

EagleFest

Narrowsburg, NY

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Summer 2005

A Pennsylvania Update

By Douglas Gross

Wildlife biologist and Endangered Bird Specialist at the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

"Pennsylvania's bald eagle population continues to grow in leaps and bounds," notes Vern Ross, Game Commission executive director. "They were so imperiled here during the 1980s that only three nesting pairs remained in the state."

Preliminary census work completed recently by the Game Commission documents a total of 95 known nesting bald eagle pairs. That's up 14 pairs from 2004, and establishes another high in a string of record-breaking nesting seasons by PA's bald eagles. The biggest development occurred in the Philadelphia suburbs. Pairs are adopting quiet areas in the busy suburbs, especially drinking water reservoirs or woodlots along streams. More than 100 eaglets are expected to fledge this summer

The bald eagle population gains PA has experienced are of historic proportion and a direct result of a bald eagle reintroduction program by the Game Commission launched in 1983. The raptor's stunning comeback represents the return of an endangered species many thought would follow PA's peregrine falcons into extirpation. The peregrine falcon, which was gone from the state's landscape for more than 20 years, also was the beneficiary of a reintroduction program launched in the mid-1970s.

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New York's Eagle Capital Plans its 5th Annual Celebration



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EAGLEFEST
NARROWSBURG, NEW YORK

Saturday, January 14, 2006
9:30AM – 4:30PM

Live bird demonstrations, observation sites, guest lectures, films, poster auction, eagle art (snow or shine)

STUDYING BALD EAGLES ON THE DELAWARE RIVER

By Don Hamilton

**National Park Service Natural Resource Specialist,
Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River**

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), the National Park Service (NPS) at the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River and Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, and the Eagle Institute are in the process of learning more about the most important habitat areas for bald eagles along the Delaware River. National Park Service funds have been secured through a competitive nationwide application process, and NYSDEC has also secured funding through the State Wildlife Grants Program toward this cooperative effort. The objectives of this study are to determine the most important, or critical, habitats used by bald eagles for roosting, nesting, and perching along the Upper Delaware River, and to target and prioritize areas for protection and management into the future. A detailed implementation plan for the study has been approved, and funding has been made available for the purchase of needed equipment.

The Delaware River, including adjacent uplands in both New York and Pennsylvania, is one of the largest and most important inland bald eagle wintering habitats in the eastern United States, is an increasingly significant breeding locale, and is viewed as a key area in contributing to the full recovery and long term viability of this species, supporting almost 10% of New York State's breeding population and up to 1/3 of the state's wintering population of bald eagles. While bald eagles have been proposed for federal delisting from their current "threatened" status, the proposal contains language strongly recommending that key habitat areas continue to be protected. Endangered species biologists and recovery teams view this type of proactive resource management as necessary in order to successfully recover, delist and perhaps most importantly, maintain our national symbol. The Upper Delaware River was recently (this past year) designated an Important Bird Area (IBA) by Audubon New York, based upon species at risk criteria. The Eagle Institute and the National Park Service were instrumental in securing this New York IBA designation, which corresponds to the prior Important Bird Area designation for Pennsylvania.



©2005 Photo provided by NYS DEC and NPS
Delaware River bald eagle nestling Y94 with satellite transmitter.

Peter Nye of NYSDEC placed satellite radio-tracking transmitters on two 9-week-old eaglets from Upper Delaware River nests in June 2004 as part of this current study, and their movements have been followed to date. Happily, both young have survived their most critical first year. Eaglet Y96 returned to the River near its natal area this spring, after wintering over in the Chesapeake Bay region, and remains along the river as of this writing. Eaglet Y94, who also wintered in the Chesapeake, appears to be summering north, first along the St. Lawrence River and now in central Maine. It will be very interesting to follow the movements of these Delaware River young as they live out their lives and head toward sexual maturity at 5 years of age, when we expect they may return to the vicinity of the Delaware to establish their own breeding territories. We hope that soon, the movements of these eagles will be able to be followed on New York DEC's website at <http://www.dec.state.ny.us/website/dfwmr/wildlife/endspec/index.html>

An adult bald eagle from the area, which was trapped and fitted with a satellite transmitter last winter, provided habitat use data for a brief time period. But unfortunately, this bird became a road kill victim on I-84 near Milford, PA in early spring (bald eagles are often struck by cars as they flush off deer carcasses they're feeding on by the side of the highway).

