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Eagle History, Tracking Gulls, & Boston Bugs

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MASSACHUSETTS WILDLIFE
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On the Cover: Just before sunset an adult male Bald Eagle departs its nest with a power-lift wing stroke that both launches him into flight and deftly avoids wing contact with the trunk and branch. The adult female and chick have no choice but to lean back out of the way, but they will soon dine on a partially consumed bullhead the male just delivered. Two chicks fledged from this nest, one of four along the Merrimack River, in 2010. Photographed with a Nikon D300 & 550 mm lens @ 1/1000 second, ISO 800. Photo © Bill Byrne

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Bringing Back Magnificence:

30 Years of Bald Eagle Restoration

by Bill Davis

A veteran biologist provides a personal, retrospective look at one of the Division of Fisheries & Wildlife's most famous and successful wildlife restoration programs...

Photo © Jason Zimmer

Somehow, almost 30 years have passed since Jack Swedberg, then Senior Wildlife Photographer for MassWildlife; Paul Nickerson, Endangered Species Chief for Region 5 of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and I, a fresh-out-of-college, recently-hired MassWildlife laborer, stood on the shoreline of the Quabbin Reservoir and decided that the mouth of Prescott Brook, on the east side of the Prescott Peninsula, would be an ideal spot to launch Massachusetts' Bald Eagle Restoration Project. Jack had been photographing wintering bald eagles at the Quabbin for years and knew the reservoir and surrounding watershed like the back of his hand, while Paul, over the previous 6 years, had been instrumental in getting New York State's Bald Eagle project up and running at the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge. I was just a rookie, thrilled to be working with professionals of this caliber and very grateful to be involved with a species as iconic and in need of help as the Bald Eagle.

The premise was simple: acquire young eagles between 4 and 6 weeks of age from wild nests in areas where the population was not endangered; bring them to a new location and raise them in artificial nests in such a way that they would "imprint" on their new surroundings as they grew and developed; then release them to the wild. In theory, the imprinting would compel the birds to return to their adopted home in 4 or 5 years when they began to mature. (At the time, waiting 4 or 5 years for results seemed like an eternity.)

Paul reported that New York's project was showing promising signs; that eagles released at Montezuma beginning in 1976, our nation's Bicentennial, were surviving to maturity, pairing off, and becoming territorial. With this vote of confidence, Massachusetts became the third state in the nation (California began in 1980) to embark on eagle restoration. Not coincidentally, our project began in 1982, the bicentennial year of the Bald Eagle being officially designated as our national symbol. It seemed only fitting that we would begin our efforts on this significant anniversary.

Bald Eagles are unique to the North American continent and were likely common when Europeans began to settle

