



Rare Wildlife of New Hampshire

Bald Eagle

Haliaeetus leucocephalus

NEW HAMPSHIRE: ENDANGERED

UNITED STATES: THREATENED

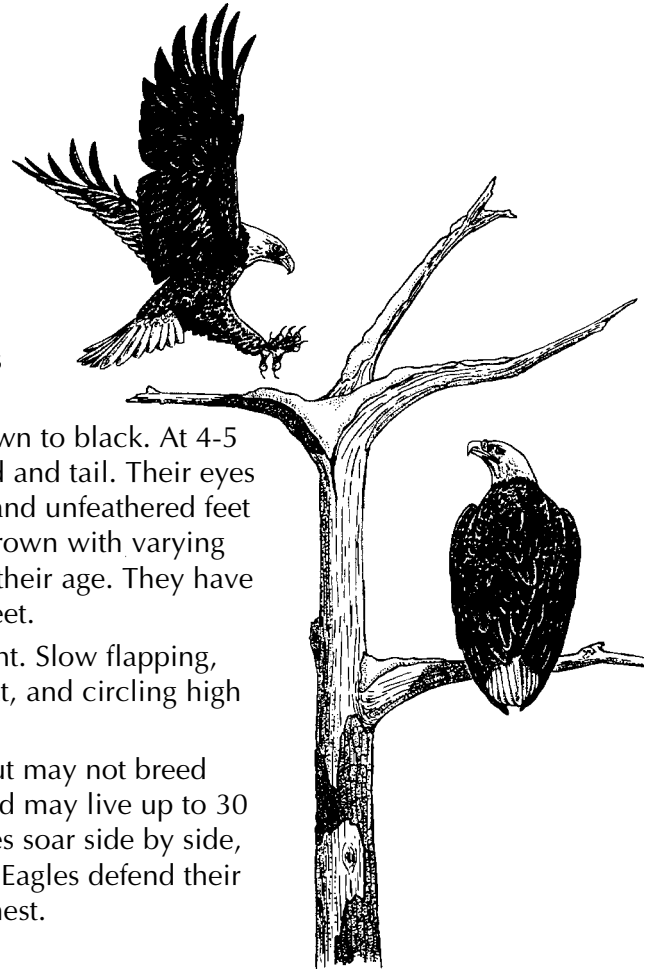
How does it look and behave?

Bald eagles are at least 3 feet tall with a wing span of 6-8 feet. Females can weigh as much as 14 pounds; males weigh 7-10 pounds.

Appearance: The body and wings vary from dark brown to black. At 4-5 years of age they acquire the white head and tail. Their eyes are pale yellow and the powerful beak and unfeathered feet are bright yellow. Immatures are dark brown with varying amounts of white or buff depending on their age. They have brown eyes, a black beak, and yellow feet.

Behavior: Bald eagles are strong and steady in flight. Slow flapping, soaring for long distances with wings flat, and circling high in the sky are characteristic.

Breeding: Eagles can breed when 4-6 years old, but may not breed until much older. Eagles mate for life and may live up to 30 years. When courting, males and females soar side by side, lock talons and free fall through the air. Eagles defend their territories more than 1/2 mile from the nest.

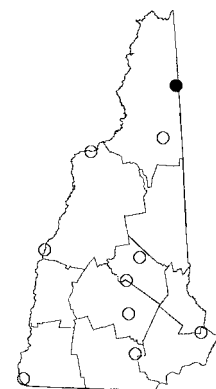


Where is it found?

Habitat: In New Hampshire, bald eagles occur in relatively undisturbed forests along major rivers and lakes or near the coast. Eagles perch on, hunt from, and nest on tall coniferous and deciduous trees or snags near water. They prey primarily on fish and waterfowl, but are also noted for their scavenging. In the Northeast white pine are the most common nest trees, although oak, ash, elm, maple, beech and hickory trees, snags, and artificial platforms are used in some parts of their range.

In winter, they leave the breeding areas and congregate in areas with large expanses of unfrozen, open water. A forest stand that offers protection from inclement winter weather is needed for communal night roosting. Night roosts are most often found near foraging areas, but may be further away if the roost is more protected.

Nest: Nests are built 5-30 feet below the top of tall, open trees near the water's edge. Nests, 5 feet wide and 3 feet deep, are made of large sticks and lined with pine needles, leaves, grasses, and feathers. Pairs often reuse and add on to the nest each year. Both parents incubate the eggs.



Bald Eagle

● nest site

○ winter roosts



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Range:

All of North America was once a breeding ground for the species. Bald eagles are re-colonizing their historic range from Alaska and Canada south to Florida and southern California. Concentrations of eagles occur in Florida, the Chesapeake Bay, the Mississippi River Valley, and the Pacific Northwest.

In New Hampshire, one pair began nesting again in 1989 on Lake Umbagog, after a 40 year absence. Bald eagles are observed each winter in the Androscoggin, Connecticut and Merrimack River Valleys, on Great Bay, and in the Lakes Region. Non-breeding adults and immatures are observed sporadically throughout the state year-round.

What are the management opportunities?

To maintain and expand the state's bald eagle population, it's essential to protect eagle breeding, roosting, and wintering areas. Management agreements, conservation easements, and land acquisitions have been used with public and private landowners to protect some of these areas in New Hampshire.

Foresters, landowners, and other land managers can follow these specific recommendations:

- Protect and maintain remaining undeveloped shorelines on major water bodies.
- Maintain large trees, particularly large white pines, along shorelines of large rivers, lakes and estuaries, for perching, nesting and roosting.
- Winter roost sites are typically located near foraging areas. These roosts are characterized by large diameter white pines spaced far apart. This allows easy access into the roost yet provides sufficient overhead cover to protect against inclement weather. Roost trees often face east on a $\geq 20\%$ slope.
- Establish a 1,320 foot (20 chain) buffer zone around a nest. Maintain all potential nest and perch trees within this buffer. Within a 330 foot (5 chain) radius of the nest, avoid any human disturbance unless it's essential to protect the site. In the 330-660 foot zone, single tree selection and small patch cuts are okay if harvesting is done outside the nesting season which is February-August.
- Other forestry practices are okay in the 660-1,320 foot outer zone as long as the nesting season is avoided.

What should you do if you see a bald eagle?

During the spring and fall migrations, adult and immature bald eagles are regularly observed throughout the state. Although these sightings are interesting, it's most important to report observations of regular eagle activity. If you observe eagle breeding or roosting behavior, record the time, date, where you observed the bird, what it was doing, and a description of its feather coloration (plumage). Note the direction of flight if it flies away and any other significant observations. Information may be sent to NH Fish and Game Department, Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program, 2 Hazen Drive, Concord, NH 03301. To volunteer for the Wintering Bald Eagle Monitoring Project contact Audubon Society of New Hampshire, 3 Silk Farm Road, Concord, NH 03301 or call (603) 224-9909. Eagle observations can also be left on a voice mailbox at (603) 224-9909 ext. 354. Artwork by Victor Young ©.



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