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2011 BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) STATEWIDE NESTING SURVEY

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The Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) was extirpated as a breeding species in Nebraska for most of the 20th Century. Nebraska's first active, successful, modern Bald Eagle nest was near Valley, Douglas County, in 1991 (Farrar 1991). Jorgensen et al. (2010) summarized modern Bald Eagle nesting records in Nebraska from 1950 to 2009. Jorgensen et al. (2010) noted the highest annual count of active nests was 54 in 2007. In this note we summarize the 2011 Bald Eagle nesting records in Nebraska.

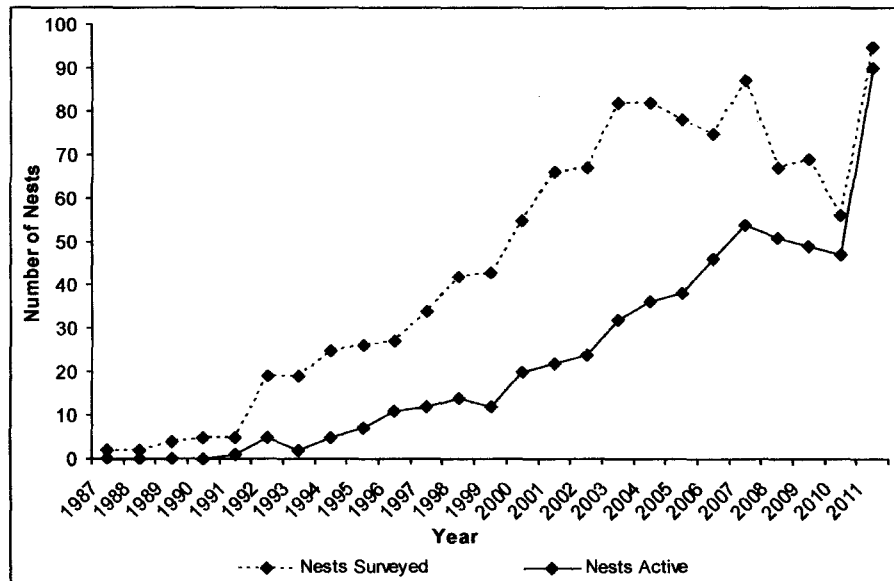


Figure 1. Number of Bald Eagle nests surveyed (dashed line) and number of active nests (solid line) in Nebraska from 1987-2011.

METHODS

Bald Eagle nesting data was compiled from formal surveys conducted by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Platte River Recovery Implementation Program and trained volunteers. These data were supplemented with information from the public. Jorgensen et al. (2010) described additional survey methods, and the 2011 survey followed those methods, with the following exceptions. We increased survey effort in 2011 in much of the state compared to previous years. Effort was increased in the Loup River system in 2011 by systematically driving roads that followed this river in March and April. We used this approach on the entire Loup River, the Middle Loup River upstream to Loup City, Sherman County, and the North Loup River upstream to Taylor, Loup County. Comprehensive survey efforts were limited on the Missouri River due to flooding; however, monitoring will resume in the future. Productivity was not determined due to the increasing number of Bald Eagles and limited personnel resources.

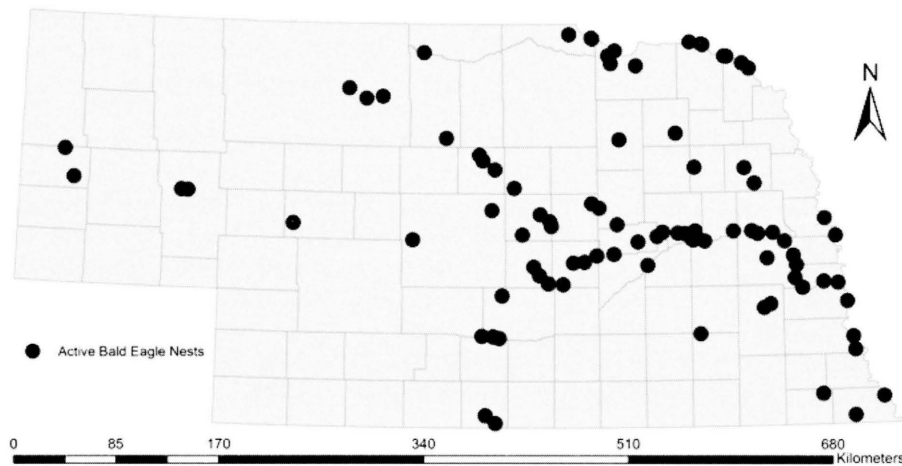


Figure 2. Spatial distribution of active Bald Eagle nests in Nebraska in 2011.

RESULTS

In 2011, we surveyed ninety-five Bald Eagle nests, which are distinctive because of their large size. A record ninety nests were determined to be active (Figure 1). Of the ninety active nests, thirty-eight nests were documented for the first time during the 2011 breeding season. Active nests were distributed across the state with highest concentrations in eastern Nebraska along the Lower Platte and Loup Rivers (Figure 2). In 2011, active Bald Eagle nests were recorded in 44% of all Nebraska counties

(n=93). Almost 50% of the active nests (n=44) were east of Lincoln and Cherry Counties along the Platte and Loup River systems.

DISCUSSION

The number of nesting Bald Eagles in Nebraska continues to increase, and a record (90) number of active nests was observed in 2011. The previous record was 54 active nests in 2007. The size of the increase in 2011 was believed to be due in part to increased survey effort. Indeed, systematic nest surveys along the Loup River system yielded eight nests that were previously unknown. The number of nests found per year over the 20-year period increased by an average of 4.5 nests per year. Our results from 2011 suggest that the number of eagle nests in Nebraska may not have peaked. The question is at what point will the increase begin to slow or level off as nesting habitat is increasingly occupied. Additional survey work will yield the answer as long as resources are available to conduct such efforts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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