

BALD EAGLE FACTS

- Female bald eagles are 1/3 bigger than males.
- Bald eagles in northern states are larger than in southern states.
- Nestlings are bigger than adults when they leave the nest, as their larger feathers aid in their first year of flight.
- Bald eagles average 33 inches tall, weigh 10 pounds, and have a wingspan of 7 feet.
- Their eyesight is eight times stronger than humans'.
- They mate for life and lay an average of two eggs per year.
- Bald eagles can live to be more than 20 years old in the wild. Arizona's oldest bald eagle was 28.
- They take four to five years to reach sexual maturity.
- Nestling and juvenile bald eagles are black; it takes five years to transition to the full white head and tail.
- Nearly 80 percent of a bald eagle's diet is fish.

USE INTENSIVE PROGRAMS TO PROTECT THE BALD EAGLE.



- Report dead, injured, harassment of, or shooting of bald eagles to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Law Enforcement (480) 967-7900 or the Arizona Game and Fish Department's Operation Game Thief Hotline at (800) 352-0700.

HOW DO I GET MORE INFORMATION?

More information is available online at www.swbemc.org or www.azgfd.gov.

WHERE CAN I SEE BALD EAGLES?

Although bald eagles can be seen in Arizona year round, they are more abundant during the winter months. During this time, bald eagles from northern states migrate south to take advantage of Arizona's mild winter weather. Bald eagles often concentrate in areas with abundant food, since winter food resources can be limited. Some of the best areas to view these winter eagle concentrations are near high mountain lakes such as Upper and Lower Lake Mary near Flagstaff; Rainbow and Show Low lakes near Pinetop; and Roosevelt Lake near Globe. Remember to enjoy eagles from a distance and use binoculars or spotting scopes to get a closer look. If you are interested in attending a Winter Bald Eagle Workshop, contact the Arizona Game and Fish Department's Nongame Branch at (623) 236-7500.



www.swbemc.org



www.azgfd.gov

Arizona Game and Fish Department
(602) 942-3000

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1/2008



Protecting an Arizona Treasure



THE ARIZONA BALD EAGLE
MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

STORY OF THE BALD EAGLE

In 1787, the newly formed United States of America adopted the bald eagle as its national emblem. It served as a symbol of freedom and power for the new, developing country. At the time, the bald eagle was thriving, and the population was estimated at more than 250,000 birds when Europeans first settled the continent.

However, bald eagle populations began to decline in the 1800s when they were shot for feathers and trophies; their habitat was reduced to build houses and farms; and their food sources were used to support the booming European settlements. By the 1940s, the federal government realized bald eagles were disappearing and enacted laws for their protection. The bald eagle continued to decline to less than 1,000 pairs even with the new laws. Scientists discovered that the post-World War II use of the pesticide DDT caused thinning of the birds' eggshells, resulting in reproductive failures. DDT was banned in the United States in 1973, and the bald eagle was listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act in 1978.

IN ARIZONA, LAND AND WILDLIFE RESOURCE MANAGERS . . .

Very little information existed on the species in Arizona when bald eagles were first listed as endangered. Only 11 breeding pairs were known. Scientists first believed the population in the southwestern United States was historically small and on the fringe of its suitable habitat. Land and wildlife resource managers in Arizona began an intensive research, monitoring, and management program after the bald eagle was listed that successfully recovered the species to more than 50 breeding areas statewide.

Although the bald eagle has been removed from the Endangered Species Act nationally, the population in Arizona still requires management to maintain its current size. The Arizona Game and Fish Department and the Southwestern Bald Eagle Management Committee have developed a cooperative management plan to maintain and increase the bald eagle population in Arizona.



WHERE DO BALD EAGLES LIVE?

In Arizona, most bald eagles nest in trees and on cliffs within a mile of water. Bald eagles can be found along the Agua Fria, Bill Williams, Gila, Salt and Verde rivers and in the White Mountains, Mogollon Rim and northeastern Arizona.

HOW BIG ARE THEIR NESTS?



The average nest is 3 feet wide by 5 feet long and 3 feet deep. Nests can weigh up to 2,000 pounds. Some bald eagle nests in Arizona have reached 15 feet deep and more than 7 feet wide.

DO THEY MIGRATE?

Breeding adults in Arizona do not migrate, but they take short “vacations” to use food sources outside their breeding area. During the summer months, non-breeding adults and juveniles migrate north to exploit the trout and salmon runs in Washington, Oregon, Wyoming and Canada. As winter approaches, they migrate south to take advantage of the wintering waterfowl in Arizona, New Mexico and northern Mexico.

