



Audubon | FLORIDA

# EAGLE Watch

Annual Report 2017-2018



# Behind the Binoculars

The 2017-2018 Bald Eagle nesting season in Florida was one for the books! It started with a hurricane and ended two months later than normal with several nests fledging young in July. Although we saw more Great Horned Owls take over nests this season, and several monitors reported “roaming juveniles,” (recent fledglings visiting other eagle families) overall, it was a strong year for Bald Eagles in Florida.

EagleWatch grew more than 30 percent this year, expanding our reach farther than ever before. Volunteer community scientists collected data on more than 650 nests, expanded into five new counties, and increased monitoring effort in others. Volunteers discovered more than 80 new or relocated nests and worked with authorities on nearly 100 nest disturbance complaints. I am so proud of all our team accomplished this year to monitor and protect Bald Eagles in Florida. EagleWatch makes a real difference in conservation by:

- Collecting key nest data,
- Tracking nest locations, and
- Reporting illegal disturbances.



Shawnlei Breeding with Paige, an ambassador Bald Eagle at the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey

**We couldn't do this good work without your support!** Thank you for making it possible. EagleWatch is one of the only consistent, widespread eagle nest monitoring efforts in Florida. With Audubon's expertise and data, we are able to inform conservation policy and report on the health of Florida's eagle population. You can be a part of this work by becoming a Friend of Eagles today. Learn more at [FL.Audubon.org/FriendsOfEagles](http://FL.Audubon.org/FriendsOfEagles).

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shawnlei Breeding".

Shawnlei Breeding, Audubon EagleWatch Manager

P.S. – Come visit Paige and our other ambassador birds at the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey in Maitland, just outside of Orlando. Check out [AudubonCenterForBirdsOfPrey.org](http://AudubonCenterForBirdsOfPrey.org) to learn more.

## This Year at a Glance

Audubon EagleWatch observations revealed most eagles that lost nests to Hurricane Irma went on to successfully rebuild and raise young. EagleWatch data also indicate the average number of young produced is holding steady at 1.31 fledglings per occupied nest, compared to 1.32 last season. More pairs attempted to nest this year than last. Successful nesting attempts were down slightly, however (85 percent this year compared to 89 percent last year) along with a slight decrease in the fledge rate, or number of hatchlings that survived to fledge (92 percent this year compared to 94 percent last year). Pairs that hatched and fledged two chicks increased almost 10 percent compared to last season, helping keep productivity rates stable this year. Overall, Florida's population of nesting eagles remains healthy and strong.



Photo: Judy Rogero

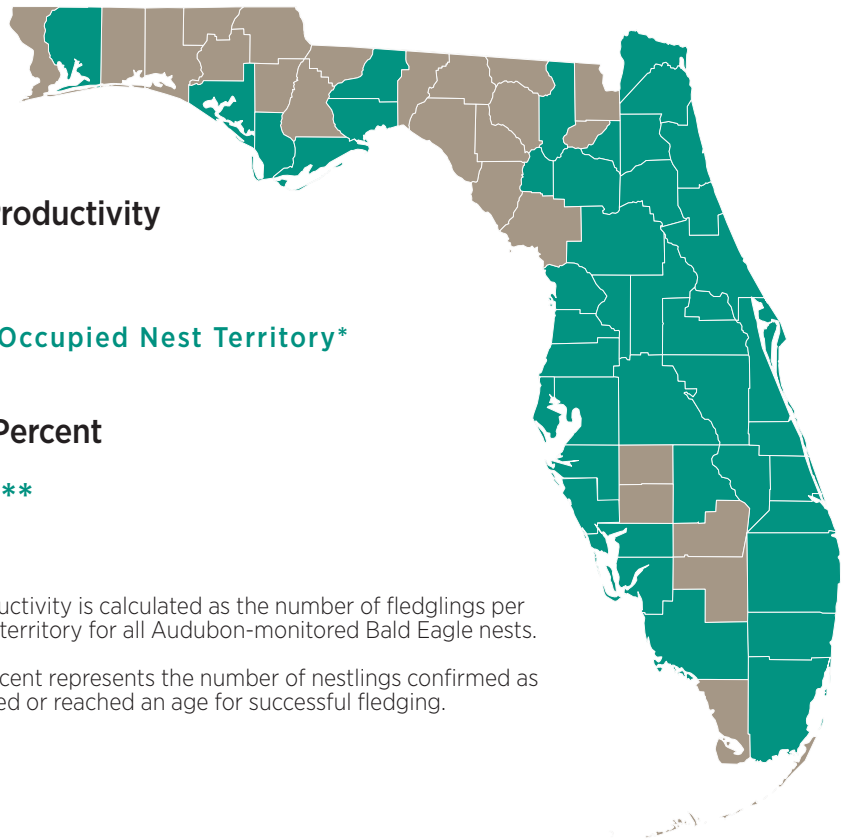
# Celebrating Audubon's 600th Bald Eagle Release



Photo: Bill Doster

In June, the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey released its 600<sup>th</sup> rehabilitated Bald Eagle back into the Florida skies. The eagle was rescued in Maitland in March after a concerned citizen found it while out for a walk. The eagle had puncture wounds on his face and beak, significant wounds on his wings, minor wounds on the feet (all due to a territory fight), and lead poisoning. After three months of treatment, many gathered to celebrate this milestone as he took to the skies again. Audubon EagleWatch works closely with our Raptor Trauma Clinic to track eagle injury statistics, and our nest monitoring data are used to locate suitable release locations for rehabilitated eagles.

