

**Restoration effort hopes for bald eagles' return**  
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A collaborative group that raised dozens of bald eagles in captivity and released them to the Vermont skies is hoping spring may bring the first mature birds back to the Champlain Valley.

The Vermont Bald Eagle Restoration Initiative released 29 bald eagles between 2004 and 2006 in an attempt to build a breeding bald eagle population in Vermont, the only state in the lower 48 that lacks breeding bald eagles. The first of those birds should be reaching sexual maturity this year, prompting hopes that they will return to the general vicinity of their youth.

“Eagles have fidelity to the area from which they fledge, so we’re hopeful we’ll see returnees any time,” said Margaret Fowle, wildlife biologist at the National Wildlife Federation, one of the collaborative partners. “We want birders to report any eagles they see, particularly if they can identify bands on their legs.”

Bald eagle sightings can be reported by e-mail to [wohlfort@nwf.org](mailto:wohlfort@nwf.org). To learn more, visit the project Web site, [www.cvps.com/eagles](http://www.cvps.com/eagles). Photos or video can be sent to [scostel@cvps.com](mailto:scostel@cvps.com) for inclusion on the Web site.

The Vermont Bald Eagle Restoration Initiative includes NWF, the Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Outreach for Earth Stewardship, and Central Vermont Public Service. Project funding was provided through efforts of former Sen. Jim Jeffords.

In 2004, the partners, with the help of dozens of volunteers, built three hack boxes at Dead Creek Wildlife Management area in Addison, Vt., where baby eagles were raised in captivity until they were ready to fledge. The eagles, from natural nests and wildlife rehabilitators in Maine, New Hampshire, New York, Massachusetts and Maryland, were fed and protected by nearly 100 volunteers who provided round-the-clock care for weeks on end in 2004, 2005 and 2006. Thousands of people watched them grow on webcams placed within the hack boxes.

Since their release, just four birds have been found dead. Surviving, banded birds have been reported regularly in past years in central Vermont and the Champlain Valley, and as far away as Forestburgh, N.Y. Steve Parren, non-game and natural heritage coordinator for the Department of Fish & Wildlife, said it’s unlikely any of the released birds will actually pair up and breed this year, but they could begin a process that leads to that in the future.