COPY

BALD EAGLE NEST SUMMARY REPORT

NEW YORK TERRITORIES

1, 3, and 4

1990

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Introduction

Observations at New York bald eagle nest sites # 1, # 3, and # 4, in Livingston, Genesee, and Seneca Counties respectively, continued during the 1990 breeding season.

The Region 8 Wildlife staff (New York State Department of Environmental Conservation) has the primary responsibility for undertaking these observations, inasmuch as all three sites are located within Regional boundaries. (See Figure #1)

As in the previous two seasons, the majority of staff time spent in observations, occurred at Territory # 4, on the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge. The effort to collect additional data from this site was again considered to be of importance due to the unusual occurrence of three resident adult eagles.

The 1990 breeding season stands apart as the first to be completed without a serious setback since the three present nest sites have been concurrently active.

The follow report is a summary of the information gathered at those three sites.

TERRITORY # 1 - Livingston County - (See figures #1 & #3)

The current resident pair of eagles at this site consists of a male, hacked at the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, (Seneca County) in 1977, and a female, hacked from the Alcove Reservoir site, (Albany County) in 1985. 1990 marked the first complete nesting attempt by these two birds, as the current female replaced the previous resident female early during the 1989 incubation cycle. Incubation was disrupted, and no subsequent nest attempt occurred during that season.

The first documentation of the pair in the vicinity of the nest came on February 8, when both birds were observed adding sticks to the same structure that had been used the previous year. From all indications things seemed to progress normally although slowly over the next seven weeks. The first observation of incubation activity at the site did not occur until March 30. This was not altogether unexpected since this was the initial breeding attempt for the pair.

The first indication of a hatching at the site occurred on the morning of May 6, when the female was observed passing food, low into the nest.

One unusual event did occur that morning, when the observer was able to view the movement of an eaglet in the nest. It has been documented in the past that clear observations of the eaglet(s) at this site, generally are not possible until they are approximately ten days old.

Two eaglets were later confirmed to be in the nest, and both were successfully banded on June 19. Each received a USF&WS # 9 rivet band and a blue anodized aluminum New York State rivet band with yellow alphanumerics. The banding data is as follows:

Eaglet	USF&WS Band	Leg	New York Band	Leg
# 1 Suspected Male	629-33325	Left	X-25	Right
# 2 Suspected Female	629-33326	Right	X-26	Left

The remainder of the nest life segment of the breeding season progressed without incident, and both eaglets had fledged by the beginning of the fourth week in July.

Occasional observations of both eaglets were made throughout the remainder of July and all through the month of August.

CONCLUSIONS - TERRITORY # 1

The arrival of the new female at this site during the 1989 season created the need for additional observation time at this nest during the 1990 effort. Inasmuch as this bird was only five years old and was beginning her first actual nesting attempt, there was no way of telling how this effort would turn out. To state the obvious, the success of the pair during the 1990 season was a great relief to all involved in monitoring this site.

Since the disappearance of the original female from this territory in 1984, the success rate from subsequent nest attempts has been disappointing to say the least. Failures in 1986, 1987, and 1989, continue to demonstrate the delicate situation the birds face. When the statewide population reaches a more stable level, individual nesting failures will be more tolerable even though undesirable. Until that time, it remains essential that the close monitoring of individual nest sites continue.

TERRITORY # 3 - Genesee County - (See figures #1 and #3)

The resident pair of adults at this site consists of a male hacked from the Oak Orchard WMA (Genesee County) site in 1982, and a female hacked from the Alcove Reservoir (Albany County) site in 1984.

The staff of the Iroquois National Wildlife refuge has made the majority of all observations at this territory since its discovery in 1986, and their efforts have been, and continue to be, greatly appreciated by the Endangered Species Unit. However, their responsibility for the operation of the entire Refuge, obviously limits the amount of time that can be spent actually monitoring the development of each breeding season. This issue was alleviated greatly during 1990 by the presence of a volunteer observer working the site and adding to the observations compiled by Refuge personnel.

Initial observations of both resident eagles at the nest were made on January 31. Normal nest building activity was observed throughout February. During that period, both birds were seen at the original nest, and at their secondary site several hundred yards to the north. Eventually their attention was totally directed to the original site, and incubation activity began on or about March 15.

