

—Slug:.....COMM-0861.bf.bald_eagles_soar
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—For section.....News
—Format.....News - byline and dateline
—Dateline.....Bellows Falls
—Article Number:.....43479

Notes from editor (not for publication):

Hi, Rob — I transposed a chunk of your quotes from Lowrey to make a lede only because you go so long without any quotes. I also added a little info I found about Mellish — it seemed a little odd referencing only his photos. Loved learning about the eagles. This is a perfect example of a story that helps readers see their world and their habitat a little differently.

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Bald eagle population soars in the region

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 Only 60 years ago, the national bird and national
3 emblem of the U.S. was nearly extinct. Now, its numbers are
4 burgeoning up and down the Connecticut River Valley, and
5 wildlife enthusiasts are excitedly monitoring its comeback.

####END SUBHED####

6 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

7 Brattleboro resident John Lowrey has been watching and
8 photographing bald eagles in the area for the past three years.

9 “There are 13 nests that I watch between Vernon and
10 North Windsor,” Lowrey said. “All have nesting pairs of adults
11 and, in 2025, eight of the nests that I monitor regularly all had
12 two eaglets born and fledged successfully.”

13 The year before, “they all had only one and they all
14 fledged with success,” he said.

15 The return of the bald eagle to the northern watershed of
16 the Connecticut River is one of the great success stories of the
17 restoration of an endangered species.

18 Biologists explain that saving the bald eagle was far less
19 a great feat of human intervention in nature than it was a matter
20 of getting humans out of the way and allowing nature to function
21 as it should.

22 Younger folk might find it hard to understand the
23 excitement their parents and grandparents often exhibit at the
24 sight of a bald eagle. They’ve never known a time when these
25 birds weren’t around.

26 But any Vermonter over age 50 not only remembers
27 when seeing a bald eagle in the Connecticut River Valley was an
28 extremely rare occurrence, as they had all but disappeared from
29 this region by the 1930s. They also remember a time when these
30 magnificent birds were in danger of becoming extinct.

31 Adopted as the national emblem in 1782, over the next
32 century and a half the bald eagle population was decimated by
33 habitat loss, hunting, and shooting.

34 Congress passed the Bald Eagle Protection Act in 1940,
35 which prohibited the killing and possession of the birds.

36 But in the 1940s and 1950s widespread use of DDT as a
37 pesticide caused the eggs of the bald eagles to become too thin.
38 This caused massive reproductive failure and, by 1963, only a
39 little over 400 nesting pairs of bald eagles remained in the lower
40 48 states.

41 Bald eagles were one of the first species listed under the
42 Endangered Species Act in 1973, and their population has grown

43 to more than 300,000 in the contiguous U.S., with more than
44 70,000 estimated nesting pairs.

45 The bald eagle was removed from the endangered
46 species list in 2007.

47 This has been the result of several factors, giving the
48 eagle's natural resilience a chance to develop without
49 environmental threats.

50 DDT use was banned in the U.S. in 1972, and the bald
51 eagle has been the focus of over 40 years of conservation efforts
52 that include habitat protection and programs that reintroduced
53 the birds to their natural habitat.

54 In the Connecticut River Valley, all these factors were a
55 vital part of the return of the bald eagle, starting in the early
56 1980s, when the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife
57 (DFW) began a bald eagle reintroduction program at the
58 Quabbin Reservoir, 15 miles from the river in central
59 Massachusetts.

60 The DFW imported orphaned eaglets from the Great
61 Lakes region and Canada, raising them to adulthood to establish
62 a new breeding population. Those eagles eventually expanded
63 into the Connecticut River basin and nesting pairs worked their
64 way up the river into Vermont and New Hampshire.

65 Preserving habitat that bald eagles need to survive,
66 including cleaning up and protecting the river and riverbanks and
67 forested floodplains along the Connecticut, has been vital for
68 bald eagles' comeback.

