

On the Status of Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) in Georgia

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Formerly, before the end 1930's – beginning of 1940's, Osprey was a local breeder in small numbers at coastal lowlands along the Black Sea coast, at western part of Kolkheti Lowland – on various wetlands in flood-plains of some large rivers, on banks of large lakes and along banks of some large rivers in other parts of Georgia. The Osprey extirpated as a regular breeding species in the territory of Georgia in the middle of 20th Century.

At present Osprey is common, but rare passage visitor in Western Georgia, i.e. in the Black Sea basin, and very rare in small numbers migrant in Eastern Georgia, i.e. in the Caspian Sea basin.

Status of presence



No nests known since the end of 1950's. Last occupied nest was known at flnkit Lake in Abkhazia in 1958. Analyses of materials published in the 19th – beginning of the 20th centuries help us to restore the former range of the breeding distribution of Osprey in Georgia. According to Konstantin Satunin this raptor species was “widely distributed over the whole Caucasus and in a number is recorded in all water-bodies rich by fish”. Modest Bogdanov mentioned on the breeding at banks of Rioni River and Mtkvari River. Ignati Mikhalovskii reported on the records of Osprey in summer 1878 near Kutaisi, where it “... was soaring often over Rioni River ...”, “... near Akhaltsikhe town along banks of Potskhovi River and over Mtkvari (=Kura) River near Surami village ...”. Gustav Radde observed “... every year numerous breeding pairs along the Mtkvari River near Borjomi, on Kvabliani River and in lower part of Rioni River...”. Anton Guldenstedt recorded breeding Ospreys on Rioni River much earlier – in the 1771-1772. This species was recorded by Nikolai Dinnik for the upper parts of Rioni River in the 1880's. Theodor Vil'konskii informed that Osprey in the middle of 1890's was “... a common breeding raptor species in Ajaria and Guria ...”. Nests were discovered near Gonio village, along the banks of Chorokhi River, Ajaristkali River near Koda, Supsa River, Natanebi River. According to this Author, at the same period this species already extirpated at Paliastomi Lake and in lower part of Rioni River valley. The breeding of Osprey in 1862 on Khrami River was recorded by Filippo di Filippi, but Yevgeni Tsvetkov conducted permanent observation here in 1890's, already did not record this species on breeding.

Current state of historically known breeding sites of Osprey

These pictures clearly demonstrate very strong transformations of habitats, which are currently completely unsuitable for breeding of Osprey



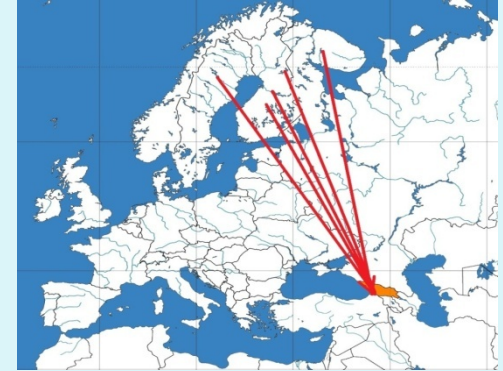
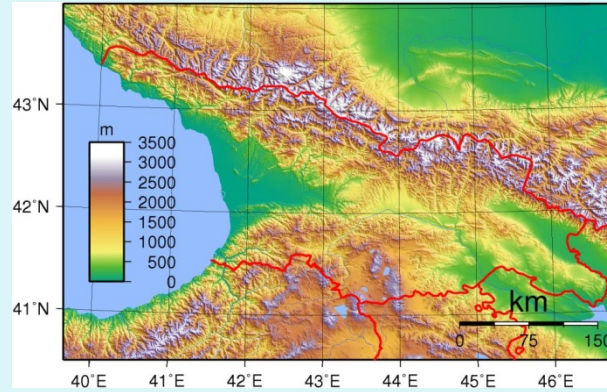
Habitats

Up to 95% of all ospreys, observed from 1973 to 2023, were recorded in Western Georgia i.e. in the Black Sea basin - mainly at sea shore, rarely on coastal wetlands, wetlands of Kolkheti Lowland, in the lower parts of large river valleys - Rioni, Inguri, Chorokhi, Khobi, Bzypi, Kodori, Natanebi rivers, on large lakes, fish-ponds, reservoirs, at sites with a regular supply of medium and large-sized fishes.

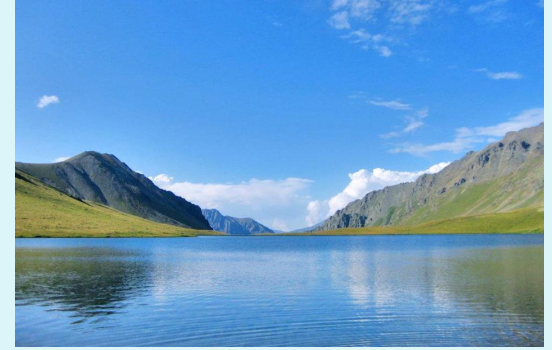
Much less often this bird was observed on the alpine lakes of Javakheti Upland and on natural wetlands of at artificial reservoirs the eastern part of country, i.e. in the Caspian Sea basin.

Vagrant individuals were recorded in very unusual habitats – in Udabno and Eldari semi-deserts, in the watershed areas at mountain ridges and on passes of the Great and Lesser Caucasus.