As at Territory # 1, all progressed normally with the first signs of hatching occurring on April 18. The results of observations made after hatching, revealed the presence of two eaglets in the nest. It is interesting that of the four successful nest attempts that have occurred at this site since 1986, all have resulted in the production of two eaglets per attempt.

The annual banding trip to the site occurred on June 4, with banding procedures identical to Territory # 1. Individual data is as follows:

Eaglet	USF&WS Band	Leg	New York Band	Leg
# 1 Suspected Male	629-33316	Right	X-16	Left
# 2 Suspected Male	629-33317	Left	X-17	Right

The remainder of the season proved relatively uneventful and both eaglets fledged successfully during the fourth week of July. each was observed on numerous occasions throughout the remainder of the summer.

CONCLUSIONS - TERRITORY # 3

Although no adverse incidents occurred during the nest attempt, it remains important to consider the benefits of having consistent observations take place at each of these nests. In several instances over the span of this program, events have transpired that have gone unobserved. To date, none of these circumstances have proven catastrophic, but they have left some clear questions and gaps in the data that has been collected. With the effort and expense that has been put forth so far, we should continue to make every attempt to gather as much information from each of these territories as is possible.

TERRITORY # 4 - Seneca County - (See figures #1 & #4)

The resident "trio" of eagles at this nest consists of a male hacked at the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge in 1978, he is marked with a white patagial tag with a secondary identifying yellow dot on the right wing. He is further identified as B06, which corresponds to the alphanumeric leg band he also carried. The second male was released at the Oak Orchard WMA (Genesee County) in 1982, and is tagged with a yellow patagial streamer on the left wing. This bird and the female of the trio are banded, but as of yet remain unidentified as to individuals. In addition, the female carries no patagial tag.

If any aspect of the Regional bald eagle program could be considered a setback in 1990, it would have to be the fact that these resident eagles abandoned the platform used during

the 1989 season in favor of a dead snag in Tschache Pool. The reason for this abandonment is not known, but may be related to activity in the vicinity of the platform during the late fall and early winter of 1989. At that time efforts were underway to install the closed circuit video monitoring system mentioned in the 1989 summary report.

As has been the case since this nest was discovered in 1987, the indigene of this territory remained in the area throughout the winter and were first visible attending to their new nest during the first week of February. As the month wore on it became apparent that the old heron nest they were decorating would, in all likelihood be the focal point of the nesting attempt for that season.

Although the abandonment of the platform was discouraging, the site selected was not without benefit. The dominant concern was the stability of the nest tree itself. As has been mentioned and experienced in the past, (see 1988 Summary Report) the snags located in the storage pool had been falling at an accelerating rate over the past several years. This in itself was the incentive behind the placement of the nesting platform in the first place. However, the site selected made observing the birds extremely easy. The observer could drive to within 250 meters of the site, and monitor the ongoing activity without leaving the vehicle. Observations seemed to have little or no effect on the birds as they went about their duties. Visibility of the activities that went on was excellent. Also since the tree was entirely surrounded by water, the threat of mammalian predation was greatly reduced.

Although these advantages made observations convenient, it would be preferable to have a stable supporting base for the nest. At this stage of the cycle it was far too late to attempt any measures that might entice the eagles to return to the platform.

The first indication of incubation occurred on March 12. As had been observed in the past the female did the majority of the incubation. (53.28%) Contradictory to what had been documented in previous years however, was the fact the yellow tagged male incubated more than BO6. (24.12% and 20.57% respectively) The eggs were left unattended for only nineteen minutes or 0.01% of the time. It should be noted that all but one minute of the time that the eggs were actually left unattended came on the first day of observations after incubation was initiated. (See figure # 5) It should also be pointed out that although the author spent more time documenting the activity at Territory # 4, than at the other two Regional sites, the actual observation time spent during the season was reduced from the previous two years.

Altered behavior that would indicate hatching, was seen on April 17. The observer was able to positively document two eaglets in the nest, on April 22.

All activity continued normally, with all adults sharing in the care of the eaglets.

