

Chesapeake Bay Bald Eagle Nest Survey - 1972 - by Jackson M. Abbott

The 1972 nesting season for the Bald Eagle in the Chesapeake Bay region showed an overall 32% in breeding pairs success in hatching young. A total of 58 active nests were found, of which 47 were rechecked before any young could have left the nest. Of these 47, 32 (68%) were abandoned after having been found with adults incubating in them and 15 (32%) produced a total of 20 eaglets. This was 6 fewer successful nests than in 1971 when 21 rechecked active nests (36%) produced 26 eaglets.

Table I shows the 1972 nest survey results by state and county. Because the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service planes and pilots which support this survey must spend the entire month of May conducting a wildfowl survey in the mid-West, we have not been able to get a recheck flight over some nests until after the time that some young could have fledged. On 15 June we flew over two nests in Dorchester County, Maryland, both of which contained one black eaglet; in both cases, as we flew over the nest, the eaglet flew off! A nest in St. Mary's County, Md., which had produced one or two young for 5 successive years and had an incubating adult in March and April, was empty about 11 a.m. on June 8. I was sure it had produced so I called James Banagan who drives by the nest site twice a day to check it on his way to and from work. Sure enough, he reported an adult and a black eaglet in the nest in the early morning and late afternoon for the next week. They come back to the nest to roost overnight and leave it to go fishing, etc., by mid-morning.

Three nests which have produced young annually for the past 4-5 years were inactive in 1972. One of these is explainable because of a housing development being constructed within 1/4 - 1/2 mile. The other two, however, are in areas where no human disturbance is evident; it is probable that something happened to one member of each pair. On the other hand, we located two active nest

sites completely new to us which the landowners say have been used and produced young annually for at least 5 years! Both produced young in 1972. Both of these nests are on large, private estates and are protected by the owners.

Dorchester County, Md., retains the greatest concentration of nesting eagles. This year we found 9 active nests in a 20-mile long, 5 mile wide strip of wild cedar and pine swamp interspersed with expansive marshes, fresh water ponds, creeks and guts extending from near the mouth of the Blackwater River, through the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge to the W bank of the Nanticoke River. Flying over this area it is easy to see why it is so attractive to eagles; there is hardly any sign of human activity in this entire area. We looked at 33 eagle nests in this area which probably represent 2 to 4 alternate nests per active pair.

At least 30 pairs of Chesapeake Bay eagles have at least one alternate nest; some have two or even three alternate nests. Alternate nests are most often about 1/4 mile apart but many pairs with only one alternate nest have built it in the closest big tree to their old nest.. Several pairs have built a second nest 5-10 feet above or below the old nest in the same tree! Why so many pairs build an alternate nest when the old seems perfectly good is one of the eagle's most intriguing mysteries. I have commented on this in earlier reports but am still unable to offer any solutions based on fact.

Although this survey is still primarily accomplished by observations from light aircraft, new nests have been found and interesting observations at nests have been made by persons on the ground. For such assistance the writer is grateful to the following people for supplying valuable data: Charles R. Ellis, Luther Goldman, "Chip" Millar, Lewis Murphy, James Benagan. The continued support of the U.S. Bureau of Sports Fisheries and Wildlife with planes and pilot Morton Smith is deeply appreciated and vital to the survey. Significant observations and data have also been submitted by Mr. William Julian, refuge

manager at Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge and his assistants, Larry Thurman and Guy Willey and by Norman Holgerson, manager, Bombay Hook & Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuges. The indefatigable Fred Scott of Richmond, Va., has provided all the data on eagle nests for Virginia from the Rappahannock River to Virginia Beach, as he has since the beginning of this survey.

Anybody who finds an eagle nest, makes observations at one, or who may be willing to check out some nests from the ground during the 1973 nesting season should send such data to, or contact, the writer at: 8501 Doter Drive, Alexandria, Virginia, 22308, phone: 360-4308.

