



AUDUBON NATURALIST SOCIETY
OF THE CENTRAL ATLANTIC STATES, INC.

5950 JONES MILL ROAD

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20015

TELEPHONE: 301-652-9188

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SUBJECT: BALD EAGLE NEST SURVEY, CHESAPEAKE BAY REGION - 1974

In 1974 we had ten fewer active (i.e. adult seen in incubating posture or egg/s or young seen in nest) bald eagle nests in this region than in 1973 (56 as compared with 66). However, for the first time on this survey a high of 50% (28 active nests) produced young. The percentage might have been higher except that three usually productive nests, which were active early in the 1974 season, were victims of misfortune; two were blown out by high winds and one was cut down by loggers. Of the 38 eaglets produced in the 28 successful nests, two disappeared while in the downy grayish-white stage (under a month old). In three of the successful nests we saw one eaglet and one egg, with the egg still present up to the time the eaglet changed from gray to brown plumage (over a month)! In all three cases the egg and eaglet were very close to each other and the egg did not appear to be broken. We have seen broken eagle eggs in nests in past years but never an apparently whole egg in a nest where there was also an eaglet present. There were at least nine adult pairs of eagles seen in formerly active nest sites (some active in 1973) but were not used in 1974 for egg laying. Thus, we do have at least 65 adult pairs of bald eagles in the nesting season in the Chesapeake Bay Region.

The accompanying table provides data on active eagle nests by state and compares the 1974 data with the previous five years. A few interesting trends are evident. First, the bald eagle nesting population in the entire region appears to be stable; secondly, although about equal in numbers, only about 1/3 of the Virginia population of nesting bald eagles

successfully hatched out young while 2/3 of the Maryland population was successful. However, this is better than the 25% or less figure for the Virginia population in 1969-1972. While the number of successful nests in Virginia has stayed about the same (average of seven) for six years, the number of successful nests in Maryland has doubled (from about ten to 20).

One interesting comparison is what's happened to the Virginia and Maryland populations of nesting bald eagles along the Potomac River. On the Virginia side, we went from 20 pairs in the 1950's to a low of eight pairs in the early to mid 1960's and have crept upward to ten pairs in 1970, '71 and '72, eleven pairs in 1973 and twelve pairs in 1974, yet the number of those pairs successfully hatching young has dropped from about nine in the 1950's to about three from the 1960's to 1972 and to only one in 1973 and 1974. By contrast, on the Maryland side of the Potomac, we had a high of 15 nesting pairs in the 1950's (about ten successful in hatching young), dropped to ten in the early 1960's and have stayed at nine-eleven pairs each year since but of these, at least six pairs have hatched young every year, including 1973 and 1974. I wonder what water samples from the Maryland and Virginia sides of the lower Potomac (South of the District of Columbia) would show in relative percent of chemical pollutants; (in my opinion, there must be some radical differences in such readings to explain such widely differing results in eagle nesting success). It may be significant that in this same stretch of river South of the District of Columbia there are three (3) great blue heronries on the Maryland side of the Potomac River, all of which thrive, but none on the Virginia side, although there are many suitable locations (the one heronry

that did exist on the Virginia side in the 1950-1960 era moved to the Maryland shore in the late 1950's).

As in most of the past ten years, our highest region density of active nesting bald eagles is in Dorchester County, Md. In this county, we found ten pairs of adult eagles in the nesting season, nine of which laid eggs (at least 12 eggs were laid); all nine pairs were successful in producing young (ten young were produced, one of which disappeared at about one month old). Unfortunately, all but one of these nine pairs have nests outside the boundaries of the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge (BNWR), five of them just barely outside. As I suggested a year ago, it would be money well spent if a $\frac{1}{2}$ to one mile wide strip of woods around the BNWR could be bought and added to the refuge property; this would insure adequate nesting habitat for at least six pairs of eagles. Lumbering of the woods just South of where three successful pairs nested was underway in June 1974.

A happy note is that for the first time in this survey a pair of eagles was known to have successfully raised young in Talbot County, Md. This pair went all out and fledged three eaglets! This makes up for their lack of success in 1972 and 1973. The only other pair to fledge three eaglets in 1974 was at the lower end of Chincoteague Bay in Accomack County, Va.

The only continuously successful breeding population of bald eagles in Virginia is along the lower Rappahannock River, south of Fredericksburg. At least five of eight pairs which reside in this area usually produce young every year. The situation along the Potomac River has been described. Of the six pairs left along the Potomac,

Mattaponi and York Rivers, five laid eggs but none produced young in 1974 and the one remaining pair along the James River apparently did not lay eggs although adults were seen around the nest in the early part of the 1974 season.

I wish to express sincere appreciation to the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, Department of the Interior for providing the aircraft and pilots Morton Smith and Ed Fergusson; to refuge managers Bill Julian of Blackwater NW Refuge, Norman Holgersen of Bombay Hook NW Refuge and Richard Antonette of the Mason Neck NW Refuge for their support; to Fred Scott of Richmond for his coverage of the SE Virginia area and to the following individuals for their observations and other support: Vernon D. Stotts of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Dr. Mitchell Byrd, Jerry Via, Mary Pulley, Dr. E. J. Willoughby, Mrs. James E. Plymire, Forester W.S. O'Neal of Tappahannock, Va., ~~and~~ Peter Nulty *and Charles Vaughn.*

Jackson M. Abbott
Coördinator
Chesapeake Bay Bald Eagle Nest Survey

TABLE: Comparative Success of Chesapeake Bay Bald Eagles in
Hatching Young, 1969 - 1974.