The main migration route runs along the Black Sea coast



Secondary fly-ways



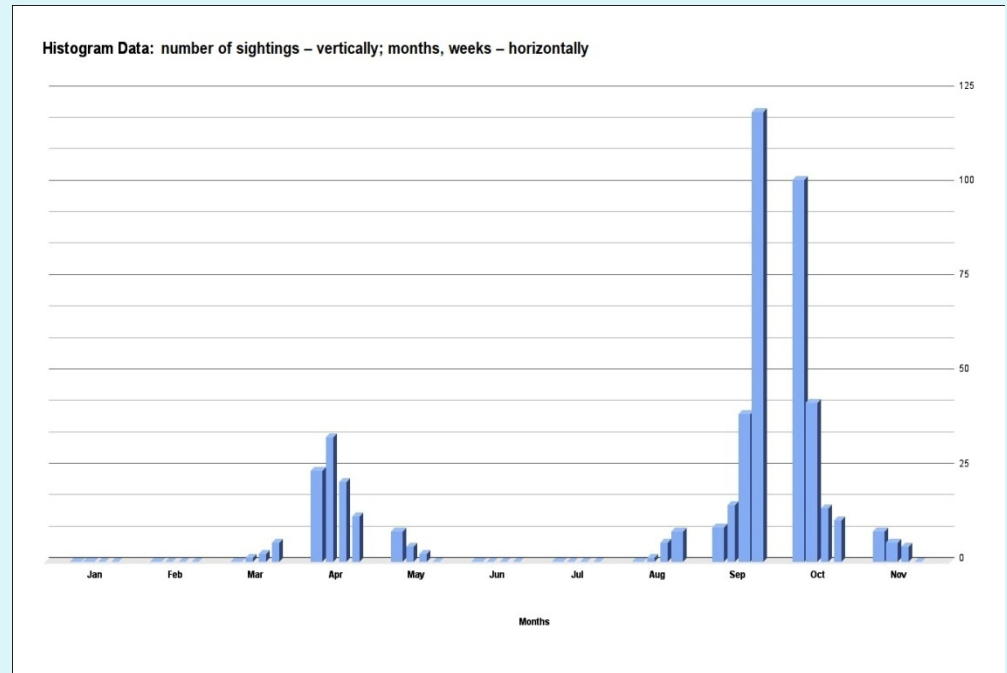
Seasonal migrations

Author's own data n- 513 sightings.

In addition, all available data (publications, web resources, unpublished reports, oral communications from colleagues) on the registration of osprey sightings within Georgia in 1992-2022. In total, reports of 2,721 observations of 2,733 individuals of these birds of prey were analyzed.

Data on the presence of these raptors within limits of Georgia, collected by both the author and available from various sources, are similar

Month	Number of sightings		
	In the Black Sea basin	In the Caspian Sea basin	Total
January	-	-	-
February	-	-	-
March	8	-	8
April	104	6	110
May	12	2	14
June	-	-	-
July	-	-	-
August	11	3	14
September	170	12	182
October	164	4	168
November	16	1	17
December	-	-	-
TOTAL	485	28	513
In %	94.55	5.45	100.00



Some features of seasonal migrations

Spring passage starts in late March and continues into middle of May, with a peak in the first half of April. The earliest spring records were on 7 March 1981, 19 March 1999 and 25 March 2015. The last transients were observed on 28 April 1991, 30 April 2010, 1 May 1995, 16 May 2023 and 19 May 2017. Around 2/3 of spring passage visitors crossed the territory of Georgia in the first half of April. The spring migration goes through in a more dense dates, birds seldom stay for several hours at sites suitable for feeding.

Autumn passage is distinct by a bigger intensity, while its dates are more extended. Autumn transit runs from mid-August to early November. Earliest transients were recorded on the Black sea shore and coastal wetlands on 14.08.1999, 17 .08.1972 and 18.08.2008, usually from 25-30 August. The latest transients typically were observed in late October, with solitary individuals recorded up to 2nd half of November on the Black Sea shore and coastal wetlands (19.11.1982; 21.11.1995). About $\frac{3}{4}$ of migrants were counted in second half of September - first half of October, with a slowly visible peak in late September - between 20 September and 5 October.

Numbers. The maximum day-count during spring passage was 4 individuals on 7 April 2021 at the Black sea coast near Inguri River mouth. The maximum day-count in autumn was 7 individuals on 1 October 2015 at the Black Sea in locality Kobuleti.

During the last three decades, the number of migrants increased, but the timing is more-or-less stable from year to year. Any cyclicity or dependence on concrete specific weather conditions at fly-ways in Georgia was not recorded.

The number of ospreys migrating through Georgia in 1970-1980's was estimated at 250-350 in spring and 300-500 in autumn. According to estimation, based on data collected in recent years 300-400 individuals migrates in spring through Georgia and 400-500 individuals in autumn.

Unfortunately, at present there are no prospects for the successful implementation of any osprey restoration programs in Georgia. All nesting sites known in the past have been irreversibly transformed, stocks of fish species potentially suitable for osprey food have been reduced to a minimum, the general level of bird protection in the country is far from ideal, there are no funds and specialists to carry out such programs

