

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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BALD EAGLE AUTOPSIES SHOW MAN-MADE PERILS

Autopsies on 39 bald eagles collected in 1969-70 show most of the birds were victims of man-made perils, the Fish and Wildlife Service reports.

Analysis just completed at the Service's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center near Laurel, Md., indicated the following causes of mortality: illegal shooting, 46 percent; poisoning, 18 percent; accidents, 15 percent; natural diseases, 8 percent; unknown causes, 13 percent. The results may be somewhat biased, however, in that eagles that are shot or poisoned may more likely be discovered than those succumbing to their own accidents or diseases.

Of the 39 eagles, 6 had potentially lethal residues in the brain of the pesticide dieldrin. No other chemicals were found in amounts high enough to have caused death, although all eagles examined contained DDE and PCB's (polychlorinated biphenyls). The Center is now conducting studies of eagles collected last year.

Many factors have contributed to the decline of this species, and many of these are of man's doing, including habitat destruction, nest disturbance, shooting, and release of toxic substances into the environment.

Population estimates of bald eagles are difficult to come by, but perhaps 2,000 to 3,000 remain in the United States, excluding Alaska. Only about 300 members of the southern race of bald eagles are believed to remain, and this species is on the endangered list. Alaska, however, has a population of from 8,000 to 10,000 northern bald eagles.