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PRESS RELEASE

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July 18, 2006

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Bald Eagle Chick Takes Historic First Flight

SANTA CRUZ ISLAND, CA - After weeks of practice, the first bald eagle to hatch on the northern Channel Islands in over 50 years took to the air in its first flight last Friday.

Close-up views from a publicly broadcast web camera and play-by-play posts from an associated discussion board allowed hundreds of people to join biologists as they watched the chick show typical pre-flight behaviors over the last two weeks. Known to biologists as A-49, and affectionately called “Cruz” and “Junior” by the web cam crowd, the bird practiced flapping its wings and bounced repetitively from limb to limb before taking its first leap.

The web cam fan club celebrated with a virtual toast, raising glasses around the world at 8:00 p.m. PDT on Friday, and offering congratulations and best wishes in several discussion threads. One enthusiastic viewer compiled a “best of” video, composed of clips from the past few months, to celebrate the fledging.

“It’s been a pretty amazing year for bald eagles on the northern Channel Islands,” says Dave Rempel, a biologist for the Institute for Wildlife Studies who has been monitoring the nest. “We are thrilled to have been able to share the excitement of watching A-49 grow and fledge with viewers from all over.”

Since fledging, the eaglet, which is thought to be male, has not ventured far from its nest. It has been perching on nearby trees, and the watchful parents are still providing food. The eaglet’s parents will likely return to the same nest next year, and may begin tending to it as early as December, bringing in fresh sticks and grass.

Although the webcam will be officially offline at the end of this week, the online discussion board will continue to post updates on A-49 and the effort to reestablish bald eagles to the Channel Islands. The discussion board can be accessed by visiting http://chil.vcoe.org/eagle_cam.html.

A second fledgling

A second bald eagle chick in a separate nest on the south side of Santa Cruz Island is expected to fledge sometime in the next week to ten days. The young bird, known as “A-60”, is actively moving about its ground nest, traveling in a grassy terrace up to 30 meters from the nest site.

Restoring bald eagles to the northern Channel Islands

This summer also marks the last year that biologists will release juvenile bald eagles onto the northern Channel Islands. Since 2002, nearly 60 bald eagles have been released in a study to determine if bald eagles can successfully reproduce and raise chicks there. DDT released off the coast of southern California decades ago continues to contaminate the food chain and cause reproductive failure in bald eagles on Catalina Island.

Funded by the Montrose Settlements Restoration Program (MSRP), a multi-agency effort to restore resources injured by DDT and PCB releases in the mid-20th century, biologists brought the last fourteen bald eagle chicks to Santa Cruz Island earlier this summer.

Twelve of these birds are flying free on the islands. One has flown to the mainland and was last seen heading north of Sacramento, California. The last bird released in 2006 is expected to fledge from its hack tower within days.

There are now over 43 bald eagles residing on the northern Channel Islands and as many as 18 currently on Santa Cruz Island.

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The bald eagle webcam was made possible through the generous donation of time, expertise, and equipment from the Ventura County Office of Education along with funding and support by the Montrose Settlements Restoration Program and the National Park Service. The bald eagle nest is on the portion of Santa Cruz Island that is owned by The Nature Conservancy and they are graciously hosting the webcam.

For the bald eagle webcam and discussion board: http://chil.vcoe.org/eagle_cam.html

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