

BALD EAGLES
In
Connecticut and Western Massachusetts



The Bald Eagle Study Group
2010

Photo by Ed Nash



Front Cover – Barnes Boat Launch, Enfield, February, 2010

Above – Kings Island Boat Launch, Enfield, December, 2010 (Bob Michaud)

Back Cover

All four of these eagles were photographed in Enfield and all have man made markers attached. The marking of birds traditionally is used to study movements and longevity, but high resolution digital photography and computer enhancement has added to the information that can be obtained from live birds. Connecticut nesting eagles are aged precisely when the band is applied. Later, when that band can be identified in a photo or through a telescope, the topography and coloration of the eagle can be matched to an exact age. Visual data collected in the last several winters indicate that beak color, as it changes from black to yellow is a more consistent predictor of age than plumage. Also, the trailing edge of the wing can distinguish a young adult from an old adult – because an eagle molts its wing feathers sequentially and the new feathers come in progressively shorter up to adulthood. Young adults still have a saw tooth look to the trailing edge, with a mix of the longer, older feathers and the new shorter ones of the adult (McCollough).

Inside – Top: Connecticut band (T8T), 8 years 9 months old January, 2010 (Rollin Tebbetts)

Inside – Bottom: Connecticut band (A over O), 1 year 9 months old January 9, 2010. Note the saw tooth trailing edge to the wing (Lisa Legasse)

Back – Top: Connecticut band (8 over E), 5 years 8 ½ months old December 30, 2010 (Howard Lunt)

Back – bottom: Note radio transmitter at the shoulders, unknown age October, 2010 (Rollin Tebbetts)

The winter of 2009-2010 was warmer than normal. The migrant Bald Eagles arrived and remained in the rapids area of the Connecticut River on January 9, 2010 at 2506 degree days, slightly earlier than our 31 year average of 2631. The National Mid-Winter Eagle Survey was taken on that date. It had 202 volunteers at 85 sites statewide. A total of 108 Bald Eagles was recorded, 67 adults, and 41 immatures. The winter ended on March 21st at 4700 degree days. The average total on that date is 5147. All of the mated pairs were on territory, on eggs, or on chicks by then.

Nesting 2010

Twenty-three Bald Eagle territories were recorded in 2010, the most ever. The record numbers after that were all negative. Five of those 23 pairs never laid eggs. Of the remaining 18 active nests, 6 failed; one in the egg stage, 2 in the chick stage, and the exact failure time of the 3 others is unknown. On the positive side, those 12 successful nests had a high production of 23 chicks, nearly two per nest.

The reasons for those 11 unproductive nests are speculation only. None of the nests was inspected. The five non-starts could be due to the inexperience of the pairs, one or both adults could be new. The Bantam Lake pair (or trio) are first timers. At East Windsor, at least one of the pair was different than 2009. This was determined by the sub-adult plumage. Also, a contributing factor to the 6 nest failures could be the heavy prolonged rain of March 29th to the a.m. of March 31st. Three to seven inches fell statewide. Interestingly, the 4 nests that had hatched by then were successful. Were some parents unable to keep the eggs warm and dry? Was food in short supply due to poor hunting conditions? The streams, ponds, and rivers were murky and fast moving for the following two weeks. The status of these 11 nests in 2011 will be interesting.

The failed nest at the Hartford dump was observed closely and consistently by Don Hopkins. The female laid eggs on March 2nd but the adults were copulating as early as January 13, 2010; an apparent territorial signaling (Hopkins, 2010). The nest failed on March 30th or 31st during the heavy rain. Upon the failure, the adult pair abandoned the nest area and by April 10th were well on their way toward constructing a "frustration nest" (Postapalsky). This was located 450 meters to the east of the original nest on the west bank of the Connecticut River. This activity has been previously reported in the state (Hopkins, et. al. 2002). After May 23rd, the pair of eagles stopped working on the "frustration nest". They then started to revisit the original nest or nearby trees. By late September 2010, the pair would return to the original nest at sunset to roost. They would depart shortly before sunrise. Occasionally, prior to leaving, they would add a stick to the original nest.

