

Wildlife Express!

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OSPREY!



Photo courtesy DonGettyPhoto.com



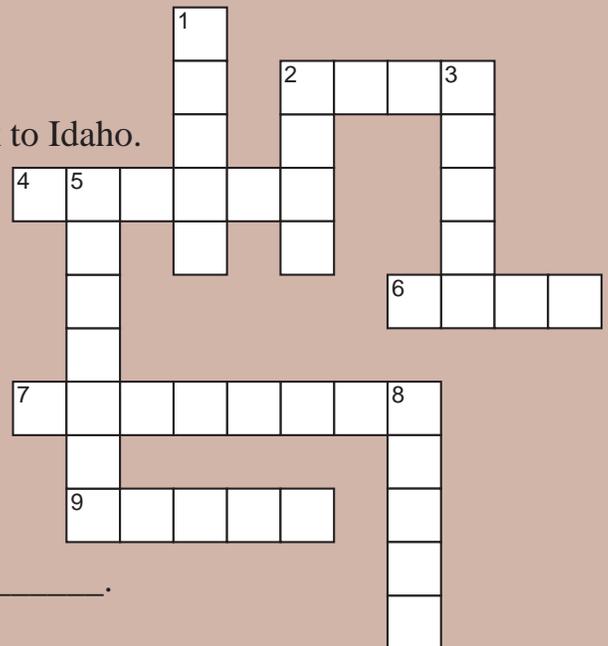
Crossword Puzzle

Words

America	April	Barbie	Barbs	Feet
Fish	Hover	Nests	Prey	Wingspan

Across

- Osprey eat these.
- This doll was found in an osprey nest.
- Osprey are considered a bird of _____.
- The _____ of the osprey is just over five feet.
- This is the month when osprey start to migrate back to Idaho.



Down

- These help osprey hold onto slippery fish.
- Osprey dive into the water _____ first.
- Osprey have the ability to do this.
- Osprey spend the winter in Central and South _____.
- Osprey are known for building large _____.

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WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU !

If you have a letter, poem or question for *Wildlife Express*, it may be included in a future issue!
Send it to the address printed above!

<http://fishandgame.idaho.gov>



RAPTORS

Birds of prey are a group of birds including hawks, eagles, owls, and vultures. They are also called “raptors.” Most raptors catch and kill their food. Vultures feed on dead animals, called carrion (CARRY-ON). Eagles will also eat carrion, especially during the winter months when prey is scarce. No matter what they eat, raptors are very beneficial. They eat many things we think are pests. Since raptors come in all sizes, so does their prey. Small raptors such as pygmy owls and kestrels eat insects and small rodents like mice. Large raptors like red-tailed hawks and great horned owls prey on rodents, snakes, and larger animals like jackrabbits and skunks. Bald eagles and osprey eat fish.

Birds of prey range in size from the tiny 5-inch elf owl of the desert southwest to the huge California condor. Here in Idaho, our smallest raptor is the 7-inch tall pygmy owl, while the bald eagle is our largest.

No matter what their size, raptors share some special characteristics. Excellent vision helps these birds spot their prey. It also helps owls fly at night. Long, sharp claws, or talons, help catch and kill food. A sharp hooked beak helps to not only kill prey but also tear food apart.

Raptors are incredible fliers. They can glide, flap, hover and soar in the air. When gliding, a hawk holds its wings slightly tucked-in with its tail closed. This streamlined body shape gives the bird the speed needed to catch its prey. Flapping flight allows the bird to rise in the air and move forward. Some raptors such as the kestrel, our smallest falcon, the large rough-legged hawk and the osprey hover. While hovering, these birds scan for prey.

When most of us think of a hawk, we picture a bird soaring high in the sky. With wings spread, the bird simply “rides” the waves of warm air rising from the ground. These waves are called “thermals”, and raptors riding them can soar long distances at great heights. Migrating raptors seek out thermals to help them on their long journey. At other times, they just seem to enjoy the ride. After watching a soaring raptor, it’s no wonder we all wish we could fly!



LET'S LOOK AT ...



OSPREY!

Spring is here -- time for flowers, playing outside, and the return of the osprey! These large birds of prey are one of Idaho's migratory raptors. After spending their winter in Central and South America, osprey start to arrive back in Idaho at the beginning of April. By the end of May, you can find osprey along forested streams, rivers and lakes in just about all parts of our state.

This attractive bird is one of Idaho's largest raptors. Their long wings give them a wingspan of just over five feet, and they are almost two feet tall. Osprey are dark brown on the top of their wings and backs. The undersides are mostly white except for a dark brown patch on the bottom of the wings at the wrist joints. An osprey has a mostly white head with a dark brown mask over its eyes. When they fly, their silhouette looks kind of like the letter "M."

