

Connecticut Eagle Survey Update

By Julie Victoria, Wildlife Biologist, CT DEP Wildlife Division.

Since 1979, the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has participated in a nationwide Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey held on the second Saturday in January. During the survey period of January 11-12, 2008, 81 bald eagles -- 49 adults and 32 immature eagles -- were recorded statewide. In January 2007, 62 birds were counted. The Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey is not a complete census of the entire wintering population in Connecticut, but an index of the species' use of the state, which can be compared year to year.

The survey is conducted nationwide. It was originally coordinated by the National Wildlife Federation from 1979-1992 and is now coordinated by the U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Geological Survey, and the Forest and Rangeland Ecosystem Science Center at the Snake River Field Station in Oregon. For more information on the survey's background and objectives visit:

http://srf.s.wr.usgs.gov/research/indivproj.asp?SRFSProj_ID=2

Bald Eagles migrate south from the northern states during winter to areas of open water where they are able to catch fish, their main food item. The high number of Bald Eagles counted in 2008 can be attributed to milder winter weather leading up to and during the survey. This survey is more an indication of the distribution of eagles around the state.

In all the survey years, volunteers from private conservation organizations, the DEP and the general public help conduct the survey by recording all eagles seen at areas traditionally used by the birds and areas of suitable wintering habitat. This survey could not be conducted without all the volunteers reporting their careful observations, and the DEP is thankful for their participation.

In 2008, 345 volunteers helped conduct the survey along 139 survey routes, which is more than double the 153 volunteers who helped in 2007, and it is the highest participation rate ever recorded for the event. The increase in volunteers can be directly attributed to media coverage prior to the event.

Those interested in helping with next year's (January 2009) survey should send a letter, including your name, address, telephone number and e-mail address, to: Julie Victoria, Wildlife Diversity Program, 391 Route 32, North Franklin, CT 06254.

Below is a table that summarizes the Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey results in CT from 1979-2008 is attached.

Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey Results in Connecticut, 1979-2008

Year	Immature	Adult	Unknown	Total
1979	*	*	*	20
1980	*	*	*	11
1981	*	*	*	26
1982	18	13	0	31
1983	18	17	0	35
1984	17	22	0	39
1985	14	24	0	38
1986	22	18	0	40
1987	15	18	0	33

1988	23	28	1	52
1989	30	58	0	88
1990	53	23	0	76
1991	31	27	0	58
1992	34	27	1	62
1993	31	29	1	61
1994	46	29	0	75
1995	40	26	0	66
1996	83	45	0	128
1997	64	50	0	114
1998	29	20	0	49
1999	27	33	0	60
2000	37	35	0	72
2001	43	34	0	77
2002	20	33	1	54
2003	45	31	1	77
2004	41	50	1	92
2005	20	25	1	46
2006	19	44	3	66
2007	20	42	0	62
2008	32	49	0	81

*The adult/immature breakdown is not available for 1979-1981.

The number of year-round Bald Eagles in the state has also increased. In 2008, 17 pairs of Bald Eagles were present in every county except Fairfield. Of these 17 pairs, 1 was territorial, 2 were inactive and 14 were actively nesting. Of the 14 active nests, 1 pair failed (lost their eggs or young) and 13 pairs fledged 21 chicks (reached flying stage). The location of Bald Eagle nests are not made public as most are on private property and human activities around the nest may cause the adults to abandon the nest or interrupt feeding or tending of the young, which can lead to the death of the chicks.

Similarly, if you are looking at wintering eagles, disruption, destruction or obstruction of roosting and feeding areas can also negatively affect Bald Eagles. Bald Eagles are sensitive to human activities and noise so be sure to keep your distance.