

**Greg Beatty/R2/FWS/DOI**

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To Mary Richardson/R2/FWS/DOI@FWS, Steve  
Spangle/R2/FWS/DOI@FWS, Debra  
Bills/R2/FWS/DOI@FWS, Susan

cc

bcc

Subject Fw: Arizona's Bald Eagle more imperiled than previously  
thought

Greg Beatty  
US Fish and Wildlife Service  
2321 West Royal Palm Road, Suite 103  
Phoenix, Arizona 85021  
602-242-0210  
<http://fws.gov/arizonaes/>

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**Robin Silver**  
<[rsilver@biologicaldiversity.org](mailto:rsilver@biologicaldiversity.org)>  
g>

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To Robin Silver <[rsilver@biologicaldiversity.org](mailto:rsilver@biologicaldiversity.org)>

cc

Subject Arizona's Bald Eagle more imperiled than previously thought

New study of AGFD Desert Nesting Bald Eagle data by CBD shows that the juvenile mortality is much greater than previously thought. For the period, 1986 - 1994 there was a 31% chance of re-sighting a bird banded as a fledgling. For the period, 1995 - 2003 there was only a 11% chance of re-sighting.

Robin Silver, M.D.  
Board Chair  
Center for Biological Diversity  
P.O. Box 39629  
Phoenix, AZ 85069-9629  
Ph.: 602.246.4170  
FAX: 602.249.2576  
Email: [rsilver@biologicaldiversity.org](mailto:rsilver@biologicaldiversity.org)  
WEB: [www.biologicaldiversity.org](http://www.biologicaldiversity.org)



PVA 2006 ADDENDUM FINAL post fledgling survival analysis 083106.pdf

# Desert Nesting Bald Eagle

## post fledging survival analysis

Martin Taylor PhD  
Center for Biological Diversity  
Tucson AZ 85705  
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### Introduction

Population viability analysis (PVA) for the “Desert Nesting Bald Eagle” (DNBE) population in Arizona was based on estimate of adult and juvenile mortalities derived by Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) from banding data over 16 years (Taylor and Silver 2006, AGFD unpubl.). The AGFD analysis did not consider new factors arising out of the analysis of Taylor and Silver (2006).

Banding records are now available for 30 years. A reanalysis of post-fledgling survival with available data and additional years of resights will show if the assumptions of the earlier PVA remain valid.

### Methods

418 DNBE nestlings were marked by Arizona Game and Fish Department from 1977-2006.

Of these 45 did not survive to fledge. Nestling to fledgling survival was estimated earlier (Taylor and Silver 2006). Hence, these individuals were removed from analysis, leaving 383 marked fledglings.

Since resightings were only done at breeding areas (BAs), the first two years after fledging had essentially zero probability of resighting. Only two individuals were resighted in the third year after fledging. Accordingly, all individuals marked two years before the right-censoring horizon of 2006 ago or later (2004+) were uninformative for survival or resight probability estimation and were removed from analysis. This left 330 individuals with usable encounter histories. 8 individuals were marked as adults at breeding areas and so were not included in model fitting for estimation of juvenile survival.

Encounter histories had 30 occasions (years from 1977 to 2006 inclusive).

Independent variables were entered as individual covariates:

- Sex (-1=male, 0=unknown, 1= female);
- Natal BA (-1 if not in Salt/Verde cluster, 0 if unknown, 1 if in Salt/Verde cluster<sup>1</sup>);
- Breeding BA (as for Natal BA) the BA at which individual breeds or attempts to breed;
- Year of fledging (1977-2003, rescaled from 0-1).

The recapture only subroutine of Program MARK was used for model construction and fitting with a logit link function. Parameter matrices followed an age- cohort design.

For models of juvenile survival, only the 322 individuals marked as fledglings were used. Sex could not be used as a independent in juvenile survival models since sex was not known until the individual reappeared as a young adult at a BA. Thus sex was only known for resighted individuals, not for all fledglings. Taylor and Silver (2006) found nestling survival declined over time for BAs outside the cluster, but remained constant inside the cluster. Hence an interaction between time and natal BA was tested in models for juvenile survival.

