

NATURE NEWS

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Drippings From the Deck

It is a little too cool to be on the deck today, so I will stay inside where it is warmer. It is so foggy I couldn't see an eagle a quarter mile away, even if it was there. It was foggy for our first Bald Eagle Bus Tour for the year, but not this bad. It just prevented us from seeing any eagle nests from on top of the bluff because they are over 1 mile from the bluff. We did see 27 adults, 4 immatures and 1 unknown.

We would not have seen that many except for one man who had thrown some dead deer, coons and possums out in his field. Almost half of the eagles seen were near his place. Other wise it would have been one of the poorest numbers of eagles we have ever seen on a bus tour.

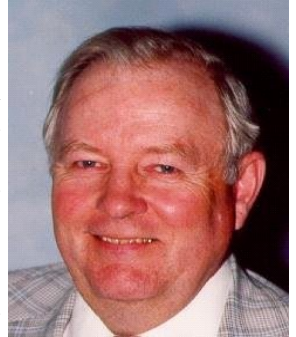
The eagle numbers seem to be reflecting what I have been saying for the past few years, the numbers of bald eagles on the Mississippi River are declining. My concern is that they appear to be declining at a rate that is faster than I had predicted. Now other people are seeing and documenting the same decline. But just a few are getting concerned. They want to live behind the statement that the trend over the past 20 years has in a positive direction.

The public coming to Bald Eagle Days at Lock & Dam #13 saw only 15 eagles, where last year they saw over 450. Those coming to Muscatine, IA, Lock and Dam #18, for their Eagle Days saw only a handful. The airplane counters flying from St. Louis to Quincy counted the fewest on their first flight that they had seen for many years.

In this issue you can read some of the stories about the eagles along the Mississippi, but also I have included a news story out of Florida, where they are trying to save their birds. This is in sharp contrast to Illinois where IDNR allows strip mines and highways to destroy bald eagle habitat, even that which they own and are supposed to be protecting.

I have so many hearings and problems which I need to attend and/or address in the next few weeks it is almost overwhelming: the IL Attorney General's lawsuit against the IDNR for how they mishandled the Banner Strip Mine Permit; the hearing for the

Petition declaring the Banner Mine Site Unsuitable for Strip Mining; the Army Corps hearing to destroy the trees along the river near Rice Lake so they can construct a levee along the river; and hearing after hearing at the Savanna Army Depot as the Army tries to deed land that has not been cleaned up to new owners. (As long as EPA will lower their standards many of the polluted sites do not need to be cleaned up).



Each of these issues needs to be addressed in some fashion or another. Add to this the problems ENF is facing; getting a larger board of directors, deciding how large that board will be, what we can do to increase membership and income and what steps we can take to insure the future of the bald eagle. So far we have had three members step to the plate to be potential board members. If we had more volunteers step forward, perhaps we could increase the board size to 11 or 13, rather than just setting the size at 9.

The regular board meetings are scheduled for Saturdays, just 4 times a year, with the next meeting set for Feb. 6 in Dixon, IL. In addition the board members, when possible, help with our many activities. We are still looking for members to volunteer. We need more help or we may not be able to save our bald eagle. Are you interested? Let me know!

We are presently busy preparing all of our end of the year financial reports and inventories and tax forms. All of this in addition to the normal activities of getting the Nature News published and mailed, arranging for help for our Mid-Winter Bald Eagle Count, taking reservations for the upcoming bus tours and selling bird seed to the public who walk in the front door. Too bad I cannot find anything to do!

You don't have to be a board member to join a bus tour or attend our annual meeting. We need you. ■

Status of the Bald Eagle

By Terrence N. Ingram

What is the real status of the bald eagle? That is the question for which we need to find an answer. The historic bald eagle communities which we visit on our bus tours keep decreasing in numbers. Two of them have lost all of the 40 or 50 birds that once were there throughout many winters. First the percentage of young decrease, then the number of young decrease, then the number of adults start to decline, soon all of the immatures are gone and gradually the number of adults decreases to zero.

This same thing seems to be occurring in other communities of bald eagles as well. Many people do not see this as these communities may be supplemented with migrating birds as other com-

munities migrate through going South or North. They just see bald eagles and make their management decisions based on the number of bald eagles they see.

Because of this we are getting management decisions made by government agencies that are not helping the bald eagle. They keep bragging about the fact that we have brought the bald eagle back from the brink of extinction. They say that banning DDT saved

saved the bald eagle. It may have had some effect, but the bald eagle was recovering on its own before we even banned DDT. Something else was affecting the bald eagle in the late '50's and we have no knowledge of what it was.

These agencies always state that we had a certain number of nests, such as 471, in the early '60's. They don't know. No one knows. That was only the number of nests that we knew about, but there were only five or six people looking for the nests. There is no way that we could know where all the nests were located in the nation.

Back on Feb. 20, 1965 my crew and I watched over 450 eagles migrate overhead that day between 9:00 am and 4:00 pm. There have been very few days since when that number has ever been sighted. Yet their claim is presently we have over 10,000 nests. Why don't we see as many as 4000 eagles migrate by in one day?

