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INTERNATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR THE RECOVERY AND REINTRODUCTION OF THE OSPREY (*PANDION HALIAETUS*)

- DISCUSSION DOCUMENT BY BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL -

Compiled by
BirdLife Europe and Central Asia
With contributions from: LIPU, NABU, RSPB, SEO,SVS

Reviews

The action plan should be reviewed and updated every four years. An emergency review will be undertaken if sudden major environmental changes, liable to affect the population, occur within the species' range.

Geographical scope

This action plan is primarily targeted at European, Mediterranean, Central Asian and West African countries. The action plan needs active implementation in: xxx (to be checked, adapted and completed) Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Croatia, Gambia, Georgia, Hungary, Israel, Jordan, Kazachstan, Lebanon, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Oman, Romania, Russia (European part), Senegal, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine and Yemen.

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SUMMARY

The Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* is classified as Least Concern at the global and at the European level (BirdLife International 2015). In Europe it occurs in Fennoscandia, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic countries, Poland, Germany, the UK, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Bulgaria. Total numbers are estimated at 9494-11628 pairs, of which 25-30 pairs are directly or indirectly linked to translocation or reintroduction projects (Schmidt et al. 2014).

In several countries, conservation action for Osprey is ongoing. Most notably, there are very positive experiences in Finland, France, Germany, Spain and the UK.

The aims of the present action plan are:

1. To allow the continued growth and expansion of the Osprey populations in northern Europe, Germany and France.
2. To assure the survival of the small relict populations in different areas of the Mediterranean and South-east Europe.
3. In the medium to long term to allow a range expansion in southern Europe.

Threats and limiting factors

* **Availability of nest sites**
* **Illegal killing**
* **Intraspecific competition**
* **Collision and electrocution**
* **Human disturbance**
* **Poisoning/contamination**

Conservation priorities

* **Forestry policies compatible with the conservation of the species – high**
* **Enforce legal protection for the species and key sites - high**
* **Provide artificial nesting platforms – high**
* **Reduce mortality from collision with all kinds of human installations and electrocution – high**
* **Evaluate the possible contribution and the need for translocation projects**
* **Locate wintering areas and migration routes - high**
* **Evaluate the impact of illegal killing on migration and wintering grounds and if appropriate reduce it – high**

INTRODUCTION

The Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* is a migratory species classified as Least Concern at both, the world level and the European level (BirdLife International 2015a & 2015b). It is included in Annex I of the EU Wild Birds Directive and in Appendix II of both the Bern and Bonn Conventions.

In Europe the Osprey has a depleted population and a distribution that is more restricted than its original distribution several hundred years ago. Since the mid 1970ies, there has been a recovery of the European breeding population and has expanded its breeding range to certain areas around 1000 km from the breeding range of the 1970ies. However, it has by far not reached its complete historical and potential distribution.

In September 2013 an International Osprey symposium took place in Orléans...

xxx... (to be completed)

PART 1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Distribution and population

The Osprey is almost globally distributed. In Europe it has – despite a recent recovery – still a depleted

population and distribution. Human persecution, especially in the 19th and early 20th century, destruction (e.g. forestry practice) of nest sites and the toxic effects of pesticides (DDT) from the 1950ies to 1970ies led to a dramatic reduction of the osprey population in Europe (Dennis 2008, Gensbol & Thiede 2004, Mebs & Schmidt 2006, Müller et al. 2008, Saurola 1995, Schmidt & Müller 2008).

Since about the mid 1970ies, a recovery of Osprey populations is observed in Europe. The species has increased its range in Germany from two to seven Bundesländer; it has recolonised two regions of continental France, where it breeds in eight départements. And it has naturally recolonised the north of England from Scotland. Translocation projects have led to c. 25-30 breeding pairs in England, Italy, Spain and – together with wild birds – Wales.