Osprey are fish eaters. In fact, they eat almost nothing else. This helps explain why they need to migrate to warm places for the winter. Osprey are not very good at ice fishing, but when the ice is gone, osprey can find plenty of fish to eat. Several neat adaptations help osprey to catch fish. Have you ever tried to catch a fish with your hands? Wow, it's hard to hold onto a slippery, slimy fish! Osprey have this problem solved by having barb-covered pads on their feet. These pads help hold the fish. A reversible outer toe is another big help. By moving the outer toe on each foot back, the osprey can grip the fish with two toes holding on in-front and two toes holding the fish in back. It is kind of like having a thumb. Because osprey dive feet-first, they can only catch fish in the top three feet of the water. To help them locate fish, osprey hover over the water searching for a school of fish. The most common kinds of fish that osprey eat include mountain whitefish, trout, suckers and carp.

The osprey's fish-eating habit caused this species a lot of trouble between the 1950s – 1970s. They were hurt by the same pesticide that harmed bald eagles, DDT. This chemical was used to kill insect pests on crops. When it rained, the DDT was washed into water where it got into fish. When osprey ate the fish, DDT got into the birds, too. It caused the eggshells of osprey to become so thin that they cracked and the developing birds died. Over time, the osprey population went down. Fortunately, scientists realized the dangers of DDT to birds and also humans. Today DDT cannot be used, and osprey populations are doing well. Their presence in Idaho is a sign that our streams, rivers and lakes are healthy.

HELPING HANDS

When you hear news about people and wildlife, it is often not very good. People have done an awful lot to harm wildlife over the years. We damage or take away important habitat so wildlife loses their food, water, or shelter. We use chemicals that can poison wildlife and its habitat. Rules that are meant to protect wildlife and habitat are broken by irresponsible people. It sounds pretty grim, but fortunately for wildlife, a lot of people care about wildlife and wildlife habitat. These people help by becoming volunteers for wildlife.

Volunteers can help wildlife in many ways. Many volunteers spend time helping habitat by planting things like sagebrush, bitterbrush, willows, native grasses and wildflowers, pine trees, and other important native plants. Others help build fences along streams to protect stream banks from being trampled by livestock. These fences protect the stream but also give livestock places where they can safely get water without damaging the stream. Volunteers who like to do woodworking build nest boxes and platforms for birds such as bluebirds, kestrels, wood ducks, and osprey. Some even build roosting boxes for bats.

Volunteers have helped develop outdoor classroom areas for students just like you to come and learn about wildlife. Other volunteers teach students and adults about hunter safety, hunting and fishing skills, bird watching, and other ways to enjoy wildlife. Some volunteers get involved in research, helping Fish and Game biologists with special studies. These volunteers have helped put radio collars on mule deer, watched raptor nest sites during the nesting season, counted birds, netted fish, checked nest boxes and platforms, and many other things.

Idaho's wildlife benefits from all these activities, but so do volunteers. These dedicated people get a lot of satisfaction knowing that they are helping. They enjoy learning new things and sharing their skills with others. For many volunteers, it is a matter of giving something back to a resource that has given them so much pleasure in their lives. You and your family can be wildlife volunteers by contacting the Fish and Game office in your region. Talk with the Volunteer Coordinator to see what you can help do for wildlife. You might be surprised at how much fun you can have as a wildlife volunteer!



Collecting sagebrush seeds.

NEST, SWEET NEST

May is a very busy time for birds as they build nests and raise their young. Nest-building is a pretty amazing process. Can you imagine having to build your house using your mouth and your feet? It would be difficult! Yet birds can create some pretty amazing nests out of a wide variety of materials, all with their beak and feet.

Nests are made to hold and protect both eggs and young. Some nests are used only once while others are used for many years in a row. Songbirds, like robins, build a new nest each year. Many birds of prey re-use their nest adding new materials each year. Sometimes these nests can get pretty big. A bald eagle nest weighed two tons when its tree finally fell down!

Nests take many forms. Most songbirds make a cup nest. Magpies build a round dome-shaped nest complete with a roof. The nests of killdeer and other shorebirds can hardly be called a nest. They are just scrapes in the soil where the eggs will be camouflaged by the ground. Some water birds, like loons and grebes, build floating nests while wood ducks nest in cavities in trees. Herons and egrets build stick nests in trees. The materials that birds use to build their nests can be common or very unusual. More common materials include sticks, grass, mud, feathers, plant down, and animal hair. Unusual materials include man-made things such as pieces of plastic, old fishing line, string, barbed wire, and bailing twine. The champion nest made of man-made materials was a nest built by a canyon wren. The little wren built its 8-inch nest out of office supplies such as paper clips, rubber bands, post-it notes, pins, and thumbtacks!

Osprey are well known for building large nests in unusual places with strange objects. They will build their nests in trees, on cliffs near water, or on buoys, nest platforms, utility poles, and light poles. Most of the nest is made from sticks that the male bird brings to the female. The nest is lined with grasses and algae mats. Many unusual objects have been found woven into osprey nests. Some of these things include shoes and boots, oars, brooms, pieces of boats, rakes, and even a Barbie doll! Here in Idaho, one unusual object that many osprey use is the bailing twine used to keep bales of hay together.



