

NEWS FROM THE DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL

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PHOTO CAPTION: A mature female bald eagle is released back into the wild Monday in Sussex County after rehabilitation at Tri-State Bird Rescue & Research in Newark.
/Tri-State Bird Rescue & Research Photo

DNREC, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service continue investigation into the deaths of five bald eagles in Sussex County

Two eagles found sick and disoriented March 19 near Dagsboro released back into wild after rehabilitation by Tri-State Bird Rescue

DAGSBORO (March 29, 2016) – While U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service agents and DNREC Fish & Wildlife Natural Resources Police officers continue an investigation into the March 19-20 deaths of five bald eagles in Sussex County, two eagles captured that weekend disoriented and possibly near death have been released back into the wild after rehabilitation by Tri-State Bird Rescue & Research of Newark, DNREC and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service announced today.

The case began with the March 19 discovery of a dead bald eagle in a field near Dagsboro. Later that morning, a group of eagles that appeared sick and disoriented were found in a farm field about a mile away from the dead bird. Five eagles from that group were captured by Tri-State and DNREC Fish & Wildlife Natural Resources Police; three of those birds died in transit to Newark from as yet undetermined causes. Two more eagles – one dead, one alive – were found the next morning, March 20, in the same area. The live bird also was taken to Tri-State.

The first eagle to be rehabilitated, a second-year female, was released to the wild from Tri-State Bird Rescue & Research's facility last week. "The eagle was demonstrating excellent flight skills and strength in our large outdoor flight cage – she was ready to go," said Tri-State Executive Director Lisa Smith, noting that because the bird was not an adult, it was not critical to return her to "territory" she had occupied in Sussex County.

"We carefully weigh the advantages of returning birds of prey to the area where they were found against the risk of possible injury during transport," Smith said. "This eagle was very active, and we were concerned that she would not travel calmly. We considered it best to release her here and allow her get to where she might be going under her own steam."

The second eagle to be returned to the wild, a mature female, soared into clearing skies over Sussex County yesterday morning, her release overseen by Tri-State representatives and Fish & Wildlife Natural Resource Police after her successful rehabilitation. One eagle remains at Tri-State, now in stable condition, with its rehabilitation continuing.

Neither U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service agents nor DNREC Natural Resources Police are commenting on what may have caused the deaths of the five bald eagles – all sent last week to the USFWS forensics lab in Ashland, Ore., for testing. “This is an active investigation and we do not know what caused the five eagles to become sick and die,” said Sgt. John McDerby, Fish & Wildlife Natural Resources Police. “We continue to ask people not to attempt to capture or handle any eagles they encounter on the ground, but to call us and report any birds that may appear sick or injured.”

Sick or injured eagles can be reported to the Fish & Wildlife Natural Resources Police dispatch center at 800-523-3336. Anyone with information about the dead eagles is urged to contact Fish & Wildlife Natural Resources Police call 24-hour Operation Game Theft hotline at 800-292-3030. All Operation Game Theft calls are kept confidential by DNREC.

Thirteen bald eagles were found dead Feb. 20 near Federalsburg, Md., with a determination made by USFWS forensics lab that those eagles "did not die from natural causes." A reward totaling \$30,000 from USFWS and conservation partners has been offered to anyone with information leading to conviction in the Maryland case. A portion of that reward – including \$5,000 posted by the American Bird Conservancy – could be made available in the Delaware case for information leading to a criminal conviction.

DNREC’s Division of Fish & Wildlife recognizes and thanks the majority of anglers, hunters and boaters who comply with and support Delaware’s fishing, hunting and boating laws and regulations. Citizens are encouraged to report fish, wildlife and boating violations to the Delaware Fish & Wildlife Natural Resources Police by calling 302-739-4580. Wildlife violations may also be reported anonymously to Operation Game Theft by calling 800-292-3030 or online at <http://de.gov/oqt>.



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