

Bald Eagles of Connecticut



2012 Report

Compiled by the Connecticut Bald Eagle Study Group

Cover Photo by Bob Michaud

For the first time in the life of this report, we probably had no winter migrant Bald Eagles in Northern Connecticut. Twenty six hundred degree days usually predicts the arrival of eagles from eastern Canada and northern New England that wander south looking for open water to fish and scavenge. That number came and went without a noticeable increase in the eagle population. The very warm winter left many of the bodies of water to our north unfrozen. So, many eagles had no urge to move. Also, the increasing number of southern New England year round resident Bald Eagles can obscure a few migrants. Twenty years ago identification was easy – any winter eagle was a migrant.



Nesting 2012

Connecticut Bald Eagles in 2012 matched 2 previous high nesting numbers: 21 active nests (2011) and 31 chicks (2009). The 21 nest plus 4 territories equals 25 mated pairs – the highest number ever. The new Unionville pair was successful on their first attempt – the 16th pair out of 25 that succeeded on their first try. Saville failed on its first attempt last year but is the only pair to have 3 chicks in their first success. Four nests had 3 chicks in 2012 – the only time there has been more than 2 nests with 3 chicks (2009). Three pairs in 2012 used a different nest than last year: Hartford – Dump to a new nest (2 chicks), Hartford – Brainard back to nest #1 (1 chick) and Suffield to a new nest (failed). Suffield hasn't had chicks since 2009 and the nest has failed 7 times in its 17 year history – a failure rate of 41%. The failed nest at Lieutenant River had at least 3 adults and one immature in the territory. The nest was frequently unattended for lengthy periods of time. The new Ellington territory is within a few hundred yards of the 2007 nest that never was active. The base of the new Ellington nest is made mostly of corn stalks. Most of the dates below are very educated guesses.

Nesting

Nest	Chicks	County	Incubation	Hatch	Banding	Fledge
Unionville	2	Hartford	02/26/12	04/01/12	couldn't be arranged	06/15/12
Hartford - Dump #2	2	Hartford	03/26/12	04/10/12	climber couldn't reach nest	06/26/12
Suffield #4	0	Hartford	02/25/12	nest failure in egg stage or chick stage		
Wethersfield - Rocky Hill #3	0	Hartford	02/28/12	04/01/12	failed by May - chick stage	
East Windsor #3	2	Hartford	03/09/12	04/13/12	couldn't climb	06/29/12
Windsor Locks	0	Hartford	03/10/12	04/14/12	failed by May 19th - chick stage	
Hartford - Brainard #1	1	Hartford	03/02/12	04/05/12	05/18/12	06/22/12
Seymour	1	New Haven	March	April	unsafe tree	June
Broad Brook Reservoir	2	New Haven	March	April	couldn't be arranged	June
Lake Gaillard	3	New Haven	Feb - March	April	Too Many Rules	June
Nott Island #3	3	New London	02/07/12	03/13/12	unsafe tree	05/29/12
Lieutenant River #2	0	New London	02/18/12	03/24/12	failed in chick stage	
Groton	0	New London	March	April	failed in chick stage	
Lisbon	2	New London	March	April	couldn't be arranged	June
Saville	3	Litchfield	02/25/12	03/29/12	unsafe tree	06/14/12
Barkhamsted #1	1	Litchfield	03/07/12	04/11/12	05/21/12	06/27/12
Colebrook	1	Litchfield	March	April	unsafe tree	June
Bridgewater #2	3	Litchfield	02/25/12	03/29/12	05/23/12	06/14/12
Goodspeed #3	2	Middlesex	late Feb.	March - April	unsafe tree	June
Cromwell	2	Middlesex	late Feb.	April	unsafe tree	June
Hemlock Reservoir	1	Fairfield	03/06/12	04/10/12	05/24/12	06/26/12
Total = 21	31	6 of 8	2/7 to 3/10	3/13 to 4/14	4 Nests, 6 Chicks	5/29 to 6/29

Nepaug		Hartford	territory only
Guilford		New Haven	territory only - new area
Middletown		Middlesex	territory only
Ellington		Tolland	territory only - new area
Bantam Lake		Litchfield	no activity
Bradway Pond		Tolland	no activity - nest in disrepair
North Haven		New Haven	no activity