The Army Corps has been keeping track of how many bald eagles their personnel see near certain dams on the Mississippi River for the past 7 years. I have placed the results of these counts for the first two weeks in January on the next page. The one thing that stands out for me is how the percentage of young seen on 1-13-2010 was the lowest for any of these counts for all the years they have been conducting them. But then I have to take these counts with a great big grain of salt. For example on 1-16-2008 they recorded the same number of adults and the same number of immatures at three different dams. I cannot image what the odds would be for that to actually happen. This makes me really question the validity of those figures. Are some other numbers fabricated also?

As you can see from Terry Bibo's article further back in this issue, many people have excuses for the poor numbers of eagles everyone is seeing. Very few of them want to accept the fact that the bald eagle population is having problems. But none of them have any experience in studying bald eagles. They may have seen bald eagles in the wild, but they have not intensely studied them for close to 50 years.

I don't have the answers, but I do know that the Fish & Wildlife Service had better put the Bald Eagle back on the Endangered Species List and soon. Only after that has been done will we be able to loosen up some money for the research that needs to be done. As long as the Bald Eagle is off the List people, businesses and government agencies are keeping their pocketbooks closed.

We must stop government agencies such as the IDNR and the Army Corps from destroying bald eagle habitat on their own property. We must get F & W to actively enforce the bald eagle habitat protections which they have placed in the Eagle Act. We must get the fisheries people to find out why there are few gizzard shad in the Mississippi River.

We need to be checking the dead eagles that are found, and the fish that they eat, for Round-Up or any of the other pesticides that are being used. The government denies that Round-Up is a problem as it is a herbicide and should only be killing plants. But we know it is killing our honey bees. Perhaps it is working its way through the food chain to affect other animals as well, and perhaps eventually man.

We have a lot of work to do! If the Eagle Nature Foundation doesn't do it, who will? ■

Bare Trees, Clear Skies Aid in Spotting and Counting Eagles

By Terry Bibo, Peoria Journal Star

Eagle-watching can be a persnickety pursuit. Most months of the year, a glimpse of one fierce white dome is enough. But in January and February, it has become commonplace to spot eagles by the dozen when conditions are ripe. "The most I've ever seen was when I lived on the Illinois River, on Christmas Day," enthuses retired photographer/entrepreneur/sportsman Jack Bradley. There's a big tree, right by the water. Twenty-six eagles were sitting there in front of my house."

He snaps out the directions to slush-packed riverside roads, telling tales of eagle sightings past. It's an ideal day. Clear skies make it easy to trace the outline of bare black branches against blue. Snowy fields and iced-in coves have limited other hunting possibilities, so open water along the channel should lure big birds like a magnet.

Half an hour later, one eagle is perched in a cottonwood at the north end of Shore-acres Park about a block above and beyond the idling Honda. It ignores us. After backing into a mini-drift, then grinding out, the hunt continues southbound on Illinois Route 29. "I always spot'em along here," Bradley says confidently, pointing out another shaggy mass tucked in the cleft of a tree at water's edge. "There's one!"

It turns out to be a squirrel's nest. Bradley shrugs. In all, the 70-mile cruise up Route 29, across the bridge at Lacon, and back down Illinois Route 26, the eagle at Shoreacres is the only one to be seen. That seems to support Terrence Ingram's theory. On the cusp of his 50th annual midwinter eagle count, the head of the Eagle Nature Foundation says the bird should not have been taken off the endangered species list. But the very next day, delighted patrons of the East Peoria Steak'n'Shake report they've been watching five of the big raptors cluster in one tree outside the restaurant. From Chilli

to chili is a whole different story. What gives?

A Passion for eagles

Terrence Ingram has been scouting eagles for five decades. He was a physics teacher at the University of Wisconsin at Platteville when he first began to research birds of prey. But in 1963, he was part of a midwinter bird count that spotted 155 eagles. "They almost turned it down," he says of the organizers' disbelief in his numbers. "They'd never had that many eagles in the 60-plus years they'd done the count."

Obviously, he's got some history. As Ingram focused his energies on eagles over the decades, his life seemed to fuse with their fluctuating fate. After the early years of dwindling numbers, the birds have rebounded to the point they are considered one of conservation's biggest success stories. At 70, Ingram doesn't pull any punches when he disagrees with the prevailing narrative. He was about as welcome as an eaglet in the punch bowl when he stood up to the 12th Biennial Governor's Conference on the Illinois River last October.

Despite all the rosy reports we get from the Fish & wildlife Service and from the IDNR, our bald eagles in Illinois are not doing well and are having trouble," he concluded, calling the official numbers "a sham" that needs to be corrected. "We must all do what we can, today, before it is too late!"

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources had just confirmed the Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board's recommendation to de-list the bald eagle that same month. The bird already had been taken off the national list in 2007. Ingram said in essence, not so fast. "I don't think they're doing well," he says. "I'm very much concerned about it."

He has his own data, based on the results of 49 Mid-winter

Bald Eagle Counts. Originally started by Elton Fawks, Ingram inherited the count about 30 years ago. On one day—this year on Jan. 30—hundreds of volunteers collaborate to count eagle from northern Minnesota to Tennessee. The idea is to get the clearest snapshot of how the bird is faring. That's why we do it over two hours," he says. "I can eliminate duplication and try to get as accurate a count as possible."

