

Survival Of The fittest Osprey

Spring 2014 came quickly after a mild winter in the UK, but even so the Rutland Osprey team were taken by surprise by the earliest ever arrival of one of the Rutland ospreys. Throughout the month of March the birds continued to arrive eager to begin their breeding.

All over the world people logged on daily to catch up with the latest arrivals and to see the nest at Manton Bay live on the webcam.

The unringed breeding female returned to this nest on March 17th and everyone held their breath in anticipation of the arrival of her mate of four years 5R. Over the four years these two had been paired they had successfully raised eleven chicks. 5R had been an excellent father and his unringed mate (now nicknamed Maya) a diligent mother. Whilst waiting, Maya spent her time feeding on trout, making repairs to the nest and scanning the sky for the return of 5R. Other unpaired male ospreys made approaches and all were chased off, as Maya faithfully waited for 5R.

Finally after waiting for 20 days she stopped being so hostile to other males who had continued to vie for her attention and began to accept the attention of a young Rutland bred bird, ring number 28. Egg laying quickly followed with Maya producing her usual 3 eggs and she commenced incubation. 28 however did not settle into his new role easily. He brought in regular fish and kept Maya fed, but took some time to get the hang of taking over incubation duties while his mate fed. The eggs were left uncovered for long periods of time and it was feared that they would fail as a result.

The situation took another turn for the worst; when two other unpaired young males arrived back from Africa. These males 33 and 51 continually intruded upon Maya and the nest. 28 proved unable to chase them away and it was left to Maya to do so, again the eggs were left uncovered. Finally after several days of intrusion the new males forced 28 to abandon the nest and one of them 33 took over as the dominant male on the nest. At first Maya would have nothing to do with him but finally she tolerated and then accepted his presence.

On April 27th Maya left the nest (with 33 on it) to go and feed. 33 took his opportunity and pushed the eggs out of the nest, you can see this being done using the link below.



Hyperlink to video of 33 pushing eggs:
<http://youtu.be/al8SwwgYf4g>

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28 wing damage



33 chases 28

Consider, discuss or write answers to the following questions.

1. Why would Maya instinctively have waited so long for her original mate 5R to return?
2. Why is it likely that 28 was unable to chase off the intruding males like 33?
3. Why is it likely that Maya instinctively finally accepted 33 in preference to 28?
4. Why did 33 push the eggs out of the nest?
5. 33 made sure that the 3 eggs Maya had laid would not hatch, is this, a good thing in the short term for the population of Rutland ospreys?
6. In the long term, why might it be better genetically for the population if 33 and Maya pair up and breed together?
7. In a natural situation like this only the strongest individuals breed, this ensures the continuation of their possibly stronger genes or genetic makeup. Who was it that originally observed this happening and wrote about it? What was his theory called and what was the name of the book in which he published his ideas?