

Eagle count shows 71 in Mass.

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An annual survey of bald eagles wintering in the state, conducted in the last week, yielded sightings of 71 individual birds, according to state wildlife officials.

The data from the survey, which was done Jan. 8 and 13 by nearly 50 state and federal wildlife officials and volunteers, will be added to similar survey results from other states to track the progress of the recovery of the bald eagle, which was delisted as a threatened species in the federal endangered species program in 2007.

"For the past 30 years, this annual rite of winter has played a critical role in the commonwealth's successful efforts to study and protect these majestic birds and their habitat," said Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Ian A. Bowles.

statewide figure includes 45 adults and 25 juvenile eagles and one of unknown age. The largest number of birds - 37 eagles - was seen at the Quabbin Reservoir. Eagles were also spotted over the Connecticut River and Washusett Reservoir as well as in Fall River, Carver, Plymouth, Sandisfield, Pittsfield, and the Lakeville / Middleborough area.

In 2009, the mid-winter survey detected 81 birds, and in 2008, 73 were seen. However the annual counts are highly dependent on weather. In years when the temperatures are unseasonably warm to the north, fewer birds have to come down to Massachusetts to find open waters for fishing.

In the 1960s, spotting even one wintering eagle in the commonwealth would have been difficult. The use of the pesticide DDT after World War II caused eagles, falcons and other birds of prey to lay eggs with little or no shell. By 1963, only 417 nesting pairs of eagles could be found in the United States outside of Alaska, and none were seen in the commonwealth.

DDT was banned in 1972, and the eagle population began to grow again. In 1980, eight wintering eagles were spotted in the commonwealth.