Even with his numbers, at first glance, the eagle seems to be faring rather well. There were 470 of them in the 1961 midwinter count, compared to more than 3,000 in 2007 and 2008. But in 2008, the total dropped to 2,192. There have been some pretty dramatic swings over other years. Ingram says the danger is underscored by the dropping number of immature birds, since their number peaked in 2001. "We don't know why it went down. We don't know why they came back," Ingram says. "Now it's going down again, and we don't know why."

He suspects West Nile Virus may play a part, but the bigger issue is loss of food and habitat as land is developed. Although he tipped his hat to Gov. Pat Quinn for help protecting eagles at Plum Island, Ingram notes many other pressures on the population. "As we plan for future development all agencies must take the bald eagle into account before we destroy more vital habitat, or we may lose our national symbol sooner than you think," he said.

Whether it's a one-day drive up the river or a one-day count through the Midwest, factors from weather to eagle-spotting experience make a difference. The 2009 Illinois Audubon Society Count reflected Ingram's results, dropping almost 30 percent from 2008. But state executive director Tom Clay says the focus should not be on one or two years, but on the trend over 10 or 15 or 30 years. And that trend is up. "Now is a good time to talk about it," he says. "They're here. People call Audubon and want to know: Where do we see eagles? Our answer is to look up."

Anecdotally, several local bird aficionados say the same. Brett Ericksen says eagle numbers may even be higher than usual near the Sun Foundation in Lacon; Randy Root says there is open water on his property for waterfowl where an eagles' wintering roost has had 40 to 120 birds nightly in the past. "To put it simply, there is without a doubt an ever-increasing bald eagle population over the last 15 years or so along the Illinois River," Root says via e-mail. "Both in wintering populations and in local breeding populations."

John Mullen, chief naturalist at Forest Park Nature Center, said he counted 18 eagles from Rome to the south end of Chillocothe on Jan. 3. Half of them were immature. Mullen helps with the Midwinter Eagle Count, and is not as worried about the percentage of mature birds as Ingram. "That percentage has decreased somewhat of late, but not drastically and may not denote anything more than a temporary leveling off of the population, a saturation of habitat, a couple of years of food disruption, or something else," Mullen says via e-mail. "Nationally, there are now approximately 10,000 bald eagle nesting pairs in the lower 48 states as opposed to a low of 417 in 1963. Those are some of the

(Continued on Page 9)

Golden Eagles Not so Rare After All

By Doug Erickson

To spot a golden eagle, Wisconsin residents typically thought they had to travel 1,000 or more miles west, where the large raptors can be found in sizable numbers year-round. Sightings here for years were minimal and scattered, limited to a few each winter along the state's western border.

Now, in a development both thrilling and perplexing to bird

lovers, naturalists are learning there are many more golden eagles wintering in Wisconsin than previously thought, and the birds probably were here all along.

Far from being off-course loners as once assumed, these birds are turning out to be part of a population of 100 or so consistent visitors who make their home in the state from November through March, said Mark Martell, director of bird conservation for Audubon Minnesota. The finding has conservation implications, but there's also a simple "wow" factor, he said. "These birds are cool, just cool," Martell said. "Here's this huge, predatory bird that we weren't even aware was here on a regular basis."

Their presence raises a serious issue—how best to protect them—and poses a mystery, said Mark Peterson, executive director of Audubon Minnesota. "The detective story is: Where do they come from?"

The current interest in the wintering golden eagles, which differ considerably from bald eagles, can be traced to an annual bird survey launched five years ago by Scott Mehus, education director of the National Eagle Center in Wabasha, Minn. Mehus thought golden eagles might be more prevalent than assumed, so he put together a group of volunteers focused solely on trying to spot them in the hills near the Mississippi River along the Minnesota and Wisconsin border.

This rigorous survey effort, coupled with improved optical equipment, has turned up dozens of golden eagles each of the last five years. One day last year, about 100 observers spotted 70 distinct golden eagles. Because of the finding, Audubon Minnesota, the National Eagle Center, and the Departments of Natural Resources in Minnesota and Wisconsin embarked this year on a three-year project to better understand the biology and management needs of golden eagles. They are focusing on the inland hills and valleys on either side of the Mississippi River from Prescott to south of Prairie du Chien, a strip for about 200 miles.

The bird is considered a threatened species in Canada, but not in the U.S., Peterson said. There are an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 nesting pairs of golden eagles in the lower 48 states, so the ones in Wisconsin are a small portion of the total population, Mehus said.

Answers to some questions are starting to come from Whitey, a globe-trotting golden eagle who came onto the scene about a year ago. Caught in a leg-hold trap set for a coyote, the bird was rehabilitated, then equipped with a solar-powered radio transmitter. Since March, he has been sending back data every few days.

Researchers particularly wanted to know where the Wisconsin golden eagles go in summer and spring. They figured the birds came from northern Ontario near Canada's Hudson Bay, but Whitey kept flying farther north, ending up above the Arctic Circle. "Holy Moses, nobody expected him to go there," said Mehus, who named Whitey because the bird's crown appeared lighter than a female golden eagle Whitey was associating with.

Whitey is back in Wisconsin now, hanging out mostly in Buffalo and Trempealeau counties. Researchers say it's too soon to draw conclusions from his data. They hope to band three more golden eagles to join him. "This is a pretty special population to us in the Midwest, and we want to make sure everything is being done to conserve this population and hopefully make it grow," Peterson said.