The 18 active nests minus the 6 failures, minus 7 unsafe trees, minus 2 uncooperative land owners left only 3 trees to climb to leg band the 6 chicks. Only 5 chicks were banded, one chick of 2 at Groton remained unbanded due to its large size and advanced age and the danger of it departing the nest. The 7 trees that are unsafe are either dead, dying, or have very treacherous geometry (tall and tilted). The adults frequently use this type of tree due to the lack of small branches near the top. The eagle and their 6 ½ to 7 ½ foot wingspan need a lot of open flight access to land and depart.

Other areas of the state had curious behaviors that someday they might be territories. Adult eagles were seen in Mansfield and Ashford flying with nesting material in late winter 2010, but no specific location or nest could be found. Rumors persist even in the Springfield, Massachusetts newspapers of nesting eagles on South Pond in West Suffield. South Pond is one of the 3 Congamond Lakes. All of the water is in Southwick Massachusetts, but the eastern border of South Pond is in Connecticut. Also, 2 adult Bald Eagles briefly closed runway 24 at Bradley International Airport on October 26, 2010. They were standing together on the runway edge (no carrion was found). Three days later on the 29th, 2 adults were standing 100ft. apart on the de-icing pad at the airport. Rainbow Reservoir on the Farmington River is the closest piece of water, about 1 ½ miles away. King's Island, a traditional winter night roost was again used extensively this winter, but it too may soon be a nesting territory. In the summer and early fall of 2010 adults were consistently seen carrying nesting material in that direction.

The following are a few more short notes from 2010: On February 23rd, Julie Victoria of the Connecticut D.E.P. and Don Hopkins got a propane noise cannon removed from the north end of Brainard Airport. It was close to the Hartford-Brainard nest and was put in place in October 2009 by the United States Department of Agriculture as a gull deterrent for the airport. Also, the new Lieutenant River nest #2 is 475 ft. from the original nest tree, (thanks to Hank Golet and G.P.S.). On banding day at Hemlock Reservoir, much of the nest had been blown to the ground. The 2 big chicks squeezed into the remaining part of the nest in the white pine.

The dates in figure 1 are best guesses based on eagle behaviors at the nest or from measurements taken on banding day. The first hatch is the incubating date plus 35 days and the fledge date is the hatch date plus 77 days.

Figure 1
Bald Eagle Nests 2010

Nest (fledged)	Incubating	1st Hatch	Banding Date	Fledge Date
Nott Island #3 (2)	Feb.1, 2010	March 8, 2010	Bad Tree	May 24, 2010
Hemlock Reservoir (2)	Feb. 20, 2010	March 26, 2010	May 20, 2010	June 11, 2010
GoodSpeed #2 (1)	Feb. 20, 2010	March 26, 2010	Bad Tree	June 11, 2010
Groton Res. (2)	Feb. 23, 2010	March 29, 2010	May 28, 2010	June 14, 2010
Suffield #3 (0)	Feb. 28, 2010	April 4, 2010	Failed Apr. 16	----
Lieutenant River #2 (1)	March 1, 2010	April 5, 2010	No landowner Permission	June 21, 2010
Cromwell (2)	March 1, 2010	April 5, 2010	Bad Tree	June 21, 2010
Hartford Dump (0)	March 2, 2010	Failed March 30 th or March 31 st	----	----
Lake Gaillard (2)	March 3, 2010	April 7, 2010	Too Many Rules	June 23, 2010
Wethersfield- Rocky Hill #3 (2)	March 3, 2010	April 7, 2010	Bad Tree	June 23, 2010
Hartford-Brainard (0)	March 5, 2010	April 9, 2010	Failed Early April	----
Nepaug #3 (0)	March 7, 2010	April 11, 2010	Failed Before May 10 th	----
Barkhamsted #1 (2)	March 13, 2010	April 17, 2010	May 24, 2010	July 3, 2010
Middletown #4 (0)	March 17, 2010?	April 21, 2010?	Failed By May 24 th	----
Bridgewater (2)	March 18, 2010?	April 22, 2010?	Bad Tree	July 8, 2010
Seymour (3)	March 19, 2010	April 23, 2010	Bad Tree	July 9, 2010
Saville (0)	March?	Failed Before June 2010	----	----
Colebrook (2)	March 31, 2010?	May 5, 2010	Bad Tree	July 21, 2010
East Windsor #3	Territory Only	2 Adults Tending Nest Feb. To April	----	----
Bantam Lake	Territory Only	2 Adults carrying sticks March to June – No Nest	----	----
North Haven	Territory Only	2 Adults in nest area carrying grass Late winter	----	----
Southbury	Territory Only	2 Adults carrying sticks near old nest site	----	----
Lisbon	Territory Only	2 Adults tending last years unsuccessful nest	----	----
Summary 23 (23)	Feb. 1st to Mar. 31st	Mar. 8th to May 5th	May 20th to May 28th	May 24th to July 21st



