



Case study 1: Lake District Osprey Project



Summary of economic and environmental impact:

- Recolonisation of Lake District habitat by rare species
- Raised awareness of wildlife and biodiversity
- Increased environmental tourism: more than 500,000 visitors to date
- New employment in biodiversity and in tourism industry
- Increased economic activity to sustain rural communities
- Improved public transport, reducing car travel

Overview

It all began with a pair of ospreys, one of Britain's rarest and most spectacular birds. Few would have guessed that they would bring half a million visitors, two dedicated viewing areas and even their own special bus service.

In 2001, after hard work by a handful of enthusiasts, a pair of ospreys settled in a purpose-built nest on the edge of Bassenthwaite Lake near Keswick.

The fish-eating birds, which have a wingspan of up to five feet, reared a single chick – the first ospreys to breed in the Lake District for 150 years. Neither the ospreys nor their guardians in the Lakes have looked back. The ospreys have returned every year, fledging a total of 13 chicks between 2001 and 2007.

The Lake District Osprey Project has been a spectacular success, not just in environmental terms but for the local economy.

It aims to provide a welcoming habitat for breeding ospreys, enabling them to recolonise the Lake District while giving local people and visitors a chance to find out more about wildlife and conservation. The project encourages people to volunteer for environmental activities, works to improve the Bassenthwaite Lake area and has sparked a boom in wildlife tourism.



Project development

The ospreys' return to Bassenthwaite Lake was the culmination of several years' work by the Forestry Commission, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Lake District National Park Authority.

Encouraged by the successful return of ospreys to Scotland since the 1950s, the Lake District Osprey Project partners built a nest platform in Wythop Woods overlooking Bassenthwaite Lake, where ospreys would find

the fish they live on.

They even splashed the nest site with white emulsion to simulate osprey droppings, so the ospreys would think this was an established nest.

Funding and partners

The three original partners in the project (see above) are working closely with a community-led environmental programme, Bassenthwaite Reflections, a scheme supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund which brings together 22 different local projects. In 2008 this partnership resulted in the launch of the Osprey Bus, a link from Keswick to major attractions around the lake.

The project is supported by over 90 volunteers from the local community, who give valuable time to support the ospreys and the project. However, during the breeding season there are also seasonal jobs for people to protect the nest from disturbance and enthuse and inform visitors.

Visitors are not charged to see the ospreys, but the project is supported by a proportion of car parking fees and profits from sales at Whinlatter visitor centre, which has been redeveloped at a cost of £500,000. The webcam that beams pictures back to Whinlatter is funded by Natural England.

Visitors are also encouraged to make donations, and the net project costs are underwritten by the three main partner organisations.

Environmental benefits

The ospreys have now nested at Bassenthwaite Lake for seven consecutive years, creating high hopes that they will establish a permanent presence in the Lake District. More artificial nests have now been constructed in other suitable locations in the hope that ospreys may colonise these too.

The Lakes osprey team are optimistic that this will start to happen before the Bassenthwaite ospreys reach the end of their breeding life.

The same male has returned each year since 2001, and in 2007 he was joined by a new mate. 'We hope the male will continue to return for many years to come' says Bill Kenmir of the Lake District Osprey Project. 'We are hopeful that when the time comes he will be replaced by a new male and other pairs will have started to nest locally.'





The success of the project suggests that schemes to attract other kinds of wildlife back into Northwest England may prove fruitful.

Local people and visitors are able to learn about the ospreys and the project's work at the viewpoints at Dodd Wood and Whinlatter. Dodd Wood is being preserved as a natural viewpoint with minimum interference with the landscape.

Meanwhile the new Osprey Bus should help to minimise the impact of extra traffic as interest in the ospreys grows – demonstrating how natural tourism and sustainable transport can work well together.

Economic benefits

• *Tourism*

The osprey project has provided a big boost to tourism in the Lake District, and in 2007 attracted its half millionth visitor. Around 100,000 people visit the ospreys each season. A study in 2003 found that these visitors spent £1.68m, of which £420,000 was directly attributable to the ospreys. This spending supported the equivalent of 34 local jobs over the four months of the osprey breeding season.

Three quarters of these visitors said 'birds and wildlife' were a major reason for their visit to the Lake District. Across the UK it's estimated that 290,000 people a year visit nine osprey watching sites, generating £3.5m extra for local economies – and in Scotland it's been found that there are more visitors when there are chicks.

'When we started in 2001 we were only expecting a few thousand visitors for that season,' Bill says. 'The viewpoint was opened soon after the chick had hatched. 'We had two or three thousand visitors in the first weekend alone and from that moment we knew this was going to be something special.'

The Bassenthwaite Lake project has won or been shortlisted for several tourism awards.

• *Labour productivity*

New jobs have been created. As well as generating extra spending on local facilities such as accommodation and restaurants, the project itself employs a growing number of seasonal staff to serve the influx of visitors: in 2007 there were nine workers.

The project staff also support more than 90 local volunteers who protect the nest and show visitors the birds. In 2007 volunteers gave up over 7,000 hours of their time to the project.

'The number of people the ospreys have reached, and the way local people and visitors alike have taken the birds to their hearts, has been one of the most rewarding aspects of the project,' Bill Kenmir says.

• *Quality of place*

The project has put the Bassenthwaite area on the map, with improved facilities for tourists and, now, better public transport. The



Forestry Commission invested in the redevelopment of the Whinlatter Visitor Centre in 2003, featuring a giant video screen with live pictures beamed from the ospreys' nest.

• *Land and biodiversity*

The project shows it is possible for a protected species to recolonise a former habitat, and could pave the way for other schemes to enhance the Lake District's biodiversity.

Pictures:

A: Osprey chicks pictured in the nest at Bassenthwaite Lake. Picture: LDOP

B: Visitors gather at the Dodd Wood viewpoint. Picture: LDOP

C: A visitor gets a close-up view through a telescope at Whinlatter. Picture: LDOP

D: An osprey following a successful fishing trip. Picture: Chris Gomersall (rsps-images.com)

E: The rebuilt Whinlatter visitor centre. Picture: LDOP

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