Meanwhile, bird lovers such as Sharon Stiteler of Minneapolis are just enjoying the view. "It's an incredibly powerful bird that is really quite stunning to see," said Stiteler, who goes by the nickname "The Bird Chick" and said she's spotted several golden eagles in Minnesota and Wisconsin. "The fact that they're picking this area to winter is a compliment. That says we're doing something right to protect their habitat." ■ Reprinted from Wisconsin State Journal, 12-27-09

Office of Surface Mining

From Brenda Dilts

The Federal Office of Surface Mining has asked for letters and comments on how to strengthen oversight of State surface coal mining programs and to better regulate the protection of streams affected by surface coal mining operations. Go to www.osmre.gov and you will see a box on the left that asks for comments on Oversight of States Mining and says the date is Dec. 18th, but that has been extended to January 18th, 2010. You can make comments by going to Oversight@osmre.com or mail comments/letters to Administrative Record (MS 252 SIB) Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, 1951 Constitution Ave. NW Washington, DC 20240.

From the OSM webpage: "In other words, oversight includes inspections and other evaluations of how well state programs are ensuring environmental protection, reclamation success, and prevention of off-site impacts. It also includes providing training to state employees to help them do their jobs better and technical assistance, such as information technology and software, to improve both state capability and efficiency in processing permit applications and evaluating reclamation"

Please let them know of our dissatisfaction with the IDNR permitting process and how the State of Illinois is not well-run. Our hearing which is supposed to be within 30 days of the petition for Hearing is now over one year old. Mine permit granted in the Canton Lake watershed which is also the drinking water for 20,000 people in the City and six other communities. The applicant changes names often and the permits are not scrutinized for accuracy or detail and the hearing officer is employed or hired by the Department of Natural Resources so getting a fair hearing is an uphill battle. You can probably think of more things than I can—but let the OSM know of how frustrating this is for the common citizen to oppose a strip coal mine within an environmental fragile area. It takes lots of money to hire an attorney as the process is so complicated that the ordinary citizen cannot speak for themselves. The mine applicant is given 2-3 years make modifications to the permit-long after the public hearing. The modifications are never made to the public so they can have a chance to oppose them. Permit application has missing information or information that is not detailed nor provided by experts in the field of biology or water.

The new Director of Office of Mines wants to update the rulemaking process for the mining permits and include the Clean Water Act. It is time for citizens to speak up. We have seen first hand how IDNR favors the coal companies and the residents of the state right's are limited. Please let others in our group know of this opportunity to speak. I do not have everyone's e-mail address.

We welcome Gerard Holland who has volunteered to fill Gene Small's vacated position on ENF's Board of Directors.

At the Feb. 6 board meeting the board plans to change our By-Laws so we can accept Richard Briggs and Edward Kinsel, who have also volunteered to join our board. Thank You

Reminder

Please get your bald eagle petitions signed and mailed back to us.

This is for asking FWS to place the bald eagle back on the Endangered Species List.

U.S. Army Corp Plans Hearing

The Army Corps is planning to schedule a "public meeting" on their proposed Rice Lake State Fish and Wildlife Area "enhancements." This project has great concerns for locals because of the amount of mature trees that will be destroyed, possibly affecting eagles and osprey known to be using the conservation area; impacts on other wildlife; the addition of a major levee and huge pumps on the Illinois river that can be used to pump water in and out of the facility.

While there is an effort underway to have the public meeting postponed, it is currently scheduled for January 27th, at the Banner Township Building, Banner. I will send out more information when this is confirmed or if we can get it postponed until spring.

The corps plans an "open house" style meeting with poster boards and the opportunity to make written comments, but no real public hearing. Local concern is that much of the degradation at Rice lake is from how the area has been managed by IDNR.

Questions include how will this help migrating birds and other area wildlife, as this project appears to be directed at helping boost hunting areas by making most of the wetlands subject to adding or removing water as IDNR wishes. This Army Corps project was originally planned at \$7 million, and as of last fall is now about \$14 million.

If anyone has anymore information on this project or suggestions please contact me. Thanks,

Joyce Blumenshine, (309)-688-0950

Project Fact sheet for: Rice Lake Complex Habitat Rehabilitation & Enhancement Project— LaGrange Pool-UMRS-EMP

Location: LaGrange Pool, IL Waterway River Miles 132 through 138, Fulton County, IL

River Basin(s): Illinois

State(s): IL

Congressional District(s): IL-17

Status: The public Review Draft Report is scheduled for distribution in late 2009.

Description: Rice Lake is a 6,800 acre backwater complex located 24 miles southwest of Peoria, IL, in Fulton County. The project lands are state owned and are managed by the IL Dept. of Natural Resources (ILDNR) as a fish and wildlife area.

Project Features:

- Reestablish the Hate Levee with a riprap over-flow structure to function as the major water control facility for the entire complex;
- Locate a pumping facility on the Illinois Waterway;
- Excavate channels for water supply to management areas;
- Install two fish passage structures;
- Construct interior levees for moist soil management; and,
- Plant mast trees and native grasses on Duck Island

Increased flood and sedimentation levels have resulted in degradation of what has historically acted as excellent mid-migration waterfowl and aquatic habitat. The lack of reliable and flexible water management capability over half of the project area severely limits its effectiveness in providing feeding and resting habitat for the 2.7 million annual waterfowl use days. Habitat degradation also has negatively affected the other migratory and resident species using the facility.

