

Eagles thriving in Ohio

By **SARAH WEBER**

weber@sanduskyregister.com

Department of Natural Resources reports record number of eagle nests

Our national bird is thriving in Ohio.

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources recently reported that the number of bald eagle nests in Ohio has risen to a record 184.

"It's a real success story," said Mark Shieldcastle, Division of Wildlife project leader of wetland wildlife research. "It shows what we can do if we really try."

As recently as 1979, Ohio had only four pairs of eagles, largely due to the pesticides DDT and PCB weakening the birds' eggshells.

Shieldcastle said the success of the bald eagle's rebound can be credited to strict laws and residents' cooperation.

"The people of Ohio really grabbed onto this bird," Shieldcastle said.

He said careful conservation efforts during the past 30 years bought the birds time to adapt to environmental pressures.

Bald eagles nest in tall trees, and have historically favored remote areas free from human activity. Shieldcastle said the birds have adapted to be more tolerant of people, and will now sometimes nest in backyards.

ODNR reports the number of young eagles is also on the rise. It estimates 222 eaglets hatched in 43 Ohio counties this year, and at least 208 of them have already fledged.

"Not only are the numbers going up, the production rate is increasing," Shieldcastle said. The average number of eaglets has increased to greater than one per nest.

Most eagle nests in Ohio are located near Lake Erie, but eagles are starting to migrate inland. Erie County had two new nests this year, as did Ottawa County. Sandusky County had one new nest.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service removed the bird from its list of endangered species two years ago because of its successful return from the brink of extinction.

In April, the Ohio Wildlife Council followed suit, downgrading the bald eagle's status from endangered to threatened in Ohio.

The bald eagle is still protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Act of 1940.

But Shieldcastle said bald eagles can still face dangers.

He said the greatest causes of death for the birds are power lines and cars.

An eaglet was killed by a car Wednesday on Sand Road in Catawba Island Township.

Shieldcastle said because eagles are large birds, it takes them longer to take flight when danger is coming. He said the young bird might also have been slow to realize it needed to get out of the way.

The Division of Wildlife's work with bald eagles is funded through the sale of bald eagle license plates, which can be obtained by calling 1-888-PLATES3.

(See photo on page 2)



Register photo/JASON WERLING

The eagles from the nest at the Old Dutch Tavern in Perkins Township make some noise Monday afternoon not far from their nest. The nest is reported to have two eggs in it according to a bald eagle watcher newsletter, said Charlene Margetiak, a naturalist with Erie Metroparks.