

Where to Watch Ospreys in New Hampshire



*Osprey by Dirk van der Merwe,
5/15/04, Pontook Reservoir, NH*

by Chris Martin

Some *New Hampshire Bird Records* readers may recall a time, not too long ago, when there were precious few places in the Granite State where you could go to watch Ospreys nest and raise young. New Hampshire's breeding Osprey population was nearly wiped out by the 1970s because of food chain contamination. In 1981, there were only three active nests known in the state, all located near Umbagog Lake in Coos County, and no young were produced that year.

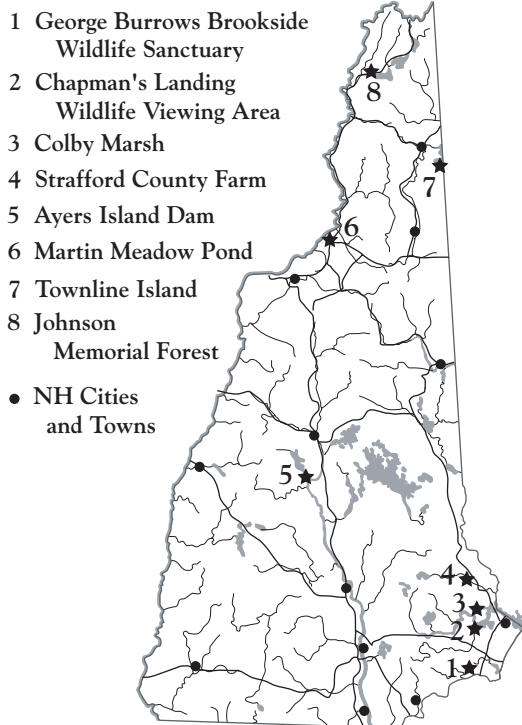
Over the past two decades, Ospreys have been clawing their

way back with help from their human friends. New Hampshire Fish & Game (NHFG) and New Hampshire Audubon (NH Audubon) have been fostering the recovery of state-listed "threatened" ospreys since 1980. In 2004, there was a post-DDT era record high total of 34 active Osprey nests in New Hampshire, in towns spread as far apart as Pittsburg, Hollis, and Littleton. Twenty-six successful nests produced 53 fledglings in 2004.

In 2000, Public Service of New Hampshire (PSNH), NHFG, and NH Audubon created *Project Osprey*, a five-year effort designed to give a final boost to prospects for full recovery for Ospreys in the state. Concluding at the end of 2004, this successful wildlife partnership not only built more than a dozen new nesting platforms in the state, but also trained many new volunteer observers, developed two new public viewing sites, and created a great new middle school science curriculum about Ospreys and their environment.

Not all Osprey nest sites are easily viewed, nor is it wise to attract human visitors to them all, but some are set up in a way that makes Osprey-watching fun for people and low-impact for the birds. Here are eight great places to observe nesting Ospreys in New Hampshire, listed from south to north. When you visit any of these sites, please remember to park safely and courteously, use good birding etiquette, and bring a spotting scope and a tripod so that you don't feel the need to approach the nests too closely. Enjoy watching the Ospreys!

1. George Burrows Brookside Wildlife Sanctuary (South Hampton) – This 31-acre NH Audubon property, and the abutting 115-acre Crosby conservation land that is managed by the town of South Hampton, includes a large flooded wetland. This site is located just a mile north of the Massachusetts border on the west side of Woodman Road, which is situated between Route 150 and Route 107A. Viewing at this site, although a bit difficult because of shrubby vegetation and moist ground, is especially



interesting because you might see Great Blue Herons and Great Horned Owls nesting simultaneously with the Ospreys in the same colony, as was the case in 2004, when Ospreys first settled here.

2. Chapman's Landing Wildlife Viewing Area (Stratham)

– This state-owned viewing area, acquired at the encouragement of *Project Osprey*, is located on Route 108 just southeast of the state's Chapman's Landing boat ramp in Stratham. Near the tidal Squamscott River, this new viewing platform is wheelchair-accessible and has comfortable benches, interpretive signs, and an on-site telescope. You get a sweeping view of a wildlife-rich salt marsh and an Osprey nest that has been present on an electric transmission pole since 1992.

3. Colby Marsh (Durham)

– Ospreys have nested since 2002 in this lovely wetland, on land now managed by the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, but they also tried to nest here once in the early 1990s. Take Longmarsh Road east from Route 108 in Durham until it dead-ends at an iron gate and a small parking lot. Walk past the gate for several hundred yards until the flooded wetland appears on your right. It's an easy walk, but you'll want to bring a spotting scope and tripod for viewing.

4. Strafford County Farm (Dover) – Take County Farm Road northwest going out of Dover to the Strafford County Farm complex on the Cochecho River. An elevated parking lot situated immediately behind the new county jail facility offers an unobstructed view of the nest platform from your vehicle. This nesting platform, on county conservation land, was installed by *Project Osprey* cooperators in Fall 2003 and was immediately occupied by nesting Ospreys in Spring 2004.

5. Ayers Island Dam (New Hampton) – Ospreys built on the superstructure of the Ayers Island Dam on the Pemigewasset River during Summer 2004, but *Project Osprey* cooperators moved the nest to an adjacent pole in Fall 2004. What will the ospreys think of this change when they return in 2005? A small vehicle-accessible public viewing area overlooking the dam is maintained by PSNH. Located just off of Route 104 between Bristol village and Newfound Regional High School, it is accessed via a paved road that passes a baseball field and the PSNH Hydro office.

6. Martin Meadow Pond (Lancaster) – Go south on Route 3 from Lancaster village and take Martin Meadow Pond Road about one mile west to the gravel boat ramp for the

pond. First occupied in 2001, the nest is located within a stand of dead pine trees set back slightly from the eastern end of the pond, on private land managed under a conservation easement. It can be observed from within your vehicle using binoculars; however, Ospreys here are relatively familiar with pedestrian activity at the ramp.

7. Townline Island (Cambridge) – This site can be found on a large state-owned island at the southern end of Umbagog Lake, diagonally across from the Umbagog Lake State Park campground, which is located approximately 6.5 miles south of Errol village on Route 26. Using canoe, kayak, or motorboat, launch from the developed state boat ramp near the campground, bear right, and travel about one mile east. The moderate open-water paddle can be challenging in windy conditions. The current nest is placed in the dead crown of a massive shoreline pine tree. Ospreys have been nesting on this island since 1990.

8. Johnson Memorial Forest (Pittsburg) – The forest is located on Route 3 near the Murphy Dam and across the road from the new fire station building in Pittsburg village. Open to the public for non-motorized recreational use, a trail system winds through over 400 acres protected by a conservation easement purchased through the US Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program. Ospreys have been active in this area since 1995, and now nest on a dead tree in a secluded beaver pond on the easternmost trail loop. It's a moderate one-mile round-trip hike, and observers must stay hidden to minimize disturbance.

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