

[From Summer 2000]

## A Fishy Romance

A male will go to great heights to impress a female. He might even be thinking about settling down and raising a family. He's tired of traveling, the weather has improved, and there's plenty of food, and water. Nature has provided sticks to build a house in a high place. After all, if he and his partner are going to raise a family, they need to feel safe and secure.

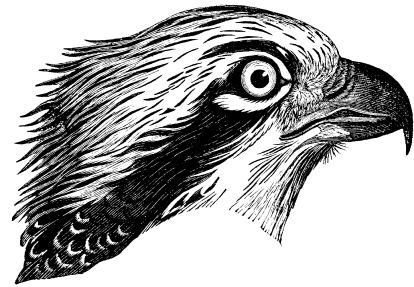
First, he must find a potential mate and court her. No diamonds, roses or boxes of chocolate will impress her. All it takes is a fresh fish. Instead of taking her out to dinner, bring her a fish whenever she's hungry. She'll be so impressed and he'll be so proud of himself that they'll likely pledge fidelity to each other.

Catching the fish won't require a license or pole, just patience and the willingness to take a plunge into water. He's done it plenty of times before in order to feed himself. A slimy fish doesn't have a chance when he's around to grab it with his spiny toes. Off he flies with the fish's head pointing the way. This handsome bird lands on a lofty perch where he and his mate can eat undisturbed.

Oops! I've let the "bird out of the bag". Our courting fellow is none other than the osprey or fish hawk. You may get the opportunity to observe him delivering a fish to his mate while she's incubating eggs or caring for young. A brood of three requires six pounds of fish daily!

Look for a large nest in a tall tree or on an artificial platform near fresh or saltwater. They will also nest right above water if a structure such as a buoy provides ample space for a nest.

These birds were in declining numbers during the 1950s - 1970s due to exposure to DDT. Thanks to conservation efforts and construction of artificial platforms in coastal nesting areas, they have made a successful comeback. With a little help from us humans, ospreys and their fishy antics will continue to amaze birdwatchers.



An osprey went a-courting, to woo himself a mate. He caught for her a slimy fish, with which to seal their fate. The fish flew facing forward, firmly gripped by spiny toes. She waited on her lofty perch, to greet her handsome beau.

So fellas, when you're dating, bring the girl a nice big fish. No need for fancy restaurant food, served on a china dish. Just promise her a house on stilts, near water, with a view. Look up! Watch for the fish hawk. He'll show you what to do!

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