Osprey Restoration in Iowa
2025 Nesting Report - Iowa DNR

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The Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) restoration program in Iowa began in 1997 and involved translocating young birds from Minnesota and Wisconsin to strategic locations across Iowa. The last year that birds were released was 2016 and currently, the objective is to monitor nesting activity. There are three main areas in the state where Osprey have become well established, the Iowa City to Waterloo corridor, Des Moines metro area, and Spirit Lake and vicinity, though there are other scattered nesting locations across the state (Figure 1).

Monitoring of nest sites is accomplished primarily by volunteers. Volunteers are assigned to a particular nest or nests and new nests are reported opportunistically. Volunteers visit the nest multiple times during the breeding season and gather information on nest activity at the start of the nesting season and whether the pair is successful in fledging young towards the end of the nesting season. Some opportunistic reports of nesting activity are also accepted if no formal data are available.

The Iowa Osprey population continues to increase, with a record 70 Osprey nests monitored during the 2025 nesting season, an increase of 20 nests compared to 2024. This increase is likely a result of both an increasing Osprey population and an increase in nest reporting. Of the 70 monitored nests, 54 (77%) were active and 16 (23%) were inactive. Of the 54 active nests, 30 were reported as successful (at least one young survived to fledging), 12 were reported as failed, and 12 had no outcome reported. Twenty-two new nests were added this year with 8 of those new nests near the Des Moines metro area and 6 in Blackhawk County.

In 2025, 22.2% of monitored active nests had an unknown outcome (i.e. we do not know if the nest successfully fledged young or failed). This rate is slightly lower than last year (23.1% unknown outcome nests in 2024). We thank our volunteers for helping to improve reporting and we will continue to work with monitors to reduce the percentage of unknown outcome nests in future years.

Based on available data, 55.6% of monitored active nests were successful (30 nests; Figure 3) and a minimum total of 58 young were fledged (Figure 4). This is a slight decrease in the percentage of successful nests from last year where 64.1% of monitored active nests were successful (25 nests; Figure 3) but with an increase in the number of known active nests, the number of young fledged increased (Figure 4). An average of 1.38 young were produced per known-outcome active nest, down slightly from last year but higher than the 3 years prior (Figure 5). The majority of new nests monitored in 2025 were in the Des Moines Metro and in Blackhawk county near Cedar Falls and Waterloo. These areas have plenty of water resources for foraging, and no shortage of tall structures, like communication towers, for nesting. Osprey breed for the first time at three or four years of age and, in areas with abundant resources, prefer to nest in loose colonies with other Osprey pairs, often returning to the general area where they were hatched and raised. The increase in active nest sites in these areas is likely due to the return of adult birds that successfully fledged from nearby nests in recent years. As the number of nest sites increase the expansion of the breeding area quickens, and we would expect to see these areas continue to support new nesting pairs in the near future. Continued monitoring and reports of new nests in these areas will help us track this anticipated trend.

In future years, the DNR will continue to monitor Osprey nest sites with the partnership of volunteers. An ongoing challenge is that Osprey like nesting on cellular towers. Osprey don't generally cause damage to the towers but conflicts can arise when work must be done on a tower during the nesting season, especially since over 81% of the 2025 active Iowa nest sites were on cellular towers. We will continue to work with partners on managing this potential conflict.

Finally, a huge thank you to all the volunteers who are vital to tracking the recovery of this species! You are invaluable. Please contact the Volunteer Wildlife Monitoring Program Coordinator if you are interested in helping with monitoring in the future; vwmp@dnr.iowa.gov.