The project goals are to enhance wetland, aquatic, and flood-plain terrestrial habitat. Reestablishing the Hate Levee and installing a pumping facility for Big Lake would increase reliability and flexibility of water level management. Habitat would be improved for waterfowl, wading birds, shorebirds, and other wetland species that the area. Structures for fish passage and escapement would

protect aquatic habitat and maintain connectivity with deep water areas. Restoration of native grasslands and mast tree species would enhance habitat for numerous floodplain species.

Summarized Financial Data

In accordance with Section 906(e) of the Water Resources Development Act of 1986 (Public Law 99-662), general design and construction costs would be shared on a 65% Federal/35% non-Federal basis. The non-Federal sponsor, the ILDNR, will assume all annual operation, maintenance, and repair costs, estimated at \$15,300.

Major Work Item (This Fiscal Year)

Completed the gross real estate appraisal for the project in 2008. Completion of the public review draft of the DPR.

Major Work Item (Next Fiscal Year)

Completion of the DPR, holding a public meeting, execution of a PPA, initiation of engineering Plans and specifications, and award of an initial construction contract. ■

H.O.M.E.S. is Sponsoring a Free Informational Meeting

Tuesday, January 26, 2010, 6:30 pm Galena Convention Center, 900 Galena Square Drive, Galena, Illinois Off of U.S. 20 West near Stoney Creek Inn

Join H.O.M.E.S. as we welcome Judy Tremmel from Luxemburg, WI, just east of Green Bay. Judy and her husband Scott live on a 4th generation family farm in a karst area. In the last 12 years, her life was forever changed as 12,000 dairy cows, all in CAFO's were sited within 2 miles of her home. The heavy application of manure on karst fields polluted many wells in the area, including her own, prompting her to speak out against industrial agriculture and its negative effects on groundwater and rural communities.

Judy volunteers her time to help communities that have had their groundwater contaminated by industrial agriculture. She also works with county conservationists in NE Wisconsin to help draft karst legislation. Judy is available for press interviews.

Also speaking will be Karen Hudson, a national grassroots consultant for the Socially Responsible Agricultural Project @www.sraproject.org). Hudson lives on a 5th generation family farm in western central Illinois. She is the president of FARM (Families Against Rural Messes www.farmweb.org) a grassroots organization that was formed when livestock factories targeted Illinois, and her community, for expansion. Karen is available for press interviews.

There will also be an opportunity to talk to representatives from H.O.M.E.S. regarding the ongoing legal battle against this facility, and how the citizens of JoDaviess County can help.

The public is welcome. Refreshments will be served. In case of heavy snow, call 815-745-9013 to check on the status of the meeting.

For more information about H.O.M.E.S. and to help support our cause, visit: www.StopTheMegaDairy.org. H.O.M.E.S. (Helping Others Maintain Environmental Standards) is a 501(c)(3) tax exempt, pro-agriculture group of farmers and citizens dedicated to protecting family farms, rural communities, human health, and the environment by promoting sustainable agriculture and conserving our natural resources. ■

This picture of two eagles at the site of the potential Canton Strip Mine was submitted by Ron Diltz.

Opposition to Mega Dairy Continues!

The legal battle against this poorly designed facility moves forward. Learn how our guest speakers had their lives turned upside down as facilities, smaller than the two proposed for Nora, became operational.

Will the Mega Dairy Help the Local Economy?

"I will **not** guarantee you I will hire all local people," **A. J. Bos, CA Investor, Warren High School public meeting, 1-10-08.**

Mega Dairy Dangerously Sited on Karst Bedrock

"If there were spills, leakage...the karst network would allow its content to rapidly enter the aquifer and create widespread contamination of groundwater and surface water as well. Further, the application of animal waste onto nearby fields may also pose a threat to groundwater and surface water," - **Sam Panno, Senior Geochemist, Illinois State Geological Survey**

"Of course it will leak; that's how these work. They are permeable. That's how they are designed."

Donald Manning, lawyer for the mega dairy, from court transcript, 11-10-2009

"42 acres of manure ponds will leak "a little less than 1,000 gallons per day per acre" **Court testimony, 9-29-09, by James Evans, Senior Agricultural Engineer for Maurer Stutz, the firm that engineered this mega-dairy. ■**

Tell the Difference

Golden Eagles VS. Bald Eagles

Golden eagles are sometimes confused with bald eagles, which are more prevalent in Wisconsin but notably different, said Scott Mehus, education director of the National Eagle Center in Wabasha, Minn.

Bald eagles are members of the sea eagle family, large fish-eating birds that live close to water. Adult bald eagles sport white heads and lack leg feathers.

Golden eagles are members of the booted eagle family. They hunt mammals and reptiles, live in hilly, dry countrysides and have leg feathers. Their name comes from the dull bronze feathers on the backs of their heads. Both kinds of eagles are what naturalists call charismatic megafauna, large animals that inspire awe and have widespread popular appeal. "Once you see one, you fall in love with it," Mehus said. ■



Cold Weather Forces Fewer Eagles to Flock to Eagle Watch

By Melissa Regennitter

MUSCATINE, Iowa - There weren't a lot of eagles along the Mississippi River Saturday during the annual Muscatine Bald Eagle Watch. Experts say the river froze early this year and the lack of in the bald eagle's primary food source on the river, gizzard shad, has made the birds head inland to tributaries or south to warmer river pools. "The gizzard shad population is in a cyclical crash. Ninety percent of the diet for eagles that feed here is gizzard shad," said Kelly J. McKay, director of the BioEco Research and Monitoring Center in Hampton, IL.