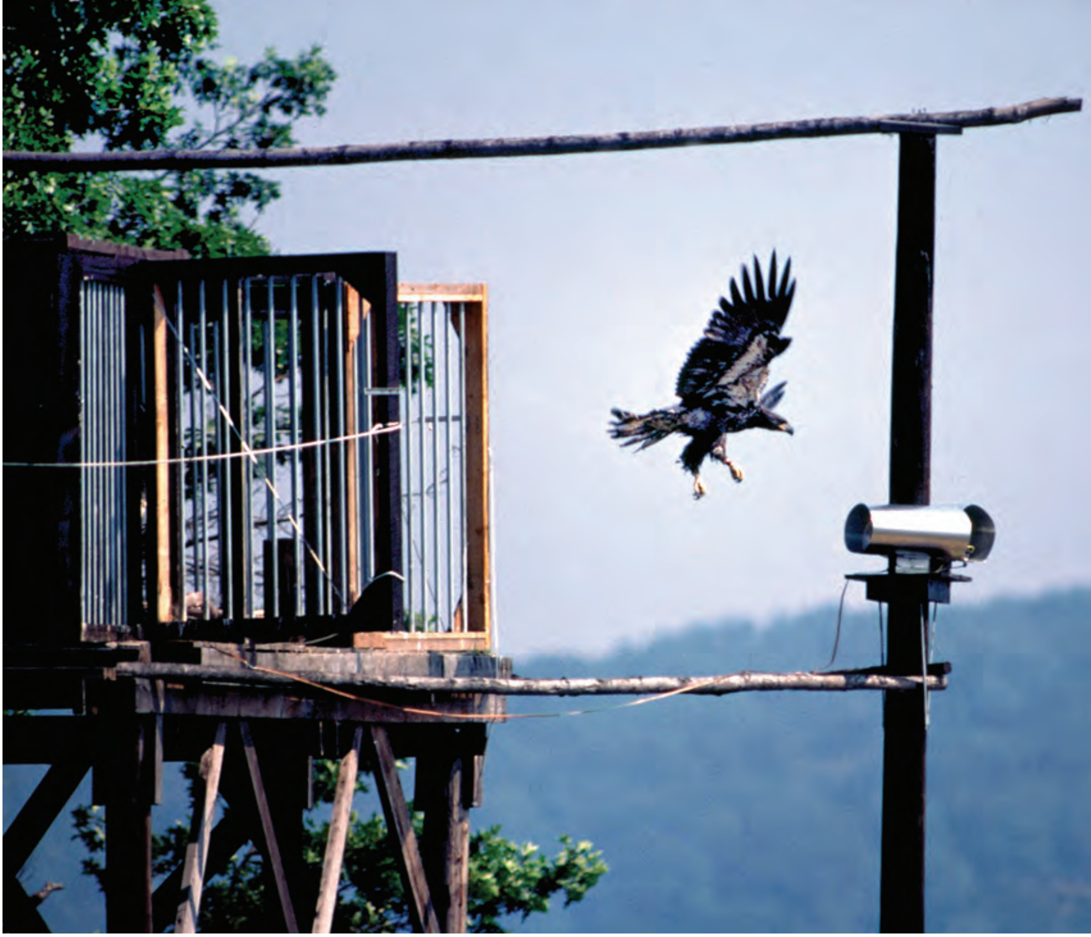


Photo © Bill Byrne

One of the two chicks hacked from the Quabbin tower in 1983 takes to the air for the first time on "release day." This was the only year we raised chicks from Manitoba. The chicks from the previous (first) year came from Michigan, and all those that followed came from wild nests in Nova Scotia.

in the New World. Historic references are vague, but it would be reasonable to assume that Bald Eagles were nesting throughout Massachusetts during early colonization, virtually anywhere there were abundant fish to feed on and tall trees in which to nest. Coastal Massachusetts, the Connecticut and Merrimack river valleys, and the great ponds Assawompsett, Quinsigamond, Quaboag, Snipatuit, Onota and the like would all have provided ideal eagle habitat. Ironically, the same nation that adopted the Bald Eagle as its national bird in 1782 would almost doom it to extinction over the next 150 years.

Massachusetts provides an accurate example of what happened to the Bald Eagle historically. Our early agrarian society needed open fields for crops and pastures, and settlers cleared approximately 80% of our original forested landscape. Forests were felled along our lakes and rivers to provide building materials for a growing nation and to expose the fertile soils. As the trees fell, so too did the eagle population. Combine habitat loss with the common misconception of the day that eagles were a threat to children and livestock, and the losses mounted. The final straw came with the degradation of the remaining habitat during the industrial revolution when our major rivers ran dark with wastewater and fish populations were severely impacted. Here in the Bay State, the last suspected eagle nest and territory was in the vicinity of Snake Pond in Sandwich, and it disappeared around 1905.

Photo © Bill Byrne

The Division's former senior wildlife photographer, Jack Swedberg (left, foreground) and Dr. Charles Sedgwick (right) of the Tufts School of Veterinary Medicine attach a radio transmitter to the tail feathers of a soon-to-fledge eagle in 1985. Behind them (from left) are Dr. Mark Pokras (Tufts), Dr. Tom French (DFW), and a veterinary student from Tufts. Swedberg (known in certain circles as "Father Eagle") was the foremost instigator of the original plan to restore eagles to Massachusetts.

While the Commonwealth's eagles were extirpated around the turn of the previous century, they weren't faring all that much better in the remainder of the country. During the decades following World War II, numbers of nesting eagles dwindled in the traditional strongholds of the Great Lakes states, the Pacific Northwest, Florida, and Chesapeake Bay. Even Maine saw its numbers drop to a scant 40 nesting pairs. The culprit this time was not habitat loss or persecution, but rather the pesticide DDT. This persistent chemical was widely used for insect control: broadcast by planes and sprayer trucks over huge areas to control mosquitoes, and also to treat agricultural crops. It was taken up in minute amounts by organisms at the lower end of the food chain, but accumulated to harmful levels by the time it reached the animals at the top of the food chain, Bald Eagles included.

The result was impairment of the eagles' ability to produce calcium, a core component of egg shells. Thin-shelled eggs were laid that could not stand up to the rigors of incubation. As the eggs cracked, the developing embryos died, with the result that few chicks were produced in any one nesting season. Over time the older eagles died off and there was insufficient recruitment of younger birds to keep the population stable.

DDT was banned in the U.S. in December 1972, allowing the environment to gradually cleanse itself and the remnant eagle population to begin to recover. The process would be slow in the northeastern U.S., however, so the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and New York Department of Environmental Conservation began translocating eagles from Alaska to the Empire State. Massachusetts soon

