



Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) in New York State

(Based on a NYS DEC document) by Lorraine Van Slooten

Before the 1970s there were only a few nesting pairs of bald eagles in New York state, mainly in the Adirondacks and Catskills. Pesticides such as DDT and the toxic compounds in fish from contaminated waters had built to high levels in the eagles' bodies interfering with the formation of calcium in their eggshells and making many of the eggs infertile. After DDT was banned in 1972, eagles and other birds of prey again began producing young.

The New York State Bald Eagle Restoration Project was hatched in 1976 in an attempt to increase the population of breeding pairs. In the 13 years that the project was under way, 198 nestling bald eagles were collected primarily from Alaska and released in New York. The project ended in 1989 when its goal of establishing 10 breeding pairs was met. By 2010 there were 173 pairs that had fledged 244 young spread throughout the state. Each year New York's bald eagles fledge about 10% more young than the previous year. An issue that is still disturbing eagle nesting areas is human activity such as logging and building development along waterways and other preferred eagle habitats. The bald eagles' status in New York is still listed as "threatened".

Bald eagles have a life span of over 30 years and mate for life. They return to nest in the same general area from which they fledged and use their nests for the rest of their lives. The nest is large (often 6 ft. wide and 8 ft. deep!) and usually located in a tall white pine tree in an undisturbed area near large lakes, reservoirs, marshes or along rivers. Their primary food is fish, but they will sometimes eat small mammals, waterfowl, sea birds and carrion, especially in winter.



An adult bald eagle has brown plumage overall with white on the head and tail and a bright yellow beak. Until they reach the adult age of five, young bald eagles are mostly brown with some white feathers scattered over their bodies, tails and underwings. One of the largest raptors in North America, adult bald eagles are about 30 in. high, weigh between 8 and 14 lbs. and have a wing span of 72 – 84 in. Females are about 1/3 larger and heavier than the males. They produce only one or two young each year. The young fledge in mid to late summer at about 12 weeks old. By 20 weeks old they are independent. Adopted as the symbol of the United States because of that independence as well as strength, bald eagles are actually quite timid despite their fierce image.



21 South Grove Street
East Aurora, NY 14052