



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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State Wildlife Officials and Volunteers Spot 71 Bald Eagles During Annual Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey

Quabbin Reservoir Tops list with 36 Birds Sighted

BOSTON – An annual one-day survey of wintering bald eagles conducted throughout the Commonwealth today yielded sightings of **71** individual birds, Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs Ian Bowles announced.

This year's preliminary statewide number exceeded 2007's documented total of 48, with the largest number of birds (36) seen at the Quabbin Reservoir. The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, which fielded more than a dozen staff for the survey, noted that the large percentage of immature bald eagles sighted today (**27** birds) bodes well for eagle reproduction in the Bay State.

“Thanks to a strong state commitment to restoring the Commonwealth's bald eagle population and protecting the species' habitat, the number of eagles counted in Massachusetts during this annual survey has grown from eight in 1979 to **71** birds sighted today,” Secretary Bowles said. “Returning this magnificent symbol of America to habitats across the Bay State is a testament to the vision and dedication of state, federal, and private sector partners that have supported Massachusetts eagle conservation efforts over the past 25 years.”

The annual Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey is a nationwide event coordinated by the US Geological Survey (USGS) and the US Army Corps of Engineers. Each year, the number of states participating ranges from 25 to 41, according to the USGS. The nationwide total of bald eagles counted during this annual event ranges from 13,000 to 16,000 birds.

The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, an agency of the Department of Fish and Game, has taken part in the national Survey since its inception in 1979. During this time, the Division has documented through leg band data that eagles wintering in Massachusetts include

Bay State natives, as well as birds hailing originally from Maine, New Hampshire, New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Michigan. The annual count provides wildlife managers with information on local eagle populations, helps officials to identify and monitor important wintering areas, and creates public interest in bald eagles and their conservation.

“The Commonwealth would be unable to collect this unique source of long-term data without the work of our expert Fisheries and Wildlife staff and committed volunteer birders throughout the state,” Fish and Game Commissioner Mary Griffin said. “We would also especially like to acknowledge the efforts of National Grid, which provided a helicopter for today’s aerial survey of the Quabbin Reservoir and Connecticut River, and has been a partner in the Commonwealth’s bald eagle restoration efforts since 1982.”

In addition to the Quabbin, locations where eagles were sighted today included nine eagles at the Connecticut River, five at the Wachusett Reservoir, five in the town of Royalston, four in the Lakeville/Middleboro area, four at the Wattuppa Ponds and Copicut River are in Southeastern Massachusetts, and **eight** at the Merrimack River.

A victim of habitat loss, unregulated bounty hunting, and reproductive failure linked to exposure to pesticides such as DDT, bald eagle populations had plummeted across the country by the time they were placed on the US Endangered Species List in 1973. Their numbers have since rebounded and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service removed them from the federal roster in July, 2007.

Listed as endangered in Massachusetts since the 1980s, bald eagles remain on the state list but are gaining ground in the Bay State – thanks in large part to a restoration project begun in 1982. The DFW and its partners brought young eagles from Canada and Michigan and raised them in cages overlooking the Quabbin Reservoir. Through a wildlife management practice known as “hacking,” the eaglets came to view Quabbin as their home turf and, after fledging, some “hacked” eagles established breeding territories at the reservoir. In 1989, eight decades after the last “historic” bald eagle nest was observed in Massachusetts (on Snake Pond in Sandwich), the first three chicks fledged from two Quabbin nests. Seven bald eagle pairs nested there in 2007.

Last year also marked the first time bald eagles nested successfully at Wachusett Reservoir, a Massachusetts Water Resources Authority drinking water supply for Greater Boston that is overseen by the Department of Conservation and Recreation. Secretary Bowles and Commissioner Griffin assisted DFW staff in banding a chick hatched in the Wachusett nest last spring. Banding young eagles is an important tool for measuring the success of restoration programs – enabling scientists to gather information about survival rates, how far birds disperse when they leave the nest, habitat preferences and causes of death. DFW bands all bald eagles hatched in the Commonwealth each year.

Statewide, there were 26 occupied bald eagle territories last year, including the Quabbin Reservoir, Connecticut and Merrimack Rivers, and areas in Plymouth, Berkshire and Worcester Counties. Sixteen of 25 nests produced chicks in 2007, and 32 young eagles survived to fledge.

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