In figure 2, the numbers of mated pairs matches the number of territories in figure 1. The mated pairs can be on an active nest with eggs or can be on territory only – building a nest or in the area of an established nest. A successful nest means at least one chick has fledged. With so many nests now, and with limited observer opportunities, two terms that were used in past reports can't be assessed accurately enough and are no longer used; breeding pair and occupied nest. Two widely accepted calculations that determine a stable Bald Eagle population are based on nest production and nest success; 0.7 young per nest and 50% nest success (Sprunt). These terms can have various interpretations but the figure 2 numbers are well above these benchmarks. Even the troubled 2010 season is above the stable or maintenance level.

Figure 2
The Latest 10 Years (2001 to 2010)

Year	(A) Mated Pairs	(B) Active Nests	(C) Successful Nests	(D) Chicks Fledged	(D/A) Young Per Mated pair	(D/B) Young Per Active Nest	(D/C) Young Per Successful Nest	(C/B) Ratio of success
2001	4	4	2	3	0.75	0.75	1.50	50%
2002	8	6	4	7	0.88	1.17	1.75	67%
2003	7	7	6	10	1.43	1.43	1.67	86%
2004	8	7	4	7	0.88	1.00	1.75	57%
2005	10	9	8	14	1.40	1.56	1.75	89%
2006	10	8	6	12	1.20	1.50	2.00	75%
2007	15	14	10	15	1.00	1.07	1.50	71%
2008	17	14	13	21	1.24	1.50	1.62	93%
2009	20	18	17	31	1.55	1.72	1.82	94%
2010	23	18	12	23	1.00	1.28	1.92	67%
10 year average	12.2	10.5	8.2	14.3	1.17	1.36	1.74	78%

Leg Bands and Markers 2010

Ten additional eagles have more known about them because of leg bands. Unfortunately, 5 are now dead. The other 5 were telescoped or photographed. The data came from the Connecticut D.E.P, The Bird Banding Lab in Laurel Maryland, Raptor Rehabilitators, and The Bald Eagle Study Group. Eight of the ten are of Connecticut origin and two were banded in Massachusetts.