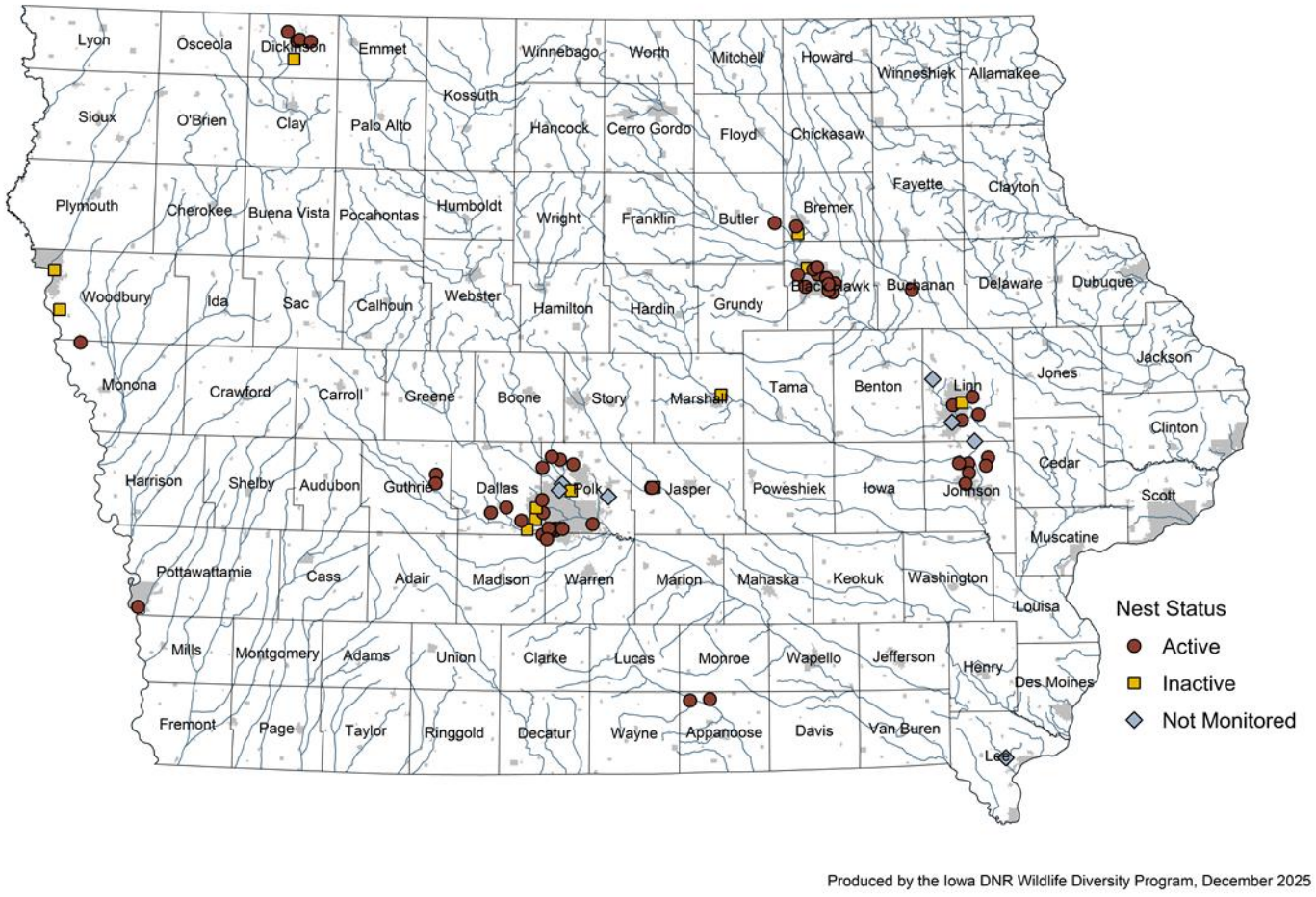

Figure 1. Statewide map showing 2025 Osprey nest locations (54 active, 16 inactive, 4 not monitored).

Table 1. Summary of 2021-2025 Iowa Osprey nesting results.

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Number of Nests Reported On	44	48	41	50	70
Number of Inactive Nests	15	16	9	11	16
Number of Active Territories	29	32	32	39	54
Number of Nests Failed	6	7	4	6	12
Number of Nests Successful	15	19	16	25	30
Nests Gone/Removed	1	5	1	2	8
Monitored Nests with Unknown Outcome	8	5	11	8	12
Minimum Total of Young Produced	26	35	26	47	58
Average Young per Nest	1.24	1.35	1.30	1.52	1.38

Table 2. Iowa Osprey nests monitored for the first time in 2025.

Nest ID	County	2025 Activity	Outcome	Young Fledged
175	Dallas	Inactive	No Activity	N/A
179	Guthrie	Active	Unknown	N/A
180	Dallas	Active	Successful	3
181	Johnson	Active	Failed	0
183	Dallas	Active	Unknown	N/A
185	Polk	Active	Successful	2
187	Dallas	Active	Unknown	N/A
182	Polk	Active	Successful	2
184	Pottawattamie	Active	Successful	1
176	Black Hawk	Active	Successful	1
189	Appanoose	Active	Successful	3
174	Black Hawk	Active	Failed	0
188	Polk	Active	Successful	2
173	Black Hawk	Active	Successful	2
178	Black Hawk	Active	Failed	0
171	Appanoose	Active	Successful	1
177	Black Hawk	Active	Unknown	N/A
190	Bremer	Active	Successful	1
191	Black Hawk	Active	Unknown	N/A
193	Lee	Not Monitored	N/A	N/A
194	Linn	Not Monitored	N/A	N/A
195	Polk	Not Monitored	N/A	N/A

