

Arizona Wildlife Podcast

Transcript: Episode 8 – Baby Eagle Biology

(Please note: this podcast was recorded live from a public presentation. It was not a rehearsed speech. This transcript attempts to capture the dialogue as it was spoken. At times when the speech was difficult to hear or understand, a good effort was made. These rare cases are noted in the text.)

The content for this episode came from the Bald Eagle Banding Media Day that took place at Lake Pleasant on March 13, 2008. It was also the launch of the Arizona Game and Fish Department's Nature's Classroom Homeschool Program. Department staff took members of the local media and the homeschool community to the top of a cliff above an active bald eagle nest. After bringing the baby eagles to the top, the biologists checked the health of the nestlings and explained a little about eagle biology.

Listen as James Driscoll, eagle biologist and raptor management coordinator for the Arizona Game and Fish Department, discusses some of the biology of the nestlings to the homeschool participants. Following the live recording, the audio was edited and Eric Proctor, a Department educator, interjected appropriate questions to link the content.

ERIC:

I noticed the babies don't look quite like the adults. They're not as black. They have that grayish color. What's the purpose of that?

JAMES:

This gray down actually helps them thermoregulate. It's like having a layer of fleece on. The black contour feathers start coming in when they hit four and a half to five. So...and then, they keep growing these out. They'll eventually get bigger than the adults by the time he's twelve weeks old and leaves the nest.

ERIC:

You just used the word "he". Did you do that on purpose?

JAMES:

This is a little guy. This is a little male.

PARTICIPANT:

Oh, you already know it's a male.

JAMES:

This is a little male. I can tell because of the size of his legs. Because this is the only population in the nation that you can actually do that with.

ERIC:

There's something unusual about his tongue. Is that an injury or is that some kind of unique adaptation?

JAMES:

If you can see his tongue...I'm going to try to move his head around.

PARTICIPANT:

Oh the barbs.

JAMES:

See the barbs in the back of his tongue. Bald eagles don't have fingers, so how do they get food down their throat? They use the barbs in the back...help pull the food down to his throat. Also, if you look, he's got a hole right in the middle of his tongue. That's his breathing hole. That's how he breathes. Okay, he's also got these nasal holes and that helps...also helps him breathe.

ERIC:

I don't see any ears. Do they have any?

JAMES:

His ears, you can't see 'em, they're right here...right behind...right where yours would be...right behind his eyes, okay.

ERIC:

Why do you put those little hoods over their heads and eyes?

JAMES:

You take away their vision...and this guy, you can see, he's just kind of resting. He'll actually...if I put him down and I leave him for two or three minutes, he'll fall asleep.

PARTICIPANTS:

Awwwww.

JAMES:

Because they're all visual, for most of their senses. Now he can hear us, that's why he's shaking; he can hear us, but they're mostly visual. See this guy's going to sleep now.

PARTICIPANT:

Uh-huh.

PARTICIPANT:

Cute.

JAMES:

So this is to reduce stress, so we're not stressing out the birds.

ERIC:

In addition to the hood, I noticed you're putting sort of a shoe on their feet. Is that to protect against those sharp talons?

JAMES:

When they're this small, they're not using their talons for defense like they will when they get about two or three weeks older. Right now they're just trying to grab and hold on to something like if they were in the nest.

PARTICIPANT:

Yeah.

JAMES:

So we put these little booties on them. So that they don't grab...they don't grab us or they don't grab their siblings or they don't grab themselves.

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Thank you.