

# BALD EAGLE RESTORATION ON THE CHANNEL ISLANDS



**Photo Credits:** First Bald Eagle to hatch on Santa Cruz Island; Biologist taking a blood sample from an eagle chick; Biologist Jim Spickler releases eagle back into nest after banding (**Peter Sharpe, IWS**)

## ***The Decline of Bald Eagles***

Historically, Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) were a resident breeding species on all of the California Channel Islands, with roughly 35 eagle nest sites existing earlier in this century. Bald Eagle populations, along with those of many other raptor populations, declined with the use of the pesticide DDT in the United States.

DDT is a chemical that bioaccumulates and is very slow to break down. Animals at the top of the food web, such as bald eagles, can feed on food contaminated with DDT and its breakdown products, and accumulate high concentrations of these chemicals. Such accumulation causes many bird species, including eagles, to lay thin-shelled eggs that dry out or break during incubation.

The last known Bald Eagle nest on the northern Channel Islands was in 1949, and the birds disappeared from the islands by 1960. In 1972, Congress banned the use of DDT. Bald eagle populations started to recover across the U.S., but continued to struggle in southern California, where a DDT factory had

released millions of pounds of the chemicals into the Pacific Ocean. The continued presence of these chemicals in the marine environment still presents challenges to bald eagle recovery on the Channel Islands.

## ***Restoring Bald Eagles to the Channel Islands***

The Montrose Settlements Restoration Program (MSRP) partnered with the Institute for Wildlife Studies (IWS) to implement the Northern Channel Islands Bald Eagle Feasibility Study. During the study, biologists released juvenile eagles on Santa Cruz Island and monitored their exposure to DDT and ability to reproduce. The hope was that the birds, farther from the source of contamination off the Palos Verdes Shelf, would be able to breed successfully on their own.

From 2002 to 2006, 61 Bald Eagle juveniles were released on Santa Cruz Island using "hack towers," where they resided for four weeks until they were able to fly on their own. **In 2006, a milestone was reached when the first eagle chick hatched naturally on Santa Cruz Island in over 50 years!**

## Check out the live Bald Eagle Webcams!

[www.montroserestoration.noaa.gov](http://www.montroserestoration.noaa.gov)

Looking for a wildlife experience without leaving your home? Visit the Bald Eagle webcams broadcast live from Santa Cruz Island to catch up on the latest nest happenings! Whether you are watching Bald Eagle adults feeding chicks in the nest or providing detailed nest observations on a discussion forum monitoring, there is something for everyone.

Partners: *Ventura County Office of Education, National Park Service, Institute for Wildlife Studies*



[www.montroserestoration.noaa.gov](http://www.montroserestoration.noaa.gov)



[facebook.com/msrprestation](https://facebook.com/msrprestation)



**Photo Credits:** Eagle chick on Santa Rosa Island; Eagle triplets from Santa Catalina Island; Eagle chicks fostered into the nest prior to MSRP funding (Peter Sharpe, IWS)



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### ***Future for Channel Island Bald Eagles***

Each year, biologists monitor Bald Eagles throughout the Channel Islands. Annual monitoring involves searching for new nesting pairs, collecting data on breeding attempts, tracking eagles, and conducting contaminant analysis. Prior to a chick fledging from a nest, biologists place wing markers, a leg band, and a radio transmitter onto the eaglets. They also take blood samples for contaminant and stable isotope analysis. This information helps biologists monitor the movements and health of the Bald Eagle chicks.

**In 2013, there were a total of 16 breeding pairs on the Channel Islands: 2 on Santa Rosa, 5 on Santa Cruz, 1 on Anacapa, and 7 on Santa Catalina.**

Although some of the nests failed, the eagles still produced 18 chicks, of which 16 fledged, or flew from the nest, in June and July. Also in 2013, the first Bald Eagle chick to hatch naturally on Santa Cruz Island in over 50 years, known as A-49, nested on her own for the second year in a row. This year she was actually successful in hatching a chick that fledged from the nest!

MSRP will continue to fund monitoring of Bald Eagles on the Channel Islands until 2017.

## **Bald Eagle Fun Facts**

### **How much does a Bald Eagle weigh?**

An adult Bald Eagle weighs about 11 pounds, lighter than the average household cat.

### **How long do Bald Eagles live?**

In the wild they can live up to 30 years but in captivity it is closer to 50 years.

### **What is the wingspan of an adult Bald Eagle?**

The average wingspan is 6-7 feet wide.

### **Do the males and females both participate in feeding and caring for young?**

Yes! Both the male and female arrange the nest, keep the eggs warm until they hatch, and take turns feeding the eagle chicks.

### **How could I tell a male and female Bald Eagle apart?**

The females are larger than males so if you see them side by side in the nest you could determine which one is the female.

### **When do Bald Eagle chicks leave the nest?**

The Bald Eagle chicks leave the nest 10-13 weeks after hatching and once downy feathers are replaced by juvenile feathers.