



Eagles Among Us! by Cindy Eusey, Park Naturalist

The Bald Eagle population in Crawford County is flying high! In 2007, according to Jason Parr, Crawford County Wildlife Officer, three active nests were confirmed in Crawford County. Three other possible nesting sights have been spotted but are not confirmed as of yet by Officer Parr.

During the annual Mid-Winter Bald Eagle Survey conducted by The Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Wildlife, 649 mature and immature eagles were observed and counted by the volunteers. The count is not a perfect measurement because it relies on volunteer spotters over a two-week period. However, this is the highest count ever recorded in Ohio. This is nearly 100 over last year's count.

Eagles are mature enough to breed at three to four years of age. They mate for life unless one of the pair dies. If this happens, another mate will be found. The mating ritual is quite an aerial acrobatic display. The pair will soar through the sky together, making big loops, rolling over, locking talons and plunging in deep dives. It is quite a "roller coaster" ride! Just before it looks like a crash into the ground is inevitable, they break apart and fly upward and start the dance again.

Bald eagles will use the same nest year after year, adding more branches and twigs until the nest is just right. A determined pair can construct a nest in two weeks. These nests are huge! They can be three to five feet across, three to six feet deep and weigh as much as one ton! Location is everything! Nests are usually constructed near lakes and rivers which provide a quick access to food.. Two of the three nests in Crawford County are built in Sycamore trees which frequently grow in wet areas or near rivers!

The largest nest was recorded right here in Ohio. It was known as "The Great Nest" and was located near Vermillion in Lorain County in the 1890's. The massive nest measured 8-feet across, was 12 feet deep and weighed nearly two tons! It was perched 80 feet from the ground and was used by different eagle pairs for more than 35 years until a storm blew it down in 1925!

In February through late March, the female will lay one to three eggs which hatch in about 35 days. Both the male and female will tend to the young chicks. The eaglets will fly within three months but the parents will continue their care for another seven to 10 weeks. Immature eagles are mottled brown in color. The traditional white head and tail feathers do not appear until the eagle is five to six years old. The mature eagle can stand two to three feet tall and have a wing span of six to seven feet. An eagle's life span is about 15-20 years but some have been known to live up to 30 years in the wild.

When going eagle watching, head out before the leaves come out on the trees. March is an ideal month. Take a good pair of binoculars and look for a large nest of twigs high in a big tree. The nest and tree size has to support the weight of these massive birds. Don't mistake squirrel nests, which are made from leaves, with the eagle nests. Some hawks and owls can also make nests from twigs but keep in mind they are much smaller than an eagle's nest.

If you observe an eagle's nest, please report it to Jason Parr, Wildlife Officer or call the Nature Center. State and federal laws protect bald eagles and their nest sites. Any type of disturbance around a nest could cause the birds to abandon the site or discourage them from using the nest in the future. Please have fun but watch from a distance!