The Osprey is a migratory species, most European breeding birds wintering south of the Sahara. However, Mediterranean birds are resident or short-distance migrants and some northern birds also winter in the Mediterranean region and even in western France. Xxx... (to be completed)

The Osprey is better able to cross the sea and therefore less concentrated at migration bottlenecks than other soaring birds. Nevertheless, some important migration routes are Xxx... (to be completed)

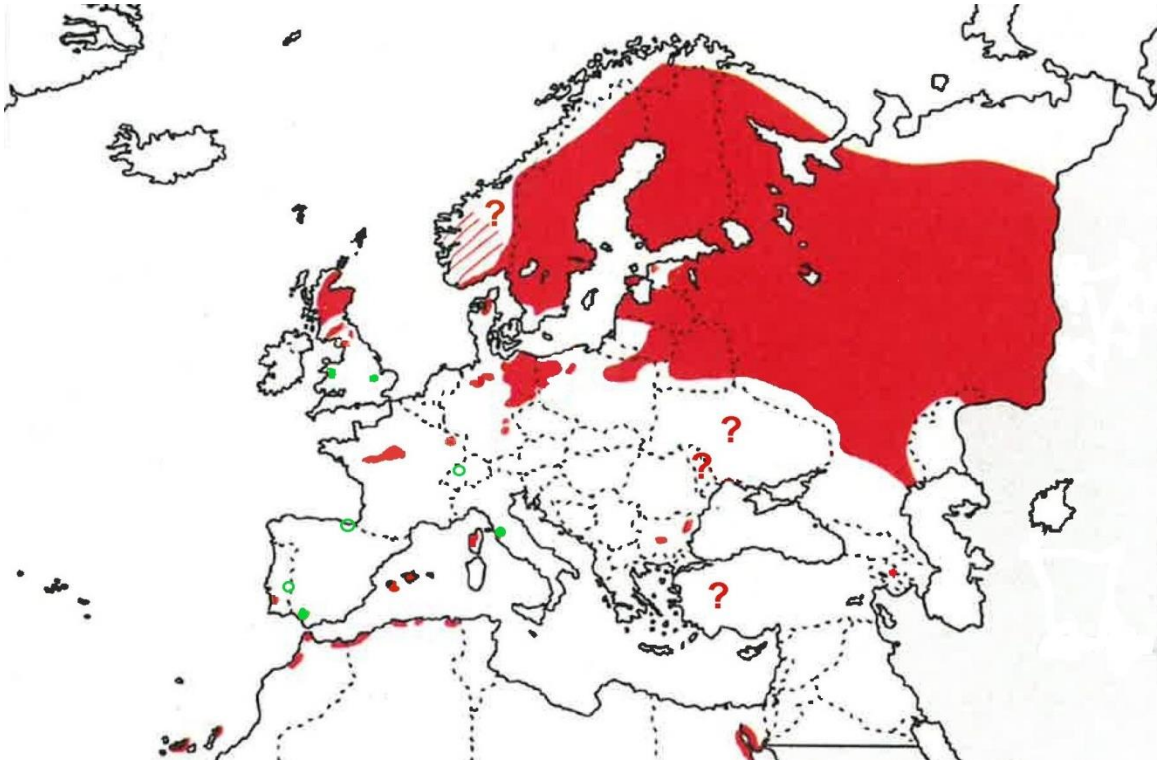

Fig. 1. *Current distribution of Osprey in Europe, the Caucasus and North Africa. Map from Mebs & Schmidt 2006, adapted using Balmer et al. 2013, Hirtz 2008, Schmidt 2010 and Schmidt-Rothmund et al. 2014. In red, breeding populations of the Osprey. In green, breeding populations directly or indirectly linked to reintroduction projects. Open green circles: newer reintroduction projects that have not yet led to a breeding population.*

Table 1. Breeding population of the Osprey in Europe, Central Asia and North Africa, adapted from Schmidt-Rothmund et al. 2014.

