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Eagles on East Texas lakes Estimated 250 bald eagles

More than 250 of America's majestic bald eagle make their winter home on East Texas lakes. The majority stay the season soaring above the reservoirs and rivers of East Texas in search of fish, crippled water-fowl and carrion, says Sandy Korowotny, a graduate student in Texas A&M University's wildlife and fisheries sciences department. Dr. Keith Arnold of that department and Korowotny were awarded two grants over the past season to study the winter account of the endangered eagles.

"The best estimate we have indicates that between 250 and 300 bald eagles wintered in East Texas this year," says Korowotny. "We have to be cautious about announcing figures. The river systems are very close in East Texas and it wouldn't be difficult for an eagle to fly 40 miles or more in search of food. "If there is a stable food supply, then usually the birds will stay in one place." The bigger lakes generally had more eagles, Korowotny said. Reported sightings include five at Lake

Somerville, 20 at Lake O' the Pines, 38 at Sam Rayburn Reservoir, nine at Lake Conroe, 19 at Lake Livingston, 22 at Lake Palestine and 15 at Lake Wright Patman.

"Essentially we are talking about the area known as East Texas. The region ranges from the coastal plains north of Houston to east of the Dallas-Fort Worth area, covering 38 reservoirs in all," Korowotny says. "It's difficult to compare one year with another," she explains. "But it is obvious the eagle population is not declining. Over the next 30 to 40 years the creation of man-made reservoirs like Somerville and Conroe will create a new habitat for the eagles, as long as the shoreline is not gobbled up by lakeside developments and summer homes.

"We are very happy about the chances for increasing the wintering bald eagle population." However, Arnold says, a growing population of wintering bald eagles

could be a problem for the Southern bald eagles which are foremost on the endangered species list. These birds have historically made their homes along the Gulf Coast and near rivers in East Texas.

"We want to carefully look at the effect the presence of wintering eagles have on the Southern bald eagles' breeding territories," adds Arnold. "In other words, we may be doing fine for the wintering eagle, but we may be doing harm to the Southern native."

Migrant eagles will roost for the winter in almost any region of the state where there is a productive reservoir. Bald eagles have been reported from far West Texas on Lake Meredith all the way to Houston.

"I'm really pleased about the results of the winter eagle survey," Arnold says. "It gave us a chance to get an almost complete survey of the eagles in East Texas. We are hoping for more funding next year to get a better picture of what happens year-to-year as they fly down to the far north."

Wintering bald eagles come primarily from northern climate from as far away as Minnesota and Canada, he explains.

The count project began November with boat and aerial surveys of the East Texas lakes.

"We found out quickly that the best way to track the eagles was the air," Arnold recalls. "To cover the lake much faster and to get a much better chance of getting an accurate count. In a boat there are times when you just can't cover the entire lake, especially in the low, timbered, backwater areas of the big lakes.

"On Sam Rayburn Reservoir in February we used two boats. We were able to fly the lake to get a count a week later, we found we missed many eagles in the backwater slough of the lake."

It's very important to take survey as quickly as possible to reduce the chances of counting a bird twice. In sighting eagles in the air, the plane flies at low altitudes and at slow speeds. The birds are easy to identify because mature bald eagle will have a span of more than six feet. Immature bald eagles are brown with white blotches. In the third year of development, eagles have the characteristic white head and tail. Many people mistake the immature bald eagle for a golden eagle, but there are very few golden eagles in East Texas, Arnold says.

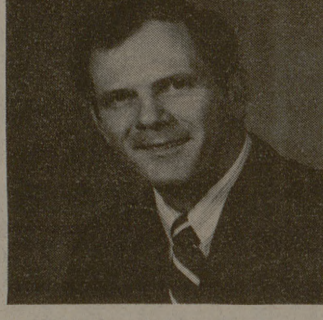
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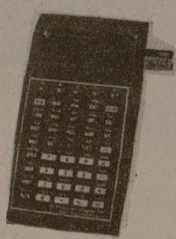
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United Press International

FORT COLLINS, Colo. — A researcher at Colorado State University said Tuesday he had invented a solar energy cell which can produce electrical power at much less cost than conventional cells.

Dr. Joel DuBow, an assistant professor of electrical engineering, said the cell would be presented to President Carter today during ceremonies at the Solar Energy Research Institute near Golden.

DuBow said the cell was a breakthrough in solar electrical technology.

The photovoltaic cell uses polycrystal, while conventional cells use a single crystal. DuBow said polycrystal is not as efficient, but much less expensive.

The polycrystal cell, he said, about 75 percent as efficient as a single crystal cell, but produces electricity at one-tenth the cost.

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