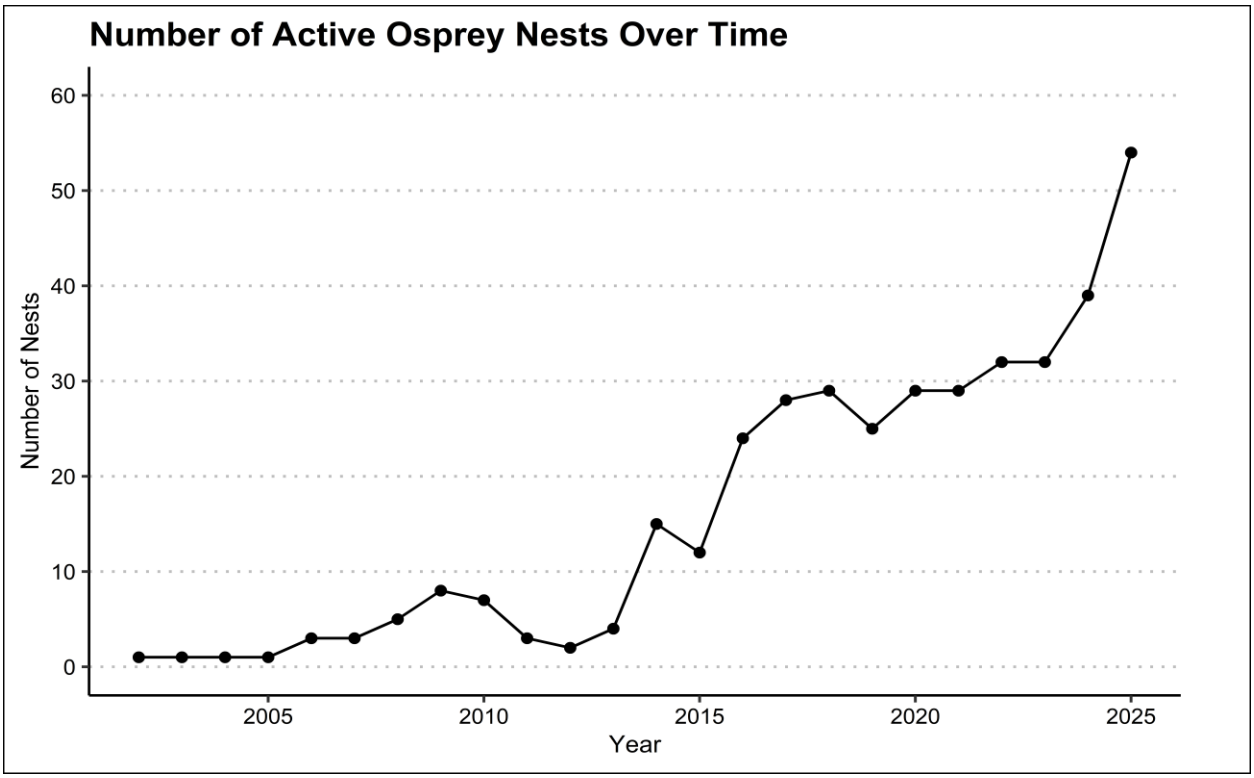

Figure 2. The total number of active Iowa Osprey nests from 2002-2025.

