



## Birds on the Island Edmund Gallizzi

The many species of land, sea and shore birds that are attracted to Coquina Key's unique 448 acre island geography make the island a wonderful place for bird watching. Two of the birds seen on the island, osprey and white pelicans, are particularly interesting.

Osprey are fish-eating raptors which are birds of prey. They are large birds with dark brown sides and white bellies and head. Our island is an ideal home for osprey because of the fish in the surrounding waters and the abundance of tall trees and structures for nesting. Other raptors are generally inland birds while osprey have physical characteristics that are uniquely suited for preying on fish. These characteristics include the ability to close their nostrils to prevent water from entering while diving for fish, and reversible outer toes and barbed soles of their feet to better hold flopping, slippery fish. The reversible toe is like being able to use your pinkie finger as another thumb. Osprey can often be seen on boat masts, electric poles or on house roofs picking away at a flopping fish. Boyd Hill Nature Preserve has an illustrative display of osprey and their reversible thumbs.

Osprey are very good anglers, often successful in more than 50 percent of their attempts. They can be seen fishing while circling high in the sky (about 100 feet) just off the island over the shallow sandbars around the island. Once they see a fish near the surface they dive down and grab it just off the surface.

It is now breeding time for osprey which lasts about five months. Osprey are monogamous and return to their nests each year. First they do "spring fix up" by adding sticks, branches and sometimes plastic or fabric sheets to their nest. Two to four eggs are laid. Incubation takes 32 to 43 days. The eggs hatch over a five day period. The young birds fledge (become able to fly) in eight to ten weeks. There are several nests on the island.

P.S. Another interesting bird, the white pelican, can be seen in the Waterside South pond just off Dolphin Drive. These pelicans are interesting because of the way they get their food. Instead of diving for fish like osprey or brown pelicans, white pelicans forge in groups by herding fish into enclosed areas where the pelicans can scoop the fish with their large bills. Often pelicans in the pond can be seen forming groups of 8 or 10 swimming in a tight circle. After moving a few feet they all dip their bills under water as if it is synchronized swimming and Esther Williams might pop up in the middle of the circle.

Information in this article came from Wikipedia, [Birds of Florida](#), and Eckerd College.