	1974	1973	1972	1971	1970	1969
1. Active Nests Found:						
Va.	26	32	29	32	30	31
Md.	29	33	27	27	26	19
Del.	1	1	2	1	2	1
Total	56	66	58	60	58	51
2. Active Nests Rechecked:						
Va.	26	32	27	31	27	30
Md.	29	33	18	24	24	19
Del.	1	1	2	1	2	1
Total	56	66	47	56	53	50
a. Nests abandoned:						
Va.	18	23	20	25	20	22
Md.	9	18	10	10	13	8
Del.	1	1	2	1	1	1
Total	28	42	32	36	34	31
b. Nests hatching young:						
Va.	8	9	7	6	6	8
Md.	20	15	8	14	10	11
Del.	0	0	0	0	1	0
Total	28	24	15	20	17	19
(1) No. young hatched:						
Va.	14(1D)*13		10	8	8	10(2D)*
Md.	24(1D) 28		10	17	13	19
Del.	0	0	0	0	1	0
Total	38(2D) 41		20	25	22	29(2D)

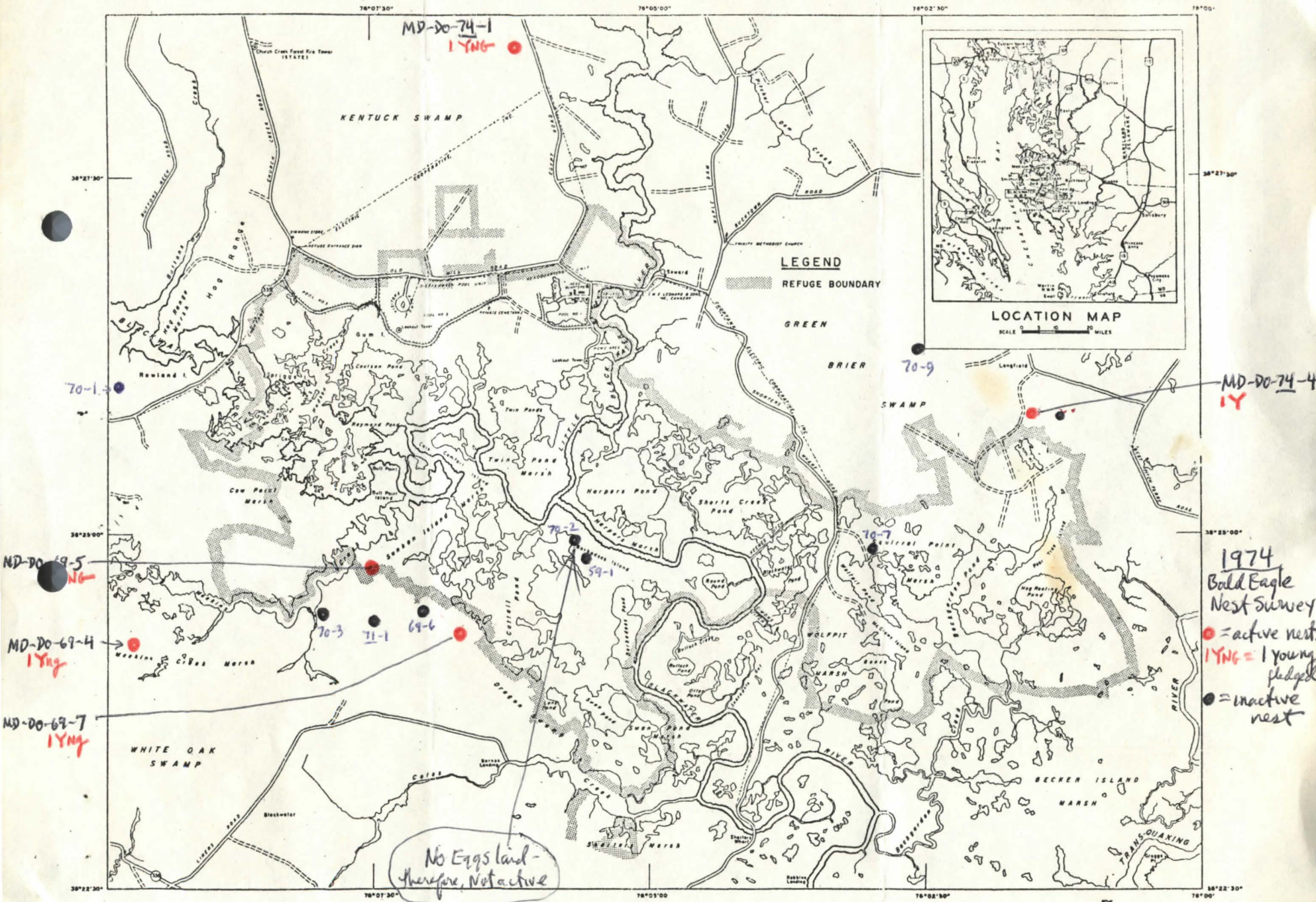
* Indicates number of young which died before fledging.

BLACKWATER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

DORCHESTER COUNTY, MARYLAND

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
BUREAU OF SPORT FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE



COMPILED IN THE BRANCH OF ENGINEERING
FROM SURVEYS BY U.S. ARMY

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

JULY, 1984

Scale 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000 10000 FEET
0 1/2 1 2 MILES

MEAN
DECLINATION
1984

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