	No. of pairs
Algeria	9–15
Armenia	1–4
Azerbaijan	0–5
Belarus	150–180
Bulgaria	3–6
Denmark	3
Egypt	150–180
Estonia	50–60
Finland	1300
France (continental)	38
France (Corsica)	38
Germany	550
Italy	1
Kazakhstan	breeding, numbers unknown
Latvia	180–200
Lithuania	20–30
Republic of Moldova	0–2
Morocco	22
Norway	500
Poland	24–29
Portugal	1
Russian Federation (European part)	2000–4000
Spain (continental)	13
Spain (Mediterranean islands)	21
Spain (Canary islands)	7
Sweden	3400-4700
Turkey	0-10 (?)
Turkmenistan	?
Ukraine	1–2
UK (Scotland)	≥ 230
UK (England)	16
UK (Wales)	4
Uzbekistan	breeding, numbers unknown
Total	8732–12167

Life history

* Taxonomic status

Four subspecies are usually recognised. Genetic studies have shown considerable divergence between the subspecies and some authors have suggested that they could be considered separate species. Currently, most authors consider all subspecies to belong to a single species though (Dennis 2008, Mebs & Schmidt 2006).

* Breeding

In most of its European range, the Osprey builds a large stick nest on the tops of trees usually surmounting neighbourigh trees and thus offering good visibility. Flat-topped pine trees *Pinus sylvestris* are favoured in many areas, but other tree species are also used. In some areas, electricity pylons are also used for nesting and in Germany nests on pylons are common. The Mediterranean population is mainly cliff-nesting.

Birds will accept purpose-built artificial nest structures on suitable trees, pylons or other structures. The absence of existing Osprey nests in an area is considered a deferring factor for the installation of breeding birds.

The clutch is completed in xxx April xxx and usually consists of 2–3 eggs; breeding success is around XX young per successful pair.

* Feeding

The diet is almost exclusively fish up to a size of xxx... Usually, Ospreys feed only on live fish, but occasionally dead fish is picked up.

* Habitat requirements

The key elements of the Osprey habitat are a suitable nest site and water bodies with sufficient fish populations. The distance between fishing grounds and nest sites are usually xxx and may be as far as yyy. The Osprey is predominantly a lowland species but xxx... For these reasons, extended wetlands with natural woodlands nearby are of particular value to the species. However, artificial structures near water bodies like fish farms can suffice.

Threats and limiting factors

* Availability of nest sites

The availability of suitable nest sites is a major limiting factor for the Osprey population in Europe, and also elsewhere (Mebs & Schmidt 2006, Nadal & Tariel 2008, Schmidt & Müller 2008). Modern forestry practices lead to short turnover times and tall, flat-topped trees in relatively undisturbed locations are too scarce. Also cliff-nesting Osprey populations seem to be limited by the availability of nest sites (...).

Importance: critical

* Shooting

Persecution has been and is a problem in Poland, in Portugal until the species went extinct there in 2001 and probably in other countries, especially on migration and in the wintering areas (Mebs & Schmidt 2006, Mizera 2009, Palma 2001, Palma et al. 2013, Schmidt-Rothmund et al. 2014, Tomialojc and Stawarczyk 2003). The reasons why Osprey populations in Ukraine, Moldova and Bulgaria are decreasing are unknown, but persecution could also play a role.

The degree of persecution outside the breeding season is insufficiently known. It has been estimated that it could affect the dynamics of the European breeding population (Schmidt-Rothmund et al. 2014). Work to better understand and if appropriate mitigate the persecution outside the breeding season is needed.

Importance: high

* Intraspecific competition

The very first sentence of Greenwood's seminal work on philopatry and dispersal (1980) reads: Faithfulness to a site or group is a well documented trait of many species of birds and mammals." Several large raptors including species of eagles *Aquila*, sea-eagles *Haliaeetus* and the Osprey are no exception (Dennis 2008, Haller 1994, Mebs & Schmidt, Whitfield et al. 2009). This philopatry leads to competition for resources and sometimes to aggressive behaviour. For the Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*, intraspecific aggression is a

known mortality factor (Haller 1982, Jenny 1992, Mebs & Schmidt 2006) and it has been suspected that it could cause mortality also in the Osprey (Dennis 2008). Intraspecific competition leads to higher age at first breeding and to lower breeding success in the Osprey and thus to a decreased "production" of young at the population level.

Importance: medium, potentially high

* **Collision and electrocution**

Collision with powerlines, wind turbines, or other structures as well as electrocution can be a relevant mortality factor.

