

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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## NEW YORKERS HELP IN INVESTIGATION OF BALD EAGLE KILLING SUSPECT

An 8-week investigation into the shooting death of an American bald eagle on Long Island has resulted in the arrest of a South Hampton man on March 17, 1977, by Special Agents of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Director Lynn A. Greenwalt announced today.

Shortly after the eagle was killed on December 13, 1976, Special Agents asked the public for help in collecting information which might lead to the arrest of suspects. Various conservation organizations and private individuals offered rewards for information. In addition, the Bald Eagle Protection Act provides for a reward of up to \$2,500 for anyone who supplies information which leads to a conviction.

"We believe that the apprehension of this individual was a direct result of the tremendous cooperation of concerned citizens in the area and the massive publicity which came out when the bird was discovered," Greenwalt said. "The telephone calls from these citizens provided our agents with information that ultimately led to the apprehension of the alleged offender and I want to publicly thank the New York residents who helped us." The response generated by the publicity surrounding this case is expected to lead to prosecutions of other individuals for the killing of hawks and other protected birds.

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Director Greenwalt praised the South Hampton Town Police for the assistance they provided Fish and Wildlife Service agents in the investigation and arrest.

Thomas Michael Counihan, 24, of South Hampton Township, New York, was charged with one count of violating the Bald Eagle Protection Act. Also arrested was a 17-year-old juvenile from South Hampton. The case has been turned over to the Criminal Division of the U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of New York.

The Bald Eagle Act provides for criminal penalties of up to \$5,000 or 1 year imprisonment or both for first offenses, and up to \$10,000 or 2 years imprisonment or both for second offenses.

Although once common in the New York Area, eagles are extremely rare on Long Island and only one active nest exists in the entire State. The total number of bald eagles in the lower 48 States is 850 to 900 breeding birds and 4,000 wintering. While this represents far more eagles than anyone thought existed a few years ago, it appears that reproductive rates are not sufficient to offset the present rate of mortalities. The major threats facing eagles today are habitat destruction, pesticide use, trapping, and shooting.

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