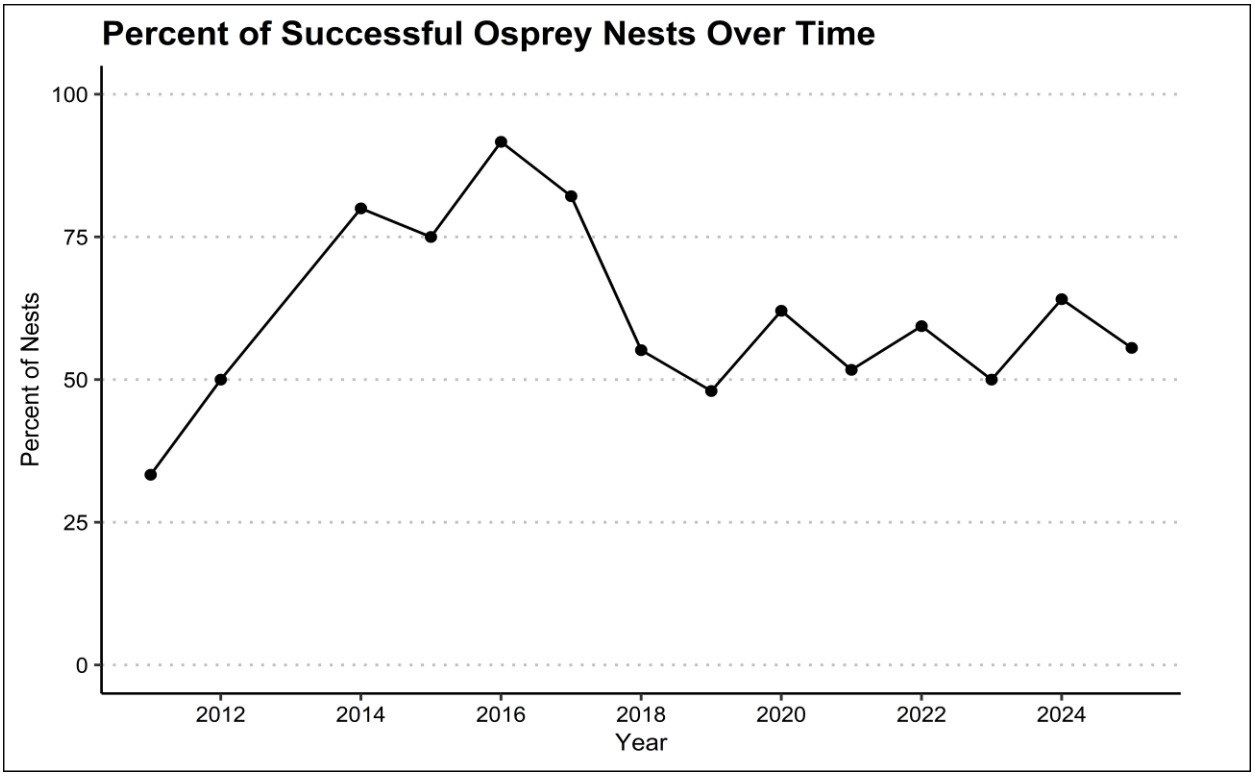

Figure 3. The percent of active and successful Iowa Osprey nests (out of total active territories) from 2011-2025 (data from 2013 are incomplete, thus not shown here).