Table I 1972 Chesapeake Bay Region Bald Eagle Nest Results

State and County	No. Eagle Nests Found		No. Active Nests --			No. of Young Produced:		
	Inactive	Active	Not Rechecked	Aban'd	Prod. Young	1972	1971	1970
<u>Delaware</u>								
New Castle	1	1	0	1	0	0	?	?
Kent	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Del. Total	2	2	0	2	0	0	?	1(+?)
<u>Maryland</u>								
Ann Arundel	3	2	2 ^{1/}	(2?)	(2?)	?	2	0
Calvert	2	1	1 ^{1/}	(1?)	(1?)	?	0	0
Charles	7	6	1 ^{1/} , 1 ^{2/}	3(+2?)	1(+2?)	1(+?)	3	2
Dorchester	24	9	0 ⁴	4	5	5	4(+?)	3
Kent	3	1	1 ^{1/}	(1?)	(1?)	?	1	2
Queen Anne	4	4	0 ^{1/}	2	2	4	3	3
St. Mary's	5	2	1 ^{1/}	1(+1?)	(1?)	?	4	2
Talbot	0	1	1 ^{1/}	(1?)	(1?)	?	?	?
Worcester	3	1	1 ^{1/}	(1?)	(1?)	?	1	1
Maryland Total	51	27	9	10(+9?)	8(+9?)	10(+?)	18(+?)	13(+?)
<u>Virginia</u>								
Accomac	2	1	0	1	0	0	?	?
Cardline	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	?
Charles City	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Essex	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	?
Fairfax	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1
Gloucester	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
James City	7	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
King George	5	3	0	2	1	1	0	0
King William	3	1	0	1	0	0	1	1
Lancaster	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mathews	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Middlesex	7	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
New Kent	1	3	0	3	0	0	0	1
Northumberland	1	2	0	1	1	2	0	0
Prince George	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Richmond	3	3	0 ^{2/}	1	2	4	2	1
Stafford	6	2	1 ^{2/}	1(+1?)	(1?)	?	1	?
Surry	0	2	1	1(+1?)	(1?)	?	0	0
Va. Beach	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Westmoreland	12	4	0	2	2	2	2	2
York	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Virginia Total	60	29	2	20(+2?)	7(+2?)	10(+?)	8(+?)	8(+?)
Grand Total	113	58	11	32(+11?)	15(+11?)	20(+?)	26(+?)	22(+?)

1/ Nests rechecked too late in season - young could have hatched and fledged.

2/ Foliage too heavy to see into nest.