Last year there was more shad and the freeze set in a little later, keeping the water open longer. Dozens of eagles put on a show for spectators in 2009. This year was different. Persistent, below normal temperatures made Saturday's show less spectacular.

Dozens of people pulled their cars up to watch the birds near the lookout tower at Lock & Dam 16, across the river from Muscatine a mile north of the Norbert F. Becky Bridge. Most of the hopeful viewers didn't get out of their cars because there were no eagles in the air around 11 a.m.

Eagle Watch volunteer Vernon Ohlendorf said he drove out to the dam several times last week and never saw more than three or four eagles. "I live on the bluff and usually see many each day, but this year it's not the same," he said. "Some years there are only a few and others I have counted 100 or more in this area." Ohlendorf helped people at the tower by focusing spotting scopes onto the trees across the river where a handful of eagles were perched.

McKay said he surveys the river from Clinton to Keithsburg, IL. And typically counts 3,000 to 4,000 bald eagles in the 80-mile stretch. Next week he will do the survey for this year but expect to see only about 1,000 eagles.

Naturalists from Wildlife Prairie State Park near Peoria, IL, presented two bird programs during the free event. People were able to get up close with, and learn about, owls, a turkey vulture and a falcon. A bald eagle named Mitkitcha is usually the star of the show but was unable to attend this year because it's getting to know a new trainer.

Rudy Vallejo, a member of the Kickapoo Tribe of Kansas, demonstrated the significance of the bald eagle to Native American culture by performing a dance in honor of the bird. Also participating Bald Eagle Days with booths were local Master Gardeners from the Iowa State University Extension, Muscatine Branching Out and the Muscatine Arboretum, among others.

Reprinted from Muscatine Journal, Muscatine, IA, 2010.

Bald Eagles Respond to Help

By Wendy B. Dial

Stretch your arms straight out for an instant idea of the bald eagle's wingspan. Then add a couple of feet. The U.S. Congress was impressed enough by the large, fiercely majestic looking bird of prey to make it the national emblem in 1782. More than two centuries later, the eagle still is the symbol of U.S. government, freedom and democracy.

It is also the symbol of one of America's best environmental success stories. Due to outstanding conservation measures, the federal government removed the bald eagle from its endangered species list in 2007. Florida took the bird off its imperiled species list the following year.

"Just because it has been delisted does not mean that it's no

longer protected," said Ulgonda Kirkpatrick, eagle plan coordinator for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). "No; you can't take down the tree with the bald eagle nest in it. Bald eagles are certainly still protected."

You might think a strong, high-flying bird with fearsome talons, a sharp beak and even sharper vision could fend for itself. *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* can see for a mile and a half. The second-largest eater, either. It scavenges for fish carcasses and carrion of other animals, swipes food from other animals and hunts live prey when needed.

Nevertheless, it was no match for habitat loss; being shot, trapped or poisoned; and the ravages of the pesticide DDT on the birds' eggshells. What mankind wrought, mankind had to fix. In 1972, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency banned DDT. Congress passed the Endangered Species Act in 1973 and added the bald eagle to its protective umbrella in 1978.

These changes made a difference. Florida's population of bald eagle nesting territories went from 200 in the 1970s to 1,340 in 2009. "The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service says Florida is showing the rest of the nation how to protect and manage the species—by leaps and bounds," Kirkpatrick said. The state has more bald eagles than any state other than Alaska and Minnesota.

Even when the numbers were low, Florida was better off than other states because of its aquatic habitats and rich supply of fish—eagles' favorite food. An FWC scientist coordinated a project to help Georgia, Alabama and Oklahoma jumpstart their eagle populations a quarter-century ago. Scientists gathered 18 bald eagle eggs and rushed them to Oklahoma to hatch. The hatchlings were fed by eagle puppets, so the chicks wouldn't imprint with humans. When the birds were strong enough, scientist took them to roosts in the three states.

The courtship ritual looks like warfare. Bald eagles are daredevils. They literally fall head-over-heels for each other. They "fly to great latitude, lock talons, and tumble cartwheel back to ward earth," breaking off at the last minute to avoid crashing, according to "The Birds of North America Online."

They're basically monogamous for life, and good parents. Eagles walk carefully around the nest with clenched feet, apparently to prevent their talons from piercing the one to three eggs in a typical clutch. Breeding adults may be very territorial, but bald eagles are social at their communal roosts, chattering away the hours.

One quirk belies the eagle's mighty image. The big bird sometimes has a weak voice. "The Birds of North America" describes it as a rapid choking sound "Ki-ki-ki-ki-ki-ker." This nation's emblem is actually a bald eagle that is 5 or more years old. Young eagles start out completely dark brown and gradually become the easily recognizable dark brown bird with white head, neck and tail. In between juvenile birds are a mottled brown and white.

Before leaving home, fledglings practice flying from one side of the nest rim to the other, then to nearby branches. Half of the first "flights" are unsuccessful, according to "The Birds of North America." Those that fall to earth may have to stay there a week or so to regain strength. In the meantime, if the parents can get to the young eagle, they'll feed it while it is on the ground. Once on the wing, juveniles in Florida tend to disperse north.