Banding of the eaglets was accomplished on June 5, in the same fashion as had been done at sites #1 and # 3. Specific data is as follows:

Eaglet	USF&WS Band	Leg	New York Band	Leg
# 1 Suspected Female	629-33319	Left	X-19	Right
# 2 Suspected Male	629-33320	Right	X-20	Left

CONCLUSIONS - Territory # 4

Inspection of the supporting snag revealed that its condition was questionable, but more stable than had first been anticipated. The nest was situated approximately 6.5 meters above the surrounding water, and appeared to be fairly well placed among several supporting branches. The tree is completely dead and is suffering from wave and ice erosion at the water line. This is the usual break off point for most of the other snags that have fallen over the years.

Serious consideration has been given to physically removing the tree, thereby forcing the eagles to select an alternate, and hopefully more secure location. However, the unpredictable nature of this trio has, at least for the time being, forced those involved to postpone this extreme move. The dominant concern being, that since the bold but warranted action of moving the original nest to the platform in late 1987, was an extensive disruption for these birds, caution should be exercised to avoid any risk of placing additional strain on them, at least at this time. This is a very complex problem for all involved to address. The tree will, at some point come down, as did the original nest tree where the platform now stands. If this occurs during the breeding season, it will result in the loss of eggs or possibly result in the loss of young present. However, inasmuch as these eagles are resident year around, dropping the tree without their being witness, would be virtually impossible, and could conceivably drive the birds from the area. This is a difficult decision to make. It is the opinion of the author, that given the relatively recent steps taken to avoid this predicament already, it is too soon to attempt another significant disturbance at this territory. The loss of young is undesirable but acceptable when compared to the possible loss of the territory. There is no guarantee that if the tree falls during the "off" season, the birds will not abandon the area. Only detailed monitoring will shed light on these concerns.

The installation of the remote video monitoring system, funded under Return A Gift To Wildlife, proceeded during the late fall and early winter of 1990. Once again the help of crews from the New York State Electric and Gas Corp. proved invaluable in this effort. The basic system is in place but has been dealt two setbacks. First is the fact that the eagles appear at the time of this writing, to be directing their attention towards the same tree that was used in 1990. Although it is still early, there is no logical reason for them to deviate from their initial nesting activity. Secondly, during the primary attempt to bring the system on line, at least two, apparently deliberate cuts, were discovered in the video and power cable near the Visitors Center. It appears as if someone is opposed to the operation of this system. Once the necessary repairs have been instituted, the system will be monitored for any other attempts to disrupt it. Anyone making such an effort will be prosecuted.

It remains to be seen at this point, which nest the birds will utilize, but if the platform site is used, it is anticipated that the video system will be in operation and will be used to document the activity.

One last bit of information that should be mentioned is a report of eaglet X-19. This bird was positively identified in the vicinity of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia on February 13, 1991, which is approximately 960 kilometers northeast of the nest site at Montezuma.

The author would like to express his sincere gratitude to the following individuals and agencies for their help and cooperation in assisting the Bureau of Wildlife to maintain the continuity of documentation of activity at bald eagle nests within Region 8.

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Ray and Deb McHargue, who once again made almost all of the observations at Territory # 1. A special congratulations on the arrival of Katrina, who will probably be making observations within a year or two.

Laura Joslyn, who's interest and dedication to making observations at Territory # 3, filled in a great deal of information that had been evading us over the past four years. Hang in there, they say good things come to those who wait. We're all still waiting.

Don Root and the Water Bureau of the City of Rochester for their interest in the project, and for allowing us to undertake the necessary activities to continue to maintain the integrity of Territory # 1. Your pictures are coming!

Don Tiller and the Staff of the Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge for all of the efforts that have gone into monitoring the activity at Territory # 3. Without your efforts, we would have known little or nothing about what was transpiring over the years.

Gene Hocutt and the staff of the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge for their help and participation in making observations at Territory # 4. Also for tolerating the author while he was wandering about the area.