The Timing of Connecticut Eagle Nests

Eagles at lower latitudes nest earlier than eagles at higher latitudes – a behavior evolving from available resources. Changing day length causes hormonal changes in birds bringing about breeding condition. These factors are the same from year to year in Connecticut. The statistical mean for our eagles putting the first egg in the nest is March 4th. But why is there an impressive 64 day range around that date in the small state of Connecticut? Barkhamsted initiated their nest in 1992 on April 4th and the Goodspeed pair laid the first egg in 2006 on February 1st. From year to year some nests have a very consistent starting date while others have a wide range of starting dates. So why do eagles start nesting when they do? One factor that might be an answer – can't be measured, the seasonal supply of fish in a nesting territory. Also, the make up of the pair each season might cause a starting change from year to year – but we are seldom sure of the exact identification of paired eagles. Small, pre-breeding, weather changes may be a factor – but the relation can't be measured. The timing of migration is not a factor because southern New England Bald Eagles are never far from home, proven by Bird Banding Laboratory records, digital photos of leg bands, and optical records. But three possible factors can be analyzed from our collected data starting in 1992.

By 2002 there were enough nests in the state to determine if a mild or severe winter changed the collective starting dates. Last winter 2011 – 2012 was one of the warmest on record. By winter's end, March 21st, only 4150 degree days had accumulated. The normal is 5147. At least 9 nests started in February and the overall mean was an early February 28th. The much colder but normal winter of 2010 – 2011 had 5116 degree days and an average start of a much later March 9th. The very cold winter of 2002 – 2003 accumulated 5508 degree days. The average start in 2003 was a late March 10th. But other years in that period were contradictory to this convenient sounding logic. The seasonal to warm winter of 2006 – 2007 accumulated 4735 degree days by winter's end but the average starting date was a very late March 13th. The very warm winter of 2001 – 2002 at 4234 had a typical start of March 6th. The other 6 seasons were inconsistent and showed no trends: 2004 – 5125 – March 7th, 2005 – 5211 - March 4th, 2006 - 4763- March 4th, 2008 - 4740 - March 5th, 2009 - 5100 - March 4th, and 2010 - 4700 - March 4th.

Each season listed above had a different combination of active nests. Barkhamsted, Nott Island, Suffield and Wethersfield – Rocky Hill were the only 4 nests that had known starting dates and were active every year from 2002 – 2012. So, to take the variables away, only those 4 nests were compared to the severity of the winter. Their average start was a very early February 25th after the warm winter of 2011 – 2012 (4150). The warm winter of 2001 – 2002 (4234) was also early at March 2nd. But other years were again contradictory. The very cold winter of 2002 – 2003 (5500) had a typical start of March 4th. The normal winter of 2008 -2009 (5100) had an early start of February 28th. The warm winter of 2005 – 2006 (4763) had a very late average start of March 15th. The others were random: 2004 - 5125 - March 4th, 2005 - 5211 - March 5th, 2007 - 4735 - March 4th, 2008 - 4736 - March 3rd, 2010 - 4700 - February 25th, 2011 - 5116 - March 4th. So the severity of the winter has nothing to do with the starting date for Connecticut's nesting Bald Eagles.

Does a new nest at an old territory have any bearing on the starting date? Twenty six times Connecticut eagles have changed to a different nest from one year to the next. The reason for the change is only speculation. New mate? New pair? "Fouled" nest? Ten of the 26 changes were successful both years, 8 went from failure to success, 6 went from success to failure, one failed both years and one went from a "territory only" to success. So 19 of the 26 changes resulted in success, 73%. The success rate of all Connecticut's nests is 77%. But does the change show a starting date trend? Eleven times eggs were laid in the new nest earlier than in the previous season's "old" nest. But, eight times the new nest had a later egg start, 2 were the same date, 4 were unknown, and the territory to nest doesn't apply. So, a nest change is also not a timing trigger.

One consistent trend was discovered when the history of each nest was examined. Bald Eagle pairs in Connecticut initiate nesting earlier and earlier as time passes. The history of each of the 6 oldest nests was divided across its chronological middle. For the first half of Barhamsted's history the average starting date was March 23rd and the recent half of its history was March 18th. Suffield was March 11th to March 6th, East Windsor was March 10th to March 1st, Wethersfield – Rocky Hill was March 9th to March 6th, Middletown was March 21st to March 15th, and Nott Island was February 14th to February 8th. Goodspeed, with an 8 year history, is February 19th to February 27th – the only contradiction for any nest with at least a 6 year history. Why does this earlier trend happen? Again, we are seldom sure of the adult pair combination at each nest from year to year, but 2 conclusions are reasonable: added age means keener hunting skills leading to better and earlier breeding fitness, or a stronger and stronger pair bond leads to efficiency. So why do Bald Eagles start nesting when they do? The complete answer probably never will be known. It's a complex combination of measurable and immeasurable factors.



