

# NH Eagles Surpass 100 Breeding Territories!

by Chris Martin, Senior Biologist

In 2023, NH Audubon staff and field volunteers continued to track the robust resurgence of the Granite State's Bald Eagle population. We confirmed 109 territorial pairs in NH, up 18% compared to 2022. We documented 76 pairs incubating, up more than 5% from the year before. We counted 61 successful nests, and tallied 93 young fledged, the latter stat up nearly 11% over 84 fledglings produced in 2022. This year's breeding season totals for all categories set new state-record highs for the post-DDT era. We continue to look for signs in the data that our eagle population is approaching carrying capacity (see graph), but population growth curves for the past 36 years have yet to flatten off, suggesting that there remains available habitat out there to support even more breeding pairs.

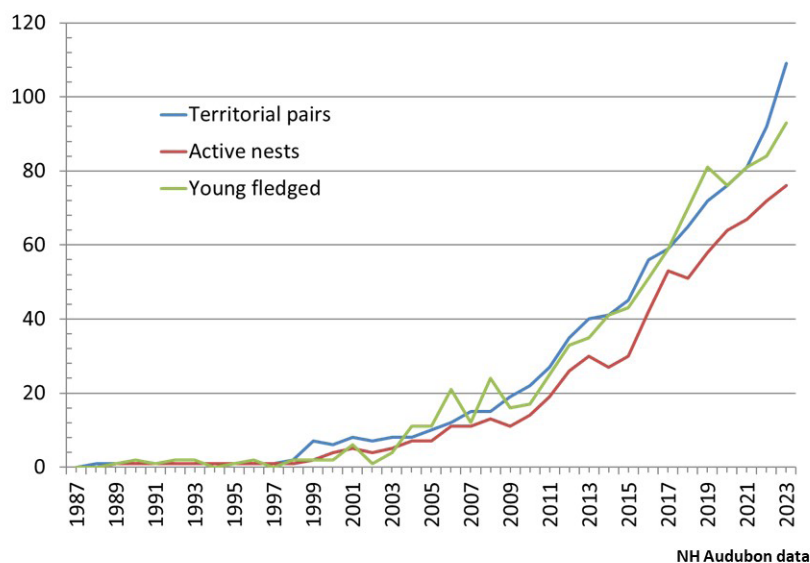
NH Fish and Game (NHFG) removed the Bald Eagle from our state's Endangered and Threatened Wildlife List in March 2017 after we confirmed two decades of population growth. Looking back this was clearly the right decision, and the population has continued to expand since then. But it's really worth pausing to recall that only 25 years ago we were thrilled to report the discovery of the state's second nesting pair at Nubanusit Lake. And now, looking ahead to the 2024 breeding season, we have more than 100 territorial pairs and expect to surpass the milestone of 1,000 eaglets fledged in NH since recovery began in the 1980s.

NH's major rivers and large lakes are now well-supplied with eagles. Currently 8 lakes, reservoirs, and bays in the Granite State support two or more breeding pairs; Winnepesaukee (11 pairs!), Umbagog (5), Great Bay/Little Bay (3), Lake Wantastiquet (3), Lake Francis (2), Moore Reservoir (2), Newfound (2), and Winnisquam (2). Working under a State Wildlife Grant (SWG) contract with NHFG, in 2019 we partitioned the state into 5 similar-sized eagle monitoring zones. In the Merrimack Valley zone, designated as our focal zone for 2023, we found 28 territorial pairs that produced 25 juvenile eagles. The Coastal zone will be our focal area in 2024.

In 2023, we found 5 nests that had 3 fledglings each, the most 3-chick nests we have ever documented in one year. In June 2023, we collaborated with scientists from Maine's Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI) to collect blood and feather samples from 8 eaglets in 4 NH nests, including at two 3-chick nests in Milan and in Manchester. BRI's Chris Desorbo (see cover photo) remarked that climbing a giant pine tree just once to obtain samples from 3 chicks is a very efficient sampling methodology! Tissue samples will be analyzed soon to look for presence of PFAS and other environmental toxins. While handling these birds, we also placed ID bands on them in hopes of relocating them again in future years.

NH Audubon continues to work with wildlife rehabilitator Maria Colby from Wings of the Dawn and veterinarian Dr.

## NH Bald Eagle Productivity, 1987-2023



Michael Dutton and his team at clinics located in Hopkinton and Weare. Among other incidents in 2023, they examined one adult eagle hit by a vehicle on I-93 in Concord, advised on treatment for a 1-yr old from Epsom with apparent rodenticide poisoning, and performed surgery on a juvenile from Lake Waukegan (see photo) that had fractured a wing and a leg during a fall from the nest.

*Our annual SWG contract with NHFG covers only a part of the monitoring and management work NH Audubon does with Bald Eagles. We depend on additional financial support from foundations, including from the Knopf Family Foundation and from individual donors, to continue to track eagles statewide. Please consider making a gift to sustain our work in the coming year. And thank you to all those individuals who volunteer their time and talents in the field to help us monitor eagles. NH Audubon would not be able to continue our statewide monitoring without your help!*



*Veterinarians Dr. Michael Dutton (l) and Dr. Julianne Richard (r) prepare to surgically repair a Lake Waukegan eaglelet's fractured wing and leg, by Helen Dutton.*