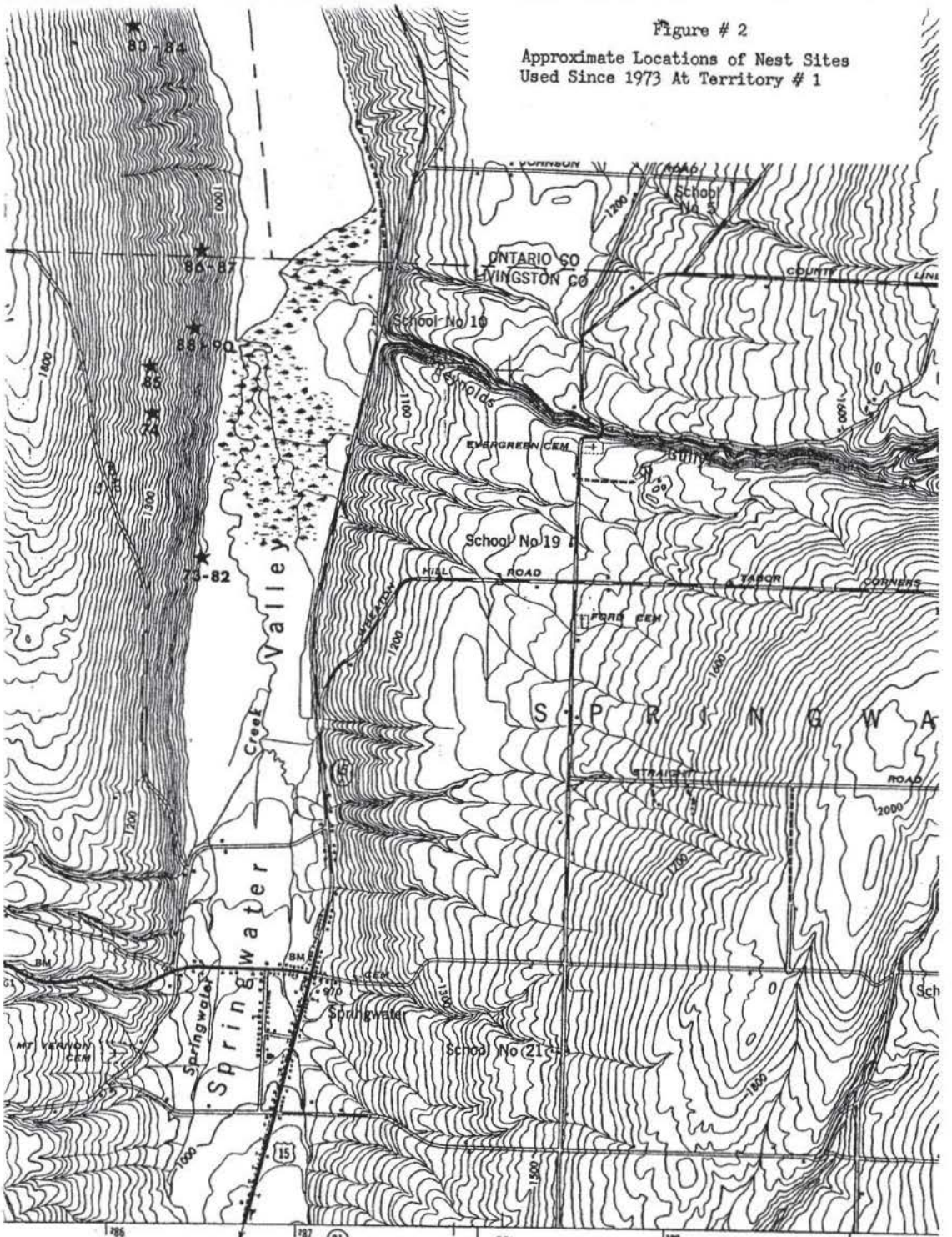
Bruce Penrod and the Regional Wildlife staff for their help when needed, and for covering for the author while he was chasing eagles.