Bald Eagle + Osprey
4-10-72

1972

Bald Eagle active 4-10-72

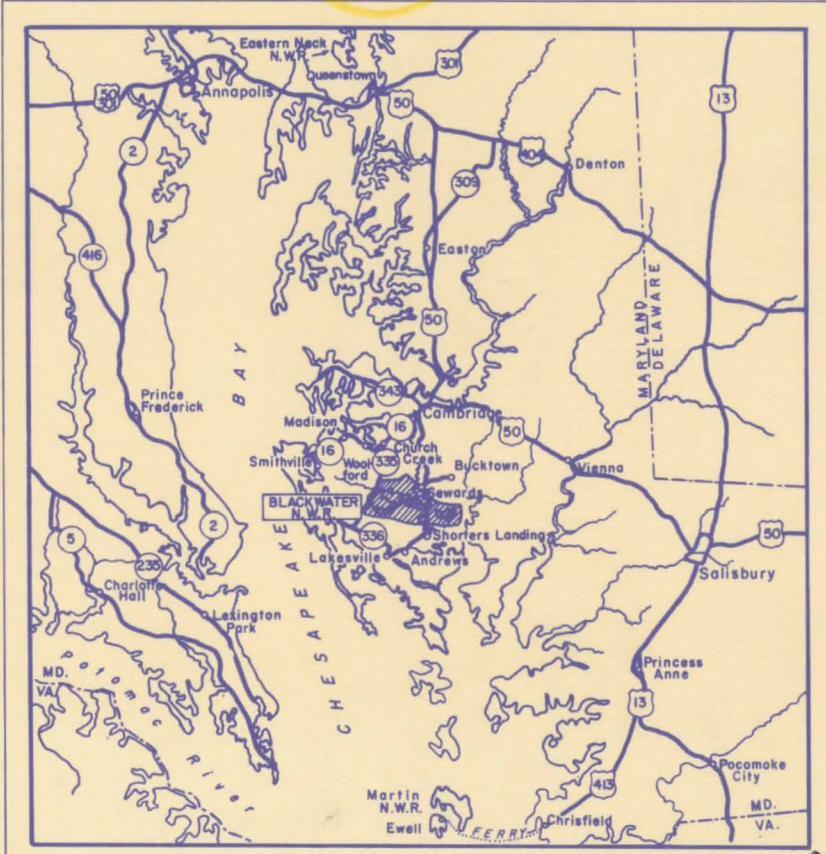
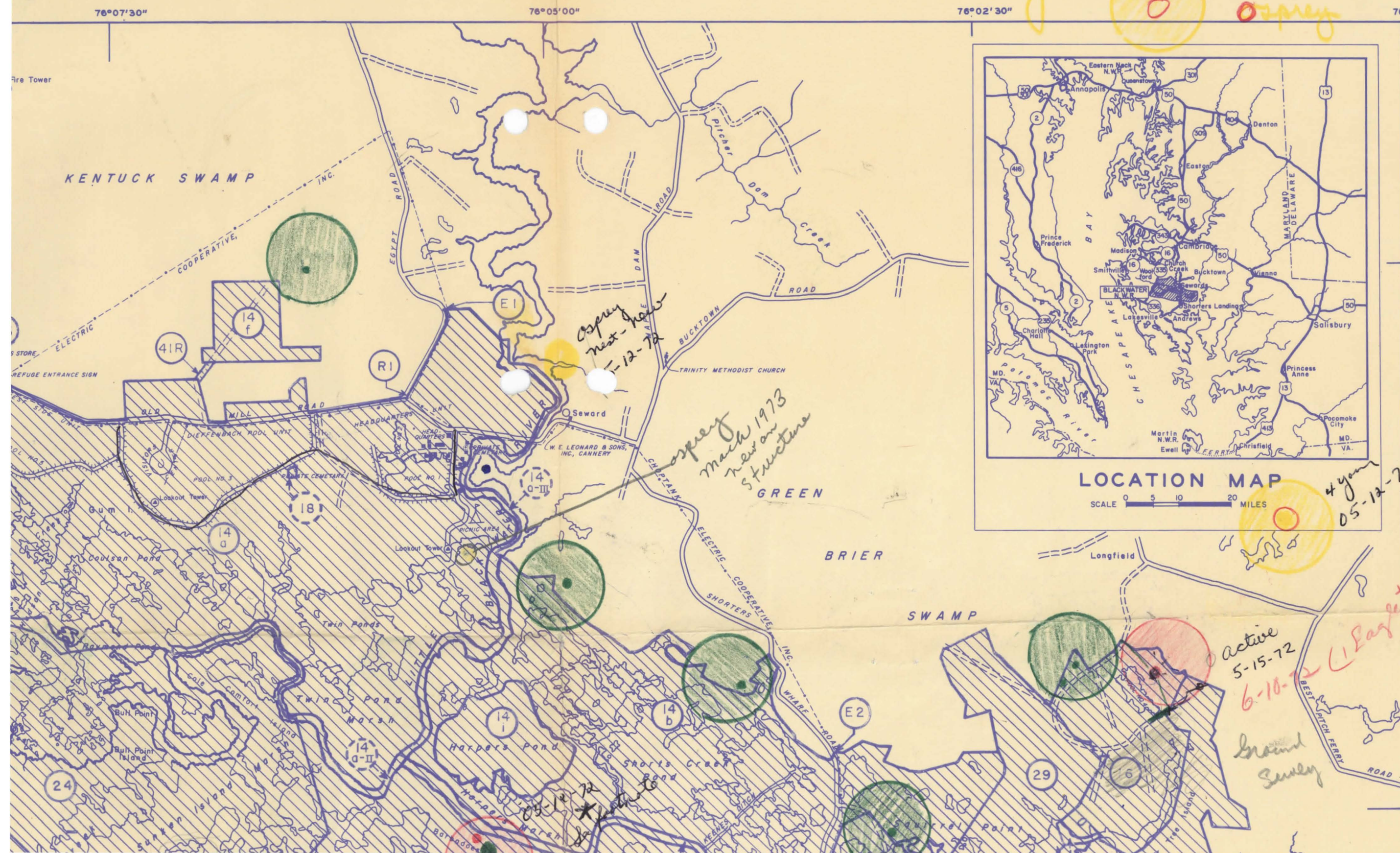
Bald Eagle IN-Active 4-10-72

Osprey FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
BUREAU OF SPORT FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

4-10-72
active

BLACKWATER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

DORCHESTER COUNTY, MARYLAND



LOCATION MAP

SCALE 0 5 10 20 MILES

4 years
05-12-72

active
5-15-72

6-10-72

Grand Survey

LI Eagle + 12

Aerial Survey Bald Eagle + Osprey
Agent Thurman
B.T. Willey

4-10-72

1972

Bald Eagle

Bald Eagle

BLACKWATER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

DORCHESTER COUNTY, MARYLAND

Osprey

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

76°07'30"

76°05'00"

76°02'30"

38°27'30"

38°25'00"