Importance: medium, potentially high

* **Human disturbance**

The Osprey is sensitive to human activities in most of its breeding areas. On the other hand, birds can get used to, and breed near, human activity.

Importance: high

* **Nest robbing**

Egg collection has been a problem in several countries even in recent decades (Dennis 2008). Generally, the significance of this threat factor is nowadays reduced, though.

Importance: low

* **Poisoning / contamination**

There are only few recent cases of xxx...

Importance: unknown, potentially medium

Conservation status and recent conservation measures

* **Armenia**

xxx

* **Azerbaijan**

Xxx

* **Bulgaria**

Three to six pairs nest in the Trakia plain and in eastern Bulgaria (Schmidt-Rothmund et al. 2014). These are currently the only known breeding pairs in South-east Europe. The species is common in Bulgaria on migration.

Legal protection... Red List... xxx

Main threats for the breeding population are xxx... What role does persecution play?

* **Finland**

In Finland, provision of artificial platforms as well as monitoring and management of nests in the framework of "Project Pandion" has been successful and led to a growing Osprey population. With c. 1300 pairs, the Finnish population is the third-largest of Europe.

* **France**

France has published a **national plan** for the restauration of Osprey. The Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux – BirdLife in France – is coordinating its implementation. Currently, the national restauration plan is under revision.

The main activities have been: evaluation of potential breeding sites, installation of artificial nests/platforms, protection of occupied nests, awareness raising and xxx (check and complete).

Translocation or reintroduction is not foreseen in the published restauration plan.

* **Germany**

The Bundesländer of Brandenburg and Bavaria have published official **action plans** for the Osprey. Main actions defined in both action plans are protection of nest sites, construction of artificial nest, xxx...

Translocation or reintroduction is not foreseen in these action plans.

Also in other Bundesländer, conservation action is undertaken. There is a group of specialists for the species collaborating across Germany. One of the objectives is to extend the German breeding population to the Danube in order to facilitate recolonisation of South-east Europe (D. Schmidt, *pers. comm.*).

* **Hungary**

Hungary does not currently host breeding Osprey, but two breeding attempts took place between 1990 and 2010 (Kotyman et al. 2011). The species is a regular migrant.

* **Italy**

A reintroduction project has been underway in Tuscany since xxx. XXX young were translocated from Corsica to Tuscany. Two pairs were breeding there in 2014.

* **Republic of Moldova**

xxx

* **Portugal**

The last breeding pair of Osprey occurred in 2001. A reintroduction program was started in 2011 at an inland reservoir. In 2015, a pair of Ospreys naturally re-colonised the "old" breeding area on the south-west rocky coast line.

* **Russian Federation**

The status of Osprey in the Russian Federation is only insufficiently known. Mischenko (2004) estimated 2000-4000 breeding pairs. Red Book...

* **Spain**

Osprey went extinct in Spain in 1991. A reintroduction project was started in Andalucia in 2005 and a second one in the Basque country in 2013. The latter is too recent to know its success to date. 182 young Osprey were translocated to Andalucia until 2013. Already in 2006, when the Ospreys released in the framework of the reintroduction projects had not yet returned from Africa, two wild Ospreys started breeding on a different reservoir about 30-40km away. Possibly, the Ospreys breeding in Morocco not far from Gibraltar have incited migrant Ospreys to settle in Andalucia.

The first breeding pair fledged young only thanks to very close management and the adoption of a nestling from Germany. Reintroduced and migrant birds joined the first wild breeding pair and, in 2014, 15 pairs were breeding in Andalusia.

* **Sweden**

With an estimated 4100 breeding pairs, Sweden holds the largest population of any country in Europe and the Western Palearctic.

Xxx... (To be completed: information on conservation etc.)

* **UK**

Wardening and effective protection of nests along with installation of artificial nests/platforms has allowed the population in Scotland to grow from a single pair in 1954 to c. 280 in 2015 and to re-colonise large parts of Scotland as well as (in 1999) northern England.

In 1996, the first translocation project for Osprey in Europe was started at Rutland, England. 64 young were brought from Scotland to Rutland until 2001 and another 11 in 2005. In 2015, 8 pairs bred there.