For estimation of adult survival, we used only the 77 individuals eventually resighted at BAs, including the 8

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<sup>1</sup>The Salt Verde cluster includes the following BAs: Bartlett, Blue Point, Box Bar, Bulldog, Doka, Fort McDowell, Granite Reef, Horse Mesa, Needle Rock, Orme, Rodeo, Sycamore, Yellow Cliffs

individuals marked as breeding adults. Because models were age structured, fledging years had to be interpolated for these 8 adults by random resampling of ages at first resightings from observed distributions and back calculation of resampled year at fledging.

We hypothesized that survival of both young adult and adult groups would be linear functions (on the logit scale) of sex, year of fledging, natal BA and breeding BA without interactions.

The effects hypothesized were:

- Survival declines with time of fledging (years);
- Survival lower for individuals fledging from BAs outside Salt/Verde (SV) cluster;
- Juvenile survival declines with time faster outside SV cluster (as found for nestling survival);
- Adult female survival higher than male;
- Adult survival lower on breeding BAs outside than inside SV cluster.
- Adult and young adult survival share same effects from independent variables, but different intercepts.

Hypotheses for survival were expressed as the following linear models:

logit Survival of age group*	Intercept	Sex	Year	Natal BA	Natal BA x Year	Breeding BA
Juvenile	A+		B*year+	C*nba+	D*(nba X year)	
Young adult	F+	H*sex+	I*year+	J*nba+		K*bba
Adult	G+	H*sex+	I*year+	J*nba+		K+bba

- \* Juveniles ages 1-3, (fledging = year 0). Young adults ages 4-5, adults ages 6+

Hypotheses for resight probabilities (denoted P) were expected to be affected in similar ways, using the following set of models. No interactions were expected so none were modeled.

logit P of age group*	Intercept	Sex	Year	Natal BA	Breeding BA
Juvenile	L+	M*sex+	N*year+	O*nba+	P*bba
Young adult	Q+	R*sex+	S*year+	T*nba+	U*bba
Adult	V+	R*sex+	S*year+	T*nba+	U+bba

- Female P no different from male;
- P increases with time;
- P lower for individuals with natal BAs or breeding BAs outside SV cluster where monitoring effort assumed less intense.

Age class definitions were also varied in stepwise fashion to test the hypothesized age class structure of juveniles age 0-3, young adults 4-5 and adults 6+.

## Results

### Graphical analysis

Excluding individuals marked 2004-2006 and 8 individuals marked as adults, 322 individuals marked as fledglings were divided into 3 approximately equal length periods by years of fledging.

Proportion resighted declined, proportion of females increased and ages at first and last resighting went down (Table 1). However, proportion resighted and ages at first and last resighting are expected to decline solely due to the bias of differential “right-censoring”. More recently marked fledglings have less time in which to be resighted. Thus more recent cohorts inevitably must have lower resighting rates, and shorter times to 1st resighting.

