

Jeff Humphrey/R2/FWS/DOI
07/26/2006 03:11 PM

To Mary Richardson/R2/FWS/DOI@FWS, Greg
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cc Elizabeth Slown/RO/R2/FWS/DOI@FWS, David
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bcc
Subject Fw: Exceptional year for Arizona's eagles

Mary,

You inquired as to the source of a CNN report on increased Arizona bald eagle BA and productivity. Here's the genesis of the news.

Jeff

----- Forwarded by Jeff Humphrey/R2/FWS/DOI on 07/26/2006 02:35 PM -----



"AZGFD"
<e-news@phx-listserv.ad.gf.
state.az.us>
07/18/2006 11:19 AM

To Jeff_Humphrey@fws.gov
cc
Subject Exceptional year for Arizona's eagles

[IMAGE]

Contact:
Debbie Freeman (602) 789-3215
Public Information Officer

Arizona Game and Fish Department

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release July 18, 2006

Exceptional year for Arizona's eagles

PHOENIX - With the breeding season now over, Arizona can celebrate what's turning out to be an incredible year for the state's bald eagles. Arizona Game and Fish Department biologists confirm a record number of eagle breeding areas in the state, as well as a tie with the year 2004 for a record number of eaglets that lived to fledge, or begin flying, in Arizona.

"We are really excited at how this breeding season turned out," says James Driscoll, head of the Arizona Game and Fish Department Bald Eagle Management Program. "Forty-two eagle nestlings fledged this year, tying our previous record in this state."

Biologists also found three new bald eagle breeding areas, for a record total of 50. Every year, many eagle breeding areas that are located near popular recreation areas are closed for the breeding season, so the birds'

breeding attempts won't be interrupted by human activity. On June 30, the last of these closures was lifted, at the end of a very successful breeding season.

"The success of the season can be partly credited to our fantastic nest watchers," says Kenneth "Tuk" Jacobson, an Arizona Game and Fish bald eagle biologist.

Every year, nest watchers camp out for four months to monitor eagle breeding efforts in Arizona. The contractors spend dawn to dusk collecting data about the eagles' behavior and notifying rescuers of any life-threatening situations for the birds. Since the program began in 1978, it has helped to save the lives of almost 50 eaglets. This year alone, nest watchers helped to rescue and save four young eagles that otherwise might have died.

The bald eagle was federally listed as an endangered species in 1978. The birds have recovered enough to be listed now as a "threatened species."

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Note to media: Eagle photos, video and biologist interviews are available by calling Public Information Officer Debbie Freeman at (602) 789-3215.

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Eagle program reports record year

Kate Nolan

The Arizona Republic

Jul. 21, 2006 12:00 AM

The last of this year's Arizona bald eagle hatchlings left their nests in June, the final act of the 2006 breeding season.

The state eagle program reports a record year with 42 babies now airborne, and the discovery of three new active nests.

Bald eagles are a "threatened" species under the Endangered Species Act, although the U.S. Department of Interior has considered delisting them since the Clinton administration.

Arizona's annual eaglet production hovered around 20 in the 1990s, but in recent years has typically run between 30 and 40 fledglings, or babies that survive to fly, said biologist James Driscoll, who supervises the Arizona Game and Fish Department Eagle Management Program.

"Forty-two is a very good year," he said.

This year's new nests, in addition to increased breeding sites, may bring more genetic diversity to Arizona's recovering bald eagle population, Driscoll said.

Genetic diversity is believed to strengthen the species, but is controversial among the state's eagle watchers. While state biologists expect Arizona birds to breed with other populations, some bird experts believe the Arizona flock is a subspecies that cannot or will not breed outside its population. It's the subject of a recent lawsuit in the federal courts.

Driscoll said that two of this year's newfound nests are located beyond the usual central Arizona

area inhabited by most the state's eagles, 43 or more breeding pairs.

"One thing we struggle with is that most of the breeders occupy nests along the Salt, Verde and Gila Rivers," Driscoll said.

A new nest at Bartlett Lake falls between two other nests. But the other two are much farther north, one near Camp Verde and the other north of Holbrook in the northeast part of the state.

Driscoll is hopeful the one above Holbrook may introduce genes from Colorado and New Mexico eagles to the tiny Arizona population.

"A study in the 1990s determined that the genetic variation of our eagles is healthy, but over time if you have no new genetic information coming in, a genetic bottleneck occurs," Driscoll said. The diversity of the Arizona stock is what earlier helped it survive DDT, he said. The pesticide decimated the national eagle population after World War II and was later outlawed.

The program's goal is to expand the Arizona population and have it overlap with other populations, Driscoll said.

But members of some environmental groups are skeptical that the birds will interbreed.

"It's undocumented thinking," said Dr. Bob Witzeman, conservation chairman of Maricopa Audubon, a bird protection group.

Witzeman said only one case has ever been recorded of an outside bird breeding with an Arizona eagle.

"This is genetically and geographically and behaviorally a unique population," said Witzeman, whose group has filed a lawsuit with the Southwest Center for Biological Diversity seeking endangered species protection for Arizona eagles as a distinct subspecies.

The environmentalists believe protection for the fragile flock will be needed if bald eagles are delisted nationally. U.S. Fish and Wildlife agreed to produce an opinion by August 9 on whether the Arizona groups' claim has scientific substance.

Driscoll credits this year's high baby production to his program's efforts to protect breeding areas.

A complex of strategies is used, including closing nesting sites in recreational areas, inspecting nests via helicopters and employing nest watchers who camp out from February until June to monitor the nests closest to recreation areas.

Arizona's eagles breeding areas reaches record high

Associated Press
Jul. 22, 2006 11:43 AM

MESA, Ariz. - The number of bald eagle breeding areas in Arizona has reached a record high.

Three new breeding areas, or nests, found this year in northeastern Arizona and along the Verde River bring the state's total to 50 nests.

"Usually every couple of years we may find a new breeding area," said Tuk Jacobson, an Arizona Game and Fish biologist. "Finding three in one year was pretty surprising."

Besides more breeding areas, 42 eaglets lived to begin flying, tying the previous Arizona record that was set in 2004.

The success of the bald eagle breeding season, which ended June 30, is due largely to protection efforts, Jacobson said. Those efforts include stationing nest watchers to monitor the eagles and notify rescuers of any danger to the birds.

Since the nest watching program began in 1978, it has helped to save the lives of almost 50 eaglets. This year, nest watchers helped rescue four young eagles.

While the increase in breeding areas is a positive sign, the eagle population is still low in Arizona as compared to other states, said Bob Witzeman, conservation chairman of the Maricopa Audubon Society.

"It doesn't mean they're out of the woods," he said. "A population of only 50 pair is still miniscule."

In March, the Maricopa Audubon Society and the Center For Biological Diversity filed a lawsuit to have the Arizona desert nesting bald eagle classified as a distinct species.

Arizona eagles have adapted to the hot weather and evolved into a nonmigrating resident of the Southwest, Witzeman said.

Bald eagles were near extinction 30 years ago when they became one of the first species to be placed on the list of threatened or endangered species.

Nationally, the population has rebounded enough that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is moving forward with efforts to have bald eagles delisted.

If this happens, the Arizona eagle will suffer because protection funds will dry up, Witzeman said.

Arizona Game and Fish officials said the eagles will continue to receive protection, even if removed, through voluntary programs and state eagle protection laws.