Nest Productivity by County		
County	Nestlings	Fledglings
Alachua	7	7
Bay	0	0
Bradford	1	1
Brevard	26	23
Broward	2	2
Charlotte	11	8
Citrus	3	3
Clay	5	5
Collier	22	21
Columbia	0	0
Duval	31	30
Flagler	7	5
Franklin	9	9
Gilchrist	2	2
Gulf	9	9
Hernando	4	4
Highlands	4	4
Hillsborough	42	39
Indian River	15	13
Lake	35	34
Lee	42	35
Leon	1	1
Manatee	33	32
Marion	5	5
Martin	17	12
Miami-Dade	1	1
Nassau	5	5
Okeechobee	2	2
Orange	59	57
Osceola	53	48
Palm Beach	20	20
Pasco	28	25
Pinellas	47	41
Polk	75	71
Putnam	8	7
Santa Rosa	0	0
Sarasota	48	41
Seminole	33	29
St Johns	12	11
St Lucie	4	4
Sumter	0	0
Volusia	34	32
Wakulla	3	3
Grand Total	765	701



## Average Productivity

**1.31\***  
Fledglings/Occupied Nest Territory\*

## Fledging Percent

**92%\*\***

\*Average productivity is calculated as the number of fledglings per occupied nest territory for all Audubon-monitored Bald Eagle nests.

\*\*Fledging percent represents the number of nestlings confirmed as having fledged or reached an age for successful fledging.

These numbers reflect EagleWatch monitoring effort in each county and may increase or decrease slightly from year to year based on volunteer availability and coverage.



# After Flying Under the Radar for More Than a Decade, Male Eagle Discovered With Family

Martin County EagleWatchers reported a new nest with two young eaglets in January, but this wasn't just any normal eagle family. One of the parents was banded, indicating it had been part of a research study or rehabilitation program. Bird banding is a powerful tool used by scientists to study bird population dynamics, behavior, and movement. After reporting the unique band code, Audubon learned this eagle was banded by Brian Millsap with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as part of a study in Central Florida. Brian shared that the male eagle was banded as a nestling in Polk County at nest PO125 in 2000. Audubon's recent report was the first resighting of this bird in 18 years!



Photo: John Johnson

# Audubon Partnership with Southwest Florida City Helps Keep Bald Eagle Protections in Place

Thanks to persistent advocates, the Cape Coral City Council voted to keep strong Bald Eagle protections in place this spring. Because eagles are a priority for the community, they receive additional protections beyond federal and state requirements. But when a proposal to reduce the protective buffers around an active nest was considered, EagleWatchers and conservation partners rallied and objected. This public outcry led city officials to reject the proposed reduction in eagle nest protections.

Partnership and collaboration are what make Audubon effective in conservation. EagleWatch partners with Cape Coral officials to share volunteers, eagle nest data, and information regarding nest disturbance issues. City officials tell Audubon that they appreciate the rapid response of EagleWatch volunteers to critical nest requests. In addition, having access to real-time nest data informs permitting decisions near active nests.

Thanks to your support and involvement, Audubon is able to collaborate with government agencies to protect birds and the places they need.



Disturbing eagle nests not only threatens the health and safety of eaglets and eggs, but it is also illegal.  
Photo: Karen Willes

# Inspiring Future Generations to Care About Eagles and Conservation

Shawnlei Breeding, Audubon's EagleWatch Manager, often gives presentations on Florida's Bald Eagles and conservation in the Orlando community. However, one routine presentation turned into an exciting field trip when dozens of children had the opportunity to visit a nearby eagle nest thanks to Audubon EagleWatcher Jim Johnson. The inquisitive children learned all about the local eagle family and about why caring for the environment is good for all birds and people.

Engaging new, young, and diverse audiences is critical to Audubon's mission of protecting birds and the places they need. As these children ended their field trip with a newfound excitement for Bald Eagles and natural Florida, we are reminded that we must engage our own friends and neighbors with our passion for conservation. As you enjoy this report, ask yourself: What are you doing to inspire others to care about the birds and places they need?



It only takes one special moment to inspire children to care about conserving the wildlife and wild lands that make Florida special.



