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## Eagle count sets record

**94 bald, 1 golden flier spotted at Lake Mead; 125 total birds accounted for**

By FRED COUZENS  
VIEW STAFF WRITER

With the nation's emblem, the bald eagle, officially taken off the endangered species list last year, a cadre of bird counters took to lakes Mead and Mohave Jan. 7 in an annual eagle count that posted a record number of birds.



National Park Service employees, along with 47 volunteers from the park service, the Nevada Division of Wildlife, the U.S. Geological Survey and the Bureau of Reclamation, climbed into their boats at sunrise and took off on eight routes around the two lakes that turned up 94 bald eagles and one golden eagle at Lake Mead, and 22 bald eagles and two golden eagles farther south at Lake Mohave.

Another six unknown types of eagle, all seen at Lake Mead, were added to the list that brought the overall total up to a record 125 birds.

The previous high count was last year, when a total of 92 bald, golden and unknown

marlene karas/VIEWDriver Pat Petrie, left, and mechanic Steve Stringer work to prepare a car for the racing season, which begins March 29 and runs through October.



jacob kepler/viewA car that is getting ready for the season at Las Vegas Motor Speedway sits in the H-Town Racing shop in Boulder City.



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eagles were seen along the shorelines of the two lakes.

Mike Boyles, an environmental compliance specialist with the park service, said there could be a variety of reasons as to why the count was so much higher this year.

"It could have been because more 'immatures' tended to migrate south," he said, noting an "immature" is an eagle 4 years old or younger right before it gets its white feathers. "It could have been the climate, since sometimes it depends on the winter weather conditions up north. And we also had a good day for surveying. The lake was like glass."

The optimum weather conditions -- calm winds and the temperature on the lake in the mid-50s -- were in stark contrast to last year, when some bird counting routes had to be cut short because of blustery winds and heavy chop that blew across Lake Mead from midday on.

"We had people write us and tell us how glad they were that the weather was nice," said Dawn Fletcher, a research assistant for the park service on loan from the Public Lands Institute headquarters at UNLV. "I wasn't sure about the weather though the night before. I went to bed and the wind was blowing, so I went to sleep hoping for the best the next day."

Boyles' boat took a route around the north side of Boulder Basin, through the Narrows and halfway up the Overton Arm of Lake Mead before heading back in to Callville Bay from where the trip started.

For Boyles and his crew, it was a memorable day of seeing numerous birds onshore and aloft in the skies.

"We had just come through from the other side of the Narrows when we saw one sitting on a rock and then two adults and another immature joined him," he said. "It was right off near Boulder Point."

He said the riders in his boat saw one real fast; they had been on the water just one-half hour.

"Seeing them was spread out all day," he said. "Last year, when we only saw a few, they must have just hunkered down until the weather passed."

The eagle officially came off the endangered species list Aug. 8, 2007, after posting a remarkable comeback in recent years.

When it starts getting cold in the north and the lakes and streams start freezing over, causing the food supply to diminish, the eagles head south, arriving at the shores and cliffs of Lakes Mead and Mohave in November and staying over until about mid-March.

Gary THOMPSON/special to VIEWA bald eagle flies over Ann-Margret Beach along the shoreline of the Overton Arm of Lake Mead in the Lake Mead Recreation Area during a Jan. 7 National Park Service eagle count.

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The increasing numbers -- from 60 in 2001 to 67 in 2005 and 2006 and then to 87 last year -- signifies that conservation efforts have worked, which Boyles predicted last August just before the delisting.

"We'll continue to monitor the eagles as we have in the past," Boyles said, when interviewed over the summer. "So we'll continue with our surveys again this January. Any time a species is delisted, there's monitoring afterward to make sure they're still there. The park service has a lot of protected habitat, so we expect to see a lot more this winter."

And his prediction came true with a record number of 125 birds, a 44 percent increase over last year's count.

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