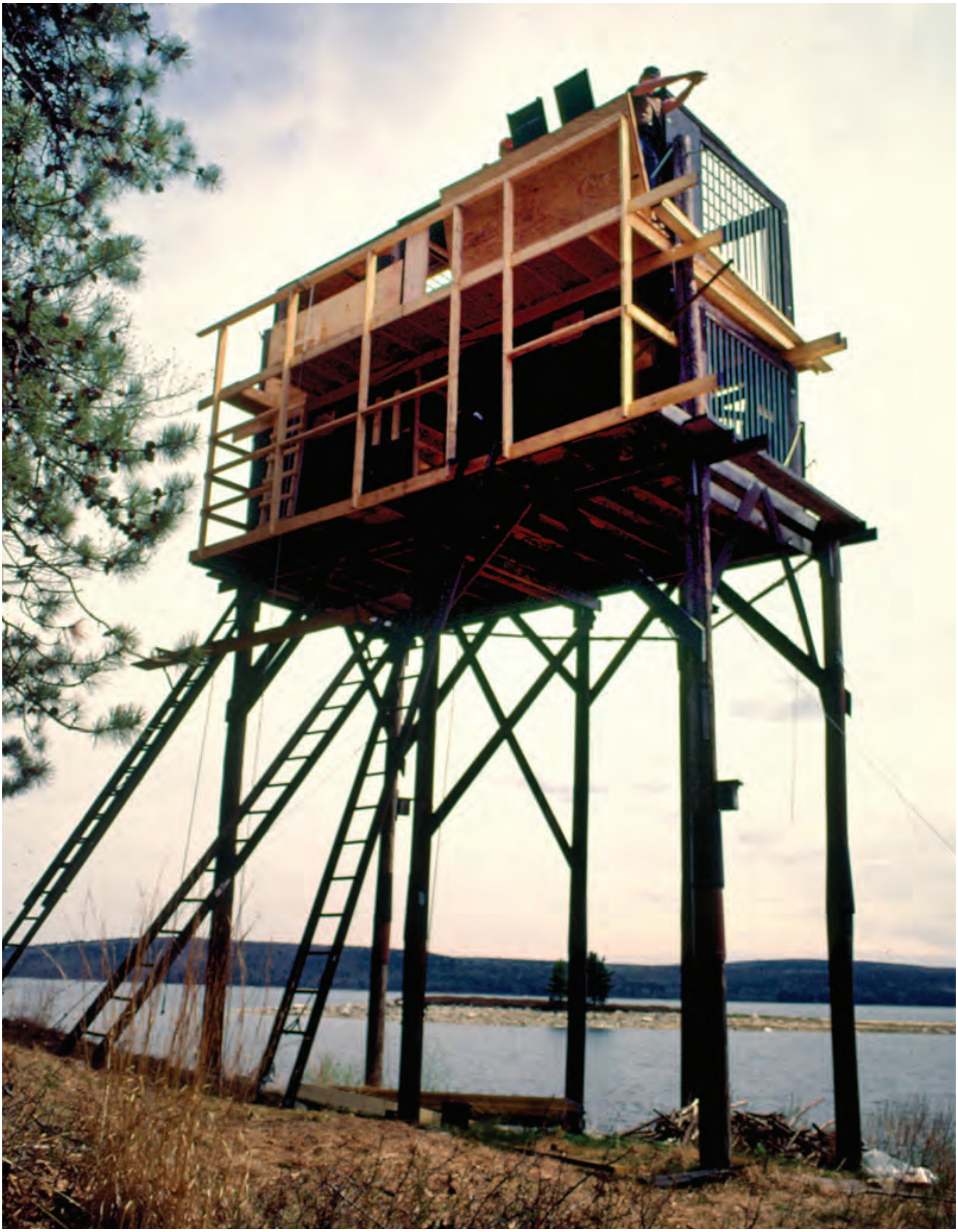


Photo © Bill Byrne

The eagle hacking tower at Quabbin, long since dismantled and removed, was designed to allow the eagle chicks to be observed and fed without ever seeing or coming into direct contact with people. This kept the birds as wild and naturally fearful of people as possible. This shot was taken in 1985 when DFW staff (one of the "marginally skilled but highly enthusiastic carpenters" can be seen clowning for the camera) added a second story to the tower that allowed us to raise up to eight eagles at a time. Island in background is the site of the infamous "lost boat" incident related in the text.

Photo © Bill Byrne

While this almost fully developed eagle chick, recovered from one of our wild nests, was a natural mortality, one of the key factors in the eagle population decline in the decades following WWII was thinning eggshells caused by the bioaccumulation of the insecticide DDT in adult birds.

followed suit with its own project to accelerate the eagle's return.

ARRIVAL

In the spring of 1982, permission to proceed with the Massachusetts project was granted by the Metropolitan District Commission (now DCR's Division of Water Supply Protection) as consistent with their mission to manage the Quabbin watershed. Jack Swedberg assembled a crew of marginally skilled but highly enthusiastic carpenters consisting of myself, Central District Supervisor Chris Thurlow, MassWildlife Photographer Bill Byrne, and District Wildlife Biologist Mike Ciborowski. With help from Massachusetts Electric Company (now National Grid), utility poles were set and the framework of a tower, a 30-foot platform overlooking the reservoir, began to take shape.

Progress on the structure was steady. No one objected to longer than normal hours because of our pristine location and constant rewards of close encounters with deer, beaver, coyote, loons, and other Quabbin wildlife. Eight-foot-square cages were built atop the tower and artificial eagle nests were constructed inside with sticks borrowed from a nearby abandoned beaver lodge. One-way glass was installed between and behind the cages to allow for eagle observation and remote feeding. Fish were stockpiled in a pool of Prescott Brook, a pop-up tent trailer was moved on site, and UMass graduate student David Nelson was selected to raise the eagles as part of his Master's degree requirement. We were ready.

