

Notornis, 2013, Vol. 60: 327
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REVIEW

A life of Ospreys

Roy Dennis
Whittles Publishing, 2008. Caithness, Scotland.
ISBN 9781904445265. 224 pp., Paperback \$17.20.

This is a well presented book for both the general conservation-minded person, as well as the keener student or mature birder or even for those *birds of prey* fanatics. The earlier chapters carefully set out the history and the scene leading up to the first return of Ospreys to the Highlands of Scotland in the mid 1950's. Following is a summary of the trials and tribulations, endured by both the birds and those earlier enthusiasts and professionals, who undertook their earlier observation and protection. The threats were both natural and climate related as well as human; particularly the latter in the form of dedicated egg thieves who would go to extreme measures to defeat the protective systems established around many of the nest sites. As a keen young UK birder at the time, I well remember the excitement and thrill when the news of the first arrivals of ospreys at Loch Garten became public knowledge, watched the very grainy black and white television coverage and then followed with some dismay the tales of raiding and destruction that often followed.

The main body of the book is perhaps for the more dedicated reader as as it contains a lengthy

narrative of over 20 years of progress on protecting the Ospreys as they spread their wings across Scotland. It contains considerably comprehensive detail and can at times may seem a bit repetitive.

The techniques developed over the years for catching, banding, feeding, protecting, tracking and even artificial nest making for ospreys are described. All of these activities often take place up some very tall and exposed trees. The application of these techniques to ospreys is enlightening and the text is well supported by photographs, diary excerpts or data tables. This section of the book is a tribute to the challenges faced and perseverance of those involved.

The book ends with a comprehensive review of osprey populations and their distribution around the world as well as recommending some good watching sites for those in the UK. Overall, this is a well presented book that makes a good read of just what it takes to try to rescue from local extinction a threaten bird of prey and return it to sustainable levels throughout the UK. The author sums up these sentiments nicely, "*Thank goodness the osprey is no longer viewed as vermin by the gillies and farmers, rather as a spectacular bird of prey that can be admired and appreciated by all who are fortunate to see them in their natural habitat*"

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