



501 W. Ocean Blvd. Suite 4470 ? Long Beach, CA 90802 ? 562.980.3236

PRESS RELEASE

CONTACT: Yvonne Menard, National Park Service, 805-658-5733
Milena Viljoen, MSRP, 562-980-3236
Dana Michaels, California Dept. of Fish and Game, 916-327-9948

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Bald Eagle Chick Brings Renewed Hope for Channel Islands Restoration

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. Elated biologists watched as a bald eagle chick hatched unaided on Santa Cruz Island, off the coast of California. This event 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 pair sat on the eggs through rain, hail and even snow!” marveled Dave Garcelon, president of the Institute for Wildlife Studies, the group that releases and monitors bald eagles on the island. This dedication is impressive for such young birds; it is not uncommon for inexperienced pairs to abandon, crush, or otherwise lose their eggs during their first breeding attempts.

The eagle pair responsible for this landmark event, a 5-year-old male and 4-year-old female, took turns incubating their eggs in a five-foot-round nest high in a tree on the north shore of the island. Biologists continue to monitor the nest.

Both parent birds were originally hatched as part of a captive breeding program 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 there. 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 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, primarily 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 are magnified in the food chain, causing bald eagles to lay thin-shelled eggs that either dehydrate or break in the nest.

“The fact that a chick has hatched without the help of humans on the Northern Channel Islands represents a significant milestone in bald eagle recovery efforts for the entire Channel Islands ecosystem,” said Greg Baker, program manager for the Montrose Settlements Restoration Program (MSRP), a multi-agency effort to restore resources injured by the chemical releases. Since 2002, MSRP has funded the Institute for Wildlife Studies to release young bald eagles on the northern Channel Islands.

“The success of this nest brings hope that we will reestablish bald eagles on the Channel Islands,” said Russell Galipeau, Superintendent, Channel Islands National Park. “All Americans can share in the excitement of this historic event.”

The National Park Service and The Nature Conservancy, co-owners of Santa Cruz Island, remind visitors that bald eagles are a federally protected species and that it is illegal to disturb nesting birds. Disturbances can cause eagles to accidentally break the eggs or fly away from the nest, leaving the eggs vulnerable to ravens or other predators.

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This bald eagle reintroduction study is part the Montrose Settlements Restoration Program (MSRP), a multi-agency program dedicated to restoring natural resources harmed by DDTs and PCBs released into the environment by Montrose Chemical Corporation and other industrial sources in Southern California in the mid 20th century. MSRP is overseen by representatives from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, California Department of Fish and Game, California State Lands Commission, and California Department of Parks and Recreation.

Further information on the Montrose Settlements Restoration Program can be found at: www.montroserestoration.gov.

For bald eagle images and footage please go to the "American Bald Eagle" folder on the NPS ftp site at:

<ftp://63.220.43.40>
username: npsftpwin
password: FTP04npswin