THE LAKE DISTRICT OSPREY PROJECT
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The *Lake District Osprey Project* is a partnership between the Forestry Commission, Lake District National Park Authority and the RSPB.

The partnership aims to ensure the continued success of breeding ospreys at Bassenthwaite, to assist with natural colonisation elsewhere in the Lakes and to provide the public with the opportunity to see and find out more about ospreys.

THE OSPREY: A large fish-eating bird of prey, with a wingspan of up to 1.7m (5½ft). They are one of the world's most spectacular and popular birds.

RETURN TO THE LAKE DISTRICT – A WILDLIFE SUCCESS STORY: The return of the osprey to the Lakes in 2001 was the culmination of several years' hard work behind the scenes to encourage them to breed. As sightings of birds on migration increased over the last few years, so did the thought that one day these birds may once again breed. **It was with this aim in mind that four years ago the Forestry Commission and Lake District National Park Authority built a nest platform in Wythop Woods overlooking Bassenthwaite Lake**. In 2001 all the hard work paid off and amid great excitement a pair of ospreys took to the platform and nested, successfully rearing one chick. **For the first time in over 150 years, and as a result of natural re-colonisation, ospreys had been recorded nesting successfully in the Lake District!**

In a double success story for England, a pair of ospreys also successfully nested at Rutland Water – the result of a re-introduction programme run by Anglia Water/Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust involving the release of osprey chicks taken from Scottish nests.

WHERE TO SEE THE OSPREYS
We hope the Lake District ospreys will return this spring to nest. If they do, an **Osprey Viewpoint will be set up from mid-April at the Forestry Commission's Dodd Wood, near Keswick**. The viewpoint offers magnificent views over **Bassenthwaite Lake, owned and managed by the Lake District National Park Authority** and a favoured fishing area for the ospreys. From here there is a direct view of the nest through high powered telescopes from a safe distance. This is an open air facility (no hide!).

The Osprey Viewpoint is situated 3 miles north of Keswick off the A591 – follow signs to the Mirehouse from the A66. The Viewpoint is 10 minutes walk uphill from the Mirehouse car park. **The Dodd Wood Viewpoint and car park are open all daylight hours. Staff from the Osprey Project partnership will be on hand with telescopes from 10.00 to 17.00 every day**.

In an exciting new development this year, we also plan to have a video link providing pictures of the nest to the Forestry Commission's Whinlatter Visitor Centre, which is situated north west of Keswick.

For more information contact a representative of the Lake District Osprey Project:

David Hirst (media enquiries) 0191 2120353/Mob: 07885 834889/david.hirst@rspb.org.uk

Graeme Prest (FC) 01229 860373/Mobile: 0774 7762916
Nathan Fox (FC) 017687 78469/Mobile: 07720 700322
Pete Davies (LDNPA) 017687 79633/Mobile: 07768 977813
Peter Barron (LDNPA) 017687 79633/Mobile: 07785 515726
Bill Kenmir (RSPB) 01931 713376/Mobile: 07736 640926

Visit the Lake District Osprey Project on the web at www.ospreywatch.co.uk

OSPREY FACT FILE

THE OSPREY: A large fish-eating bird of prey, with a wingspan of up to 1.7m (5½ft). They are one of the world's most spectacular and popular raptors. The osprey is famed for its dramatic fishing technique of plunging into water with wings swept back, talons thrust forwards at the last minute to snatch a fish below the surface.

HISTORY IN BRITAIN: Ospreys were once common in Scotland, and probably England - there are references to ospreys in Shakespeare's plays (1564-1616) and poems by John Skelton (c1460-1529) and Michael Drayton (1563-1631). Numbers declined in the 18th and 19th centuries due to human persecution in various forms. It is unlikely that any ospreys nested in England after the 1830s and probably for much longer. The last breeding pair was destroyed in Scotland in 1916. A few migrant birds were seen in Scotland during the 1930s and 1940s but ospreys were extinct as a breeding species in the UK until a pair started to nest in Strathspey from 1954. Breeding success was low until 1959 when intensive wardening increased the security given to the birds. The population in Scotland has grown slowly to 136 pairs in 1999. The first recorded pair to recolonise England nested in the Lake District in 2001 – the start of a new chapter in the story of the osprey.

POPULAR APPEAL: Last year the public viewpoint at Dodd Wood, overlooking the Lake District nest site, attracted more than 25,000 visitors between late June and early September.

HABITAT: The osprey is a summer visitor to Europe, spending the winter in Africa. The UK's birds winter mostly in Senegal, The Gambia or Mauritania, returning in late March to early April and departing mid-August to mid-September. Adults migrate several weeks before the young who have to find their own way south. The core population area in the UK is in the Scottish Highlands where ospreys favour areas with Scots Pine forests, fresh water lochs and rivers. These provide nesting and feeding sites similar to those found in Scandinavia.

DIET: During the breeding season, ospreys hunt up to 20 km from their nest site. They catch live fish weighing up to 1 kg, including pike, perch, trout and eels. During incubation, the male does the fishing, taking prey to his mate on the nest. Daily food consumption is about 300g (10 oz), with between one and four fish caught, increasing when young are in the nest.

Ospreys dive feet first but can only penetrate about one metre below the water surface and so only catch fish that frequent shallow water. The osprey's feet are specially adapted to catch fish: short sharp spines covering the base of the foot pad and toes aid the long sharp talons in catching prey.

BREEDING: Osprey nests tend to be a large platform of sticks in the crown of a Scots Pine or similar conifer tree and birds return to the same site each year. Nesting sites are normally within 3-5 km of water and are often reused each year, some for decades. The eggs are extremely variable, having a white to fawn background colour, which is blotched with brown or deep red. The clutch of 2-3 eggs is laid from mid-April to mid-May. Both sexes incubate the eggs, with the female taking the greater share and incubating at night. There is only one brood and the young fledge after 53 days. Young birds mature slowly and are able to breed when between three and six years old.

POPULATION: The osprey is a cosmopolitan raptor and is found in every continent except the Antarctic, although it does not breed in South America nor in most of Africa. The estimated world population is 25,000-30,000 breeding pairs, although the European population, which is mainly in Scandinavia, is only around 8,000 pairs (1994). The Scottish population is 150-160 pairs.

For regular up-dates visit the Lake District Osprey Project at
www.ospreywatch.co.uk