

OSPREY *Pandion haliaetus*
Uncommon but regular passage visitor.



Osprey

photo: Peter Curran

1990 – A bird flew up the Washburn Valley past Lindley Wood Reservoir on 19th April.

1991 – A bird flew in from the south-east at Chelker Reservoir on 14th May only to leave northwards almost immediately, mobbed by Carrion Crows.

1993 – Our best ever year with five records. April 4th recorded two records over Stockbridge Reserve and flying low over Swinsty Reservoir. The next record was in mid-summer; a bird flying up the Wharfedale Valley on 17th July. This was followed by a single over Ilkley Moor on 28th August. The final record, at Paul Clough on 4th October, was of an immature which, after flying low over the moors, landed on a transmitter mast for a short time before continuing south.

1994 – An excellent passage for the second year in succession with ten records received involving five different birds. Presumably this area is benefiting from the breeding success and spread of this species in Scotland. The first, an immature/first-year, was seen north-west at pylon height over Stockbridge Nature Reserve on 23rd April. The finder rushed to the telephone to alert the Group's Recorder, two miles away at Silsden, who was then able to add one further species to his garden list. The second record involved a bird flying north-west over Thornton Moor Reservoir on 1st May. Next was a single west over Weecher Reservoir on 17th May resulting in a further telephone call to Silsden. Amazingly 20 minutes later the bird was viewed from the afore-mentioned garden. Autumn passage involved one south-west at Thornton Moor Reservoir on 1st September and one, on 17th October, south over Elland Gravel Pits.

1995 – A memorable year, thanks in part to the drought and hence the low water-levels which concentrated fish in relatively small areas of water. The first was a bird flying south-east low over Kex Gill on 14th September. On the following day one was perched out at Timble. Between 16th and 18th September two, possibly three, birds were observed at Swinsty, Fewston and Lindley Wood Reservoirs. These gave Group members some of the most exciting birdwatching the area has seen. The birds provided some very close views as they fished with considerable success. Fish, some so large that they were dropped, were usually carried off to nearby Timble Plantation, where the birds ate their prey and roosted for the night. The birds were thought to be juveniles but conflicting literature made ageing difficult.

1996 – This year has seen an increase in the number of recorded sightings of this species; records were received for 15 separate dates, which probably involved up to eleven different birds. The first record of the year was of a bird that flew in at Lindley Wood Reservoir on the afternoon of 13th April; what was presumed to be the same bird was seen hunting the following day, with one observer being lucky enough to watch it plunge and successfully catch a fish. The next record was of a bird seen flying north in Wharfedale on 19th April; this was followed by a bird which stayed in the Wharfedale area from 4th to 12th May, giving excellent views to many observers, and even seen catching fish from the river. A bird was seen leaving its overnight roost at Timble Ings on the

morning of 6th May, and a further sighting came from the same location on the evening of 21st May. A bird was seen flying down the Aire Valley from Crosshills on 20th June.

Autumn records began with a bird which passed low over Thornton Moor Reservoir as it headed south on 23rd August. Another bird gave excellent views at Wharfedale on 1st September, followed by one seen at Lindley Wood Reservoir on 4th September. Wharfedale again featured on 8th September, with an individual described as 'a very dark bird', finally, one was seen carrying fish at Timble on 9th September.

1997 – This species has been reported more often since 1993, presumably because the Scottish population continues to increase. This was another very good year (only last year has bettered it), with a total of ten records involving at least six different birds.

The first record was of a bird seen flying up the Wharfe Valley on 30th March – the earliest date for an Os- prey sighting so far. A Common Buzzard rose to intercept the Osprey but the latter paid little attention. On 3rd April, a bird passing up the Aire Valley overflowed an observer's garden at Silsden. This was followed on 11th April by a bird which flew north-west up Airedale over Farnhill and Low Bradley moors, its progress hampered by mobbing Mallard, Eurasian Curlew and Carrion Crow. A fourth bird was reported over Masrtons Nature Reserve, Airedale on 10th May, while the last record of the spring was of a bird which flew east-south-east near Graincliffe on 27th May.