1. Connecticut (black/white) leg band (letter A over letter O) was in Enfield on January 9, 2010 . It is a male banded as one of two nestlings at the Hartford-Brainard nest May 18, 2008 (photo by Lisa Legasse)
2. Connecticut (black/white) leg band (T8T) was in Enfield in January 2010. It is a male banded as one of two nestlings at the East Windsor nest #2 on May 30, 2001. (photo by Rollin Tebbetts)
3. Connecticut (black/white) leg band (letter C over #1) was at Hanover Pond in Meriden on February 12, 2010. It is a male banded as one of three nestlings from the Lieutenant River nest #1 in Old Lyme on May 13, 2009. (Telescoped by Jeff Seelig).
4. Connecticut (black/white) leg band (#8 over letter H) was read on a perched adult 200 meters north of the Hartford dump nest by Don Hopkins on February 26, 2010. It is a male banded as one of two chicks at the Middletown nest on June 7, 2005.
5. Connecticut (black/white) leg band (#9 over letter S) was killed by a train in Brewster, New York just west of Danbury, Connecticut on February 26, 2010. It was a female banded as the only nestling at Middletown nest #4 on June 15, 2007. (Bird Banding Lab Records)
6. Connecticut (black/white) leg band (#9 over letter B) was found dead April 2, 2010 at latitude 443, longitude 0702 – about Lewiston, Maine. That is 200 air miles from East Windsor nest #3. It was a female banded there on May 14, 2007 as one of two nestlings. (Bird Banding Lab Records – cause of death unknown)
7. Connecticut (black/white) leg band (#7 over letter Z) was found dead, decomposing and mud covered on April 15, 2010 in the Connecticut River in South Windsor / Windsor near the mouth of the Farmington River. It was a female banded as one of two nestlings in the Cromwell nest on May 20, 2005. It is possibly the female from the failed Suffield nest. It is now in Massachusetts awaiting chemical tests and x-rays. (recovered by Ed Nash)
8. Massachusetts (gold/black) leg band (W76) was recovered on Selden Island in Lyme Connecticut on June 12, 2010. It had a badly broken and infected wing and had to be euthanized. It was banded as a nestling on Prescott Peninsula at Quabbin Reservoir in 1996. At the time of recovery, the federal band was not on the eagle, only the state gold band. Its tissues and organs became study specimens at Tufts University before it was sent to the eagle repository in Colorado. (Mary Beth Kaeser and Alan Nordell – Raptor Rehabilitators)
9. Massachusetts (gold/black) leg band (W N O) was found dead on the Connecticut River on September 11, 2010 on a sandbar in South Windsor. It was banded as a nestling on the Connecticut River in Hadley, Massachusetts on May 14, 2004. It is now back in Massachusetts awaiting chemical tests and x-rays. (recovered by Dean Anglace)
10. Connecticut (black/white) leg band (#8 over letter E) was flying over the King's Island boat launch on December 30, 2010. It is a male banded as one of two nestlings at the Middletown nest #3 on June 7, 2005. (photo by Howard Lunt)

-One eagle had a marker of unknown origin. A flying adult wearing a back pack type radio transmitter was in Enfield on October 6, 2010. Web searches have yet to be productive. (photo by Rollin Tebbetts)



Presently, one hundred and eleven Bald Eagles have been leg banded in the state, 6 after hatching year (AHY) birds and 105 (L for local) of the 157 nestlings. With the 8 above, 17 of them or 15.3% now have some post banding information. This is a remarkably high encounter rate for Connecticut banded raptors, considering the Sharp Shinned Hawk rate is 2.3% and the American Kestrel rate is 3.7%. However, it does expand the truism that the bigger the raptor, the higher the encounter rate because, Connecticut banded Ospreys have a rate of 5.2%, Coopers Hawks are at 7.3% and Red Tailed Hawks are 7.6%. (Mersereau unpublished data). Connecticut banded eagles also have the advantage of wearing the additional big color band with a very short, very visible code that can be read with optics or can be photographed. These leg band encounters provide only a short piece of the eagle's movements. Yet for years, the data has consistently shown that they do not travel far, either as adults or immatures. This is probably one of the contributing factors to our healthy and expanding breeding population. The short travel is an advantage to the adults because it saves both time and energy. It saves time because no long pair bonding period is necessary. They are already paired up or nearly paired up year round. It saves energy because there is no long return migration just prior to breeding. For the younger eagles at age 3 or 4, the short distance movement allows them to quickly fill any nesting gaps that arise, either pairing up in empty suitable habitat to establish a new territory or replace an absent mate at an existing territory - a floater (Hunt). This efficient filling of territories has led to an extensive and flexible breeding season in Connecticut. From figures 1 and 2, some pairs are on eggs in the first week of February and others are still incubating into early May. Some pairs are brooding chicks by early March, others are still tending to chicks into late July. Other factors are surely at work too; like tolerance and a clean environment but the seasonal efficiency works quite well.



