



# OspreyCam

## FAQ

### Belwood Lake Park

Thanks to many partners working together, the Grand River Conservation Authority has a webcam on an osprey nest at Belwood Lake near Fergus.

Osprey watchers can go to [www.grandriver.ca/osprey](http://www.grandriver.ca/osprey) where they can check the live feed, review the previous four hours, read more about ospreys and see the GRCA's intervention policy.

#### Does the same breeding pair return to this nest every year?

Ospreys are monogamous, and the same breeding pair usually comes back to a nesting site year after year. Sometimes, however, one or both of the birds don't survive the winter or they nest at a different location. If the parents are not banded, we have no information about them.

#### What happens each month during nesting?

**April:** Adult birds return to the nest early in the month. The male must prove to the female that he is a good provider. Two to three eggs appear one at a time around the end of the month.

**May:** This is a quiet time with parents taking turns on the nest until the eggs begin to hatch in late May or early June (incubation is 36 to 40 days).

**June:** Parents feed the young, which grow quickly and become increasingly independent. The chicks may be banded toward the end of the month.

**July:** Parents may leave the young birds alone on the nest. Around the middle or end of the month,

the young will be ready to take their first short flight.

**August:** The juveniles spend less time on the nest as the parents are teaching them how to fish.

**Mid-September:** The ospreys fly south for the winter, leaving the nest one at a time. The camera will be turned off.

#### Which is Mom and which is Dad?

Female ospreys are bigger than their male counterpart. They tend to do most of the incubation and feed the young birds. Males tend to fend for the family by bringing home fish. Aside from size and behaviour, male and female ospreys look the same.

#### Why is this not always easy to watch?

Please be forewarned — this unfiltered look into nature is not always easy to watch. Ospreys and their young face many dangers, including harsh weather,

predators, food shortage, disease, pollution and the challenges of learning to fly.

The GRCA has developed an intervention policy, and based on consultation with osprey researchers, it is our policy not to intervene in the nest. See [www.grandriver.ca/osprey](http://www.grandriver.ca/osprey) to read the intervention policy.

### **What do ospreys eat?**

Ospreys live exclusively on live fresh fish, which they dive down to snatch from the nearby water. The fact that ospreys nest at many locations within the Grand River watershed means the ecosystem can support them and supply enough fish. They are excellent anglers and live up to 25 years.

### **Is it okay for the eggs or young chicks to be left alone?**

We may not see the parents on the nest at all times, however they are usually away from the nest only for a very short time. It is likely that one of them is nearby, although out of view of the camera. They will leave the nest for longer periods once the young birds are bigger.

### **Is the younger one getting enough food?**

The older osprey hatchling dominates its younger siblings, and can monopolize the food brought by the parents. The survival rate of osprey chicks is low and this gives one of the year's brood the best chance of survival. If food is abundant and the male is a good provider, there will be enough to go around and life on the nest will be harmonious.

### **When do the young get their feathers?**

Osprey chicks start to grow feathers at about two or three weeks old, and at this time they will change colour and begin to do a lot of preening. We will see their ability to move around the nest slowly improve. They will start flapping their wings, and eventually lift off of the nest.

### **When will the young start to fly?**

The chicks are expected to start to fly in July. Osprey chicks begin to fly when they are 48 to 76 days old. Once they can fly, osprey chicks begin to hunt for themselves, though they usually also take food from

their parents until they can catch enough fish to feed themselves.

### **Is there something wrong with the mother's wing?**

She is preening, which is normal for osprey. All birds do this in order to clean and align their feathers. While preening, birds will remove dust, dirt and parasites and align each feather. Most birds will preen several times a day to keep themselves healthy and this attention to feathers is normal in birds.

The uropygial gland, or preen gland, is near the base of the tail. It produces an oily substance that contains waxes that help waterproof feathers and keep them flexible. The male also preens, but it is off camera on a nearby tree branch. When the feathers of the young grow in (around three weeks), then they will start preening, too.

### **Are they disturbed by the camera at night?**

The webcam uses infrared light at night, creating a black-and-white image of the nesting birds. This does not bother ospreys. Like humans, the ospreys are not capable of seeing infrared, so are not bothered by it. The camera is designed to use infrared to "see" at night, creating a clear nighttime image without any colour.

### **Are they disturbed by noise or people?**

Ospreys become used to human activities, as they have at this nest site. The sound of passing cars and gatehouse activities do not disturb them, but please



David Lamble  
bands an  
osprey



respect the ospreys by staying away from the nest if you visit.

### Why do ospreys need a special nesting platform?

Traditionally ospreys nested in trees. As the landscape was altered by people, nesting sites became scarce. They then began to nest on hydro poles and this led to the installation of artificial structures similar to hydro poles, like the one by the gatehouse at Belwood Lake.

### Will the young ospreys be banded?

Ospreys can be banded as adults, but it is difficult to catch them. For this reason, they are banded before they are old enough to fly. The GRCA expects the young from this nest will be banded by Master bird bander David Lamble. He has banded over 200,000 birds of 93 species since 1981, including the ospreys from Belwood Lake and Luther Marsh.

Banding is a scientific way to learn about birds. It allows observers to collect information about habitat use, life processes and movement. Banding protocols follow international standards, and information is

stored and accessed through a central system. The blue band provides an accurate age and information about where the birds originate.

### What do I do when I see the number on a blue banded osprey?

Please help track blue-banded osprey that hatch within the Grand River watershed. Every spring, osprey chicks from Luther Marsh Wildlife Management Area and other parts of Wellington County are banded by Master bird bander David Lamble. These birds have a silver U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service band on their right leg and a blue band on the left leg. The coloured band has a two digit number over a letter.

If you capture the numbers and letter, please send the date, location and time the bird was seen to [dlamble@hotmail.com](mailto:dlamble@hotmail.com). David has had reports of blue-banded osprey as far west as Minnesota, as far north as Algonquin Park, as far east as Hamilton, and as far south as Michigan.

Any banded bird may be reported to the Bird Banding Office operated by Environment and Climate Change Canada in Ottawa at 1-800-327-BAND (2263). A reported band will earn you a certificate of appreciation and information about the original banding of the bird.

### Do ospreys migrate?

While we don't exactly know where these ospreys go in winter, some Ontario ospreys have been fitted with tiny solar-powered satellite transmitters and this shows that they migrate to South America during the winter. The ospreys leave the nest one at a time. Usually the female leaves first, followed by the young and the male leaves last.

**Questions/comments can be emailed to:**  
[osprey@grandriver.ca](mailto:osprey@grandriver.ca)

**Make a donation at [www.grandriver.ca/osprey](http://www.grandriver.ca/osprey)**

**If you enjoy watching the OspreyCam, please make a donation. Donations to the Belwood Lake OspreyCam Fund will help support this and other GRCA projects that help bring you closer to nature, right here in the Grand River watershed.**