

Historical Ospreys - Some Ideas for History Teachers

Early human's only interest in birds was as a source of food. However with the invention of the gun, the pass time of shooting wild birds for 'sport' became increasingly popular.

Early naturalists used to catch, kill, and stuff animal specimens and there were collectors of stuffed birds and birds eggs. Birds of prey became a desirable target for collectors, in particular birds such as ospreys, because they were so beautiful and so rare.

Victorian ladies made bird feathers a fashion accessory, and even whole stuffed birds were used to adorn their hats!

The horror of the increasing rarity of many birds exploited for fashion or adornment eventually led to a group of society ladies forming what has now become one of the world's most important bird conservation organisations, the RSPB. From its very beginning, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds had osprey conservation as one of its priorities. Its first publications included a pamphlet entitled 'The Osprey'. Persecution of ospreys and habitat destruction led to their extinction in England about 100 years ago.

A brief history of the RSPB and a timeline can be found on the RSPB's website www.rspb.org.uk. Ospreys feature in several places on the timeline.

Lesson Ideas;

1. Research the RSPB website history section .Look in 'about', then 'history' and 'timeline & milestones'. Discuss the levels of society in Victorian Britain which could on one hand have, a society lady adorned with a bird on her hat, a taxidermist stuffing birds and mounting them and their eggs as ornaments, whilst on the other hand many of the people of Britain only viewed birds as food.
2. Draw a timeline for the RSPB from its inception, highlighting all mention of ospreys from then until the present.
3. Research the Rutland Ospreys website www.lrwt.org.uk/rutland-ospreys Look in 'our ospreys' then 'translocation project'. Prepare a timeline showing the major steps in the reintroduction of ospreys to Rutland.
4. Equality of the sexes was not exactly a feature of Victorian society, yet a group of society ladies were able to form what quickly became a large powerful and politically active bird conservation organisation (RSPB). Research this and another powerful political movement formed by Victorian 'society ladies' and produce a brief summary of their part in this story of conservation.