Photo by Ed Nash

Leg Band Codes Identified – 2012

Nine more Bald Eagles have additional pieces added to their history – further proof that southern New England eagles wander. They don't migrate!

W68 GOLD – BLACK MASSACHUSETTS, Photographed by Bob Michaud and Ed Nash at the Barnes Boat Launch on 2/6/12. It was put on a nestling on the Mill River at the Oxbow in Northampton in 1996. It is the only encounter ever of this bird after banding. Massachusetts bands this old seldom have any original color left. Instead of GOLD – BLACK it appears metallic and dark.

9/U (9 over U) BLACK – WHITE CONNECTICUT, a sight record from Niack, New York on 2/13/12. It was put on a nestling at Lieutenant River 5/13/08. Report from the Bird Banding Lab to Jenny Dickson to Don Hopkins.

W60 GOLD – BLACK MASSACHUSETTS, Photographed by Howard Lunt at the Barnes Boat Launch 2/18/12. It was put on a nestling in 1995 at Mt. Russ at Quabbin Reservoir. It is also the only encounter ever of this bird after banding.

P/1 (P over 1) BLACK – WHITE CONNECTICUT, Photographed by Bob Michaud at the Barnes Boat Launch on 2/20/12. It was put on a nestling at the Hartford – Dump nest 5/15/09.

U/1 (U over 1) BLACK – WHITE CONNECTICUT, Photographed by Ed Nash and Bob Michaud at the Barnes Boat Launch 2/27/12. It was put on a nestling at the Hartford – Brainard nest on 5/18/09.

B/W (B over W) ORANGE – BLACK MASSACHUSETTS, Telescoped by Mike O'Leary at the Parsons Road Boat Launch 3/12/12. It was put on a nestling at Fourth Island, Deerfield 5/11/09.

9/Z (9 over Z) BLACK – WHITE CONNECTICUT, reported on 5/17/12. It is alive in captivity due to injury in Pennsylvania at 39 degrees 50 minutes, 75 degrees 20 minutes (near Philadelphia). It was banded as a nestling at the Hartford – Brainard nest 5/15/08, Bird Banding Lab report.

8/H (8 over H) BLACK – WHITE CONNECTICUT, Telescoped at Hartford on 2/26/11 by Don Hopkins and in May 2012 in South Windsor by Joseph Cala. It was put on a nestling at Middletown on 6/7/05.

R/2 (R over 2) BLACK – WHITE CONNECTICUT, Photographed at Montezuma Refuge, New York on 9/22/12. It was put on a nestling at Middletown 6/2/11, Bird Banding Lab report.

Of Connecticut's 219 Bald Eagle chicks since 1992, 118 have gotten the BLACK – WHITE riveted aluminum leg bands. Twenty five of those bands have since been encountered, 21%. One was encountered twice. Twenty-one percent is not unlike some of the encounter rates for species of hunted waterfowl. Many non-game species can have rates in the low single digits. Of the 25 eagle leg bands, 7 are sight records (telescope), 8 are photographs, 2 are injured/rehab and 8 are dead.

Acknowledgements 2012

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Photos by Steve Woronechi

ROSTER 2012

George & Beverly Bancroft
Arielle Beaudry
Greg Bollard
Mike Caronna
Merle Davis
Jenny Dickson
Brianna Dube
Julia Edmonds
Lynn Edmonds
Sheia Edmonds
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Larry Fischer
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Mike Gigone
Hank Golet
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Kyanna Kohler
Kelly Kubik
Oneil Langle
Lisa Legasse

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Lillian Seidler
Jeff Selig
John & Susan Sirko
Janet Smith
Shirley Sutton
Rollin Tebbetts
Mr. & Mrs. Paul Tellier
Walter Unsworth
Julie Victoria
Bob & Joyce Welch
Steve Woronechi Sr.
Steve Woronechi Jr.
Jerry Woods
Mark & Mindy Yuknat



Photo by Bob Michaud

Bald Eagles
Of The Upper Farmington River Valley



Report #34

2012

Area

The area covered in this study is the upper Farmington River from the state line down to Unionville which is an extension, due to a new nest there. It also includes Colebrook, Hogback, Barkhamsted, and Nepaug Reservoirs, Lake McDonough and the state hatchery on Punch Brook.

