

## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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## News Release

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### Weakened Outer Banks Juvenile Bald Eagle Lives, Thrives and Goes Back into the Wild



Jennifer Bridgers (Coastal Animal Hospital) and "Juvie Bald Eagle #12"- just before release.

While many Outer Banks Veterinarians will accept sick or injured wildlife for evaluation and treatment, wildlife professionals advise the public to leave the animals alone. Sick or injured wildlife can be dangerous, and in most cases, the animals are better off left in their natural environment. Certainly, in the case of a bald eagle, other raptor, or any endangered or threatened species, reporting the situation to professionals is appropriate and appreciated. Photo Credit:

Don Bridgers



Photo Credit: Don Bridgers. Immediately after take-off.



The eagle made a large circle, then flew directly over the release site. Observers said the bird easily covered more a mile while circling before it flew out of site over the farming area of Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge. Photo Credit: Ben Figard

July 9 was a regular beach day for Cole Yeatts of the Ocean Rescue Team. Regular, that is, until a bald eagle flew up to his 4-wheeler and landed on his light bar. “We had had reports that an immature bald eagle was either sick or injured and in the area,” Yeatts said. He promptly covered the bird with a blanket and contacted the Dare County Animal Control Office for assistance. Thus began a string of events that took the bird from the beach to the Coastal Animal Hospital in Nags Head to the Eastern Wildlife Center in Greenville and finally to Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge for release on Wednesday, August 27.

Dennis Stewart, Wildlife Biologist for Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge, said, “ This situation is not unheard of. In fact, this is the second case this year that I’m aware of on the Outer Banks. We caught another immature bald eagle on Pea Island earlier this summer. Same situation- no injuries or illnesses- it just hadn’t been able to take care of itself successfully and was starving or thirsting to death. Young bald eagles have a harder time in a salt environment. Finding fresh water and finding food can present problems for them. We caught that eagle on the refuge and it ended up going to the Raptor Center in Charlotte for rehab.”

Not all “sick or injured wildlife” stories have happy endings. Especially with birds, it can be touch and go. “There’s a critical period with birds that are weak. They instinctively know to avoid humans, so often they’re so weak by the time they can be captured and fed that they are unable to recover,” added Stewart.

Bald Eagle Number 12 for the Eastern Wildlife Center was the July 9 capture. Mark Ansley, Director for the Center, described the bird’s condition as “sound physically, but emaciated on keel

to a grade 3. There were no fractures”. He added, “The bird was fed and watered and treated for parasites and infection. Then, we moved him to a flight cage.”

And, fly he did. Though the bird could only fly ‘short hops’ when it arrived, by day 3, it was able to fly up to the 10’ perch. “By the fifth day, he was able to fly the length of the cage; the sixth day was able to stop in flight and perch. His recovery has been unremarkable since 6 weeks at EWC,” Ansley said.

The success story of “Juvie BE #12” is the perfect example of a community working together for the benefit of all, especially “Juvie BE #12”. Concerned individuals called in the alarm. The Ocean Rescue Team, Dare County Animal Control, and several private individuals and businesses set out to find the bird. The Eastern Wildlife Center, established in 1992 (a licensed, 501-c tax exempt wildlife rehabilitation organization) was called for guidelines on husbandry, and The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, for whom the bald eagle is a trust resource, was called for transport and release.

On release day, Ansley described the eagle as having “a weight of 7 pounds, good body mass, excellent flight skills. All sight and hearing are normal, it can fly, nonstop stop 200 feet at a time. We have not forced him to fly; he flies at his pleasure. Now he goes straight up against the netting and walks, which is a sign for release.”

The release occurred just after 5:30 pm on August 27 on Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge. Jennifer Bridgers of Coastal Animal Hospital, who coordinated care of the bird from the beginning, handled the actual release. The eagle immediately gained altitude, made a huge circle and flew directly over the small crowd that had come to celebrate the release. After flying several large circles around the release site, it flew out of sight.