



## Species Spotlight: Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Ospreys, also known as fish hawks, are one of Cape Cod's birds of prey, and they, like many of our human residents, are snowbirds, meaning they enjoy the warm summers here, but travel south for the winter. When the osprey returns each spring, it is common that they revisit the same nesting site they have used in years past. They tend to build nests high off the ground for the safety of their young, but unfortunately, sometimes they choose utility poles to nest on, which can lead to power issues and electrocution of the birds.

Adept hunters whose diet consists of almost entirely fish, these birds are often found along the edges of ponds, inlets, and streams. Their powerful talons can grab fish from the water and grip it easily with tiny, specialized barbs inside their claws. Watching an osprey hunt is quite fascinating. Except for Bald Eagles, they are the only hawks you will see diving into the water for food. An osprey will hover high above the water, using their keen eyesight to home in on a fish, then tucking their wings tightly to their body; they make a swift vertical dive, feet first into the water to snatch their prey.



*An osprey comes in for landing at its nest.*

The osprey population wasn't always as abundant here on Cape Cod as it is today. In the early 1970s, only two pairs of nesting ospreys were recorded. This decline was mainly due to DDT, a chemical used for mosquito control. The chemical affected the eggshells of the ospreys, causing them to be flimsy and brittle and nearly wiping out the population. Since the banning of DDT in 1972, there has been a tremendous increase in the osprey population, with almost two hundred documented nests on Cape Cod today.

One location in Brewster, where this magnificent bird can be viewed is along the John Wing trail, located behind the Museum of Natural History on Route 6A. While crossing the marsh, look to your east, and you will see the manufactured stand occupied annually by a family of ospreys. Or get an up-close live-action view by watching the ["Osprey cam"](#) position on the nest, but make sure you do it before they fly south for the winter.