

SANDUSKY — The once-rare bald eagle may exceed 300 nests in Ohio this year, state wildlife officials predict.

America's national symbol was once down to just four known nests in Ohio in 1979 but has rebounded. During 2018, Ohio Department of Wildlife biologists estimated Ohio had 286 eagle nests raising 445 eaglets, with many of those nests found locally in Ottawa, Erie and Sandusky counties.

The bald eagle was removed from the federal government's endangered species list in 2007 and from Ohio's list in 2012.

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"I am proud of our agency's restoration efforts to bring back this iconic symbol of our nation, and thrilled the population is thriving here," said Kendra Wecker, chief of the ODNR Division of Wildlife. "Each time an eagle soars overhead, Ohioans have the opportunity to experience the natural beauty in our state. Nesting season is an exciting time, and I hope we can exceed 300 nests this year."

State wildlife officials say the western Lake Erie shore area — Erie, Ottawa, Sandusky and Lucas counties — have a sizeable eagle population. Estimates of the number of nests by county are not available, said Brian Plasters, a spokesman for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources.

The breeding population has been going up about 3.5 percent a year for the past 10 years. Eagles typically lay their eggs from mid-February to late March.

March is a good time to look for eagle nests, with visibility good because the trees are still bare. The Division of Wildlife says good places to look for eagle nests are Magee Marsh Wildlife Area, Pickerel Creek Wildlife Area, Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, Mosquito Creek Wildlife Area and Killdeer Plains Wildlife Area. Pickerel Creek is located on U.S. 6, about halfway between Sandusky and Fremont.

If you find a nest, however, keep your distance. Wildlife officers advise spectators to stay at least 100 yards away, lest the eagles become anxious and abandon their eggs. Disturbing eagle nests is against the law under the federal Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, and taking or bothering an eagle and can lead to a hefty fine and up to a year in jail.

The bald eagle has been the U.S. national bird since the country's founding and is found on many U.S. government seals. Take a dollar out of your wallet, and you'll find a picture of a bald eagle clutching arrows and an olive branch in its talons.

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