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PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Second bald eagle chick hatches on Santa Cruz Island

SANTA CRUZ ISLAND, CA – Less than three weeks after welcoming the first bald eagle chick to hatch unaided on the Channel Islands in more than 50 years, restoration biologists have yet another reason to celebrate. Yesterday, a second chick pecked its way through its eggshell and into the world, nestled in a grassy spot on the south side of Santa Cruz Island off Southern California.

Before the two chicks hatched this year, 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 and can cause bald eagles to lay thin-shelled eggs that either dehydrate or break in the nest.

“We were especially interested to see the outcome of this second nest, since...,” says Dave Garcelon, president of the Institute for Wildlife Studies, which has been releasing and monitoring bald eagles on Santa Cruz Island since 2002. Funded by the Montrose Settlements Restoration Program (MSRP), a multi-agency effort to restore resources injured by the chemical releases, the reintroduction effort aims to determine whether eagles released on the northern Channel Islands are far enough away from the source of contamination to reproduce without human intervention.

“These hatchings represent an exciting milestone in the bald eagle restoration efforts on the Channel Islands,” says Annie Little, MSRP bird biologist. “Once we begin to see multiple breeding attempts across multiple years, we can really start to determine whether the birds can successfully survive out there on their own, and begin to...”

Biologists first discovered the nest in early April, when biologists tracking the island's birds, which are fitted with radio transmitters before they learn to fly, noticed one female behaving oddly. Instead of remaining constantly on the move, as most eagles do, she spent several consecutive nights in one place. A strenuous four hour hike later, the second Santa Cruz Island nest was confirmed.

The chick's parents paired up late last year, establishing a territory on the southern part of Santa Cruz Island. The 4-year-old female originally hatched in southern Alaska in 2002. At 10 weeks old, biologists relocated her to Santa Cruz Island as a part of the MSRP study. She has spent most of her life on the island. The 5-year-old male originally hatched at the San Francisco Zoo in 2001 as a part of the Zoo's bald eagle breeding program. He was later fostered into a nest on Catalina Island, and first appeared on Santa Cruz Island in 2002, likely attracted by the presence of the nearly 30 other resident eagles that have been reintroduced there over the last four years. He has remained on the island ever since.

Both chick and parents will be monitored closely in person and by video in the coming months. In approximately 8 weeks, biologists will tag the bird, using a blue wing marker and leg bands that identify it as a Santa Cruz native, and fit it with a radio transmitter so they can record its movements when it learns to fly just a few weeks later.

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 fly away from the nest, leaving the chicks 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