The first returning bird was reported from Barden Scale, where one flew east on the evening of 25th August. The next sighting was also from Barden Scale, on 30th August when a bird flew over during the late morning. On 4th September a bird carrying a fish was seen flying near Kex Gill Quarry, and one flew east over Timble Ings Plantation (again carrying a fish) just two days later. Finally, a bird was seen flying up the valley at Swinsty Reservoir on 10th September. The latter three locations are all close together in the Washburn Valley, and this would almost certainly indicate that the same bird was involved in each case; it is also a distant possibility that all the autumn records related to just one wandering individual. Moreover, although spring migrants mostly pass straight through the Group's recording area, autumn movement is a more leisurely affair with birds tending to linger, particularly if the fishing is good.

1998 – A creditable 1998 total of seven birds engendered far more individual records (24 in all) than have ever been received before, courtesy of two lingering autumn individuals.

The first record was of a bird reported flying up Wharfedale past the Barden Scale watch-point on 27th March, the earliest date yet for the species. The next record was of a bird being mobbed by two Lesser Black-backed Gulls as it flew north over Skipton Moor on 31st March. Another bird was seen flying up the Shibden Valley on 12th April, and the last record of the spring was of a bird flying up Airedale on 27th May, viewed from a house at Silsden.

An adult bird in active wing-moult which was found at Timble Ings Plantation on 2nd September continued to frequent the area, roosting in the plantation, until at least 13th September. During its stay, the bird fished the nearby Fewston and Swinsty Reservoirs, usually bringing its catch to the plantation to eat; it was also seen at the ponds at Kex Gill/Blubberhouses Quarry on three occasions. Overlapping with this bird was a juvenile that was present at Swinsty Reservoir from at least 8th September until 14th September, it was not aged until 10th September, but it must have been one of the two birds which had been reported from the Swinsty/ Fewston Reservoir area on 8th September. Single birds seen at Swinsty Reservoir on 6th and 8th September could have been either of those birds, but were likely to have been the juvenile, verbal reports suggest that the latter probably arrived about the same time as the adult or just afterwards. A single bird was seen standing in the silt-pond at Kex Gill Quarry on 14th September. The year's final record concerns a bird seen near Dob Park Bridge on 3rd October, as it flew up the Washburn Valley carrying a fish.

1999 – This was an excellent year, with nine singles recorded. Osprey passage has become one of the highlights of the passage periods of late, and sighting of the species is almost guaranteed if enough hours are put in at the right time of the year in the right place. With Scotland's population now bulging at the seams, it is surely only a matter of time before breeding takes place in England. The year's first bird was seen from the Barden Scale watchpoint in Wharfedale on 6th April while another was reported from Fewston Reservoir in the Washburn valley on 28th April. The remaining spring record concerned a bird flying northwards high over Lower Barden Reservoir and Barden Moor on 8th May.

Autumn passage was more fruitful still, beginning with a bird seen fishing Chelker Reservoir on 20th August. The next bird was seen flying westwards at Barden Scale on 30th August, and the same site produced another on 29th September, the latter bird being mobbed by a Peregrine. Nearby Lower Barden Reservoir also scored with a bird on 5th October, and one flew east over the observer's house on Bradford Road, Shipley, on 14th October. Finally, a bird was reported flying south-west at Thornton Moor Reservoir on 16th October. The three October records equalled the previous totals for that month since the Group's records began in 1987.

2000 – Previous years' Group reports have highlighted the dramatic increase in sightings in the last 13 years. A level of records such as that for 2000 (22 records, submitted by 14 observers), is therefore almost to be expected. As some birds apparently lingered in the area, an exact assessment of the number is difficult. It is considered, however, that a minimum of ten birds was involved. With the exception of two birds seen together on 12th June, all the records were of single birds. Fishing was seen to take place on four occasions, and birds often provided close views.

As with the other large raptors, nearly all the records come from the north of the Group's recording area, with Barden again to the forefront. Birds were recorded in every month from March to October with the exception of May, with, most unusually, the majority of records coming from June and August, this perhaps indicating the presence of summering birds. The first and last sightings were on fairly typical dates: 26th March at Burley and 22nd October at Thornton Moor Reservoir.

2001 – Whilst the number of records submitted was down on the previous year, the number of individual birds, probably 13 in all, represented the best year on record.