If wild animals could ever be called celebrities, then the first two eagles brought to Massachusetts in 1982 would certainly qualify. Taken from two multiple-chick wild nests along the Menominee River of Michigan's Upper Peninsula by the Department of Natural Resources, the two young eaglets were shipped to Logan Airport courtesy of Republic Airlines. After a quick exam by Bill Satterfield, DVM, the birds were flown from Boston to Quabbin on a float plane piloted by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Clyde Bolen. The plane touched down on Quabbin's clear waters and taxied to the gravel shoreline where the two wooden transport crates, on loan from New York State, were quickly off-loaded and carried to the tower. The chocolate brown, 5- and 6-pound eaglets were carefully taken out of the crates and placed together in one of the eagle cages. The media, staff, and colleagues present took photos and documented the historic event. The eaglets panted, preened, and pecked at the large white sucker placed in their nest. They appeared entirely unimpressed with the whole event. The Eagle Project had officially begun!

Wildlife biologists seldom name the animals they work with, but this occasion was special so we allowed ourselves some latitude. The general consensus is that Dr. Wendell Dodge, Unit Leader of the UMass Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit and Dave Nelson's academic advisor, came up with the simple but bicentennially appropriate names of "Betsy" and "Ross." The names stuck. (As an aside, the only other Bald Eagles in Massachusetts with similarly patriotic names live at the Ecotarium, a science and nature museum in Worcester. These non-releasable eagles are on exhibit and are named "Liberty" and "Justice." The Ecotarium zoo staff affectionately refers to the pair as "Mr. and Mrs. Forall.")

BABYSITTING

Raising young eagles may seem like a glamorous job at first glance, but there was a lot of work involved, and it often had to be done under less than ideal conditions. First and foremost, the eagles had to be fed twice a day, rain or shine, hot or cold, windy or calm. This meant pulling nets, every day, rain or shine, hot or cold, windy or calm, and usually by yourself. Our most effective tools were three 125-foot gill nets, set in various locations off the east side of the Prescott Peninsula. On a good day we'd catch just enough white perch, white suckers, and brown and yellow bullheads to feed the birds. At other times the nets were either completely empty, or, if we happened to hit a school just right, completely full of white perch.

Either result meant a 2-mile trip up the peninsula to the Five College Radio Astronomy Observatory to either take fish out of our freezer or make a deposit of the surplus catch. Once in a while you'd be rewarded with a surprise catch, like a 6-pound smallmouth bass or a 16-pound lake trout. These leviathans were usually just barely caught by the lower jaw, as they were too big to enter the mesh of the net. We'd weigh them and record the data for MassWildlife's Quabbin fisheries biologists, and then return them to the deep.

Dave Nelson took on the task of living at Quabbin for the 1982, 1983, and 1984 summer seasons, raising and releasing a total of 11 eaglets that came from Michigan (2), Manitoba (4), and Nova Scotia (5). Dave graduated and Jack next offered the attendant's job to Dianne Benson, the first female falconer in Massachusetts and a licensed wildlife rehabilitator. Dianne raised 8 birds obtained from Nova Scotia in 1985 and is credited with refining our techniques, adding vitamin supplements to the eagles' diets, and painstakingly cutting their 16 pounds of fish per day into easily swallowed strips, just like an adult eagle would provide it to its chicks in the wild.

I was fortunate to take over the attendant's duties for the summers of 1986, 1987, and 1988 and saw 22 eagles take wing over that period. All of those birds came to us courtesy of the Nova Scotia Department of Lands and Forests and, with the retirement of Jack Swedberg, I was lucky enough to help acquire the "Class of 1988" with the help of Provincial biologists Dave Harris and Dan Banks, as well as their Director, Peter Austin-Smith. The birds and I flew first class courtesy of Wyman Gordon Company's corporate jet and pilots Dick Buckau and Ken Bonk. In short, being part of the project in this capacity was an opportunity and a privilege that none of us will ever forget.

Betsy and Ross, like all of the 41 eagles raised and released from the Quabbin tower, were outfitted with tail-mounted radio transmitters just prior to their first flight. (The tail-mount design, though effective at the time, is obsolete today, replaced with technologically improved "backpack" designs as mentioned in the gull research article elsewhere in this issue. Back then, satellite tracking simply wasn't an option.) The transmitters would enable biologists to track the birds and locate them if they ran into trouble. We were, after all, serving as their surrogate parents, and adults in the wild continue to provide for their young long after they leave the nest. First flights were always a nerve-wracking experience, for eagles and their caretakers alike. Ross flew like a pro when the cage doors were opened and made an awkward landing along the shoreline. Betsy struck out over open water, heading east toward Mt. Pomeroy, but quickly tired. She fluttered down on the reservoir with her wings splayed out on the surface, floating easily while Dave Nelson, fellow graduate student Ken Elowe, and I took off after her in our 13-foot Boston Whaler. She was too tired to put up much of a fight when Dave grabbed her and draped a shirt over her head to calm her. Dave could have used a sedative himself!

