

Hopewell Township Environmental Newsletter

New Jersey Bald Eagle Project

NJDEP Fish & Wildlife’s Endangered and Non-game Species Program (ENSP) biologists, Conserve Wildlife Foundation (CWF) staff, and volunteer observers located and monitored bald eagle nests and territories. *This is their report for 2023:*

Two hundred eighty-six nest sites were monitored during the nesting season, of which 255 were documented to be active (with eggs) and 31 were territorial or housekeeping pairs. Thirty-four new eagle pairs were found this season, 23 in the south, five in central, and six in the north. One hundred-eighty-eight nests (78%) of the 242 known-outcome nests produced 309 young, for a productivity rate of 1.28 young per active/known-outcome nest. Twenty-two percent (54 nests) failed to produce young. The Delaware Bay region remained the state’s eagle stronghold, with roughly half of all nests located in **Cumberland** (*including parts of Hopewell Township*) and Salem counties and the bayside of Cape May County. The state’s eagle population would not be thriving without the efforts of the dedicated eagle project cooperators and volunteers who observe nests, report sightings, and help protect critical habitat.

Objectives of the New Jersey bald eagle program:

- 1) monitor the recovery of the bald eagle in the state by documenting the status, distribution, and productivity of breeding bald eagles in NJ;
- 2) enhance nest success by protecting bald eagles and their nest sites;
- 3) monitor wintering areas and other concentration areas and plan for their protection;
- 4) document location data in the Biotic’s database and apply it to identify critical habitat using the Landscape Project mapping following mapping protocols;
- 5) provide information and guidance to landowners and managers with regard to bald eagles on their properties;
- 6) increase our understanding of bald eagle natural history in New Jersey as eagles repopulate habitats.



Commission Members

- Beth McClain - Chair
- Jane Hankins - Vice Chair
- Ken Strait - Land Use Board
- Cheryl Lalancette - Secretary
- Jerry Lewis
- Burt Doremus
- Marion Carl - Editor

Meetings

First Wednesday of every month @7:00 PM (new this year)

Newsletters

Available on township website and Facebook Page. Copies are available at the township office and at the Senior Center.

Every year, a census of sorts is conducted by the New Jersey Bald Eagle Project, a cooperative effort between the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) and the nonprofit Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey. Staff members and about 150 volunteers monitor known and potential nesting sites to collect data on our national bird's remarkable recovery in New Jersey. "We have a lot of eyes and ears out there providing us with information," said Kathy Clark, supervising biologist of the NJDEP's Endangered and Non-game Species Program (ENSP).

DDT

Little is known about the abundance of bald eagles in New Jersey until the 1950s, when a state study indicated more than 20 pairs were nesting in the Delaware Bay region. That number would plummet as a result of the use of the pesticide DDT, which thinned eggshells and made them too fragile to withstand nesting. The use of DDT was banned in New Jersey in 1968 and federally in 1972, largely as a result of environmentalist Rachel Carson's book, "Silent Spring," which raised concerns about the widespread agricultural use of synthetic pesticides.

Because of residual effects, the DDT ban didn't bring immediate results. New Jersey's bald eagles reached their lowest point in the 1970s, when only one breeding pair remained at a nest in Cumberland County. In 1982, after that nest's thin eggs cracked for six consecutive years, biologists from ENSP stepped in. They carefully removed the nest's single egg and artificially incubated it, later returning the hatchling. Artificial incubation and fostering chicks continued with success until 1989, when a younger female took over the nest and the pair was able to hatch their own eggs. But increasing the production of that one nest in Cumberland County wasn't enough to boost the state's bald eagle population. In 1983, ENSP biologists began releasing young eagles from Canada - 60 birds over an eight-year period.

With this jumpstart, the number of active eagle nests in New Jersey began steadily increasing, from four in 1990, to 23 in 2000, to 82 in 2010, to 150 in 2015, to 220 in 2020! As of 2023, the statewide breeding bald eagle population stood at 286 territorial pairs. Of those, 255 pairs had active nests, producing 309 young. There are now nests in all 21 of the state's counties, though **Cumberland** and Salem remain the state's bald eagle

stronghold, with by far the highest concentration of nests.

Other Threats

But bald eagles still face many threats, including human disturbance, habitat loss and contaminants in the food web, including lead from shotgun pellets in deer carrion. Breeding eagles are listed as endangered in New Jersey, while non-breeding eagles are listed as threatened.

Though it's a thrill to glimpse an eagle soaring overhead, be sure to give nesting eagles plenty of space. The mere presence of people in nesting or foraging areas can cause eagles to change their behavior.

"When eagles change their behavior in reaction to people, they cease doing what is best for their survival and the well-being of their eggs and young," the 2023 New Jersey Bald Eagle Project report warned. "Ultimately, that can reduce the survival of individuals and the population."

Volunteers

The ENSP is looking for volunteers to help monitor nests, especially in Salem and **Cumberland** counties. Being a nest monitor entails checking a specific nest every 1-2 weeks for about an hour at a time, during the nesting season that runs from January through July. The goal is to record key information: when the pair is nest-building, when they lay eggs and begin incubation, when the eggs hatch, and the number of chicks seen and fledged. For more information, email Kathy.Clark@dep.nj.gov.

To learn more about bald eagles, go to the Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey website at www.conservewildlifenj.org/protecting/projects/baldeagle/.

NJ Spotlight News article by Andrew S Lewis, [The Bald Eagle's Recovery, but threats lurk](#). February 19, 2024 for more info.