

Thistle's Movements in 2007

Autumn Migration

Because of the chick's behaviour of perching quietly in big trees near the nest for hours on end waiting for the male to bring fish, the radio was not getting enough sun on the solar panel, so the GPS was not functioning properly until the migration flight charged up the battery.

10 September 2007

The radio charged sufficiently to send out its first GPS fix at 11am when the chick was near Alva, at the end of the Firth of Forth. She was flying SSW at 70kph at an altitude of 1007 metres. This position is 159 kilometres south of her nest site. Very interestingly at 1014GMT, the younger chick was near Grangemouth about 15-20 kilometres away, suggesting very strongly that the chicks set off together early in the morning. It is a pity the radio battery was not charged because it would have been very interesting to have checked how the two birds migrated between the nest and central Scotland. An hour later she was 5 kms to the south of the Forth, and at 1pm she was migrating SSW at 55kph at 1111 metres over Glenboig. An hour later she had flown another 36 kilometres and was SE of Darvel in Ayrshire. At 3pm she was migrating south over Dalmellington at 34kph, at 660 metres. At 4pm she was heading just SW of Newton Stewart, Kirkcudbrightshire. An hour later she was 1.5 kilometres north of the northern point of the Isle of Man, flying east at 22kph. She did not stop on the island because an hour later she was migrating over the Irish Sea, 34 kms SE of Douglas, flying SSW at 76kph.

At 7pm, she was 3 kms north of the Anglesey coast in North Wales, and I would have expected to roost on the island but she again set off from land heading SSW, and at 8pm was 16 Kilometres SW of Anglesey. At 8pm she was flying SW at 58kph, 43 metres above the sea, and 27kilometres out in the sea from Bardsey Island. She had travelled at least 556 kilometres and was by now flying through the night with following winds.

11 September 2007

At 0400GMT, the first fix came in 55 kms NW of Land's End and 55kms north of the Scilly Isles. She had clearly missed Ireland and south Wales, and had flown

all night over the seas. Later signals showed that she was on the sea, probably standing on flotsam of some sort, although I hoped she might be on a boat. Between 0400 and 0600GMT she moved 2.5 kms NE, then 6.7 kms SW between 0600 and 1300GMT, and back 3.5 kms NE by 1700GMT. A very accurate Argos signal at 2312GMT was about 8 kms to the SW.

12 September 2007

No signals received - she was either drowned at sea or was on board a boat, and the solar panel was not being charged by the sun. This bird's determined migration to the SSW shows the real dangers of travelling long distances over the sea from Scotland - why she did not stop on Anglesey in the evening of 10th is hard to understand. Her descent onto the sea at night must have been due to tiredness or she may have been attracted by the lights of a boat.

17 September 2007

I emailed Nigel Hudson, the bird recorder for the Scillies Isles to ask about local views on the plight of the chick and asked if he would get a view from local fisherman. His reply says: I have spoken to the boatmen/fishermen. There are plenty of trawlers in that area of all nations. There are no rocks. The speed of traveling about 13 miles in 13 hours (albeit a zig-zag course) is NOT likely to be a trawler - too slow I was told. So it comes down to a bit of flotsam and some tides, and that of course they felt was possible with tides meeting and, of course, rising/falling in that 13 hour period. Unfortunately it would seem the bird has perished at sea or have you picked up a signal again?

I expect we will do a small article on this for our next newsletter in January. If you want to pen such an article of say 2-3 paragraphs, with a Scilly angle to it in terms of them coming over our air-space, then I'd be very grateful. We also had an Osprey here from Aug 28 to Sep 15, though it could have been 2 birds as there was a few days gap in the first week September

Regards, Nigel

It would be great to be proved wrong and for the chick to arrive in a foreign fishing port and be handed over to a conservation organisation. This is very sad but it vividly demonstrates the dangers for young ospreys migrating out of Scotland; the safest orientation for them would be SSE towards the south coast of England with a short crossing to France from Kent, Sussex or Hampshire. Unfortunately an initial heading of SSW leads them down the west side of the British mainland with the possibility of transit through Ireland or direct out into the

Atlantic Ocean. In good weather conditions, and especially with westerly winds to drive them ashore, they can successfully complete long overseas migrations, but on other occasions they drown in the sea.

This aspect of osprey migration is of particular concern for their conservation and for the full restoration of their range in the UK, because it involves higher mortality.