The 7 years of raising young eagles and their subsequent releases "flew" by, and as of the fall of 1988 there were 41 young eagles on the wing that we hoped had been duped into thinking the Quabbin region was their home. We'd stay at Quabbin late each summer, long after the birds had left the tower, monitoring the eagles using the radio telemetry equipment and supplementing the natural food supply with fish we placed along the shoreline. As winter approached, we continued to provide food, mostly in the form of road-killed deer, which the eagles eagerly scavenged. On one particularly bleak, late-November day, I picked up a large road-killed buck and headed to the Quabbin. Arriving at the mouth of Prescott Brook, I wrestled the deer into the bow of the 13-foot boat for a quick trip to the small island just to the east of the eagle tower.

The deer carcass would last a long time if placed on the island, which would remain essentially inaccessible to Quabbin's thriving coyote population until the surface of the reservoir froze. The wind was strong from the north and small white-caps were forming as I motored out of the cove toward the island. Snow flurries swirled around the boat as I beached it on the island's sandy shoreline. A second wrestling match ensued as I flopped the deer off the bow and dragged it away from the water's edge. I cut a few long slices through the deer's hide to expose the red meat for the eagles, and then looked up and noticed a boat heading south, about 30 yards offshore.

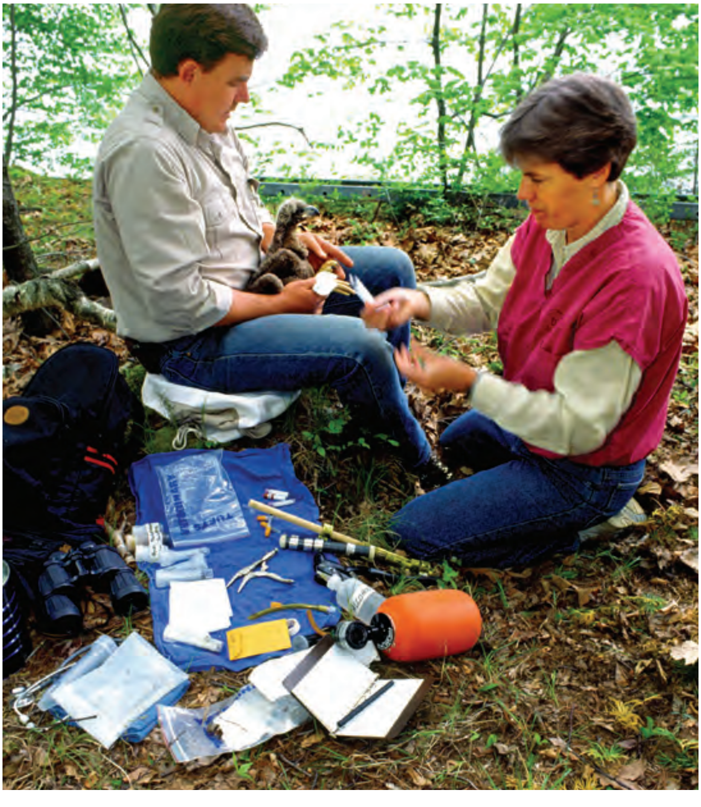


Photo © Bill Byrne

The author and Mrs. Davis process and band an eagle chick from a wild nest in the early 1990s. Mrs. Davis (then Ms. Benson) had been the caretaker for the 1985 season, the first to raise eight chicks at once. The author took over the "babysitting" duties from 1986 to 1988, and successfully fledged 22 chicks during that period. The two caretakers were wed in 1991.

"That looks like my boat," I thought, and then quickly realized "That IS my boat!" Once the weight of the deer had been taken off the bow, the wind had pushed the boat off the shoreline and now it was on its way toward Goodnough Dike!

It's amazing how many thoughts can go through your mind in a fraction of a second: "Do I swim for the boat or do I stay put on the island? Is there going to be anyone else out on the reservoir on a day like this?" I like venison, but not THAT much!"

I looked at the boat. I looked at the deer. Boat. Deer. Deer. Boat. Off came my jacket, shirt, shoes, and pants, and with all the grace of a startled hippo, I plunged into the water. I don't even remember pulling myself into the boat; I think I swam right over the gunnels! Luckily the finicky motor started and I returned to the island, pulled the bow well up on shore, and quickly re-dressed before heading back to the Peninsula. A truck's heater never felt so good!

Photos © Dave Fuller

THE FIRST NESTS

Our hopes "soared" when we documented a few large sticks placed in the crotch of a mature red oak on Quabbin's Russ Mountain in the spring of 1987, and then saw a full scale eagle nest there in the spring of 1988. The sightings of banded eagles we had recorded, particularly during the winters, suggested Ross had survived to adulthood and was likely one member of the Russ Mountain pair. This was proven to be the case in the spring of 1989, when we were able to ID Ross at the nest, and also identify the female eagle he was paired with as one of the eagles Dianne had raised and released in 1985.