Passage commenced in some style on the 28th March when, in the course of an hour, three different birds moved up the Washburn Valley at Blubberhouses. One of these birds appeared to be fitted with a radio transmitter. These were shortly followed by individuals in April at Stockbridge Nature Reserve on 1st, and Barden Scale on 3rd and 27th, and two birds were seen over Beamsley Moor on 7th.

In summer birds carrying fish were seen at Kex Gill on 16th July, and 11th August at Barden Scale, though there was no suggestion of summering in the area.

Autumn records comprised a bird at Barden Scale on 3rd September, and singles in October, on 4th at Queensbury and on 7th at Burley, proving that birds can be seen away from the well-watched locations in Upper Wharfedale and the Washburn Valley.

2002 – Whilst a far cry from the meagre returns of 10 years ago, 15 records and about 12 different birds can now be described as average.

The first returning bird was seen at Barden on 31st March, followed in April by one over Timble Ings on 7th, and another over Thornton Moor Reservoir on 14th. Other spring records consisted of individuals seen in May over Luddenden Dean on 2nd, at Barden on 3rd and 5th, another at Addingham on the latter date, and one over Silsden Reservoir on 15th.

Autumn passage commenced with one fishing at Chelker Reservoir on 4th July, followed by singles at Barden on 19th and 24th August. September birds were at Thruscross Reservoir on 7th, over Leeshaw on 14th, with the year's final record, a bird at Hoodstorth on 30th.

2003 - A slightly disappointing year with 10 records received, all of single birds. On 18th April birds were noted at both Lindley Wood Reservoir and Barden with further records from Barden on 9th May and 1st June. Elsewhere one flew over Lippersley Pike, Timble Ings on 7th May and one flew over Oxenhope on 13th May. Autumn records came from Lindley Wood Reservoir 23rd August, Otley Gravel Pits on 26th August (Pri) and Barden on 6th and 20th September.

2004 - The Barden watchpoint provided records of single birds on 6th and 12th April, 5th May and 9th June (AGG, BV et al). The only record away from this area concerned a single bird near Timble Ings on 5th September (DFH). Given the increase in the Scottish population, the fact that this species is now breeding in northern England and the trends in recent years, this selection of records is very disappointing.

2005 - After a poor year in 2004, this bird came back to form, with a good series of records, although many of them came from the watch-point at Barden Scale, and might have involved a limited number of birds in all.

The first returning bird was at Barden on 6th April, from where there were three more April records of up to three different birds (AGG, JLT, BV). In the south of the area a bird over Oxenhope on 13th April might have accounted for the further reports at Leeshaw Reservoir on 15th and 21st (RHP, BV).

The Barden area had all the May records. There were nine reports, beginning with at least two birds on 9th, and between 15th and 20th there were further sightings of up to two birds, including several on consecutive days. From the pattern of observations, seven birds could have been involved (MD, AGG, M&PR).

With one exception, Barden again monopolised the June records. There were ten reports, beginning on 4th June, but, particularly towards the end of the month, it was thought it was the same bird, or perhaps two (JF, AGG). Away from here, a bird was seen from Thornton Moor Reservoir as it flew north-west over Leeming on 20th June (KM). July had only one record, again at Barden, on the last day of the month (AGG).

In the following month, the first two days had records of the bird seen on 31st July, and a different one on 21st (AGG et al). The last two sightings of the year were in the south. On 30th August, a bird stopped off and bathed at Thornton Moor Reservoir, before leaving southwards (BV), and finally, a departing bird passed over Oxenhope on 20th September, just over five months after an early arrival had been noted there by the same observer.

2006 - Such are the expectations of seeing Ospreys in the area these days that the 2006 tally of at least 13 birds might be viewed as disappointing. Allowing for some duplicated reports, there were 18 records, about half of which came from the Barden Scale watchpoint.

The year's first sighting came from the south of the region, however, when a bird passed Warley Moor Reservoir on 25th March (HC). Barden's first record was on 7th April, and there were then reports of single birds on a further five days during the month, until the 26th (AGG, MKT, BV et al). The pattern of sightings indicates a minimum of two birds were involved, but, given the tendency in recent years for birds to linger in the vicinity, there might not have been more than this. Further records from here, on 16th May, 25th August and 1st and 15th September, will have been different birds (AGG, MKT, D&BP).