Bald Eagle Nests in Connecticut 1992 - 2010

The First documented Bald Eagle nest in Connecticut since the D.D.T. era of the mid 1950's was at Barkhamsted Reservoir in 1992 (Hopkins 1992). Figure 3 is the most accurate compilation of this recent nesting history. The year to year data at each nest does not necessarily mean the same parents. The mated pair or occasionally a trio can seldom be positively identified at a nest from year to year . The romantic "mate for life" can be an inaccurate assumption. The digit in parenthesis means the number of chicks, zero means a failed nest, and T means territory only. The number sign (#) indicates multiple nests were used in the territory. The month and day is the start of incubation.

Figure 3
Bald Eagle Nests – Connecticut (1992-2010)
The First 10 Successful Territories (1992-2005)

Barkhamsted	Suffield	East Windsor	Southbury	Nott Island	Nepaug	Middletown	Wethersfield-Rocky Hill	Cromwell	Goodspeed
4/5/92 (2) #1	3/7/96 (0) #1	3/8/00 (0) #1	3/?/01 (1)	2/5/02 (2) #1	3/15/02 (0) #1	3/?/02 (1) #1	3/10/02 (0) #1	3/7/05 (2)	3/2/05 (1) #1
3/27/93 (2) #1	3/13/97 (1) #1	3/12/01 (2) #2	-/-/02 (T)	2/5/03 (3) #1	3/1/03 (1) #1	3/26/03 (1) #2	3/12/03 (1) #2	3/8/06 (3)	2/1/06 (0) #2
3/29/94 (2) #1	3/13/98 (2) #2	3/15/02 (0) #2	3/?/03 (0)	2/12/04 (2) #1	2/28/04 (0) #1	3/?/04 (0) #2	3/10/04 (2) #2	3/13/07 (2)	2/?/07 (1) #2
3/18/95 (1) #1	3/11/99 (0) #3	3/28/03 (2) #2	-/-/04 (T)	2/10/05 (2) #1	2/20/05 (0) #1	3/18/05 (2) #3	3/7/05 (1) #2	3/13/08 (1)	2/27/08 (1) #2
3/?/96 (0) #1	3/11/00 (1) #3	3/5/04 (0) #3	-/-/05 (T)	3/8/06 (2) #2	2/23/06 (2) #1	-/-/06 (T) #3	3/8/06 (1) #2	3/11/09 (2)	3/13/09 (1) #2
3/21/97 (1) #1	3/13/01 (0) #1	3/3/05 (2) #3	-/-/06 (T)	2/17/07 (0) #2	3/14/07 (0) #2	3/9/07 (1) #4	3/7/07 (1) #2	3/1/10 (2)	2/20/10 (1) #2
3/13/98 (2) #1	3/10/02 (2) #3	2/26/06 (2) #3	4/1/07 (0)	2/5/08 (2) #3	2/18/08 (3) #2	3/9/08 (2) #4	3/9/08 (1) #2		
3/27/99 (0) #1	3/11/03 (2) #3	3/4/07 (2) #3	-/-/08 (T)	2/3/09 (3) #3	2/17/09 (3) #2	3/15/09 (2) #4	3/10/09 (1) #3		
-/-/00 (T) #1	3/7/04 (2) #3	2/26/08 (0) #3	-/-/- (-)	2/1/10 (2) #3	3/7/10 (0) #3	3/17/10 (0) #4	3/3/10 (2) #3		
3/30/01 (0) #1	3/4/05 (2) #3	2/23/09 (0) #3	-/-/10 (T)						
3/11/02 (2) #2	3/16/06 (0) #3	-/-/10 (T) #3							
3/16/03 (0) #2	3/4/07 (2) #3								
3/31/04 (1) #2	2/27/08 (2) #3								
3/26/05 (2) #1	3/4/09 (1) #3								
3/29/06 (2) #1	2/28/10 (0) #3								
3/16/07 (1) #1									
3/26/08 (1) #1									
3/13/09 (1) #1									
3/13/10 (1) #1									



Figure 3 cont.
Bald Eagle Nests – Connecticut (1992 -2010)
The Newest 10 Successful Territories 2007 – 2010

