

TECHNICAL

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

NOTES

IOWA STATE OFFICE
DES MOINES, IOWA

Biology #25

Date: March 2008

Subject: BALD EAGLE NEST SITE INFORMATION

Species Description: Both sexes have similar plumage. Adults have a white head, white tail, and a large bright yellow bill; elsewhere the plumage is dark. Immature Bald Eagles are dark with variable amounts of light splotching on the body, under wing coverts, flight feathers, and tail base; averages 79-94 cm. long, 178-229 cm. wingspan.

Reproduction: Clutch size is one – three (usually two). Both sexes incubate the clutch. Incubation lasts about five weeks. The second hatched young often dies. Both parents feed the young in the nest. Young first fly at ten – twelve and one half weeks. The young are still cared for by adults and may remain around the nest for several weeks after fledging. Generally, Bald Eagles reach maturity and first breed at about five – six years. Adults may not nest and lay eggs every year.

Food Comments: Bald Eagles feed opportunistically on fishes, injured waterfowl, various mammals, and carrion. They hunt live prey, scavenge, and pirate food from other birds.

Breeding Habitat Preference: Bald Eagle breeding habitat most commonly includes areas close to (within two miles) rivers, lakes, or other bodies of water that reflect the general availability of primary food sources including fish, and waterfowl. Bald Eagles typically nest in tall trees or on cliffs near water. Nest trees may include pine, spruce, fir, cottonwood, oak, poplar, and beech. Eagles often use the same nest year after year for extended periods. Eagles will build more than one nest in their territory, although they use only one each breeding season. Occasionally eagles may alternate between two nest sites in successive years. If a nest is lost to storms, etc., the eagle will often re-nest in the same vicinity.

In February or March in Iowa, Bald Eagles begin building a nest or repairing a nest that they built in a previous year. Nests are made of large sticks and other vegetation, the sticks forming the shell and more flexible greens lining the inside platform. Bald Eagle nest sites are typically large structures constructed in the top of large open canopied trees. When a pair of eagles reuses an old nest, they will add new materials to it. While the average active Bald Eagle nest is four feet in diameter and three feet deep, a new first year nest may be considerably smaller. Nests may be in the flood plain near streams, reservoirs, ponds, or lakes, or in the uplands within two miles of such sites.