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BALD EAGLES NEST AT NORTH PLATTE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
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The refuge, located in Scotts Bluff County, played host during the summer of 1993 to one of only two bald-eagle nests in Nebraska, and three eaglets were reared to flight stage. A successful nest on the Middle Loup River in 1992 was the first bald-eagle nest to fledge in Nebraska in over 100 years. [See NBR 60 (2): 59. June 1992.]

The nest was discovered on April 2 while I was inspecting an abandoned heron/cormorant rookery. A startled adult bald eagle leaped out of one of the larger nests and began making several treetop-level passes and snapping its beak over the intruder. Staff members Felix and Lucy Koenig began to make casual observations of the area during routine, biweekly wildlife surveys. Lucy relocated the nest from afar, using a spotting scope, and witnessed the first hatchling on May 5.

A vantage point was selected 1/4 mile from the nest, and an observation blind was erected. During subsequent visits to the blind, a second and then a third (May 13) eaglet were confirmed by Mrs. Koenig. We knew that there would be anxious days ahead prior to any young leaving the nest; usually only one eaglet is produced from a successful nest. The biggest risks facing the three eaglets until flight stage would be sibling rivalry and high winds. It seemed unreasonably optimistic to expect all three eaglets to fledge.

The adult eagles proved to be exceptional parents. We were able to watch them bring ducks and carp to the nest and share in the feeding responsibilities. During most of May and June, there was never a time when at least one adult was not at the nest, tending to or merely watching over their brood.

The first eaglet fledged July 15 and the last took flight July 20. During an inspection of the area beneath the nest shortly afterwards, we found a variety of food remnants: over 60 carp carcasses, numerous waterfowl parts, one cottontail leg, and a pocket-gopher skull. All three young and both adults were seen in the area of the nest up to September 1, when the observation blind was dismantled.

The Panhandle of Nebraska is very fortunate to have bald eagles nesting so early in their comeback to this state. It is a positive indication of the continuing health of the eagle population, as well as a tribute to the bountiful wildlife habitat found in the North Platte River valley. Refuge staff will be spending several anxious months ahead in anticipation of the adult eagles returning to nest again in 1994.

Editor's Note: In addition to the three eaglets mentioned in the above article, three eaglets fledged in 1993 in a nest along the Middle Loup River northwest of Grand Island. This is the same nest where two eaglets fledged in 1992.