Figure # 1

Base Map Locations of Region 8
Bald Eagle Nest Territories

Figure # 2

Approximate Locations of Nest Sites
Used Since 1973 At Territory # 1



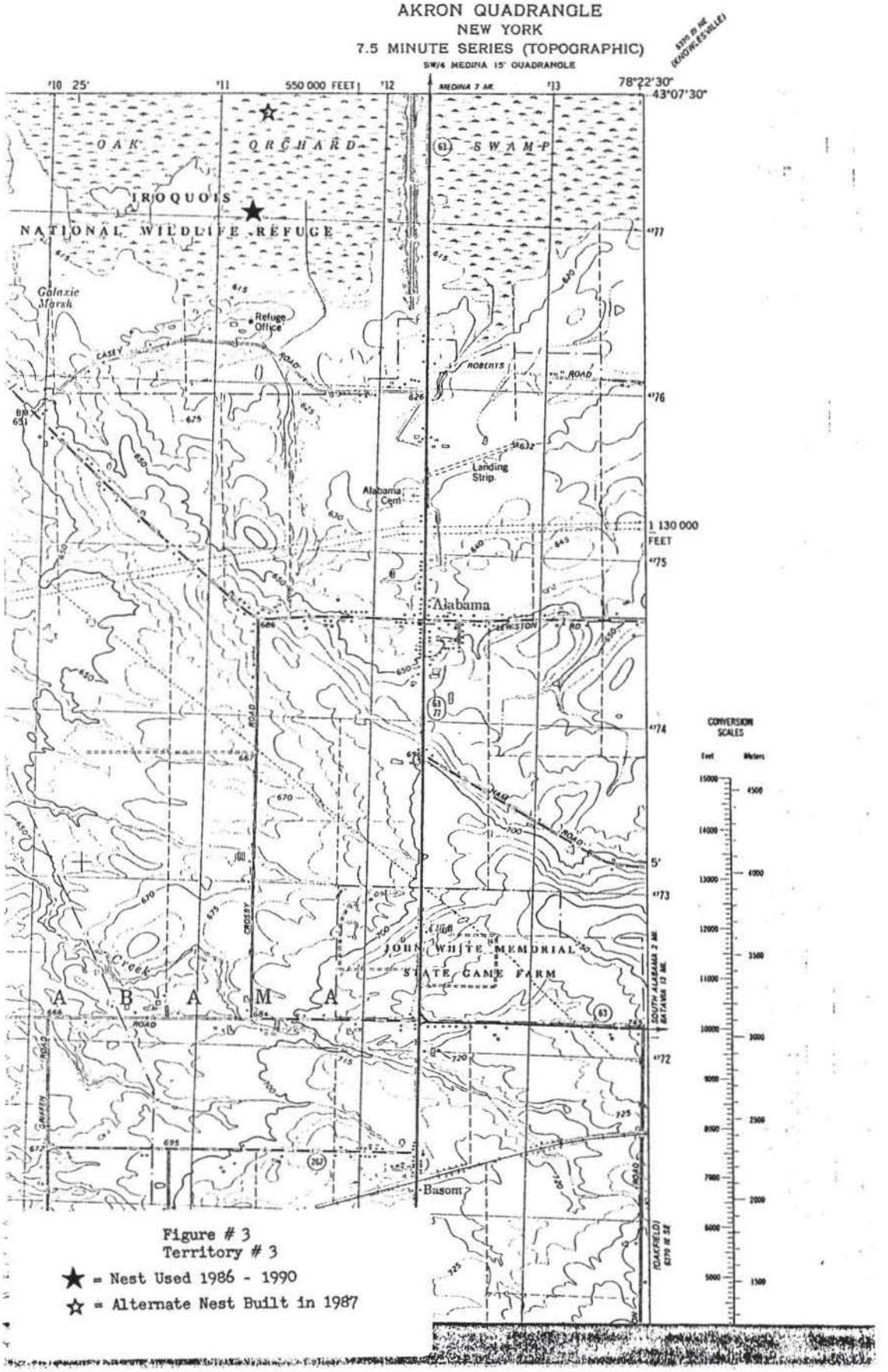


Figure # 3
Territory # 3

★ = Nest Used 1986 - 1990

☆ = Alternate Nest Built in 1987

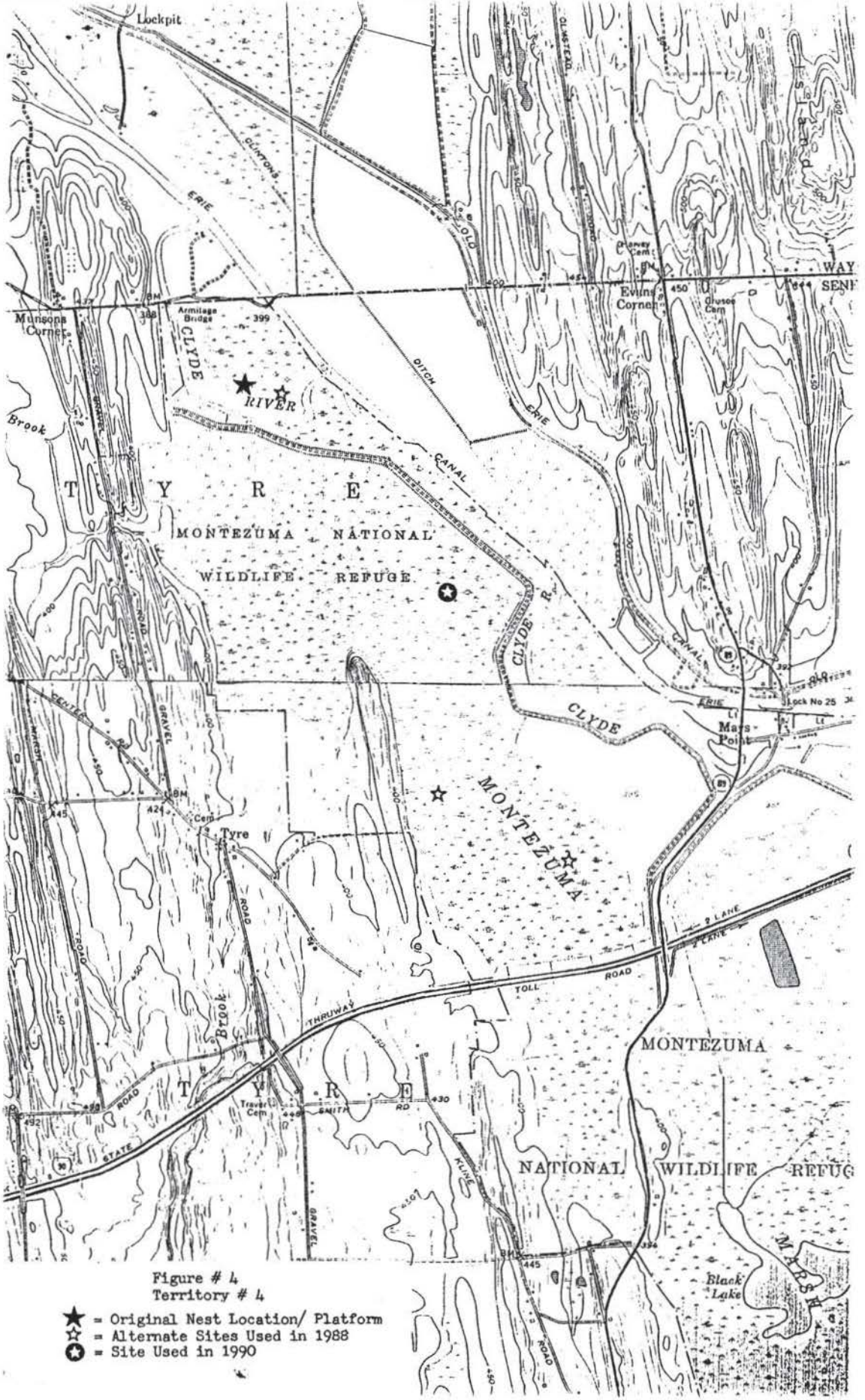


Figure # 4
Territory # 4

★ = Original Nest Location/ Platform
☆ = Alternate Sites Used in 1988
✪ = Site Used in 1990

FIGURE # 5

SUMMARY OF INCUBATION ACTIVITY
TERRITORY # 4
1990

DATE	OBSERVATION TIME (MIN.)	BY UM	%	BY B06	%	BY YT	%	EGGS NOT ATTENDED	%
3-16	330	228	69.09	20	6.06	64	19.39	18	5.45
3-19	190	61	32.11	124	65.26	5	2.63	0	0.0
3-23	240	137	57.08	21	8.75	82	34.17	0	0.0
3-28	210	101	48.10	31	14.76	77	36.67	1	0.48
4-03	101	20	19.80	77	76.24	04	3.96	0	0.0
4-06	422	308	72.99	29	6.87	85	20.14	0	0.0
4-10	30	18	60.00	12	40.00	0	0.0	0	0.0
4-13	305	119	39.02	62	20.33	124	40.66	0	0.0
	1828	974	53.28	376	20.57	441	24.12	19	0.01

UM = Female
B06 = White Tagged Male
YT = Yellow Tagged Male