The southern sector had all but two of the remaining records, the exceptions being a single at Timble Ings on 28th May, and another which was seen to catch a fish at Lindley Wood Reservoir on 5th September (AGG). This second date was clearly one of some movement, as two birds were seen at Ogden Reservoir, and what was presumably one of them was also noted from Soil Hill and Thornton Moor Reservoir (HBC), which location had also produced a bird several weeks earlier,

on 14th July (RHP). The year's final record was of a bird perched in a pine tree at nearby Lower Laithe Reservoir on 17th September.

2007 - With eleven records, this was one of the quietest years for Osprey since the species started to be re-ported with some regularity in the late 1990's.

A bird moving west over Oxenhope on 25th March (RHP) was the first of four to be seen here, the others comprising one north over the nearby moor on 6th April (SR, PCK, BV), and two, again over the village, on 3rd August (RHP).

Other April reports concerned a bird flying up the Aire Valley at Riddlesden on the 10th (JBb), and on the same day one was near Barden Bridge (JF). Barden's remaining records, all from the watchpoint, were singles on 19th May (AGG), 17th August (BV), and possibly the same bird four days later (AGG). The year's final bird, at Chelker Reservoir on 3rd October, might have been the one seen two days previously at nearby Draughton Heights. One flew north over Lindley Wood Reservoir on 16th April.

2008 - A good year, particularly at Barden Scale, where there were four birds in late March and early April, and 10 records in August and September, probably involving at least seven different birds (AGG, BV et al). In the south of the area, individuals were seen in April at Harden (RHP) and Thornton Moor Reservoir (DCB), one overflew Leeshaw in June (BV), and there was another at Dean Head in September.

2009 - Barden Scale had most sightings, with two birds in March and April, three reports of a single bird in July, and one in August (AGG et al).

Other singles, were seen at St. Ives in March (SS), Chelker in April (per JLT) and Oxenhope in May (RHP), and in August at Embsay, Snaygill, Fewston and Timble, whilst two birds passed Thornton Moor in September (DCB).

2010 - A good year, with 20 sightings, but an indeterminate number of birds. The first returning bird was seen at Barden Scale on 17th March, comfortably the Group's earliest ever (AGG, AT). This watchpoint then dominated the remaining records, with further observations in April on the 2nd and 7th (AGG et al) and 17th (BV). There were more records of single birds here on six dates between 13th and 27th May, 14th and 15th June, and 18th and 19th August (AGG et al).

Away from here, an early bird was seen from Addingham Moorside on 23rd March (GL), one was over Oxenhope on 30th May and Otley Wetland on 30th July (RHP), and consecutive days in September produced singles at Chellow Dean on 13th, Thornton Moor on the 14th (DCB), and over Keighley the day after (IH).

2011 - A rather thin year by recent standards, with only nine birds reported directly. Barden Scale had singles on 1st May (WNS), 15th August (AT, BV), and on the 27th (BV), but the only other record from the north of the area was of a bird near March Ghyll Reservoir on 23rd September (WNS). The earliest sighting was on 4th April at Ogden Reservoir (HBC), and the remaining ones were all from the Oxenhope area, comprising singles over the village on 1st September, at Leeshaw Reservoir on the 8th (RHP), and at the nearby watchpoint on 26th June and 3rd September (DCB), with probably this bird also being seen at Warley Moor Reservoir.

2012 - A distinctly better year than 2011, as probably 14 birds were seen in all. All but four of the sightings came from the Barden area, where the first bird was seen on the earliest ever date of 12th March (WNS), shortly followed by other individuals on 20th March and 1st April (BV). A bird at Baildon on 13th May (JD) broke the monopoly, but Barden had the final spring sighting a week

later (BV), followed by another bird on 21st July (AGG, BV), and a different one at Gill Beck Head on the 31st (KM). Six Barden records between 5th and 18th August might have involved the same bird (AGG, RHP, BV), but one at Lower Barden Reservoir 10 days later (MS) was probably different, and an individual at Scargill Reservoir on the 21st certainly was (SR). The year's final records: a bird over Oxenhope on 8th September (RHP), and another past the nearby watchpoint (DCB, HC).