Connecticut Valley District Supervisor Ralph Taylor (left) aims a sling-shot-like device designed to shoot a line over a secure limb near an eagle nest. A climbing rope will then be pulled up with the shot line. Specialized equipment like this improves the safety and efficiency of banding operations, which require personnel to climb to more wild nests (above) every year to retrieve the chick(s) for banding.

Photos © Bill Byrne

Kurt Palmateer, Assistant Fish Culturist at the McLaughlin Hatchery and one of our most proficient climbers, prepares to capture two eagle chicks. In typical fashion, the older, dominant chick offers a vocal, wings-spread, aggressive display, while its younger nestmate remains passive, keeps its head down, and tries to hide.

A second pair of eagles had established a territory at Quabbin Park, in a huge white pine that Bill Byrne and DCR's Paul Lyons modified with some selective pruning to encourage eagle nesting. This pair was also comprised of birds released years earlier as part of the restoration project. Many hours of patient nest observations were made by us, Quabbin staff, and volunteer eagle watchers like Ed Bennett. Finally, in the spring of 1989, we documented eagle chicks in both the Russ Mountain and Quabbin Park nests.

Bill Byrne and DFW Assistant Director Tom French made the climb to the Quabbin Park nest when the chick was 5 weeks old. Bill poked his head over the rim of the nest with camera in hand and took an historic photo of the first chick produced in the wilds of Massachusetts in more than 80 years. The chick spread its wings and grunted at Bill as he clicked his camera, then toppled over a pine stick and sat down on its haunches. So much for the intimidation factor!

Tom lowered the chick to the ground in a cloth bag and I hustled it a few hundred yards away to be banded, given a quick physical, and introduced to the public and the media. Jack Swedberg was waiting with a smile from ear to ear and proudly held the chick, referring to

Exhibiting behavior typical for a young eagle in the last week or two before it leaves the nest, an exuberant, 10-week-old chick leaps up and down to exercise its wings and balance in preparation for a successful first flight. Any attempt to catch and band chicks of this age will usually result in one or more taking wing.

it as his "grandchild." State and federal leg bands were applied and Charles Sedgwick, DVM, pronounced the chick to be in good health. We quickly returned the young bird to its nest, left the area, and watched from a distance as the adults returned to care for it. We repeated the process at Russ Mountain, where Ross and his mate circled above the nest, scolding Bill Byrne long and loudly. Two healthy chicks greeted Bill at the end of his climb and were lowered, banded, examined, and quickly returned to the nest.

We continued to conduct research on our nesting and wintering bald eagles by making regular observations from a blind along the shoreline of Quabbin, not far from Prescott Brook. Bill Byrne and I would regularly place bait along the shoreline to lure multiple eagles to within camera and spotting scope range. The bond between a nesting pair of bald eagles is strong and remains intact throughout the year. By observing eagle behavior in front of the blind we were able to identify many of the individual birds that made up our first nesting pairs and to document the continuing survival of many of our released eagles. On a particularly memorable day there were a total of 48 different bald eagles in view at one time!

