

SPECIES AT RISK in New Brunswick



Bald Eagle

Scientific name: *Haliaeetus
leucocephalus*

N.B. Status: Regionally Endangered

Bald Eagle

Description & Biology

The Bald Eagle is a distinctive bird of prey, with its white feathered head and tail and its yellow feet and bill. It develops its vivid plumage only as it reaches maturity, at the age of four or five years. Juvenile Bald Eagles are entirely brown for their first 2 years of life, after which they begin to develop white feathers.

Bald Eagles have toes that are equipped with strong, sharp talons, which are used to capture their prey. They possess a large, hooked bill used to dispatch prey and to tear food into pieces. They are capable of capturing live large fish, but also feed on carrion, especially in the winter. Aquatic birds and small mammals are also part of their diet.

In New Brunswick, bald eagles return to nesting sites as early as February, and breeding occurs in April through mid-May. Any disturbance during this sensitive period may cause the pair to abandon their nest. The young have usually left the nest by the end of August.

Habitat & Survival

Bald Eagles build their nests of sticks and plant material in the tops of tall trees; most often large white pines. They have the largest nests of any bird in North America; as big as 2m in diameter. These nests are often used for a number of years before they are abandoned. Bald Eagles become very territorial during their breeding season, and defend an area of up to 2 km around their nest.

Nests are usually built at sites that are near open water, where there is an abundance of fish. In New Brunswick, a number of our coastal islands provide suitable habitat and therefore it is not uncommon to see eagles nesting there.

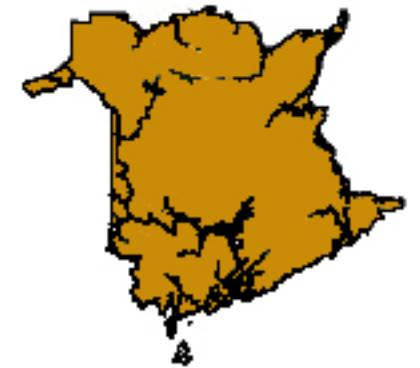
During the winter season these birds are more frequently found in the south-west region of New Brunswick, where there is more food availability due to the fact the Bay of Fundy does not freeze over.

An effective conservation measure for this species is to limit alterations to the environment around nesting sites, and to avoid disturbing nesting pairs.

Distribution

There are two different populations of Bald Eagle in New Brunswick; one which is a permanent resident and spends its winters here, and one that annually migrates to and from southeastern US. Although the Bald Eagle may be found throughout the province, it is more common in the southwestern region where there is more open water.

The distribution of the Bald Eagle extends across Canada, with the exception of the prairies and the arctic, to just south of the United States. The largest concentration of Bald Eagles in eastern North America is found in Cape-Breton



NB Distribution of
Bald Eagles