

Eagles expanding their habit beyond the wild



A bald eagle is released near Carson Pass in 2009.

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By Gregory Lee Sullivan, Washington Post

If there's a time of year to see a bald eagle, this is it. But those who spot one during the current nesting season won't be observing quite the same national bird as in decades past.

"The main thing is they just don't really care as much about people anymore" and now can be found nesting in residential areas, said Kevin McGowan of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, based in Ithaca, N.Y.

According to scientists, changes in the behavior of the bald eagle – from a bird once found only deep in the wild to one willing to cohabitate with humans – are the result of laws that protect the bird and have helped the species recover after nearly dying out in the early 1960s. The government is empowered to go after those responsible for the death of bald eagles – even if it's unintentional (such as in the case of a New York farmer who received a fine and probation last year after several eagles died from poisoned meat he had set out to

kill coyotes). Federal and state officials are investigating what happened to 13 bald eagles found dead recently near a farm on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

The bald eagle's historical range covers most of North America. The bird was hunted for sport before the Bald Eagle Protection Act of 1940 outlawed the practice; that ban was reinforced by the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act in 1962. The pesticide DDT was found to cause eagle and other species significant difficulties with reproduction. By 1963 America's iconic bird was on the verge of dying out in the nation's 48 contiguous states. But with the banning of DDT in 1972, combined with more federal and state protection and recovery efforts, the species has made a steady rise.

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