A record 103 active bald eagle nests were recorded in Nebraska in 2012, surpassing the previous record of 90 set in 2011.

While bald eagles have been increasing as a breeding species in Nebraska since 1991, the jump in numbers that has been observed the last two years has been partially due to additional survey effort.

“After a couple of years of less intense focus, in 2011 and 2012 we spent a few days surveying areas that had not been checked for a few years,” Joel Jorgensen, nongame bird program manager for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission said. “It did not come as a surprise to us that those areas where harboring additional nests.”

Bald eagles nested historically in Nebraska but were extirpated around 1900. The number of early nests is few and it is possible that bald eagles are more common now than before settlement by European Americans.

The recovery of the bald eagle is considered a modern conservation success story. The bald eagle was listed as a federally and state endangered species in 1978. Populations declined greatly throughout the 20th century primarily due to the use of DDT and similar chemical pesticides. In 1963, there were fewer than 500 breeding pairs in the lower 48 states. After the banning of DDT and many years of intense management efforts, the bald eagle was removed from the federal and state lists of threatened and endangered species.

Bald eagle nest monitoring is conducted and coordinated by Game and Parks but also relies on cooperating agencies and trained volunteers to collect data. Partners include National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Platte River Recovery Implementation Program, Nebraska Public Power District and students from Concordia University.