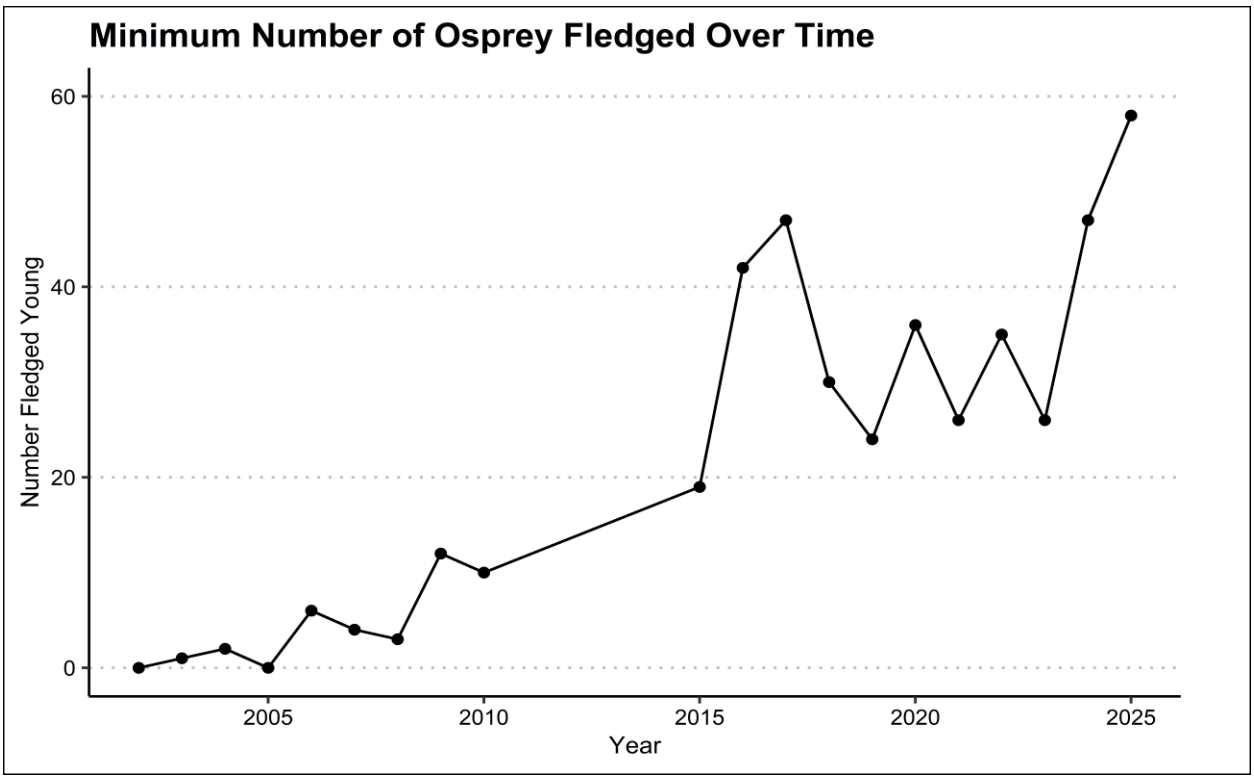

Figure 4. The minimum number of young Osprey fledged per year in Iowa from 2002-2025 (data from 2011-2014 were incomplete, thus not shown here).

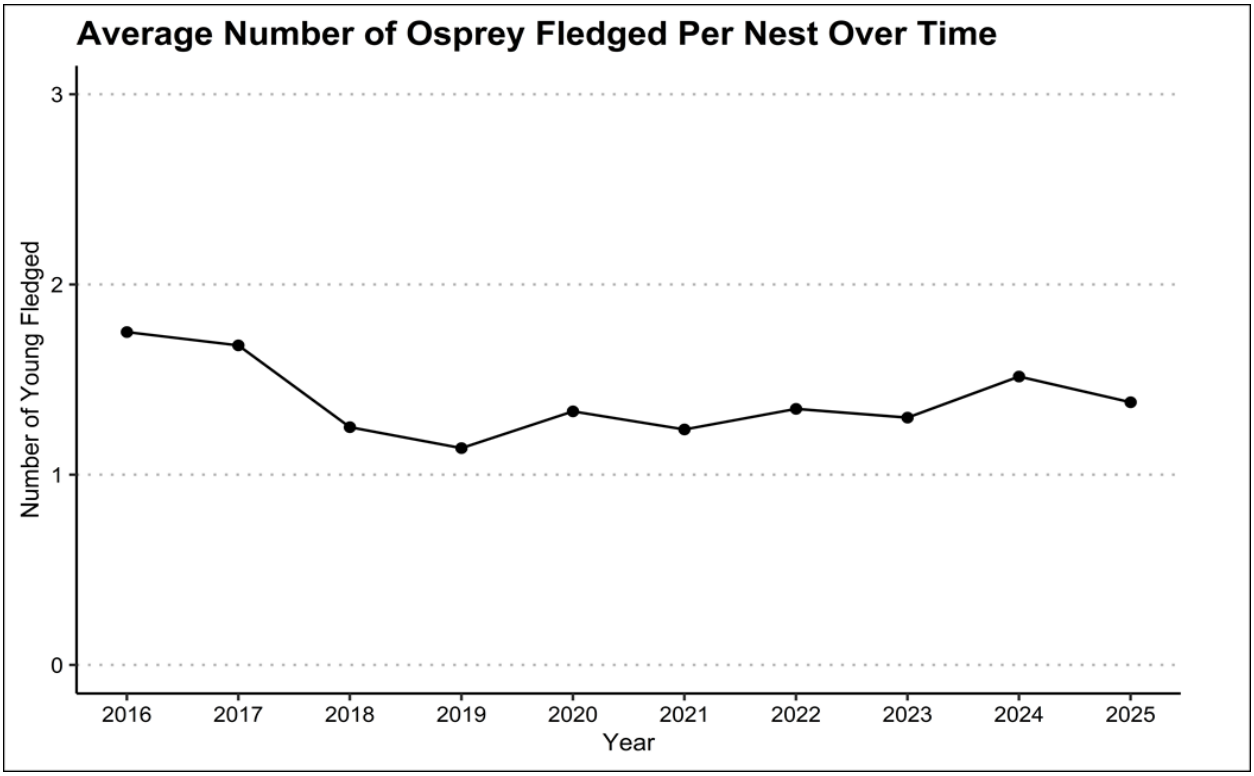

Figure 5. The average number of young Osprey fledged per known-outcome nest in Iowa from 2016-2025.