Two males released at Rutland paired up with probably Scottish-born females in Wales, about 200 km from both, Rutland and the Scottish breeding population. In 2013, three pairs of Ospreys bred in Wales.

* **Ukraine**

The Osprey is now very rare in Ukraine, despite the extent of potentially suitable habitats and good populations in neighbouring Belarus and the Russian Federation. Both, the status of and the threats for the breeding population are poorly known. What role does persecution play?

* **International**

xxx

PART 2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

AIMS

1. In the short term to allow the continued growth and steady expansion of the growing Osprey populations in northern Europe, Germany and France.
2. In the short term to assure the survival of the small relict populations in different areas of the Mediterranean and South-east Europe.
3. In the medium to long term to allow a range expansion in southern Europe.

OBJECTIVES

1. POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE

1.1. To promote policies which ensure long-term conservation of the Osprey as well as its habitat and to make use of synergies with the conservation of other species

1.1.1. Forestry

It is recommended that forestry policies should take into account the presence of Ospreys in yearly forestry plans, and human activity should be prevented within 300 m of an active nest.

Priority: high

Time-scale:medium

1.1.2. Protected areas

xxx (to be completed)

1.1.3. International cooperation

The experience of successful conservation programmes for the Osprey should be made available to those countries, where conservation action is most urgent.

1.2. To promote national legislation which adequately protects the species and its habitat

Where appropriate, a review and update of national laws and regulations relating to nature conservation should be encouraged to ensure that:

(a) The Osprey is given high level of protection, and deferring penalties are instated for shooting, trapping, taking, poisoning, disturbing, possessing or trading specimens or their eggs.

(b) Recovery plans and habitat management plans are foreseen for endangered species.

(c) Environmental impact assessment is required for afforestation schemes, dam construction, powerlines or any other infrastructure likely to affect the habitat of the Osprey and threatened species.

Priority: high

Time-scale:medium

1.3. To promote implementation of international conventions and treaties

There are three major international treaties which list the Osprey: annex II of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention); annex II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS - Bonn Convention) and on annex II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (Washington Convention or CITES). These conventions, together with the Biodiversity Convention, provide an adequate framework for the conservation of the Osprey and its habitat, and all the countries where the species occurs are encouraged to sign,

ratify and implement them. The Osprey is listed on Annex I of the EU Wild Birds Directive.

Priority: high

Time-scale:long

2. SPECIES AND HABITAT PROTECTION

2.1. To ensure that the Osprey habitat retains the necessary conditions for the presence of the species

2.1.1. Promote the designation of all the Important Bird Areas critical for Osprey as protected areas

The compilation of the directory of IBAs (Grimmett and Jones 1989) allowed the identification of many sites of high importance for the avifauna, including for the Osprey. Those sites that are critical for the Osprey population and distribution (sites with one or more breeding pairs in small populations, sites with several breeding pairs in larger populations and sites with large numbers of Ospreys outside the breeding season) should be designated as protected areas.

Priority: medium

Time-scale:short/long

2.1.2. Provide artificial nest structures to avoid the loss of clutches and chicks due to bad weather

If manpower and expertise are available, nests belonging to pairs attempting breeding for the first time should be secured to the supporting tree to ensure that they do not fall. It will occasionally be necessary to provide artificial nest structures to encourage birds away from areas prone to human disturbance. This sort of management activity should take place outside the breeding season, within the framework of a wider conservation programme, and by experienced personnel.

Priority: high

Time-scale: short/ongoing

2.1.3. Encourage appropriate habitat management in unprotected sites

xxx

2.2. To eliminate or control non-natural factors which are affecting the Osprey

2.2.1. Control illegal killing

Governments should be urged to enforce hunting regulations and increase surveillance in areas where Osprey occur, especially wetlands and near fish farms or at other exposed sites. Awareness campaigns targeted at hunters' and fishermen's associations should be undertaken in those areas where the problem is especially acute.

At important sites outside the breeding season, public education among the local population is also necessary.