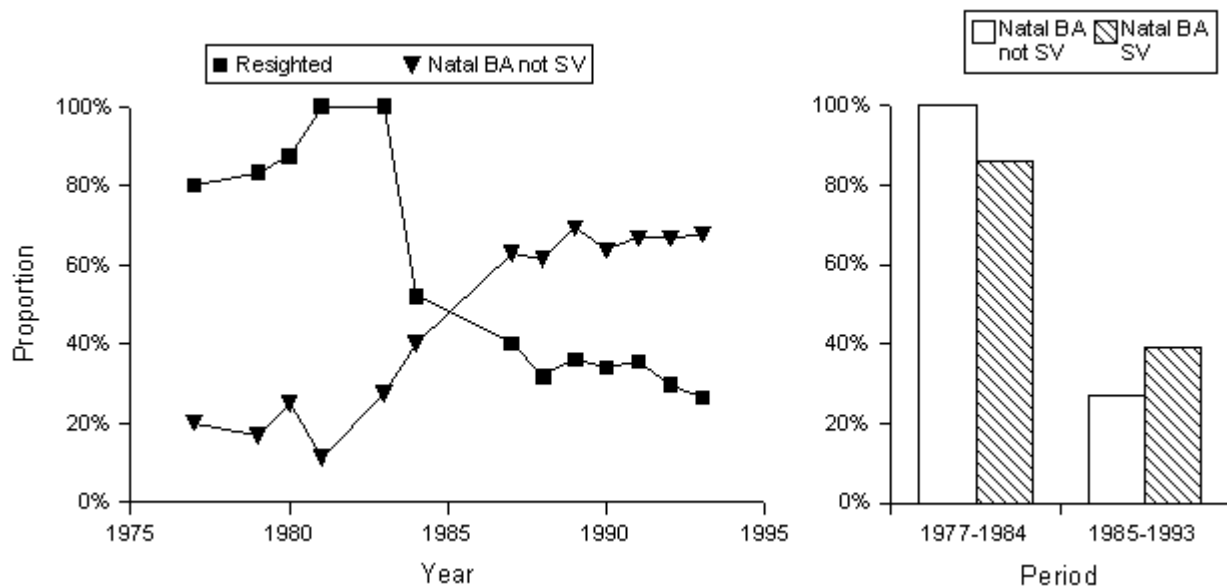
**Table 1. Resighting statistics for three arbitrary nine-year periods.**

Period fledged	N marked*	Resighted	Females%	Age 1st resight	Age last resight
1977-1985	11	10 (91%)	36%	7.2 (3.1)	16.4 (6.7)
1986-1994	126	39 (31%)	35%	5.5 (1.8)	11.5 (4.2)
1995-2003	185	20 (11%)	45%	5.7 (1.3)	7.5 (1.9)

\* excluding 8 individuals marked as adults at the BA, and fledglings marked after 2003.

To avoid this effect, data were reduced to 127 individuals that fledged no later than 1993. Their encounter histories were then uniformly right-censored at 14+ years post fledging. This age was chosen since the longest time to first resighting after fledging was 13 years. These individuals could not differ in resighting statistics due to different times between marking and right-censoring. Rather they should differ only due to environmental factors.

Proportions of marked fledglings resighted within 13 years after marking (that is, appearing at a BA) declined dramatically in the years 1984-1993 (Fig 1a). Progressively more BAs have been discovered over the period of study and more have been discovered further from the geographical “core” of the Arizona population around the Salt-Verde confluence with time. Hence we expected proportionally more fledglings marked in later years to have come from BAs outside the cluster. This is confirmed by the increasing time trend of proportion of marked fledglings not in the SV cluster (Fig 1a).



**FIG 1 (a) LEFT Proportions of fledglings resighted and proportions of fledgling marked that were in BAs outside of the Salt Verde cluster by year of fledging. (b) RIGHT Proportion of fledglings resighted in two different periods for fledglings from BAs in the Salt-Verde cluster or not in the cluster.**

It could be that the apparent decline in proportion resighted was not due entirely to a tendency for less resighting effort at BAs outside the SV cluster, so that individuals marked outside the cluster were less likely to be resighted due to lower effort. However, proportions resighted declined from the earlier to the later period for fledglings of both non SV BAs and SV BAs, although less dramatically in the SV natal BA group (Fig. 1b). Thus the decline in resighting probabilities appears not to be due to the shift in effort to BAs outside the SV cluster but to other factors.

### Mark-recapture modeling

Models were selected not solely by minimal Akaike Information Criterion (AIC). Minimal AIC models sometimes had marginal parameters that contained zero within the 95% confidence interval around the fitted mean. In such cases models were selected with only statistically non-zero parameters, unless difference in AIC from previous steps exceeded 7. Models were developed stepwise from the basic two parameter model (constant survival or resight probabilities).

