



CATALINA ISLAND CONSERVANCY
35 YEARS  1972-2007

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EASTER MIRACLE!

Third Bald Eagle Chick in 50 Years Hatches Naturally on Catalina Island

A fourth egg still in the nest on Island's East End may hatch at any time, biologists say

AVALON, California, April 9, 2007 – A third bald eagle chick pecked its way out of its shell in a cliff side nest on the East End of Catalina Island sometime very late Friday night or early Saturday morning, joining its two cousins who entered the world last weekend without the aid of human intervention.

Eye-witnesses said one of the chick's first meals was a garibaldi fish plucked fresh from the sea by one of its parents.

The hatchling's (its sex to be determined at a later date) father is a 15-year-old native Catalina bald eagle whose egg was rescued from a nest on the Island's West End in 1992 and hatched at the San Francisco Zoo before being returned to Catalina to be fostered into an adult by his parents. The 14-year-old female was from an egg hatched in the San Francisco Zoo in 1993. She was then brought to her new home of Catalina where she was reintroduced into the wild.

“This is further evidence that we are on the road to recovery for the Catalina bald eagle,” said Dr. Ann M. Muscat, President and CEO of the Catalina Island Conservancy, stewards of the eagles’ habitat. “We are very happy about this third birth, and are hoping to welcome the fourth chick into the world.”

Dr. Peter Sharpe, Wildlife Biologist for the Institute for Wildlife Studies (IWS), who directs of eagle restoration and monitoring projects on Catalina and in the Channel Islands, said this third chick was the product of one of the four eggs that were left in their nests rather than be taken to IWS headquarters in Avalon for artificial incubation.

“We made this decision based upon several factors, including the successful hatching of two chicks on Santa Cruz Island last year, the low contaminant load of eggs from one of the [Catalina] territories over the past several years, and the quality of the eggs from these territories in 2006,” he said. Sharpe further noted that in 2006, there was “a 50 percent hatching success from each territory and little additional care needed to control the eggs’ water loss.

“This is quite amazing,” he said after receiving a cell phone call from his research assistant Stephanie Jijón who had driven out to the nesting site earlier on Saturday to monitor the nest. “And, we have one more due on Monday.”

DDT contamination in the San Pedro Channel separating the Island from the mainland had caused eagle eggs to be too fragile to be hatched naturally. As a result, bald eagles, native to the Catalina and the other Channel Islands, virtually disappeared from the skies.

Eating Lower on the Food Chain May Be One Explanation

Dave Garcelon, Founder of the Institute for Wildlife Studies who initiated Bald Eagle restoration on Catalina 27 years ago, said that the apparent lack of build up of DDE – what DDT breaks down into and gets absorbed into the body fat of the bald eagles, may be attributed to “a female who wasn’t particularly interested in eating marine mammals and sea gulls.” However, he cautioned, “that won’t mean she won’t do that for the rest of her life.”

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DDT Contamination: A History

A landmark lawsuit settled in the 1990s found the Montrose Chemical Corporation of Torrance, California and other polluters guilty of dumping millions of pounds of DDT into the channel. The \$140.2-million Montrose settlement the largest environmental settlement in history, second only to fines paid by Exxon following the Exxon Valdez oil spill, had allocated \$250,000 a year to the IWS for eagle restoration on Catalina.

However, in 2005, the lion's share of that funding was reallocated by the Montrose Settlement Restoration Program (MSRP) Trustees, consisting of state and federal environmental agencies, after U.S. Fish and Wildlife biologists asserted that chicks weren't likely to be hatched on Catalina, and the money would be better put to use on Northern Channel Islands – farther from the source of the DDT pollution.

The Catalina Island Conservancy objected to this ruling, asserting that there was still a chance that bald eagles could successfully hatch their eggs on Catalina, and that of all the Channel Islands, Catalina was most accessible to a public eager to enjoy and to learn more about bald eagles. More than 500 letters from the public were received by the Conservancy and the Montrose Trustees supporting continued funding of eagle restoration on Catalina, where more than 1.2 million visitors to the Island each year have an opportunity to enjoy the magnificent birds. In response, the California Coastal Commission voted to overrule the Montrose Trustees' decision, reallocating the \$250,000 per year for 10 years. Despite the Commission's ruling, Montrose Trustees allocated only about \$30,000 in 2006 and the same amount in 2007 for eagle monitoring on Catalina.

Early Restoration Efforts on Catalina

In 1979, Garcelon brought six chicks from captive breeding sites and wild nests in the Pacific Northwest to Catalina. The chicks were raised in artificial nesting sites called "hacking towers" that protected them from other birds, and kept the chicks from seeing their human surrogate

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parents. Between 1980 and 1986, 33 bald eagles were released on Catalina Island and eventually formed mating pairs.

However, in 1987 when the first eggs were laid, the eggs broke under the weight of their mother. DDT contamination was proved to be the culprit. Garcelon and his biologists started taking newly hatched eggs out of the nests, sometimes by dangling from a helicopter. Surrogate eggs are left in the nest, while the real eggs were taken to the San Diego Zoo, and later at IWS facilities on Catalina to be artificially hatched. The healthy hatchlings would then be re-deposited back into the nests. Although the mother and father eagles would watch this activity while circling the nests, they would begin parenting their babies as if nothing out of the ordinary had gone on.

Since 1980, more than 100 bald eagles have been released, or fostered into nests on Catalina Island. There are now 23 eagles regularly on Catalina Island, including five nesting pairs.

The Institute for Wildlife Studies is a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of wildlife species, habitats, and diversities, and conducts conservation projects around the world. IWS has conducted bald eagle restoration on Catalina Island for more than 25 years, as well as efforts on the northern islands of the Channel Islands National Park. For more information, including a live Catalina eagle cam, visit www.iws.org.

The Catalina Island Conservancy actively protects and restores the wildlands that the Island's bald eagles call home. The organization's mission is to be a responsible steward of its lands through a balance of conservation, education and recreation. Through its ongoing efforts, the Conservancy protects the magnificent natural and cultural heritage of Catalina Island, stewarding approximately 42,000 acres of land, 50 miles of rugged shoreline, an airport, and more than 200 miles of roads. Twenty miles from the mainland, the Island is a treasure trove of historical and archeological sites, and numerous rare and endangered plants and animals, including the endangered Catalina Island fox. Visit us at www.catalinaconservancy.org.

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