Lieutenant River	Seymour	North Haven	Hartford-Brainard	Lake Gaillard	Bridgewater	Colebrook	Hemlock Reservoir	Hartford Dump	Groton
3/9/07 (0) #1	3/20/07 (2)	4/8/07 (2)	3/13/07 (1)	3/9/08 (2)	3/7/08 (1)	3/7/09 (2)	2/25/09 (2)	3/2/09 (2)	3/7/09 (1)
2/29/0 (2) #1	3/20/08 (1)	--/--/08 (T)	3/5/08 (2)	3/2/09 ((2)	3/17/09 (2)	3/31/10 (3)	2/20/10 (2)	3/2/10 (0)	2/23/10 (2)
2/28/09 (3) #1	3/20/09 (2)	--/--/-- (-)	3/2/09 (2)	3/3/10 (2)	3/18/10 (2)				
3/1/10 (1) #2	3/19/10 (3)	--/--/10 (T)	3/5/10 (0)						

The 6 Never Successful Territories 1996-2010

Hartford	West Suffield	Ellington	Lisbon	Saville	Bantam Lake
3/7/96 (0)	--/--/00 (T)	--/--/07 (T)	--/--/09 (T)	3/7/10 (0)	--/--/10 (T)
		--/--/08 (T)	--/--/10 (T)		



The raw data from the 20 successful territories in figure 3: 19 years, 157 chicks, 131 nests, and 36 individual nest structures. Seventeen of the nineteen years were successful (1996 and 1999 had no eagle production). The 157 chicks were made up of 32 single chick nests, 52 with 2 chicks and 7 with 3 chicks. Of the 131 nests, 91 were successful, 29 failed and 11 were territory only. Nine of the twenty territories have had alternate nests. At those 9 territories, the average length of use was 3 years (3.1) before the first move and 3 years (2.8) before any move. The pairs moved to an alternate nest 20 times; 7 times from failure to success, 6 times from success to failure, 7 times from success to success, and zero times from failure to failure. Fourteen of the 23 failures used the same nest the following year (can't use this year's 6 failures yet). There is a tendency as the territories get older for the incubation date to get earlier. Why?

Common sense would dictate that the first 10 successful territories should be the best, be in the most prime habitat, be the most productive and might improve with age. None of the comparisons from Figure 4 agree with that logic, the newest territories are superior. Why?

Figure 4
Comparisons

	First 10 Territories 1992-2005	Newest 10 Territories 2007-2010
Chicks in First Successful year	14	17
Chicks the following year	13	16
Chicks per Territory	1.10	1.55
Chicks per Active nest	1.20	1.67
Chicks per successful Nest	1.67	1.88
Successful Nests / Territory	66%	83%
Successful nests / Active nests	72%	89%
Active Nests / Territories	91%	93%
Chicks in 2009	14	18
Chicks in 2010	8	14

I think the small urban – suburban state of Connecticut with 690 people per square mile has safely and successfully adapted to the Bald Eagle. The expanse of the data on figures 1 to 4 is the amazing thing, considering the only eagles around in the late 70's and early 80's were a few wintering adults and an occasional immature.

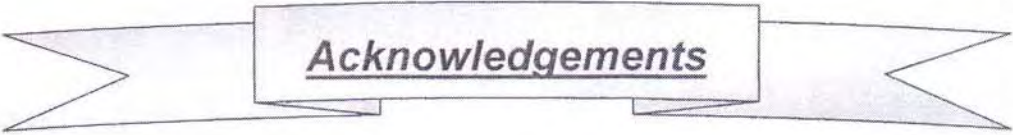


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Condolences

*To The Family & Friends
Of
Kathy Fischer*

*Kathy Passed Away November, 2010.
She Courageously Accompanied Larry
On The Banding Days This Season*

*To The Family & Friends
Of
Stu Mitchell*

*Stu Passed Away January, 2011.
He Was A Raptor Rehabilitator With
His Wife Jan, And An Early Tallier
Of Eagles*



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