



NATURE AT RISK

By Carol Hillestad for the Brodhead Watershed Association

Practicing “Eagle-Eyed Etiquette”

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In the early 1970s, only two nesting sites of American Bald Eagles were known to exist in the entire length and breadth of Pennsylvania.

Those were dark days. Was the symbol of America going to go extinct... in America?

With the help of the Pennsylvania Game Commission, bird professionals, volunteers, and the Environmental Protection Agency (newly signed into law by President Richard Nixon), the eagles are back. Instead of two nests in all of Pennsylvania, these days there are more than a dozen in the Brodhead Watershed alone.

And yet...to continue to thrive, eagles still need our cooperation.



Most of the year, American Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) live as solitary beings. They tend to migrate alone, and spend the early winter alone. Yet eagles mate for life, and in late winter breeding pairs often return to last year's nest, refurbishing and expanding it over the years. The female lays two or three eggs, and both male and female incubate them and care for the eaglets to maturity.

Watching the adults prepare the nest, counting the days as they take turns incubating the eggs, catching the first glimpse of an eaglet being fed, seeing the young stretch their wings, teeter on the edge of the nest, take their first terrifying plunge toward flight — eagle-watching at this time of year is, no doubt about it, just plain thrilling.

Much as you love watching them, do the birds a favor. Keep your distance. Give them the privacy and peace they need — don't try to get “just a little” closer; use binoculars or a scope instead. Move slowly and avoid moving toward the nest. If you must speak, whisper. Watch and photograph from a blind, even if it's just some concealing shrubbery. And of course, never even think of trying to make the birds fly.

You should also notice their behavior. If a bird becomes agitated, starts vocalizing, or heaven forbid, moves away, stop whatever you are doing and leave the area.

The emotional rush of catching sight of an eagle, on a nest or soaring above a creek, elevates a normal day to something magical. Do your part to protect them!

For more information about eagle etiquette from the Pennsylvania Game Commission:

<https://www.pgc.pa.gov/Wildlife/WildlifeSpecies/BaldEagles/BaldEagleWatching/Pages/BaldEagleNestEtiquette.aspx>

For humans, eagles and every living thing, Brodhead Watershed Association protects water quality and quantity throughout our area. Get involved! Become a member! www.brodheadwatershed.org