Method

Again, the main effort of the study was devoted to observing the Bald Eagle's nesting activities. We were able to read the color bands on most of the eagles.

Observations

The study group observed in the area for 38 days and Bald Eagles were seen on 35 days. A summary of the observations is included at the end of this report. We did not include reports of the Unionville nest as the eagles were under observation daily since they first laid eggs in February.

Food

There were no reports of winter kills on the ice.

Nesting

The Colebrook eagles fledged one chick as did the original Barkhamsted pair. The new Barkhamsted pair fledged 3 chicks, while the Nepaug pair failed. The Unionville nest fledged 2 chicks.

Individuals

Along with five breeding pairs in the area, the immatures frequenting the area bodes well for the population.

Observation Key

Eagles	Locations	Observers
A = Adult	BR = Barkhamsted Reservoir	DH = Don Hopkins
I = Immature	FR = Farmington River	KN = K. Nicoletti
	PB = Punch Brook	SS = S. Sutton
	CR = Colebrook Reservoir	DR = D. Rosgen

Observations

Date	Eagles	Location	Observers	Obs. Hours
1-Jan	2A	BR	DH	3
4-Jan	1A	BR	DR	
7-Jan	1A, 1I	BR	DH, KN	6
10-Jan	3A, 2I	FR, PB	SS	
14-Jan	1I	BR	SS	3
	2A, 2I	FR, PB	DH	
23-Jan	1A	FR, PB	DH	
28-Jan	2A	BR	DH	1 3/4
4-Feb	0	BR	KN	2 1/2
11-Feb	1A	BR	DH	1 1/4
12-Feb	1A	BR	DH	
17-Feb	1A	BR	KN	1
19-Feb	3A	BR	DH	3 3/4
22-Feb	1A	BR,CR	DH	
25-Feb	2A, 2I	BR	DH	3 1/4
26-Feb	2A	BR	DH	2 1/2
4-Mar	2A	NR,FR,BR	DH	4
10-Mar	3A	BR	DH	3 3/4
11-Mar	3A	NR,FR,BR	DH	4 1/2
13-Mar	3A	BR	DH	3 1/4
15-Mar	3A	NR,FR,BR,CR	DH	2 3/4
18-Mar	4A	NR,FR,BR	DH	2 1/2
24-Mar	2A	NR, FR, BR	DH	3
1-Apr	4A	NR, FR, BR	DH, KN	9
5-Apr	1A	NR	SS	
8-Apr	3A	NR, FR, BR	DH	4
14-Apr	3A, 1I	BR	DH, KN	11 1/2
17-Apr	3A	BR	DH	4 1/2
19-Apr	3A	BR	DH	2 3/4
21-Apr	4A	BR	DH	3
24-Apr	1A	NR	SS	
25-Apr	2A	NR	SS	
28-Apr	4A, 2I	BR	DH	3 1/2
30-Apr	1A	NR	SS	
4-May	1A,1I	BR	SS	
5-May	1I	FR	SS	
6-May	3A, 2I	BR	DH	4 1/2
13-May	1A, 2I	BR	DH	3 1/2
20-May	1A, 2I	BR	DH	3 1/4
26-May	1A, 2I	BR	DH	3 1/2
4-Jun	2I	BR, CR	DH, KN	4
9-Jun	3A, 3I	BR	DH, KN	7
17-Jun	3A, 4I	BR	DH, KN	4
24-Jun	2A, 1I	BR	DH, KN	6
1-Jul	1A, 1I	BR	DH, KN	5
4-Jul	1A, 4I	BR	DH, KN	6
15-Sep	0	BR	DH	1/2
4-Nov	1A	BR	DH, KN	6
17-Nov	1A	BR	DH, KN	5
9-Dec	2A	BR	DH, KN	5 1/2
15-Dec	0	BR	DH, KN	7

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We note that Julie Victoria of the D.E.E.P. Wildlife Division after years of managing the Bald Eagles retired this past June. She had banded more than 200 eagle chicks. The eagles may not miss her, but we sure will. She was a great person to work with.