

BALD EAGLE



NORTH CAROLINA WILDLIFE RESOURCES COMMISSION

fact sheet, 2005

Found throughout North America, the bald eagle has been a symbol of pride and freedom for the United States for many decades. This magnificent bird has a wing span that reaches approximately eight feet as an adult, and it can weigh more than 15 pounds. The bald eagle prefers to live in areas near a source of water because it feeds primarily on fish. The American bald eagle forms life-long pair bonds and will usually return to the same nesting area every year. With a relatively long life span of up to 40 years, the bald eagle does not need to produce very many offspring per year—a female bald eagle will lay one to three eggs every year.

POPULATION DECLINE

Due to large-scale deforestation over past decades, trapping and shooting by early settlers, and poor water quality, bald eagle populations plummeted through the 1950s, '60s and '70s. In the early 1970s, agricultural pesticides such as DDT and PCBs had alarming effects on eagle populations. These pesticides washed into streams, exposing fish and other wildlife to harmful chemicals. When bald eagles ate the toxic prey, they too ingested the harmful chemicals, which caused them to lay soft-shelled eggs that crushed under the weight of the nesting female. Starting in 1972, Congress passed a series of bills banning DDT and providing protection for these and other raptors.

ESTABLISHING A NEW POPULATION

In 1982, the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission began the North Carolina Bald Eagle Project. One of the first objectives of this project was a “hacking” program, which involved raising eagles in captivity and reintroducing them into the wild. Young eagles were released from artificial nests near Lake Mattamuskeet in Hyde County. Commission biologists released



A mature bald eagle lands on its nest.

29 juvenile bald eagles near the lake from 1983 through 1988. These juveniles were monitored intensely around the lake. In 1984, North Carolina's first post-DDT wild bald eagle nest was documented just seven miles from Lake Mattamuskeet. Today, biologists monitor over 80 eagle nesting territories in the state.

SURVEYS AND MONITORING

Other objectives of the Bald Eagle Project include identifying the location of new bald eagle nests, monitoring activity and productivity of known eagle nests, and providing technical guidance to landowners about how to help



Bald eagle nests are very large and high of the ground.

protect bald eagles and their nesting sites in North Carolina. Commission biologists conduct annual aerial and ground surveys to monitor known bald eagle nests and territorial areas. The number of fledglings are recorded and compiled on an annual basis.

PROVIDING TECHNICAL GUIDANCE

Commission biologists also meet with landowners and timber companies to discuss logging operations around eagle nests. In most circumstances, biologists are able to work with these landowners to protect the eagle nesting sites without substantially interfering with the landowner's objectives.

CURRENT STATUS AND EAGLE RECOVERY

In 1990, the Commission implemented wildlife habitat management practices at Jordan Lake and Falls Lake to provide roosting and nesting habitats for bald eagles. Eagle observation data has shown that eagles prefer large dominant pine trees with an open flight path for roosting and nesting. The Commission created and maintains several of these eagle habitats at both lakes by thinning the timber and allowing individual pine trees to get very



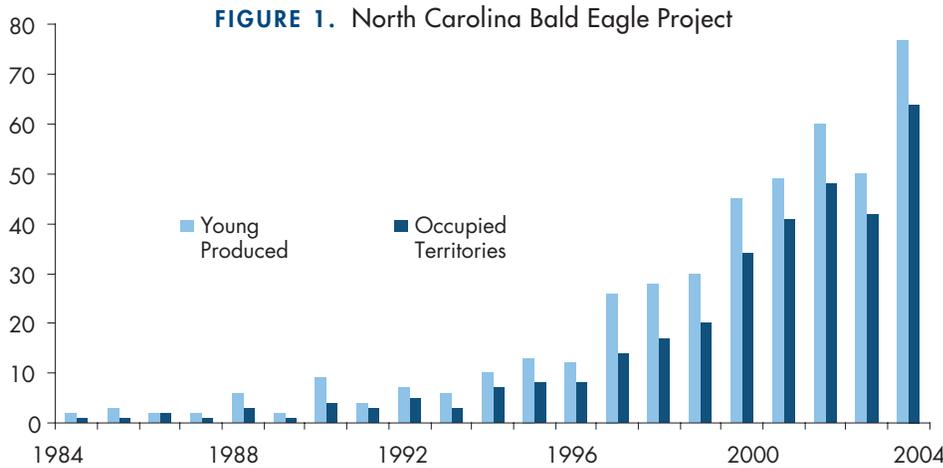
large. Eagles have also been enticed to use the Gull Rock and Goose Creek Gamelands.

The recovery of the American bald eagle has certainly been a success story for our state. In 2004, at least 60 active nesting territories had been established and at least 80 eagles fledged in from these nests in North Carolina. With current population trends and continued protection, biologists hope to see many more bald eagles nesting and reproducing across the United States, which should soon lead the delisting of the bald eagle from the federal list of threatened and endangered species.

Immature bald eagles lack the distinctive coloration of their parents.



This hacking site was used to release bald eagles at Lake Mattamuskeet.



HOW YOU CAN HELP

1. Limit the use of pesticides and herbicides whenever possible to reduce the risk of water pollution.
2. Educate yourself and others on bald eagle biology and conservation efforts.
3. Join a conservation organization to help support eagle conservation in the state.
4. Donate to the N.C. Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Fund.

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