Priority: medium

Time-scale:medium/ongoing

2.2.4. Reduce mortality from electrocution by powerlines and collision with human installations

xxx

2.2.5. Prevent human disturbance

In cases where human disturbance is a persistent cause of breeding failure in vulnerable populations, wardening should be organised to prevent both intentional and unintentional disturbance to nesting birds. Such schemes can be carried out with the help of volunteers who must be adequately briefed to avoid becoming a disturbance themselves. Nest wardening also provides the opportunity to gather information about the species' biology. It is essential that wardens are provided with equipment to carry out their observations from a long distance, and with radios to seek assistance from the authorities if required.

Priority: medium

Time-scale:medium/ongoing

2.3. To support the spread of the Osprey to former breeding areas, especially in South-East Europe

2.3.1. Provide artificial nests

Provide artificial nests/platforms according to 2.1.2.

2.3.2. Evaluate the costs and expected contribution of reintroduction

Evaluate, whether natural recolonisation of any specific country is realistic within periods of 10, 30 or 50 years and whether waiting for natural recolonisation is appropriate or not. If applicable, carefully plan and conduct a translocation project following IUCN guidelines and making use of the experience gathered in successful projects, notably in England and Spain.

3. MONITORING AND RESEARCH

xxx

4. PUBLIC AWARENESS AND TRAINING

4.1. To improve and maintain awareness, concern and support for the protection of the Osprey and its habitat

The Osprey has great potential to be used as a symbol of wetlands, alluvial and other natural forests, which covered significant parts of Europe in the past. Public information programmes should be geared to provide updated, accurate information on the status and needs of the osprey, other raptors and wetland species.

Priority: medium

Time-scale:medium/ongoing

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ANNEX 1. RECOMMENDED CONSERVATION ACTIONS BY COUNTRY

* **Armenia**

xxx

* **Azerbaijan**

xxx

* **Bulgaria**

The Osprey pairs nesting in the Trakia plain and in eastern Bulgaria are currently the only known breeding pairs in South-east Europe. Effective protection of known breeding pairs in Bulgaria could allow an increase in the two small and local populations (through immigration and local breeding success) and the two populations could then act as crystallisation points for the natural recolonisation of other countries in South-east Europe.

Main threats for the breeding population are xxx... What role does persecution play? Threats for migrating osprey xxx...

It is acknowledged that Bulgaria is an important range state for other raptor species including the globally threatened Imperial Eagle and Egyptian Vulture, too. Consequently, maximum use of synergies between the conservation of Osprey and other conservation goals should be made.

1.1. Understand the threats for the small Osprey population in Bulgaria and effectively protect existing nests.

1.2 Evaluate, whether existing guidelines to avoid disturbance to Imperial Eagles can be adapted to cover the needs of Osprey.

1.3 If persecution is a threat, promote strengthened legal protection of the Osprey and increase the penalty for killing or taking specimens or eggs.

1.4. Promote designation of protected areas to cover nests and fishing grounds of Osprey.

1.5. Provide artificial nest structures and prevent human activities during the incubation and early rearing periods within 300 m of nest-sites of pairs attempting to breed.

1.6. Organise wardening for nests.

1.7. Evaluate, whether the research on the impact of electrocution on, and the habitat requirements of the Imperial Eagle and Egyptian Eagle that have already been carried out can give guidance for the conservation of Osprey.

1.8. Initiate a public awareness campaign.

* **Finland**

1.1. Continue the successful work ("Project Pandion") in order to support further population growth of this important population.

* **France**

1.1. Continue the successful work of the plan de restauration in order to support the further growth of the population and recolonisation of further départements.

1.2. xxx

1.3. xxx

* **Germany**

1.1. Continue the successful work in order to support the further growth of the population and recolonisation of further Bundesländer as well as expansion of the Bavarian breeding range to the Danube.

1.2. xxx

1.3. xxx

* **xxxx**

xxx

* **Republic of Moldova**

1.1. Conduct a survey to know the breeding population and nest sites of Osprey.

1.2. Effectively protect Osprey breeding sites and provide artificial nests to encourage local population growth.

* **xxxx**

  xxx

* **xxxx**

  xxx