

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife offer tips to increase chance of spotting bald eagle this winter

“Bald eagle numbers continue to climb in the Commonwealth giving winter birders a better chance to glimpse these impressive birds. Get ready for your winter outing with these tips for where to look and how to prepare.

Many people are surprised to find out that winter is a prime time for birding. There are opportunities for beginner and experienced birders to spot our year-round resident birds as well as the seasonal “snowbirds” that visit Massachusetts for the winter months. Some veteran birders make an annual trek to the Massachusetts coast in winter catch a glimpse of seabirds and sea ducks. Other, more casual birders are content with the sight of back-capped chickadees, downy woodpeckers, or white-breasted nuthatches as they walk or ski along. One iconic bird, the bald eagle, is becoming easier for winter birders to spot.

Where to look for eagles in MA

Bald eagles usually live in coastal areas, estuaries, and larger inland waters. They need a lot of shoreline habitat with forested areas for nesting. They prefer areas where trees project above the forest canopy for perching with an unimpeded view. The waterbody they choose typically has a good supply of moderate- to large-sized fish.

Winter is a prime time for spotting bald eagles! Follow these tips:

? Look for bald eagles in coastal areas, estuaries, and larger inland waters. They prefer areas where trees project above the forest canopy for perching with an unimpeded view.

? At this time of year, eagles are building nests so look for large nests in big trees. Massachusetts is home to over 70 nesting pairs! If you spot a nest, keep your distance and observe from afar.

? Eagles are drawn to open waters. As many lakes and ponds freeze, there are fewer areas of open waters which may make eagles easier to find. Eagles will often gather below dams, especially if water is being released.

? If you do see an eagle, watching with binoculars from inside your vehicle is a great way to observe the birds without disturbing them and you'll stay warm.

? If you see an eagle once, visit that site again. Eagles tend to return to the same section of shoreline or even the same tree throughout the season and year after year.

What do eagles do in the winter?

Bald eagles are sexually mature at 4–6 years old, but they may be considerably older before breeding for the first time. Courtship takes place in mid- to late winter. After courtship, a mated pair builds or adds to a large nest in December–February. The nest is built with large sticks and lined with sprigs of pine, grasses, and other soft materials. Male eagles collect the nest materials and deliver them to their mates, which are responsible for most of the actual nest construction. Once a nesting site is chosen, mated pairs usually return every year and add to the existing nest. Egg laying usually takes place from early March to early April.

If you see a bald eagle carrying sticks to a nest this winter, please report your observation to MassWildlife at mass.wildlife@mass.gov. Please include the location and date of the observation and your contact information. These observations help MassWildlife identify new nest locations and monitor our eagle population. At any time of year, if you

observe a bald eagle at a nest, please report it to MassWildlife using the Heritage Hub.

Bald eagle restoration is one of the best conservation success stories in Massachusetts, and our biologists continue to document expansion of the eagle population. That means there are more opportunities than ever to see an eagle this winter!"
-Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife.