



## Montrose Settlements Restoration Program

### Restoring natural resources harmed by DDTs and PCBs

Update Summer 2006

#### Bald Eagle Chicks Bring Renewed Hope for Channel Islands Restoration

Dave Garcelon / IWS



*In April, biologists confirmed the successful hatching of a bald eagle chick on Santa Cruz Island.*

SANTA CRUZ ISLAND, CA – The American bald eagle, symbol of our nation's freedom and heritage, has claimed a momentous victory in its efforts to repopulate historic breeding grounds. This spring, elated biologists watched eagerly as two bald eagle chicks hatched unaided on Santa Cruz Island, off the coast of California. This marks the first time in more than 50 years that the birds have successfully reproduced on the Channel Islands without the help of humans.

The last known successful nesting of a bald eagle on the northern Channel Islands was in 1949 on Anacapa Island. Bald eagles disappeared from the Channel Islands by the early 1960s due to human impacts, including pollution. Millions of pounds of DDTs and PCBs released into the ocean off the Palos Verdes Peninsula between the 1940s and the 1970s continue to contaminate the regional food web. The effects of these chemicals magnify in the food chain, and can cause bald eagles to lay thin-shelled eggs that either dehydrate or break in the nest.

“The fact that chicks have hatched without the help of humans on the Northern Channel Islands represents a milestone in bald eagle recovery efforts for the entire Channel Islands ecosystem,” says Dave Garcelon, president of the Institute for Wildlife Studies, which has been releasing and monitoring bald eagles on Santa Cruz Island since 2002 as part of the Montrose Settlements Restoration Program (MSRP) Bald Eagle Feasibility Study.

The Feasibility Study aims to determine if eagles released on the northern Channel Islands are far enough away from the source of contamination to reproduce without human intervention. Bald eagles on Santa Catalina Island further south still experience impaired reproduction due to persisting high levels of DDTs in their food.

The first nest is located high in a tree on the northern part of the island. The parent birds, a 5-year-old male and 4-year-old female, were both originally hatched at the San Francisco Zoo, then fostered into nests on Catalina Island in 2001 and 2002. After leaving Catalina Island, they each roamed the western U.S. mainland and visited the northern Channel Islands, likely attracted by the presence of up to 30 other bald eagles placed there as a part of the Feasibility Study. For the past year the pair was seen perching together at various locations on Santa Cruz Island before they established a territory and built a nest in late 2005.

The second pair nested on the south side of the island, in a grassy spot overlooking the ocean. The 4-year-old female hatched in the wild in Alaska, but was brought to Santa Cruz Island as a part of the Feasibility Study. The 5-year-old male hatched in the San Francisco Zoo, and was fostered onto Catalina Island in 2001.

“The success of the second pair is particularly exciting, since the female is the first eagle released on the northern Channel Islands that has nested successfully,” says Annie Little, MSRP bird biologist.

Says Little, “Once we are able to see multiple breeding attempts across multiple years, we will have a better picture of how or if DDT contamination is affecting eagles on the northern Channel Islands, and whether or not the eagle population can successfully survive on its own.”

Both chicks and parents will be monitored closely in the coming months. At 8 weeks of age, biologists will tag the chicks with a blue wing marker and metal leg bands that identify them as Santa Cruz Island natives, and fit them with satellite transmitters to record their movements once they learn to fly just a few weeks later.



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#### In Brief



#### Final Restoration Plan Released!

The MSRP Final Restoration Plan / EIS / EIR was released late last year and is available online at [www.montroserestoration.gov](http://www.montroserestoration.gov). Hard copies can also be requested by contacting Milena Viljoen by e-mail at [milena.viljoen@noaa.gov](mailto:milena.viljoen@noaa.gov) or by phone at (562) 980-3236.

#### Seabird Biologist Position Opening

The National Park Service will be advertising for a seabird biologist to oversee implementation of several seabird projects, including this project, and other seabird restoration projects on Santa Barbara and San Miguel Islands. For more information, contact Annie Little, MSRP bird biologist by phone at (760) 431-9440 x 219, or by e-mail at [annie\\_little@fws.gov](mailto:annie_little@fws.gov).

#### Fish Contamination Study

The joint MSRP/USEPA study of contaminants in southern California sport fish is nearing completion. The study represents the first comprehensive survey of contaminants in Los Angeles and Orange Counties since the late 1990s, and includes analysis for DDTs, PCBs, and mercury. A summary report will be available near the end of this year.

#### Continued monitoring of bald eagles on Catalina Island

The Trustees included limited funding in their annual program budget for continued monitoring of bald eagle demographics and egg contamination on Santa Catalina Island to help guide future decision-making on bald eagle restoration.

#### Project Highlight: Restore Seabirds to Scorpion and Orizaba Rocks



Duncan Wright / Wikipedia

*Cassin's auklets (Ptychoramphus aleuticus) will benefit from habitat enhancement and efforts to reduce human disturbance on Scorpion and Orizaba rocks.*

Scorpion and Orizaba Rocks are two islets located near Santa Cruz Island in the Channel Islands National Park. Both rocks support important nesting habitat for burrow-nesting seabirds such as ash storm-petrels and Cassin's auklets, both of which were among several bird species impacted by DDTs and PCBs. Other seabirds using these rocks include cormorants, western gulls, state-threatened Xantus's murrelets, and federally endangered California brown pelicans. Although the islets support a variety of seabirds, nesting of several of these species has declined over the past years, probably due to human disturbance.

#### Scorpion Rock

This restoration project will enhance degraded habitat on Scorpion Rock through the removal of exotic plants and revegetation with native plants. Biologists will also

attempt to increase the breeding success of ash storm-petrels and Cassin's auklets by installing nest boxes to provide stable and secure nesting areas for the birds. Finally, managers will aim to reduce human disturbances to the birds by posting signs to inform the public that the rock is closed to protect nesting seabirds. An increased National Park Service presence at the rock will help enforce the closure and educate visitors about the effects of disturbance.

#### Orizaba Rock

Restoration efforts on Orizaba Rock will include the installation of nest boxes for ash storm-petrels and Cassin's auklets, as well as signage to reduce human disturbance. As with Scorpion Rock, this project will also include additional personnel presence to enforce closures.

## Restoration Begins: Upcoming Requests for Applications

With the MSRP Restoration Plan officially finalized, project implementation has begun! The MSRP is pleased to announce the release of three Requests for Applications (RFAs) soliciting applications for projects related to fishing and fish habitat restoration. The anticipated publication date for these RFAs is June 1, 2006. The RFAs include:

### Restoration of Full Tidal Exchange Wetlands, Southern California Coast

*Anticipated closing date: July 15, 2006*

MSRP will provide funding of up to \$3,000,000 for projects to restore coastal wetland and/or estuarine habitats in the southern California coastal region that have direct tidal links to the ocean and serve as nursery habitats for fish, especially species that are targeted by ocean anglers. Such projects have the potential to restore fish and the habitats on which they depend, as well as restore lost fishing opportunities, to the extent that they increase production of recreationally valuable species that are lower in contamination and eventually inhabit ocean fishing sites. Projects funded may include land acquisition, design, construction, implementation, monitoring, and/or maintenance of restored wetlands that include full tidal exchange to a subtidal basin or channel.

### Outreach and Education Mini-grants

*Anticipated closing date: August 15, 2006*

MSRP has partnered with Cabrillo Marine Aquarium to create an educational comic book, geared to children at the 4th-6th grade level, which tells the story of DDT and PCB contamination off the coast of southern California. MSRP intends to provide \$50,000 in seed money to develop curricula, programs or activities to educate young people on safe ways to enjoy or benefit from fishing along the Los

Angeles and Orange County coasts where fish consumption advisories have impacted fishing. Projects should use the comic book (available online at [www.montrosere restoration.gov](http://www.montrosere restoration.gov)) and/or concepts outlined in the comic book as a basis, and are encouraged to draw from any other educational materials available through the EPA's Fish Contamination Education Collaborative ([www.pvsfish.org](http://www.pvsfish.org)) as appropriate.

### Implementation of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), Southern California Coast

*Anticipated closing date: September 15, 2006*

MSRP will provide up to \$400,000 to support the implementation of Marine Protected Areas in the southern California coastal region that promote the production of commonly caught coastal fish species. MSRP is specifically interested in funding projects that would evaluate the degree to which MPAs function as a production zone, thereby enhancing fishing opportunities outside their borders. MSRP is also interested in projects that evaluate the strengths and weaknesses associated with applying lessons learned from the existing network of MPAs adjacent to the Channel Islands to the design and effectiveness of similar reserves in the mainland coastal waters, particularly in southern California.

Beginning June 1, 2006, the MSRP RFAs can be accessed through the federal [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) website, or by contacting:

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*The MSRP fishing comic book follows Mariza, Jose and their animal friends as they learn about fish contamination.*



Get your MSRP updates electronically!

E-mail [msrp@noaa.gov](mailto:msrp@noaa.gov) and include "Mailing List" in the subject line, or sign up online at [www.montrosere restoration.gov](http://www.montrosere restoration.gov).



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### In This Issue: Restoration Begins!

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- Fish Contamination Study
- Continued monitoring of bald eagles on Catalina Island

#### Project Highlight

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Lee Emery / USFWS

Bald eagle  
(*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)



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