The bald eagle flies by slow, deep wing beats. It holds its wide wings at a right angle to its body on a flat plane. Its golden eyes watch intently over the wild landscapes of America.

Scientists, government agencies and citizens are watching the bald eagle too, this time to protect it. To learn more, go to MyFWC.com/Wildlife. Despite being removed from Florida's

imperiled species list, the bald eagle can't be disturbed or harmed except under conditions specified by federal and state permits. Management plans, such as Florida's, and the science of population surveys also ensure future chapters of the eagle's bittersweet success story have a happy message.

To think: in the first half of the 20th century, humans placed bounties on eagles. Now, those who illegally kill or endanger a bald eagle have to pay fines of up to \$200,000 under the federal Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. Laws even prohibit possessing the bird's feathers without a permit.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) adopted its new Bald Eagle Management Plan in 2008. It outlines strategies to maintain the Florida population of bald eagles at or above current levels "in perpetuity." This plan closely follows the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's national guidelines.

Part of the FWC's management plan for eagles involves making sure people and development keep their distance. Nests are protected by state rule and federal laws. Under state rule, an FWC eagle permit is not needed for any activity occurring outside the recommended 660 foot buffer zone. The FWC prohibits all activity within 330 feet of a nest during nesting season or when eagles are using a nest.

If the FWC management plan guidelines cannot be followed, the agency recommends obtaining a permit whether for disturbance, nest removal or scientific collecting. The FWC offers technical assistance for projects requiring a permit and ample information about its Bald Eagle Management Plan online at MyFWC.com/Eagle. "The new guidelines reflect optimism in mankind," said Ulgonda Kirkpatrick, bald eagle coordinator for the FWC. "Luckily, people are respectful of the eagle and of regulations protecting it. Being such an important symbol, it evokes a lot of emotion."

Get Involved:

- If you suspect potential wildlife law violations, call the FWC's toll-free Wildlife Alert hotline: 888-404-3922.
- If you find a nest, make sure it is an undocumented one by using the eagle nest locator on the FWC website, and follow the directions to report a new nest. Still unsure? E-mail bald eagle@MyFWC.com with the name of the county the nest is in, the global positioning system (GPS) location or nearest address, direction and distance to the nest and your complete contact information.
- Volunteer with Audubon of Florida's Eagle Watch. Spend 20-30 minutes a month documenting eagle activity. Visit fl.audubon.org/who_centers_CBOP for more information.



A bald eagle dropping a Coot it had just captured photographed by Board Member, Jane Ward, Lewistown, IL



1st 2010 Bald Eagle Bus Tour participants looking for eagles
Photo by Steve Hippchen

Scientists Skim Treetops to Study Nests

"Love and Marriage...go together like a horse and carriage. You can't have one without the other." These lyrics to an old Frank Sinatra song apply to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) bald eagle nest survey and management plan. One exists for the other.

For three decades, FWC biologist working for the agency's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute has climbed into a small plane from late fall to early spring to count the number of bald eagles nesting territories, each one made up of an active nest and surrounding habitat. A bald eagle's territory often includes unused nests.

Jane Brush, an avian research biologist with the FWRI, coordinates this annual count.

"We used to go nest-to-nest throughout the entire state, but now that we have more than 2,000 potential nesting territories, we'd be sacrificing solid information on productivity to continue doing that," Brush said.

Statisticians recommended the FWC survey a third of the state each year. With the new system, retired FWC biologists Steve Nesbitt and John White have time to make two to five passes over each active nest to record everything from presence of adult eagles to the number of eggs in a clutch, incubating behavior and the number of chicks.

Pilots ferrying Nesbitt and White skim the treetops so the biologists can observe what goes on in the giant nests. One U.S. nest reportedly weighed thousands of pounds. Another nest, in St Petersburg, measured 9.5 feet in diameter and was 20 feet tall, according to "The Birds of North America Online."

The FWC's 2009 survey found 1,340 nesting territories. The 2008 survey reported 1,280. Nest produced 1,796, young compared to 1,495 the previous year. Florida's eagle population totals 3,565 adults and 5,360 with nestlings included.

"The immediate impact of the survey is that if a nest is active, then we apply the Bald Eagle Management Plan guidelines about buffer zones and permitting to the nest," Brush said.

"Many territories discovered when we started conducting surveys are still active today," Brush said. Longevity in a territory is a sign of good habitats.

The survey shows that bald eagles' favorite tree for nesting is a dominant live pine. Knowing such details about working habitats helps scientist ensure the bald eagle's continued recovery. ■

(Continued from Page 4)

numbers that influenced federal and then state authorities to take the bald eagle off the endangered species list.

Jody Millar is a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Rock Island. She said the federal agency has been working with the state since those low-number days to collect data about nesting sites. While she is aware of Ingram's objections to de-listing eagles, she politely disagrees. "We want species to on the list that are truly threatened with endangerment. Just because it's a great species doesn't mean it needs to be listed," she says. "In fact, the bald eagle has its own act, the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. It's an extremely protected species."

Winter figures can be problematic, she says, because weather conditions may drive eagles down from Canada or cause them to concentrate wherever there is food. The general assumption behind nesting data is that any time an adult bird is seen on the nest, it is one half of a pair. However, the nests are not checked regularly. "With the success of the bald eagle population, that became a very expensive and time-consuming proposition," she says. "What we are doing now is sampling them."