69 The first nesting pair of bald eagles were recorded on
70 Lake Umbagog in New Hampshire in 1988. By 2002, nesting
71 pairs were recorded in Vermont along the Connecticut River.
72 Successful nesting, with living offspring, was verified in 2008.

73 Tall trees for nesting and hunting and an abundant
74 supply of fish for food are key factors in the eagles' resurgence. In
75 addition, conservationists have taken a few other special practical
76 steps.

77 Some of the earliest nesting eagles lost their eggs or
78 newly hatched eaglets eaten to predators like raccoons,
79 prompting the DFW to install metal sheeting around the trees to
80 prevent predators from being able to reach the nests.

81 According to the Connecticut River Conservancy, by
82 2023, 32 nests had appeared along the Connecticut River
83 between New Hampshire and Vermont. By 2025, New
84 Hampshire reached a new high of 128 nesting pairs statewide,
85 and Vermont was up to 38, with most of those along the
86 Connecticut River.

87 **Nests up and down the river**

88 Lowrey's interest in the eagles goes much further back
89 than three years. He said his "dear friend," Tom Manning, was
90 part of a volunteer program at the University of Massachusetts at
91 Amherst which involved trapping three of the nesting pairs from
92 the Quabbin Reservoir and relocating them to the tidal pool
93 above the Vernon Dam in the early to mid-1980s.

94 "The rest is history, and it's all fact. We all owe Tom a
95 salute of thanks," Lowrey said.

96 This year, he has been keeping track of several active
97 nests including one near the Massachusetts state line, and one
98 below and another north of the Hinsdale, New Hampshire, boat
99 ramp.

100 Around Brattleboro, one bald eagle pair is nesting near
101 the Riverside Industrial Center, and another at the Retreat
102 Meadows.

103 There are other nesting pairs along the Connecticut River
104 in Chesterfield, New Hampshire and in Westminster, and a pair
105 frequently seen in Bellows Falls nests across the river in North
106 Walpole, New Hampshire.

107 Lowrey said he has recently learned of a nest a couple of
108 miles north of the North Walpole one. He also keeps an eye on
109 two others along the Vermont side of the river north of
110 Springfield.

111 In addition there are nesting birds on the West River
112 north of Townshend Dam, and on Lake Spofford in New
113 Hampshire.

114 Lowrey said that “all the nests currently have sitting
115 mothers on the nests,” and some eggs are hatching. He is also
116 keeping his eye on nesting peregrine falcons in Dummerston,
117 another successful returning species.

118 **Volunteers monitor the** 119 **progress**

120 Lowrey, and Craig Mellish of North Walpole, whose
121 photos accompany this article, are among the many enthusiastic
122 bird watchers who watch and photograph the returned bald
123 eagles.

124 Mellish is no stranger to documenting the world of
125 nature. A member of the creative team of Walpole-based
126 documentary filmmaker Ken Burns, he worked as co-producer of
127 the documentary series *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*,
128 visiting and filming more than 40 national parks for the project.

129 Many of these amateur ornithologists share their findings
130 with the fish and wildlife agencies of Vermont, New Hampshire,
131 and Massachusetts, as well as the National Audubon Society, and
132 other organizations monitoring the bald eagles, peregrine falcons,
133 and other wildlife, helping to create an extensive record and data
134 bank about these species.

135 “I’ll let folks know how many chicks are born within the
136 next week or so,” Lowrey said. “The Dummerston falcons are
137 there at the quarry and active — I’ll monitor them also.”

138 As Lowrey describes his experiences with these great
139 birds, his enthusiasm is palpable.

140 “Bald eagles have around a 35-day incubation period
141 and breed towards the end of February,” he explained. “They
142 return to their lifetime nests to rebuild and repair in January, and
143 then all hell breaks loose if you love wildlife.

144 "By the time they fledge in late June, they are already
145 bigger than turkey vultures, which is tectonically amazing!"
146 Lowrey said.

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BIO/COATTAIL:

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

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