HOW LONG IS THE BREEDING SEASON?

Courtship and nest building begin in October and November, and eggs are laid from December to March. Incubation lasts 35 days. Hatching occurs between January and April, and the nestlings fledge (begin to fly) from April to

June at 12 weeks old. The juveniles remain in the breeding area for 50 days before they migrate north.

WHY MANAGE THE BALD EAGLE?

Bald eagles are very sensitive to human activity during the spring breeding season. Depending on the type and proximity of human activity to the breeding area, a disturbance can cause nest abandonment, egg failure, a decrease in the ability to capture food, and early unsuccessful fledging. Intervention is sometimes needed to ensure that human activities do not negatively impact breeding bald eagles.



Also, water is in short supply in the desert, and with the increasing human population, the demand for water, water-based recreation and water-related projects is rising. Bald eagles depend on adequate water sources to catch fish. Development and projects that reduce the abundance, availability and diversity of fish can affect bald eagles and must be monitored.

HOW DO AGENCIES MANAGE BALD EAGLES?

• **Seasonal Closures** – More than 20 seasonal closures are enacted around the state to help protect bald eagles breeding near popular human recreation areas. The closures are designed to keep people away from the breeding areas, so the bald eagles are not disrupted during their breeding attempts. The closure areas vary in size and times, but most start Dec. 1 and end June 30.

• **The Arizona Bald Eagle Nestwatch Program** – Every year, the Arizona Game and Fish Department contracts around 20 individuals on behalf of the Southwestern Bald Eagle Management Committee to monitor nests near high recreational use areas. These “nestwatchers” are stationed within the breeding area to ensure that human activity does not affect the breeding pairs. The contractors also collect data on each pair’s behavior, educate the recreating public, and alert biologists and law enforcement when a situation needs attention.



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The nestwatchers have saved many young nestlings that would have died without a helping hand.

• **Banding and Visual Identification** – Biologists place unique, numbered identification bands on nestlings and read the bands of breeding adult bald eagles to determine the health of the population. When entering the nests to band the nestlings, biologists can also determine what the bald eagles have been eating; collect unhatched eggs



and eggshells to test for contaminants; and remove fishing line and other materials that may pose a threat to the bald eagles. Fishing line can entangle a bald eagle and cause starvation or loss of appendages if it is not removed.

• **Monthly Nest Monitoring and Survey Flights** – Members of the Southwestern Bald Eagle Management Committee take helicopter flights around the state to check the status of existing bald eagle breeding areas and to search for new breeding pairs. This effort enables the land and wildlife managers to implement management tools, like monitoring or closures, to proactively protect the breeding attempt.

• **Monofilament Recovery Program** – Two bald eagles have died from being entangled in fishing line, and biologists have removed fishing line from more than 60 percent of bald eagle nests in Arizona. The Arizona Game and Fish Department implemented a Monofilament Recovery Program in 2002 to help remove fishing line from the shores of Arizona’s lakes and rivers. The program offers recycling bins in most major angling shops and at boat ramps with the assistance of local groups like the Boy Scouts and angling clubs.

• **Winter Count** – Arizona participates in a nationwide winter survey to determine the status of the bald eagle population. The count is conducted along common bald eagle wintering areas in Arizona. The results from Arizona’s count are combined with the other states to determine nationwide trends in population numbers.

WHO MANAGES THE BALD EAGLE?

The Southwestern Bald Eagle Management Committee provides recommendations for Arizona bald eagle

management. Implementation of management projects is the responsibility of the Arizona Game and Fish Department, with public land managers enacting seasonal closures to protect the breeding pairs. The Southwestern Bald Eagle Management Committee consists of more than 20 federal, state and local agencies, Native American tribes, and private organizations.

HOW CAN I HELP PROTECT BALD EAGLES?

- Enjoy bald eagles from a distance, as they are very sensitive to human activity. Disturbing bald eagles is against federal and state laws.
- Observe the closure area dates and regulations. Contact your local USDA Forest Service Ranger District for notification of closed areas.
- Listen to Arizona Bald Eagle Nestwatch contractors you meet, as you may be disturbing a breeding pair.
- Use appropriate pound test line while fishing, and replace fishing line yearly.
- Collect used fishing line and remove it from the environment by placing it in Monofilament Recovery Bins or the trash. You can help the Arizona Game and Fish Department construct and place more recycling bins along Arizona’s lakes and rivers by calling (623) 236-7500.
- Use lead-free ammunition or bury your gut piles after hunting. Bald eagles scavenge off hunter-killed gut piles that may still contain bullet fragments. Lead poisoning can cause mortality of bald eagles.

