is the most successful site in Tayside.

End Note:

In 1995, grant aided by Scottish Natural Heritage, the S.W.T. installed an infra-red camera, microphone and television monitor to aid surveillance of the nest site and no human disturbance was observed during the incubation period. However, the equipment did record the activity of Pine Martens *Martes martes* around the base of the tree on several occasions during the hours of darkness. These were the first records of this species for the reserve although they had been recorded in the immediate vicinity of the Lowes previously.