Satellite and conventional radio transmitters will be placed on many more bald eagles to document their use of habitat in the Upper Delaware region. New York State DEC has considerable experience in trapping, handling, placing transmitters on these birds, and documenting their movements (see <http://www.learner.org/jnorth/> for educational information about the migration of bald eagles from this area). The newest satellite transmitters weigh only 50 grams (1.6 ounces), or about 1% of the birds' body weight, and are designed to fall off after about 3 years of data collection. A wealth of location information from the transmitters worn by the eagles is up linked to satellites daily, and can be accessed, downloaded, and compiled to pinpoint their location, analyze their movements, and document their use of habitat. The Eagle Institute, with which a cooperative agreement is being developed, will provide assistance as well with field-truthing, recording sightings and observations.

We are extremely excited about this project, the results of which we believe will be essential to the perpetuation of bald eagles along this magnificent river.

EAGLE FACTS:

- Height: 30-31", Wing Span: 6'-7'6", Weight: to 14 lbs, Life Span: 25 – 30 years.
- Mated bald eagles are monogamous.
- Female bald eagles are larger than the males.
- 2 or 3 white eggs in a massive nest of sticks usually in a tall tree.
- Can fly 36 – 44 miles per hour.
- Juvenile bald eagles resemble Golden Eagles, require 4 – 5 years to reach full adulthood, have a longer tail and wider wings than adults.
- Are fish eaters, like Ospreys, but snatch fish from the surface with their talons.

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BALD EAGLES IN THE LOWER DELAWARE RIVER

By Larry Niles, PHD

***Chief of Endangered and Non-game Species Program
Division of Fish, Game, and Wildlife, New Jersey DEP***

Over the last 20 years the population of bald eagles in New Jersey increased from one unproductive pair to 48 territorial pairs. The measure of this success is most apparent by their yearly productivity, which averages over 1.2 young per active nest. Given the fact that the state is the nation's most densely populated, that's an astounding productivity rate. Our eagles face many different problems, from intense disturbance and development conflicts to reproductive impairment from contaminants. Despite these challenges, our productivity rate equals that of the most rural environments – all because we have a program that links dedicated staff with volunteers who religiously care for the pairs under their watch.

The difficulties facing our eagles and the strengths of our approach to protect them are most obvious in the eagles that nest along the lower Delaware River. This is an area of intense industrial activity interspersed with highly productive freshwater inter-tidal wetlands. Significant portions of the waterfront include beautiful wetland and stream-bank forests that often are sprouting from abandoned waterfront industry remains dating back to the colonial era.

These eagles struggle to support themselves and their offspring in an environment teaming with tankers, tugs and barges and recreational boaters on the water, commercial airliners and helicopters aloft, and everybody from fishermen to ATV riders on the ground. The industrial past of the waterfront has left significant contamination, particularly of PCBs and DDE, which consistently cause nest failure in at least three pairs of eagles. The revival of the waterfront has now caused a significant boom in development, the most important being a proposed \$2.4-billion development of the Camden waterfront and nearby Petty's Island (home of a very controversial pair of eagles).

in the river channel and leaked as much as 430,000 gallons of crude oil into the Delaware River. The oil spilled into all the inter-tidal wetlands of the lower river, from Big Timber Creek to Mannington Meadows off the Salem River. At least three pairs of eagles were directly affected by the oil, with signs of oil on their tails, breasts or heads. The oil fouled thousands of ducks and geese, leaving many of them weakened and easy prey for the local eagles, thus indirectly increasing the eagles' potential exposure. It is very likely that as many as five pairs of eagles have ingested oil, either directly or through preening, since the oil first appeared on the river beaches and marshes.

