

## Iowa's Bald Eagle Territory Monitoring SURVEY INSTRUCTIONS



### Step by Step Instructions

The overall goal of eagle nest monitoring is to collect three important pieces of information:

- 1) **Is the Bald Eagle territory active/occupied?**
- 2) **How many young, if any, are produced?**
- 3) **How many fledglings, if any, are produced?**

In order to gather the needed information the territory monitor will be required to make a **minimum of 3 visits** to the nest with binoculars and/or a scope, and **spend 30 minutes or more** watching the nest at each visit. The following the steps should be followed:

#### 1) *Locate the nest*

- Monitors should scout for the nest each year prior to the nesting season and note the best viewing locations.
- Any changes to the nest site location, including the nest's absence, should be recorded and reported to the nest monitoring program coordinators.
- If you are unable to find a nest, conduct a thorough search of the area within a 1-2 mile radius of the original nest site.

#### 2) *Visit 1: Is the Bald Eagle Territory active/occupied?* **Recommended: MARCH 1-31**

- Monitors should visit the nest site during the first month of the nesting season during daylight hours when visibility is good (no fog or rain).
- Spend at least 30 minutes observing the nest for any eagle activity on or within 50 yards of the nest site.
- If no activity is noted, a further visit may be needed during this initial time period and monitors should plan on making visit 2 as directed in order to confirm that the territory is inactive.

#### 3) *Visit 2: How Many Young are produced?* **Recommended: MAY 1-20**

- The purpose of this visit is to count the number of young in the nest. A spotting scope will be an especially useful tool for this task.
- Tips for seeing and counting young:
  - Be patient and make multiple visits.
  - Try different vantage points for viewing.
  - Schedule visits to coincide when the young are 5-7 weeks of age, as they will be bigger and more active and therefore easier to see.

#### 4) *Visit 3: How Many Fledglings are produced?* **Recommended: JUNE 1-15**

- Monitors should visit the nest during the final part of the nesting season and record the number of chicks preparing to fledge.
- What counts as a fledgling? The eaglet has fully developed feathers, is adult sized and may be doing wing exercises or exploring the edges or outside of the nest. If they've already made some initial flights they may be perched in the vicinity (within 50 yards) of the nest.

5) Enter data and/or Submit Data Sheets

- **By August 1:**

- Enter data in online database if you are able: <https://programs.iowadnr.gov/vwmp/>
- Submit data sheets using the stamped self-addressed envelopes to: VWMP; Iowa DNR Boone Wildlife Research Station; 1436 255<sup>th</sup> St.; Boone, IA 50036; [vwmp@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:vwmp@dnr.iowa.gov).

**Other Helpful Information**

**Etiquette!!** Especially in the early part of the nesting season, eagles are VERY sensitive to any kind of disturbance. It is important during this early part of the nesting season that you keep your distance (no closer than 600 feet) and try to be as inconspicuous as possible. Once the young are a little older the parents are less likely to abandon the nest, and you can get a little closer (no closer than 330 feet), while still being respectful and trying to keep disturbance to a minimum.

**Territory** Refers to one bald eagle pair’s breeding territory. This territory may have more than one nest (serves as an alternate nest or replaces destroyed nests) but will never have more than 1 breeding pair of eagles. The territory is what is being monitored, meaning that even if a nest is destroyed and a new nest is built in a different location, monitoring of that newly built nest continues. *How can you tell if two nests are in the same territory?* Excluding certain special situations, any two nests that are within 1 mile of one another and which have not both been recorded as active within the same breeding season are considered to be within the same territory. Any two nests that fall outside of either of these criteria will be considered separate territories unless evidence to the contrary is observed.

**Timeline** The nesting timeline for each pair of eagles will be slightly different and it is for this reason that it may be useful to make some unofficial trips to the territory in order to determine when the various nesting stages begin. This will help you time your official visits within the survey periods so that you have the greatest likelihood of seeing young and counting fledglings etc...

Activity	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Nest Repair and Building												
Egg Laying and Incubation												
Hatching and Tending Young												
Fledging												

\* The darker shading represents the most usual time for the associated nesting activities.

**Inactive**

**Territories** If the territory is inactive one year, and you have done a thorough search within 1 mile of the nest site and have seen no eagle activity, do not assume the territory will remain inactive in future years. Territory monitors should continue to visit the territory for 2 more years after the initial year of inactivity as often a territory will be re-occupied. Information on territory inactivity is just as important as information on an occupied territory!!

**Online** Extra datasheets are available for download online: [www.iowadnr.gov/vwmp/](http://www.iowadnr.gov/vwmp/) You can also access a 20 minute training video on this page if you’d like a refresher! If you’d like to download an electronic version of a nest map, a link to the maps on google drive has been sent to your e-mail or request an electronic map from the coordinator at [vwmp@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:vwmp@dnr.iowa.gov).

**Monitoring**

**Assignments** If you reported a new nest during last year’s nesting season, you will be assigned to be a monitor for that nest automatically, HOWEVER don’t feel obligated to do so! My experience has been that most folks like to do this but if you don’t have time, I would rather you focus on your originally assigned nest. Simply return the nest info form with your other completed datasheets and indicate that you cannot be a monitor for the nest. This really goes for any nests if you are assigned to multiples, though please remember that sentinel nests take priority. If you are unsure about which nests you should prioritize just get in touch with the coordinator!