Young osprey in nest.



Photo courtesy Beth Waterbury

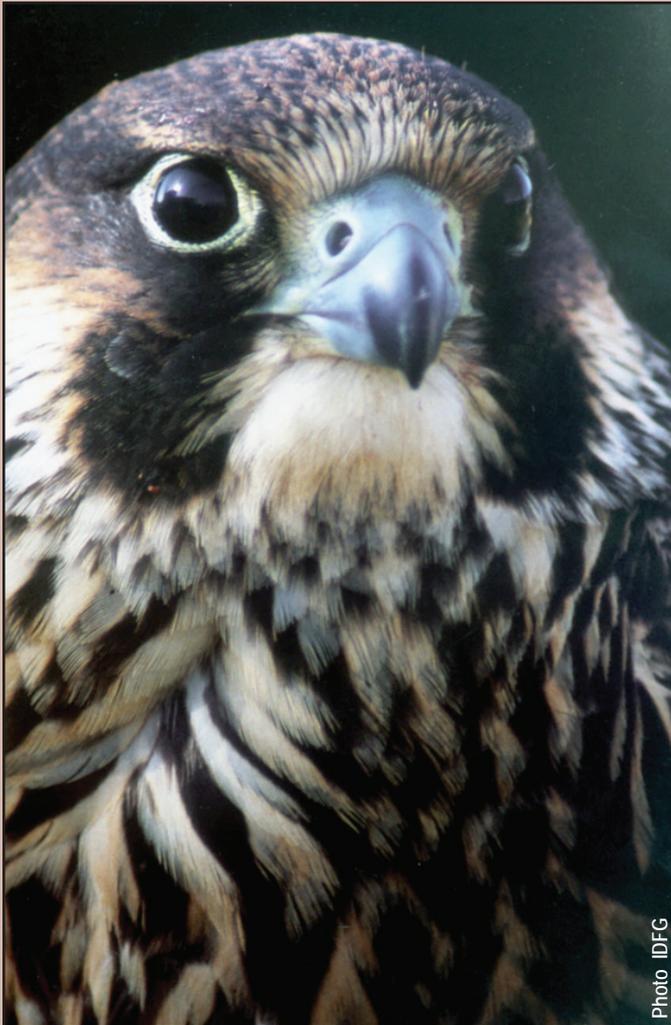
This twine was collected from one osprey nest.

This orange plastic twine may look like the perfect decoration to the osprey, but it can be deadly. Many young osprey have died after becoming tangled up in the twine. Picking up and properly disposing of bailing twine will help make sure that osprey nests are safe places for young osprey to grow up.

THE EYES HAVE IT!

Good eyesight is important to birds of prey like osprey. They can spot prey from long distances and keep it in focus until it is caught. Predators are avoided, and owls can hunt at night. Like most predators, birds of prey have eyes that face forward, just like yours. Both eyes look at something at the same time. This is called binocular vision. Raptors can also see things off to the side by using their right or left eye by itself. This is called monocular vision. You can have monocular vision by covering one eye.

Because raptors have both binocular and monocular vision, they have two well-focused side views and one well-focused front view all at the same time. Large numbers of special cells called cones are grouped together to form foveae (fo-VEE). These groups of cones give the bird very sharp vision, as well as color vision. Birds of prey have two kinds of foveae. The central foveae provide sharp monocular vision on either side of the bird. Temporal foveae give the bird sharp binocular vision when looking straight ahead. Together, these foveae give birds of prey three areas that provide excellent vision. The bird has three well-focused views at the same time. This is a big advantage when finding and catching prey that might be running, flying, or swimming.



Birds of prey are also able to focus their eyes very quickly. The lens of the eye and the shape of the eye can change very rapidly, keeping objects in focus. These changes in the eye are called “accommodation.” A falcon diving to capture a bird can keep its prey in clear focus from the time it spots the prey until the prey is caught and dinner is served.

Climb a tree!



Photo courtesy Leona Svancara

BE OUTSIDE!

Yay! summer is almost here! How do you plan to spend your summer? Why not plan to spend a lot of your time outside this summer. Being outside is so much fun because you can see and do so many things. On this page you will find some fun things to do this summer. For more fun outdoor activities visit www.beoutsideidaho.org. Sit down with your family and take a look at all the ideas and activities you can enjoy outside this summer. Make this a summer to remember --- **Be Outside!**

- Play an outdoor game with your friends
- Have a backyard camp-out
- Read under a tree
- Watch the clouds
- Ride your bike
- Plant a garden
- Go swimming
- Have a picnic
- Go camping
- Build a fort
- Play catch



BE OUTSIDE
IDAHO CHILDREN IN NATURE

Listen to the birds sing!



Photo courtesy Sue Dudley

Go fishing!



Photo courtesy Bill Harryman

Go for a hike!



Photo courtesy Deniz Aygen