To Ingram, that's why the nesting numbers are "a sham." He says his numbers are based on eagles actually seen, while the Fish & Wildlife numbers are compiled "by someone sitting behind a desk." But the Endangered Species Protection Board looks at several numbers, including midwinter counts, breeding season counts and nesting data. It recommended that the bird be de-listed in Illinois, as well. "It becomes problematic to use just one or the other," says board Director Anne Mankowski, offering the report headlined "Species Recovery Success Story," which outlined the reasoning. "I certainly do not discount his data," Mankowski says. "We do seek additional data to inform ourselves. Our compilation does not agree with what he presents."

It appears eagle-watching is a more complex endeavor than a simple drive up the river. Matching up the different counts as they are compiled this spring should be interesting. It also appears, however, all parties do agree on at least one thing: Bald eagles are a symbol of conservation efforts worth making. "We should be proud as a people. We recognized the impact we had. We realized we needed to change our ways," Clay says. "It's not a short-term process. It's forever. We have to remain diligent." ■

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Wolves Decline in Yellowstone Population falls as animals lose protection, kill each other in battle for food

By Janice Lloyd

YELLOWSTONES NATIONAL PARK, WY. - A dozen tourists in parkas huddle around wolf researcher Colby Anton in the northern range of park, an area famous for gray wolves, to catch a glimpse of images on his digital camera.

The wolf watchers have become a familiar scene since the animals were reintroduced into the park in 1995 after being gone for nearly 70 years. The wolves have fueled a \$35 million-a-year industry as cars full of tourists spend dawn to dusk looking for wolves and trading tales.

Now the tales are changing. The image on Anton's camera is of a dead wolf he discovered on an 18-mile hike in the high country of the park. "We found it partially buried under the snow, did a necropsy and concluded a wolf from another pack killed the wolf," he says.

The gray wolf population is declining, says Doug Smith, the coordinator of the reintroduction efforts and leader of the Yellowstone Wolf Project that studies and manages the wolves. Wolves are killing each other at a higher frequency to compete for elk, their primary food source, which is less abundant now, he says. "The good times are over," Smith says. His annual census of the parks wolf population is expected to be the lowest in 10 years, he said. Smith is still gathering data but says the number of gray wolves in the park will be 116, a 33% drop from 2003, when the population was at an all-time high of 174.

While parvo-virus and mange continue to reduce the population, part of this year's decline can be traced to the fact that in 2008, wolves lost protection in the Northern Rockies under the Endangered Species Act. Wolves, like all wildlife, are protected inside the park, but when they roam beyond the borders, they fall into the state's wildlife management practices. Idaho and Montana, which borders Yellowstone permitted hunting of wolves this fall. Idaho recently extended it hunt until March.

The Yellowstone pack hardest hit by the hunt is nicknamed Cottonwood. Hunters killed four members of the pack, including the breeding female, her mate and her daughter in a Montana wilderness area bordering the park. "The wolves have it hard enough inside the park," says Rolf Peterson, a wildlife biologist at Michigan Technological University. "The Yellowstone wolves should be treated like national treasures and protected."

Several conservation groups, including the Sierra Club and Defenders of Wildlife, have joined in a lawsuit and argue that the Northern Rockies wolves should be put back on the endangered species list. If wolves are relisted, hunting would be banned. "We're very much against the hunting of wolves at this time," says Jamie Rappaport Clark, executive Vice President of Defenders of Wildlife.

The group faults the states' management plans to reduce wolves from 1650 to 450. State officials state the need to balance the wolves with the habitat and other wildlife. "It probably sound counterintuitive to kill wildlife to protect wildlife," said Caroline Sime, wolf program coordinator for Montana Fish and Wildlife. "We haven't opened the flood-floodgates to killing wolves, but having wolves, livestock and other wild game on the same landscape in Montana is tricky. It's a very tenuous balance."

Montana Fish and Wildlife closed the hunting season early in the area where the Yellowstone wolves were killed and plans to wait until spring to decide about next seasons wolf hunt—if there is one.

Wildlife biologist Peterson says the wolves in the northern part of the park will need to turn to prey other than elk, which he says will help Montana because it doesn't want the animals migrating into the state where they spread disease to cattle. "The wolves are going to have to learn to hunt bison," he said.

The winter elk numbers in the park have dropped from 17,000 to 6, 800 since wolves were reintroduced. Hunting and weather factors have also taken a toll, Smith says. The remaining elk are stronger, he says, making hunting harder for wolves. "I've seen three cases this fall where a pack of wolves have gone after elk and the elk puts up a tremendous fight," Smith says. "I've never seen anything like that before. The wolves are risking their lives to hunt and eat."

Peterson, author of *The Wolves of Isle Royale*, a 50-year study of the wolf packs in the Lake Superior region of the country, says other wolves will move into the territory dominated by the Cottonwood pack and the overall health of the wolves in Yellowstone is good. "This is just part of the ebb and flow," he says.

The roadside spectators still have plenty to see even as the wolf population drops in the park. "This is still the best place in the USA to see wolves," Smith says. "It's just that there's an equilibrium now between the predator and the prey." ■ *Reprinted from USA Today.*

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