The best fitting age structure for both adult and juvenile models had uniform survival for ages 1-4, survival to age 5 fixed and uniform survival for ages 6 and up (Table 2). Juvenile survival (ages 1-4) was significantly correlated with

year fledged, but not with Natal BA or the interaction of Natal BA and year.

**Table 2. Age specific survival probabilities of best fitting juvenile and adult models (AIC=1144.9; AIC for 2 parameter constant model = 1970.3).**

Annual survival prob. (%) to	Fitted estimates
ages 1-4 fledged 1977-1984	98.4 (80.6,99.9)*
ages 1-4 fledged 1985-1993	74.8 (69.2,80.0)*
ages 1-4 fledged 1994-2003	65.3 (59.5,71.1)*
age 5	100 (fixed)**
ages 6+	92.3 (89.6,94.4)**

\* fitted by juvenile models

\*\* fitted by adult models

The best fitting model was a categorical period model rather than linear trend model, with three periods of approx. equal length. Fitted juvenile survival declined significantly and dramatically from early to more recent periods (Table 2) as indicated by graphical analysis (Fig 1a,b).

Adult survival was not significantly correlated with any of the hypothesized factors, although sex was marginally significant (Table 2).

Fitted resighting probabilities (an index of effort) varied much as hypothesized (Table 3). Best fitting age structure was not a simple juvenile, young adult, adult structure. Rather, ages 3-7 had age specific fitted estimates increasing by age, and ages 7+ a uniform single estimate.

Juvenile resighting probabilities were correlated with Natal BA. Fledglings from BAs in the Salt-Verde cluster were more likely to be resighted than those outside the cluster (Table 3).

Adult resighting probabilities were correlated with Sex, Natal BA and Breeding BA. Adults fledging from or breeding at BAs in the Salt-Verde cluster were more likely to be resighted than those outside the cluster. Females were less likely than males to be resighted explaining in part the male biased sex ratios of resighted adults (Table 1). Adult resighting probabilities were also weakly positively correlated with year fledged. However this factor was partly confounded with both natal BA and breeding BA.

**Table 3. Age specific resighting probabilities of best fitting juvenile and adult models.**

Resighting prob. (%) at	Fitted estimates	Male/Female	Natal BA SV/notSV	Breeding BA SV/notSV
ages 1-2	0 (fixed)*			
age 3	0.6 ( 0.1, 2.3)*		+0.3/-0.2	
age 4	21.7 (13.8,32.5)*		+7.4/-6.2	
age 5	52.8 (41.0,64.4)**	+/-5.4	+7.7/-7.8	+6.3/-6.4
age 6	61.3 (48.9,72.4)**	+/-5.3	+7.1/-7.6	+5.9/-6.3
age 7+	83.5 (78.4,87.6)**	+/-3.2	+3.9/-4.8	+3.3/-3.9

\* fitted by juvenile models

\*\* fitted by adult models

## Discussion

Taylor and Silver 2006 hypothesized that fecundity and nestling survival would be lower outside the Salt Verde cluster than inside, due to artificially higher fish abundances from dumping of fish removed from the Salt River Project canals. This hypothesis was supported with significantly lower numbers of nestlings per adult female outside than inside the cluster, and nestling survival declining with year outside the cluster, but remaining constant inside the cluster.

A similar effect was not found for juvenile survival however.

Juvenile survival declined with year of fledging regardless of where the natal BA was.

Individuals fledging (or breeding) outside the Salt Verde cluster were less likely to be resighted regardless of where they bred, and females less likely to be resighted than males.

### Comparison with AGFD model estimates

AGFD (unpubl.) analyzed post-fledging survival for bald eagles banded or marked between 1987 and 2003. It is uncertain to what extent the data used by AGFD overlap with this study, as AGFD did not provide a list of individuals included in their analysis.

AGFD did report marginally significant sex and time correlations, but did not consider hypotheses to do with the Salt/Verde cluster.

The AGFD selected model had 3 age groups for survival probabilities: Ages 1-3 (fixed at 1, with zero resighting probability), Age 4, Ages 5+, with more age groups for resighted probabilities, similar to that found here.

When this model structure was fitted to the juvenile model data set used in this study, the Akaike Information Criterion was significantly greater (2986.2) than for the best fitting model of this study (1271.4). Indeed it was greater than that found for the basic 2 parameter model (no age differences, AIC=1970.3). Fitted parameters were however, close to those reported by AGFD (Table 1), with survival estimates slightly higher for adults.

**Table 4. Comparison of fitted parameters for model used by AGFD(unpubl) fitted to data used in this study and as reported by AGFD (unpubl) for “level 2” adjusted data.**

Parameter	This study			AGFD (unpubl.)		
	Estimate	Lower 95%CI	Upper 95%CI	Estimate	Lower 95%CI	Upper 95%CI
Prob. survival to ages 1-3 (S)	1	fixed		1	fixed	
S4 (actually survival from 0 to 4)	0.28	0.22	0.34	0.28	0.15	0.47
S to ages 1,2,3,4	0.73	0.68	0.76	0.73	0.62	0.83
S5+	0.92	0.89	0.95	0.88	0.79	0.94
Prob. resight at ages 1-3 (P)	0	fixed		0	fixed	
P4	0.21	0.14	0.32	0.22	0.07	0.53
P5	0.46	0.35	0.58	0.44	0.20	0.71
P6	0.56	0.44	0.89	0.70	0.51	0.84
P7	0.78	0.65	0.88	0.88	0.75	0.94
p8+	0.78	0.73	0.83	0.95	0.85	0.99

### Is the downward trend in juvenile survival real?

There is no obvious explanation for the observed and fitted downward trend in juvenile survival over the period of study.

There are several possibilities to explain the “missing” birds in later years of resighting effort:

- Birds have emigrated. Juvenile birds are known to migrate north to Canada and return to Arizona. If this is the case we might expect band recoveries or resights outside of Arizona. However, no such reports are evident to date. Even if birds did emigrate permanently however, they are effectively “dead” to the Arizona population.
- Birds are not dead, but have joined the non-breeding “floater population.” If this is the case we would expect progressive delay in average time to first resighting at a BA, since birds would be spending more time in the floater population. However, time to first resighting actually declines with time rather than increases for the data set described in Fig 1 (data not shown).
- Resighting effort has fallen off, so birds are surviving at same rate but simply less likely to be resighted. In fact, models show if anything a slight increase in fitted resighting probabilities with increasing year fledged.
- Birds are dying at higher rate.

Increased mortality seems to be the only conclusion that can be drawn from the data. The discovery of new BAs has flattened off since about 2000, so one possibility is that increased juvenile mortality (and nestling mortality found by Taylor and Silver 2006) may indicate arrival of the population at carrying capacity with heavy competition for limited

food and suitable breeding areas. The other possibility is that environment and habitat have deteriorated, with a resulting increase in juvenile mortalities.

### **Significance for Population Viability Analysis**

Taylor and Silver (2006) reported PVA results ranging from rapid extinction to population persistence based on their analysis of fecundities and AGFD estimates of survival (Table 4).

Based on this reanalysis, current juvenile survival is significantly less than that estimated by AGFD, due to a highly significant downward time trend that AGFD alluded to as only marginal in their analysis.

Mean estimate of juvenile survival of 65% per annum is 8% less than that reported by AGFD and close to the lower 95% CI limit of that estimate. However, adult survival estimated in this study is about 4% higher than that found by AGFD. Hence, we expect a PVA based on this data in general to produce less optimistic predictions of extinction risk than found by Taylor and Silver (2006).

### **References**

Taylor M, Silver R, 2006. Population viability analysis: Desert nesting Bald Eagle. Center for Biological Diversity unpublished report. June 19, 2006. 20pp.