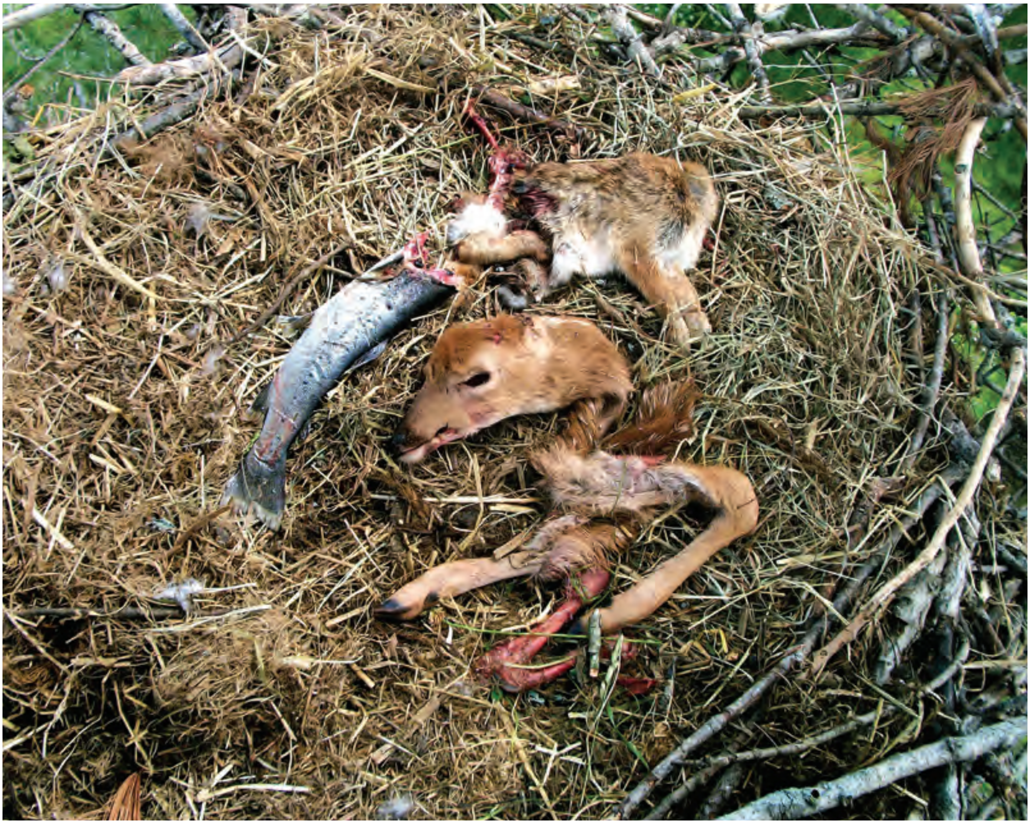


Photo © Kurt Palmateer

Parent eagles are resourceful hunters and scavengers, so diverse food items are often discovered in wild nests. This Berkshire County nest offers a "surf-and-turf" menu, including a salmon, a cottontail rabbit, and the remains of a deer fawn that was probably scavenged from a roadside or another predator. Gray Squirrels, waterfowl, cormorants, gulls, and Musk Turtle remains are also often encountered.

Bill and I would usually double-team the eagles, and work together to read bands and keep track of the total number of eagles we observed. On occasion, however, we would head to the Quabbin solo, get into the blind before daybreak, and not emerge until all of the eagles had gone to roost at dusk. One winter day found me alone in the blind with binoculars, spotting scope and data sheets. The eagles cooperated and I was lucky enough to record multiple band numbers. As the sun began to set the eagles headed off to the north and a favorite roosting site; all but one, that is. I watched the last eagle, an immature, standing out on the ice and wondered why it wasn't flying to roost with the others.

I slowly opened the blind door and waved my hat, hoping that the motion would get the eagle moving, but the bird didn't budge. I crawled out of the blind and stood on the shoreline and the eagle turned away. Now the problem was evident: one wing was drooping severely, likely the result of an aggressive interaction with another eagle while squabbling over the bait. I took off my coat and walked in a wide arc, hoping to keep the eagle between me and the shoreline and not let it get out on the main body of the reservoir where the ice thickness would be questionable. The eagle watched for as long as he could, then started flap-hopping over the ice to the south, paralleling the shoreline. The chase was on!

I closed in on the bird as he (and I) tired. As I went to throw my coat over him, he rolled over on his back, spread his 6-foot-wings, and showed me nothing but flailing talons and beak. I flipped my

Photo © Jeff Breton

Once the eagles began to nest on their own, management switched from raising and releasing to protecting and monitoring. Here the author and a Southeast District crew install a predator guard at the base of a nesting tree that will prevent raccoons and other climbing predators from reaching the nest. Below, a nest with three chicks overlooking the Quabbin. Survival of a third chick generally requires experienced parents and abundant food supplies.

coat beyond his head, dragged it back over him, and made a grab for his feet. Luckily I avoided a handful of talons! With legs and talons under control in my right hand and the bird tucked under my right arm like a football, I headed for the truck. Just getting the keys out of my pocket was a challenge, not to mention getting into the driver's seat and getting the truck started, at which point the eagle grabbed the bottom of the steering wheel with his right foot.

"All right, YOU drive!" I said as I tried to pry the talons from the wheel. Finally underway, the eagle and I drove up the Prescott Peninsula to the Five College Radio Astronomy Observatory where I was able to find a sturdy cardboard box to keep the bird contained and quiet. The eagle made a full recovery at the Tufts Veterinary School under the watchful eyes of Dr. Sedgwick and Dianne, who was now a veterinary technician at the school. Eventually, we were able to band and release the bird

