

NDG&F March 28th Newsletter

Report Bald Eagle Nest Sightings

Bald eagle nests are more common today in North Dakota than they once were. Even so, the public is encouraged to report nest sightings to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department.

Sandra Johnson, Game and Fish Department conservation biologist, emphasizes the department is looking for locations of nests, not eagle sightings. "April is the best time to see an eagle nest," she said. "The eagles are actively incubating eggs and it may become difficult later in spring to see the nest because of the leaves beginning to grow on trees."

Johnson said it is easy to distinguish an eagle nest because of its enormous size. "They stand out because of the large tree and the size of the nest," she said.

Eagle nests can be found statewide, but most likely east of the Missouri River. "Historically, eagle nests were found along the Missouri River," Johnson added. "But over the past decade they have increased significantly in the Red River Valley, and have been observed in many parts of the state along streams and mid- to large-sized lakes, and even in unique areas such as shelterbelts surrounded by cropland."

Nest observations should be reported to Johnson at (701) 328-6382, or by email at ndgf@nd.gov.

Johnson asks observers not to disturb the nest, and to stay away at a safe distance. "It is important not to approach the nest as foot traffic may disturb the bird, likely causing the eagle to leave her eggs unattended," she said.

For more information on nesting bald eagles see the February 2010 issue of North Dakota OUTDOORS. To view the magazine, access the department's website at gf.nd.gov and click on the publications/radio/tv link.

Game and Fish Sponsors Earth Day Project

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is once again celebrating Earth Day by sponsoring youth clean-up days on public-owned or managed lands in April and May.

Each member of a school, Girl Scout, Boy Scout, 4-H club or youth organization who participates in cleaning up public lands during April and May will receive a specifically designed conservation patch.

Last winter the Game and Fish Department sponsored a contest for students ages 6-18 to design a North Dakota Earth Day Patch. Winners receiving a pair of Leupold 8x25 compact binoculars in the three age categories were Carleen Christofferson of Tolna (6-9), Ben Callahan of Dickinson (10-13), and Zachary Bristol of Stanley (14-18). Callahan's design was chosen the contest winner, and will be used on this year's Earth Day patch.

Groups participating in the Earth Day project are encouraged to take the following precautions to ensure safety: keep young people away from highways, lakes and rivers; and only allow older participants to pick up broken glass.

Interested participants are asked to contact Pat Lothspeich at 328-6332 to receive a reporting form for their project.

Whooping Cranes Migrating Through North Dakota

Whooping cranes are in the midst of their spring migration and sightings will increase as they make their way through North Dakota over the next several weeks. Anyone seeing these birds as they move through the state is asked to report sightings so the birds can be tracked.

Whoopers stand about five feet tall and have a wingspan of about seven feet from tip to tip. They are bright white with black wing tips, which are visible only when the wings are outspread. In flight they extend their long necks straight forward, while their long, slender legs extend out behind the tail.

Whooping cranes typically migrate singly, or in groups of 2-3 birds, and may be associated with sandhill cranes.

Other white birds such as snow geese, swans and egrets are often mistaken for whooping cranes. The most common mistake is pelicans because their wingspan is similar and they tuck their pouch in flight, leaving a silhouette similar to a crane when viewed from below.

Anyone sighting whoopers should not disturb them, but record the date, time, location, and the birds' activity. Observers should also look closely for and report colored bands which may occur on one or both legs. Young whooping cranes were marked during 1975-1988 with colored leg bands to help determine their identity.

Whooping crane sightings should be reported to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service office at (701) 387-4397, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's main office in Bismarck at (701) 328-6300, or to local game wardens around the state. Reports help biologists locate important whooping crane habitat areas, monitor marked birds, determine survival and population numbers, and identify times and migration routes.