

**Many great places to see bald eagles on Seacoast**

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**N.H. Estuaries Project**

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"Look, up in the sky, it's a bird, it's a plane, no, it's a bird - a really big bird!"

Seeing a bald eagle in flight can be a jarring experience, because they are so much bigger than many other animals in the sky. They actually seem like a surreal computer-generated creature that you might see in a Hollywood movie.

But these magnificent animals are real and are flying in the Seacoast skies right now. Winter is a great time to see bald eagles because as lakes and rivers freeze in the North, they congregate around areas of open water, like Great Bay.

Laura Deming, a state Audubon senior wildlife biologist, said Great Bay is currently the winter home of a small group of eagles.

"There seem to be at least five eagles that have established themselves at Great Bay this winter," she said. "We have a great group of volunteers who have monitored eagle activity on the bay for a long time, and they report that the number of Great Bay eagles is down since past years. This is due to an unseasonably warm winter and more open water in the region. The regional eagle population does not appear to be smaller, just more spread out."

The lack of ice in Great Bay seems to help eagle watching at Sandy Point Discovery Center. Kelle McKenzie, center director, said eagles have been closer to shore this year, foraging for food on the exposed mud flats. "A couple weeks ago we saw four eagles, one adult and three immatures, feeding on the carcass of a gull near the center," McKenzie said. "We have also seen a few confrontations between crows and eagles over food on the shore. Needless to say, the eagles get the right of way."

There are two very good public access spots around Great Bay to look for eagles. Although the buildings are closed for the winter, the property around Sandy Point Discovery Center on Depot Road in Stratham provides excellent views of the Bay with good parking and an elevated boardwalk. Adam's Point in Durham also provides a good vantage point to scan the northern part of Great Bay and of the Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge, where eagles often roost at night.

Great Bay, the state's largest estuary, covers an area of approximately 17 square miles, with 144 miles of shoreline made up of steep wooded banks, rocky outcroppings, shale beaches and beautiful salt marshes. Protection and enhancement of the Great Bay Estuary, as well as the Hampton-Seabrook Estuary, are primary goals of the New Hampshire Estuaries Project.

Eye on Our Estuaries is an educational column initiated by the New Hampshire Estuaries Project about coastal watershed issues. The New Hampshire Estuaries Project is a collaborative program involving governmental agencies, universities, nonprofit organizations, businesses and the public to protect, enhance and monitor the environmental quality of the state's coastal bays and rivers. Go to [www.nhep.unh.edu](http://www.nhep.unh.edu) for more information.