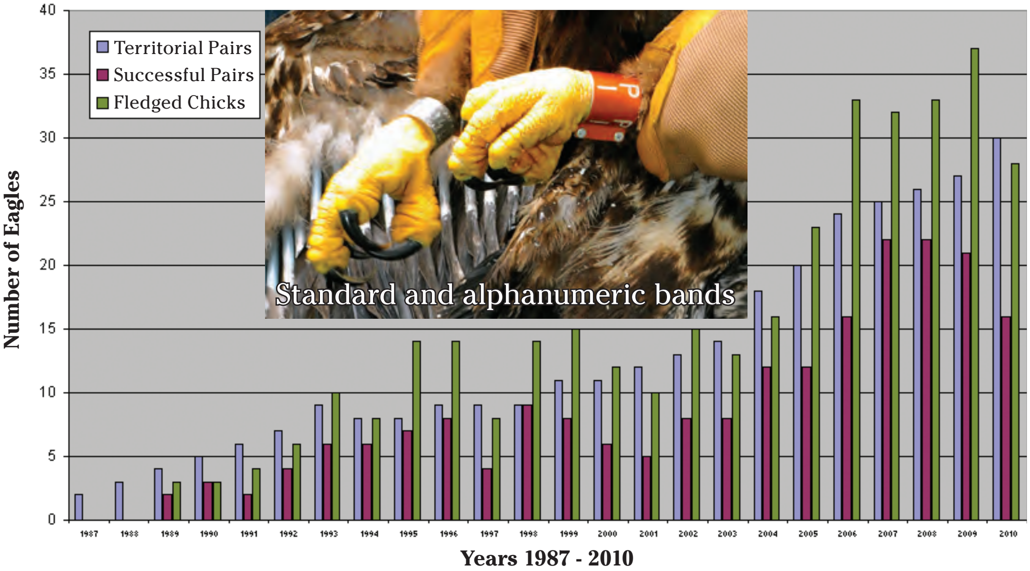
Photo © Bill Byrne

back at Quabbin the following spring. The eagle expressed his gratitude with the raptor equivalent of a handshake, courteously driving several talons into my hand and wrist as I took him out of the transport box. I was thus able to celebrate his good fortune and return to the wild with a tetanus shot!

New pairs of nesting eagles began popping up in the years that followed while the established pairs enjoyed continued nesting success, sometimes building and using alternate nests in their multiple-square-mile territories. Eagles colonized the Connecticut River, first nesting at Barton Cove in Gill, and then just north of the Turnpike Bridge in West Springfield. A pair turned up suddenly at Pocksha Pond in Middleborough, and the Quabbin population continued to expand with new pairs showing up at Mt. Pomeroy, Little Quabbin Island, Hamilton Island, and Mt. Zion.

Quaboag Pond in Brookfield soon had a pair of eagles, as did Wachusett Reservoir in Boylston and Lake Shirley in Lunenburg. Further to the west, more pairs took to the Connecticut River, finding Sunderland, Deerfield, North Hadley, Hatfield and Longmeadow to their liking. And in the Berkshires, Lake Onota in Pittsfield, the Housatonic River in Sheffield, and the Farmington River in Sandisfield saw nesting eagles take up residence. Finally, the Merrimack River was colonized and now has nesting eagles in Salisbury, West Newbury, Methuen, and Tyngsboro. While this isn't a complete list of the Commonwealth's nesting eagles, it certainly shows that the Bald Eagle's comeback has been dramatic and widespread.

From the first two successful nesting pairs documented in 1989, the Massachusetts population has grown to 32 nesting pairs as of 2010. Starting with the first three eaglets banded at those two nests in 1989, MassWildlife personnel have now banded a total of 376 chicks produced from our wild nests, and there's no end in sight. Bald Eagles are displaying a high level of tolerance for human activity, actually nesting in backyards in West Newbury and Lunenburg and most recently prospecting for a nest site in a backyard in Sutton. If New York State is any indication of how high our bald eagle population might get, then watch out! New York's DEC released a total of 198 eagles to the wild during the restoration phase of their project. Today, New York enjoys a total of 173 nesting pairs that



Standard and alphanumeric bands

This chart illustrates the dramatic upward trend in eagle nests in Massachusetts, fed by the original 41 releases, captive-bred chicks placed in wild nests and fostered by wild adults, and of course the chicks hatched in wild nests. We have documented 34 wild pairs building nests in the Commonwealth so far this year.

Photo © Bill Byrne

produced some 244 chicks in 2010 alone (1,540 chicks in the past decade)! While Massachusetts didn't release nearly as many eagles as New York, we are now reaching a threshold point where the number of nesting pairs and total number of chicks produced will soon result in an unprecedented spike in the nesting population. The Bald Eagle is back!

Somehow almost 30 years have passed since we started down the road to Bald Eagle restoration. Our success is shared with, and a tribute to, all the people mentioned in this story and hundreds more, and we've been fortunate to be able to share our progress through the media, *Massachusetts Wildlife* magazine, and dozens of public appearances. There's a strong sense of personal pride as we continue to work with eagles, and we are now confident that our national symbol will be with us for generations to come.

EAGLE INFLUENCE

To say that working on Bald Eagle restoration became a personal and career-long commitment of mine would be an understatement. I could say, in fact, that the Bald Eagle has been responsible for shaping much of my adult life. Six years after Dianne spent her summer with the eagles at Quabbin, we were married. Two years later we had a son whom we named "Ben." We've joked that the letters that spell BEN actually stand for "Bald Eagle Nestling," as we've tried to be as devoted to him as eagle parents are to their own offspring. And in another interesting parallel, a female eagle Dianne raised in 1985 paired off with a male bird I raised in 1986 and they established the original Barton Cove territory on the Connecticut River. They established a territory, we got married. They built a nest, we bought a home. They had young, we had Ben. Then one spring Dianne's female showed up on the territory with a new male eagle sporting leg bands that showed he was from New York. I wonder if Dianne wants to tell me something…

Bill Davis is the DFW's Central District Supervisor, working out of the District office in West Boylston. He lives in Grafton and is a very successful deer and turkey hunter as well as a pretty good fisherman.

MASSACHUSETTS WILDLIFE

GYPSY MOTH
OUTBREAK OF 2016

MASSACHUSETTS WILDLIFE

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