We don't know the long term effects of the oil spill, and more importantly the combined effect of oil, existing contaminants and the disturbances that are always a part of a response to a major oil spill. But one ray of hope was the involvement of our volunteers. Throughout the entire episode, people like Elmer and Bunny Klegg, Red and Maryjane Horner, Steve Gates and many others worked with our staff, mainly Kathy Clark and Larissa Smith, to form a dedicated team – ensuring that all that could be done was in fact done. We keep daily surveillance of eagles for oiling, put out deer carcasses to provide an alternative to oil-weakened birds and keep count of oiled waterfowl. All this is done to make sure that, during all of the hyperactivity that is always part of an oil spill response, the plight of the bald eagles is always a priority.

As the years go by, we find that this is the only way we can deal with the many difficulties facing our eagles. An always-present surveillance and an immediate response to problems is the best we can do in a complex environment that always involves much more than just wildlife. With perennially tight budgets, our cohesive mix of staff and volunteers is the most effective way to protect the eagles of the New Jersey.

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New York's Eagle Capital Plans its 5th Annual Award Winning Celebration

EagleFest in Narrowsburg - According to festival organizer, Yoke Bauer DiGiorgio, EagleFest 2006 will continue in its mission to combine a day of entertainment and education for young and old.

New programs are still being planned:

Returning this year, is **Bill Streeter** Director of the Delaware Valley Raptor Center with two live birds of prey demonstrations.

Peter E. Nye, Endangered Species Unit Leader, Wildlife Diversity Group at NYS DEC will be returning again this year. Pete will be presenting an update on the status of eagles in NYS and recent study which has been initiated along the Upper Delaware River.

Douglas Gross, Wildlife biologist and Endangered Bird Specialist at the Pennsylvania Game Commission. Doug will be presenting an update on the status of eagles in Pennsylvania.

Dr. Keith Bildstein, Director of Conservation Science, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary will be returning this year. Keith will be presenting "America's Bald Eagle: A Conservation History".

Eric Stiles, Vice President of Conservation and Stewardship of New Jersey Audubon will be discussing conservation issues in the region.

Lauren Butcher, full-time educator, from the Raptor Trust in NJ will be presenting an owl program for children featuring live owls.

Teaching children about the environment, wildlife, and family values, **John and Teresa Crerand** are returning with all new stories about Christopher, a river otter and his discoveries about his world and other wildlife.

There will be eagle viewing assisted by Eagle Institute Volunteers*, and exhibits throughout town:

- Eagle art posters by local artists for auction.
- Eagle photography by John A DiGiorgio.
- Ice sculpture demonstrations by Ice Works.
- Telescope demos by High Point Scientific.
- "Sullivan County Wildlife", National Parks Service.

and much more .

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AN INVITATION TO JOIN US AT...

the fifth annual Narrowsburg EagleFest, a day to celebrate the return of the Bald Eagle to the Delaware River Valley.

Most of the numerous presentations and events will be free of charge.

We hope that you will join us on January 14, 2006, and that when the day's events are concluded, you will leave with a better understanding of ways to enjoy the wonderful bald eagle in its natural habitat.

Narrowsburg EagleFest Committee,
Delaware Valley Eagle Alliance

THE DELAWARE VALLEY EAGLE ALLIANCE

is dedicated to increasing awareness, understanding and promoting conservation of our wildlife and natural environment.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Call: 1- 845- 252- 6509 (Nature's Art LLC)

1- 845- 252- 7146 (Narrowsburg Town Hall)

Visit our Web Site:

www.naturesartllc.com

www.tusten/narrowsburg.org

