



Press release

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SIX YOUNG OSPREYS HAVE JUST ARRIVED IN SWITZERLAND

After long and careful preparation, six young Ospreys have recently been translocated from Scotland to Switzerland. This marks the start of an ambitious reintroduction project launched by the Swiss Romande Society for the Study and Protection of Birds (“*Nos Oiseaux*”), exactly one century after the Osprey’s disappearance as a breeding species.

As in many other countries in Europe, the Osprey became extinct in Switzerland due to persecution by poachers and egg collectors. It probably bred in Switzerland for the last time in 1914. The aim of the project, launched in 2013 by “Nos Oiseaux” on the occasion of its 100th birthday, is to restore the Osprey as a breeding species in Switzerland. The project was able to start thanks to the support of the Rita Roux Foundation. It is also supported by the MAVA Foundation for Nature and several other donors. The Highland Foundation for Wildlife and Scottish National Heritage have also played an important part in the successful launch of the project.

Similar reintroduction projects have already been undertaken successfully in England, Spain, Italy, Portugal, as well as in the United States. The idea is to take individual young birds from nests with many chicks, from regions in northern Europe which have healthy and increasing Osprey populations. The chicks are then translocated when they are between 5-6 weeks old to the reintroduction site, where they are reared inside aviaries specially designed for them. Ospreys are “philopatric”, which means that when the birds reach breeding age (at 3-4 years old), they return to nest in the area from where they fledged. This means that birds reared in Switzerland will return here when they are old enough to breed.

The project has received valuable support and advice from international Osprey specialists, in particular, from Roy Dennis from Scotland. On his advice, a site in the canton of Fribourg in the Seeland region was selected as being one of the most suitable in Switzerland for the reintroduction. The site is near Lakes Morat and Neuchâtel, within the grounds of the State Prison of Bellechasse, which owns a large and secluded agricultural area which is well protected from disturbance. No-one is allowed to enter (or leave!) without authorisation and lack of disturbance is essential to ensure the success of the operation. As well as benefitting from the quite surroundings and surveillance at Bellechasse, the commitment and involvement of detainees and prison staff alike to the project has also been very important both for the operation and socially within the prison. Aviary construction and preparation of the release site was achieved thanks to the efficient and much appreciated work of several detainees, working alongside enthusiastic prison staff.

The young Ospreys will be monitored and fed with minimal contact with people, first in the aviaries and then in the immediate vicinity, until they migrate to tropical Africa around mid-September. The Natural History Museum in Fribourg, one of our project partners, has provided logistical support, including setting up webcams to monitor all the aviaries, and providing small transmitters to be attached to the birds when they are released to monitor their movements.

Please note that for reasons of security and tranquillity, access to the whole area of Bellechasse is strictly forbidden.

For further information contact: Dr Wendy Strahm, Project Coordinator. info@balbuzards.ch or telephone 079 810 12 73. See also www.ospreys.ch