2013 - It was an average year by recent standards, with seven birds recorded on spring passage and three in August. It was mid April before there were any birds passing through, when an adult was seen at Barden. The following day, the 16th, another passed the same vantage point and three days later, a third bird was recorded here (both AGG). At Swinsty Reservoir, on the 12th May, a bird was watched as it caught a fish, which it consumed before continuing northwards (PR). Another bird passed Barden Scale on the 16th May and at Pool, on the River Wharfe, a bird was seen flying upstream on the 24th May. The following day, the final bird in this sequence followed the River Wharfe past Barden.

The return passage got underway with a sighting at Barden on 6th August and three days later, at this location, a bird was repeatedly attacked by a Peregrine causing the Osprey to roll over and present its talons (AGG). The final record was a bird that stopped off at Lindley Wood Reservoir on 16th August, it flew round for 15 minutes, attempted to land, but was moved along by an irate Heron.

2014 - This year there were just six records, one less than 2013. There were three in spring, one in mid-summer, one at the end of July and the final bird was seen in August. The first bird appeared over Esholt on 18th March (MR) and the second one, seen from Sunnydale, drifted north-west on 5th April (MG). A bird, showing its white head and underwings and mobbed by gulls, slowly meandered between Swinsty and Lindley Reservoirs on 27th April. The other three birds were seen in the Barden area; one on 21st June, another on 29th July as it flew determinedly north-west whilst being mobbed by a Kestrel and the final one on 23rd August (AGG, WNS).

2015 - Just two birds were seen on northwards migration. On 8th May a bird was seen following the river at Barden Bridge (IS), and on 23rd June another was watched from Barden Scale as it took the same course (BV).

The return passage proved to be rather hectic. The first bird was seen at Keighley Moor Reservoir on 26th August battling against a very strong headwind (IH), and the remaining records were all in September. On the 1st a bird was watched as it flew over a private lake in Washburn (WNS), and on the 9th two - at least one thought to be a juvenile - were fishing in Lindley Wood Reservoir (AJ, RP), with one of these remaining until the 17th (WNS). On the same day, at the migration watchpoint at Oxenhope, a bird carrying a blue colour ring passed overhead (DB, HC, CJK), and the next day one flew over Soil Hill (BS). Finally, a single frequented Fewston and Swinsty Reservoirs from the 22nd until at least 4th October (WNS).

2016 - Sixteen records of at least that number of birds represents the best return in 10 years, and all parts of the area participated.

Spring passage produced two thirds of the records, starting with birds at Barden Scale on 25th and 26th March, followed by at least one in the area on 3rd April, and another 10 days later (all BV). This period was particularly productive, as three presumably different birds were seen on the 4th, over Hazlewood Moor (RN), Queensbury (BS), and Bradup (SR), one went over Beamsley Beacon on the 5th (WNS), and Queensbury had another bird on the 8th (BS). This period of movement

was completed by sightings at Scargill Reservoir on the 13th (SR), and over the Sladen Valley near Stanbury on the 19th April (IH).

The return movement started with a relatively early record of a bird over Bingley Moor on 10th July (PW), but there was a seven week wait before the next bird was seen on Keighley Moor on 26th August (IH), quickly followed by singles on the 28th at Barden (RN) and Oxenhope Watchpoint (DCB, HC), with the final record one over the Aire Valley on 7th September (IH).

2017 - A probable 11 birds is now about average, and as usual, most were seen in spring. At Barden, singles were noted in late March and early April (GH), on three days in May (HC) and in early October (DD), and two were there on 10th May (HC). The remaining reports were all from the south, and comprised individuals at Apperley Bridge in April (MW), Warley Moor Reservoir on two dates in May (BS), and Leeshaw in August (CK).

2018 - The probable total of 19 individuals seen is the best for 13 years, and, once again, birds were noted right across the area. In the south, birds passed Oxenhope in March, July and August (RP), Warley Moor Reservoir in March (BS), Silsden in April (TH), Keighley Moor in May (IH), and Stanbury Moor in June (KM). Wharfedale and the Washburn had reports from Knotford Nook in March (RK), Barden in April, June and August (HC, RC, DD, BV, WNS), Burley in May (RG), Sandwith Moor in June and September (AJ), and there was a long-staying bird at Lindley Wood Reservoir in August (PR, AJ et al).