



BALD EAGLE BREEDING POPULATION STATUS 2024

June 2024

In the spring of 2024, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Division of Wildlife completed its annual bald eagle nesting survey. The survey consists of flying five blocks that are roughly 10 square miles each and looking for eagle nests in woodlots and along rivers. Two of the blocks, which are located around Sandusky Bay (Ottawa/Sandusky counties) on Lake Erie and Mosquito Creek Wildlife Area (Trumbull County) in northeastern Ohio, are flown every year, while the other three are rotated every year. In 2024, the other three blocks were located along the Maumee River (Defiance/Henry counties), around Grand Lake St. Marys (Mercer/Auglaize counties), and around Killbuck Wildlife Area (Wayne County). The survey is usually conducted in March to search for nests when eagles are incubating eggs, but this year's survey was delayed until late March/early April due to logistical issues. A follow-up survey is done in May to determine the number of young produced in active nests, and this was done on schedule on May 8.

The number of eagle nests decreased by 7.6% from 2023, resulting in an **estimate** of 841 eagle nests within the state for 2024 (Figure 1). This is the first decrease in the number of nests since 2013, when nests decreased by 12.6%. This year's decrease may be a response to the avian flu outbreak in 2022 that resulted in eagle mortality and below average nest success and productivity. Furthermore, this statistic was somewhat driven by a lower count of eagle nests in the Mosquito Creek area (-30%), whereas other surveyed areas saw stable nest numbers. The lower count of nests may also be driven by logistical issues in conducting the aerial survey which caused the initial nest survey to be flown later in the spring (late March and early to mid-April). The eagle has also seen unprecedented growth in recent years, and this may indicate some stabilization of the eagle population across the state. Overall, the decrease for one year is not too concerning, but more concerning would be sustained decreases over time.

Fortunately, nest success rates were similar to pre-avian influenza levels documented prior to the 2022 outbreak. The average nest success rate in 2024 was 81.6%, compared with 47.8% in 2022 and 72.9% in 2023. In addition, in 2024 the number of young per active nest was 1.6, which is higher than 0.8 in 2022 and 1.2 in 2023. This also suggests resilience to possible impacts of the avian flu in 2022.

The 2024 survey results present mixed news this year, but the robust nest success and productivity numbers indicate that the bald eagle population is resilient and continuing to thrive. The Division of Wildlife will continue to work with other agencies and rehabilitators on monitoring the impacts of avian flu and continue to enforce protective state and federal laws such as the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act to ensure the ongoing success of the bald eagle.

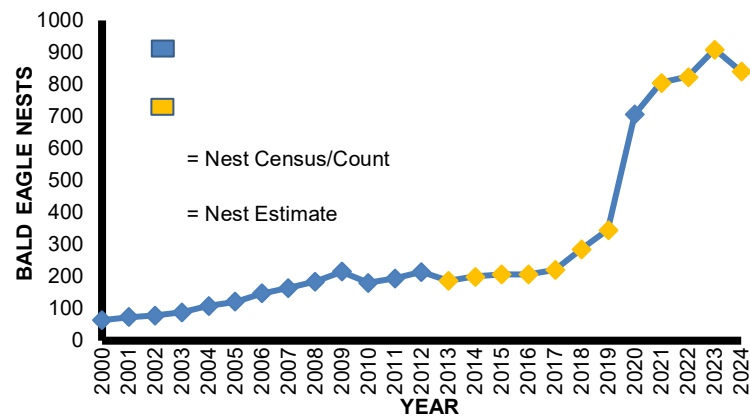


Figure 1. Censused/estimated number of bald eagle nests in Ohio, 2000-2024.