| Eagles Fly High Again |
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| **Article**  Lexile 800  **PAGE 1**  image  Photo credit: Wikimedia /  Commons/Paul Friel  *>Today, the number of bald eagles in the U.S. is on the rise.*  **KEMPTON, Pennsylvania** (Achieve3000, March 17, 2011). Bird-watchers at a ridgetop preserve in eastern Pennsylvania counted a record number of migrating bald eagles. The count is a good sign. It shows that the once-endangered species is making a remarkable comeback. This comeback follows a century of decline.  Hawk Mountain Sanctuary (HMS) is a 2,600-acre preserve. It was set up 76 years ago. Since then, the preserve has kept a yearly tally of migrating birds of prey. The count has included various species of hawks, falcons, and eagles. In mid-December 2010, the yearly fall count at HMS drew to a close. Sanctuary scientists reported that an amazing 407 bald eagles had been counted at the preserve. This broke the old record of 245, set in 2008.  "[This is] possibly the greatest wildlife success story of our time," said HMS's Keith Bildstein.  Bildstein was talking about the bald eagle's comeback after a steep decline in population. The decline happened between the 1870s and 1970s. It was due at first to habitat loss and hunting. The eagle population continued to fall later. This was due to the widespread use of a pesticide called DDT. The chemical did its job of killing insects that damaged crops and spread diseases. Unfortunately, however, it did not stop at insects. DDT also reduced eagle populations. The pesticide built up in fish. Fish are a main food for eagles. This resulted in the birds laying eggs with weakened shells that broke too early.  By the early 1960s, the species was nearing extinction. Only 417 breeding pairs of bald eagles remained in the 48 mainland states. Over the next decade, concerns mounted over the use of DDT. In 1972, the pesticide was banned in the U.S.  By that time, the bald eagle had become a rare sight at HMS. The low point came in 1975, when counters spotted only 13 bald eagles the entire fall. Catherine Elwell, 68, is a bird-watcher. She has been visiting HMS since the early 1970s. According to Elwell, bald eagle sightings were so uncommon at HMS during that time that "great cheers would rise up" whenever one was spotted overhead.  In 1976, the struggling species was officially added to the U.S. Endangered Species list.  Over the years, the bald eagle gradually began to come back. In 2007, the bird was removed from the Endangered Species list. The population of bald eagles has since reached more than 10,000 pairs.  "This has been just the most remarkable [comeback]," said Elwell. "I don't think many of us thought it would happen."  This year's count included one especially good day in late August. That's when scientist David Barber tallied 36 eagles. Fourteen of these eagles were spotted within one hour. It was the second-highest single-day total in HMS's history.  "We just kept looking at each other, like, where are all these eagles coming from?" Barber remembered.  Where indeed. Scientist Laurie Goodrich plans the yearly count at HMS. She thinks there were a number of reasons why 2010 was like no other. For one thing, the weather cooperated. According to Goodrich, there were plenty of days of northwesterly winds. These winds helped push migrant birds closer to the ridgetop. There, they could be spotted and counted. Also, an increase in the number of breeding pairs in the northeastern U.S. may have helped: Eagles guard their own area. They push migrants from Canada farther south toward the preserve.  Then again, the record count might simply reflect a higher number of eagles than ever before.  Whatever the reason, Goodrich said, "It's something we can celebrate, as bird-watchers and as scientists."  *The Associated Press contributed to this story.*    **PAGE 2**  Dig Deeper  The bald eagle is not just *any* bird. It is the national bird of the United States. Take a look at the $1 dollar bill. There it is! The bald eagle is strong and beautiful, like the U.S. It's no wonder people were worried when these animals began to die out.  Why did the number of bald eagles begin to drop? One reason is that some people hunted bald eagles. Another reason is that people built on bald eagle habitat. Also, people used DDT—a poison that kills crop-eating bugs—on crops. DDT also got into bodies of water, then into the fish that lived in those bodies of water. Bald eagles that ate the fish got sick. They could not have healthy offspring.  A law called the Endangered Species Act helped the bald eagle. The law helps animals by making rules to protect them. One rule might say that the animal cannot be hunted. Another rule might say that people cannot use things that can hurt the animal, like DDT.    **Dictionary**   |  | | --- | | **bird of prey** *(noun)*    a bird (such as an owl) that eats other animals | | **decline** *(noun)*    a fall or drop in number | | **endangered** *(adjective)*    in danger of becoming extinct | | **pesticide** *(noun)*    something used to kill bugs | | **sanctuary** *(noun)*    a place set aside in which birds and other animals are protected from hunting | |