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News Release



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July 3, 2012

First Successful Bald Eagle Nesting at Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge

On July 1, a bald eagle took his first flight at the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). This was quite a momentous occasion, since the bald eagle was the first one to be born on the Sacramento NWR. During the winter, bald eagles are a common sight on the refuge, when eagles from northern states and Canada congregate in the Central Valley to feast on the abundance of waterfowl. However, during the summer, breeding bald eagles are not typically found in the Sacramento Valley. Overall, they tend to stay close to lakes, rivers, or the ocean.

The bald eagle was placed on the endangered species list in 1967 due to nesting failure associated with contaminants such as lead and DDT. DDT was a common pesticide used to control mosquitos and other insects and caused thinning of the egg shell in many raptors. The banning of DDT in 1972 and reintroduction across the United States has allowed the bald eagle to increase its numbers. In 2007, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service removed the bald eagle from the federal endangered and threatened species list. However, California continues to list the bald eagle as endangered.

The adult male and female bald eagles on the Sacramento NWR began building a nest in 2011 but it was blown out of the tree during heavy winds. This winter, they tried again in a section of the refuge closed to the public. Bald eagles will typically lay one to two eggs and in this case, only the one young male has been observed in the nest. The fledgling is now approximately 11 weeks old and is staying close to the nest. Over the next several weeks, he will stay with mom and dad as he learns how and where to hunt. The managed wetlands on the refuge provide a variety of prey for the bald eagle including ducks, geese, and mammals.

While winter provides great opportunities to watch flocks of geese, visiting the Sacramento NWR any time of year provides a variety of opportunities to view the diversity of wildlife that utilizes the wetland habitats. Currently, visitors have the opportunity to catch glimpses of the young bald eagle along the 6-mile auto tour or the viewing platform. This summer, the adult eagles have been seen hunting American coots and fish on the auto tour.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.

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The adult female bald eagle feeds its young at Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge on May 17, 2012. USFWS photo



The juvenile bald eagle (on left) sitting on its nest next to its mother at the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge on June 7, 2012. USFWS photo