



# Return of a Native



When the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources began a Bald Eagle Restoration Project in 1984, Bald Eagles had not successfully nested in Alabama since 1949. Thanks to these restoration efforts, Bald Eagle populations increased and today they nest all across the state. Once in danger of extinction, Bald Eagles made a tremendous comeback not only in Alabama but all across the country.

In the fall, there is an influx of Bald Eagles into Alabama from northern states and Canada. These migrants spend the winter in Alabama enjoying moderate temperatures before returning north in the spring.

Historically, Bald Eagles nested in Alabama's Tennessee Valley and the state's coastal region. The population dwindled in the 1950's and 1960's due mainly to the devastating effects of DDT poisoning. This chemical passes through the food chain by accumulating in fish, which in turn are eaten by eagles. DDT in the eagles caused eggshells to thin so that they broke during incubation and failed to hatch. The population plummeted, wintering eagles in Alabama became rare, and the breeding population completely died out.

## Can You Spot a Bald Eagle?

Adult Bald Eagles have a gleaming white head and tail, which contrasts against their dark body feathers. This striking characteristic, along with their bright yellow bill, does not fully develop until they mature at about five years of age. The adult female has a wingspan of almost

eight feet and may weigh as much as fourteen pounds. The adult males are slightly smaller. Immature Bald Eagles, lacking the white head and tail, are often misidentified as Golden Eagles. Unlike Bald Eagles, Golden Eagles are not usually found near large bodies of water.



Bald Eagle/USFWS



Hacking tower/ADCNR, Keith Hudson

## Bald Eagle Restoration

The work of many dedicated wildlife biologists and conservationists helped this magnificent bird of prey return to Alabama. Using a process known as *hacking*, 91 juvenile eagles were released throughout the state from 1985-91. Juvenile eagles take their first flights in Alabama, become imprinted on the geographic area and return to nest as adults.



Bald Eagles nesting/ADCNR Photos

## Breeding and Nesting

Bald Eagles mate for life and share nesting and brood rearing responsibilities. Nests are often built in the crowns of tall trees near water. Pairs usually return to the same nest each year, adding new nesting material. One, two, or occasionally three eggs are laid from December to January and are incubated for 30-32 days. Eaglets are small at hatching and require nearly three months of development before leaving the nest.