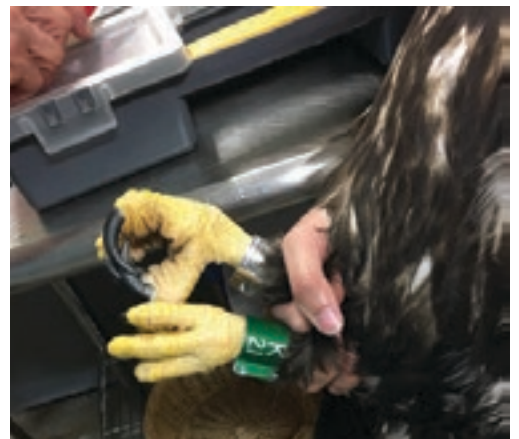
## Despite Unwelcome Nest Thieves, Florida's Eagles Persist After Irma Devastation

Hurricane Irma made landfall in Florida as a Category 3 hurricane in September 2017, just as many Bald Eagles were preparing for the nesting season. Intrepid volunteers ventured out after the storm passed, reporting on the status of approximately 300 nests across the state. Volunteer observations indicated that 37 percent of the nests visited were lost or damaged. As eagles began to rebuild, there were increased reports of other displaced species, like Ospreys and Great Horned Owls, attempting to take over eagle nests. The number of eagle nests taken over by Great Horned Owls this season almost doubled, but eagles are resilient. Our end-of-season data shows that 78 percent of the pairs affected by the hurricane went on to rebuild or relocate and attempted to nest. Most were successful, and the data underlie the incredible persistence of the species.

## Keep an Eye Out! More Banded Eagles Take to the Florida Skies

As part of an ongoing research study, juvenile eagles are banded prior to release after treatment and recovery at the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey. The band color indicates the type of nest the young eagle hatched in: green for nests in trees and black for nests on artificial structures. Audubon seeks to determine if the nest substrate (natural or artificial) chosen by parents affects their offspring's future nest substrate choice. In addition to banding, the sex of juveniles is recorded to identify any correlation between future nest site choice based on the sex of the bird.

For the 2017-2018 season, Audubon released eight female and four male eaglets with these special bands. Ten eaglets came from natural nests, and the other two from nests on artificial structures. To date, EagleWatch volunteers have resighted eight of the 12 eagles, documenting both post-release survival and persistence of released young. The auxiliary banding program is a multi-year study, with banded birds added to the sample during each successive nesting season.



Bands are applied to rescued and rehabilitated Bald Eagles.

## See a banded Bald Eagle?

Try to snag a picture of the band(s) without disturbing the eagle and report it to Audubon by emailing [EagleWatch@Audubon.org](mailto:EagleWatch@Audubon.org) with the location, date, and time of the resighting.



# Human and Eagle Population Booms Mean Eagles Need Audubon (and You) Now More Than Ever

The Sunshine State is home to one of the largest nesting populations of Bald Eagles outside of Alaska coupled with one of the highest rates of development in the U.S. Less available open space and more people puts significant stress on the species. Audubon is at the forefront of protecting eagles and their habitat, but we need your help as pressures mount and protections are threatened.



Photo: Katie Houvener

## Will you join our efforts?

- **Volunteer to monitor eagles.** The data collected by EagleWatch volunteers has the power to reflect critical fluctuations in population trends. Email Shawnlei Breeding at [EagleWatch@Audubon.org](mailto:EagleWatch@Audubon.org) to sign up!
- **Become a Friend of Eagles.** Join our exciting membership program at [FL.Audubon.org/EagleFriend](http://FL.Audubon.org/EagleFriend) and help Audubon to protect eagles in Florida.
- **Spread the word.** Share this report with your friends and family. Download additional copies at [FL.Audubon.org/EagleWatchReport](http://FL.Audubon.org/EagleWatchReport).

## Audubon's Volunteer-Powered Network Breaks Records

EagleWatch is fueled by passionate people who care about eagles. Did you know that more than 300 volunteers donated 6,000 hours to Bald Eagle conservation last season and submitted 9,000 nest observations? Breaking all previous records, we had more volunteers monitoring more nests this year than ever before. This season was full of amazing stories of EagleWatchers in action: speaking up for eagles at government meetings, working with wildlife refuge biologists to post protection signs at nests and guiding fire management decisions, and advising local businesses to reduce rodenticide use. Audubon's community science volunteers dedicate time, energy, and enthusiasm to educate others and protect this important species. Thank you to our record-breaking volunteers. They are all extraordinary!




Audubon celebrating with our EagleWatchers in Naples, Florida.

## Special Thanks to EagleWatch Donors

American Eagle Foundation | Central Florida Foundation | The Batchelor Foundation  
Stanley and Mildred Zamo Charitable Trust

Thank you to all our donors, big and small! Your support protects eagles and their habitats today and for the future. As threats to both increase, your gifts are needed and appreciated now more than ever.

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