

# EagleWatch

Annual Report 2020 - 2021

 Audubon | FLORIDA



Photo: Valerie Clayton

# Behind the Binoculars:

## NOTES FROM THE EAGLEWATCH PROGRAM MANAGER

After 2020, we were all hopeful for a return to “normal” – whatever that is, right? As someone who manages a program fueled by dedicated volunteers, I keep health and safety at the forefront of my mind. But I also understand the importance of what you do for conservation. EagleWatch is now the only consistent, statewide Bald Eagle nest monitoring effort in Florida. The data our volunteers collect is used every day by state and federal wildlife biologists and other key stakeholders to make management decisions that affect eagle nests. If we don't speak for the eagles, who will? In spite of lingering effects of COVID-19, our steadfast volunteers pushed the program to new heights for a fifth straight year of growth in the numbers of active volunteers, nests monitored, and counties covered.

Every season has its unique challenges and 2021 proved no different. We experienced a number of strong storm events in the spring that impacted nests, and a higher than usual occurrence of monitors reporting young eagles on the ground below their nest before they were ready to fly. Spending a day or two on the ground can be a normal part of the fledging process for many bird species, and the decision on whether the young eagle truly needs help or should be left alone is never easy to make. Through it all, our volunteers used their training and networks to assess each situation to make the best decision for the eagles.

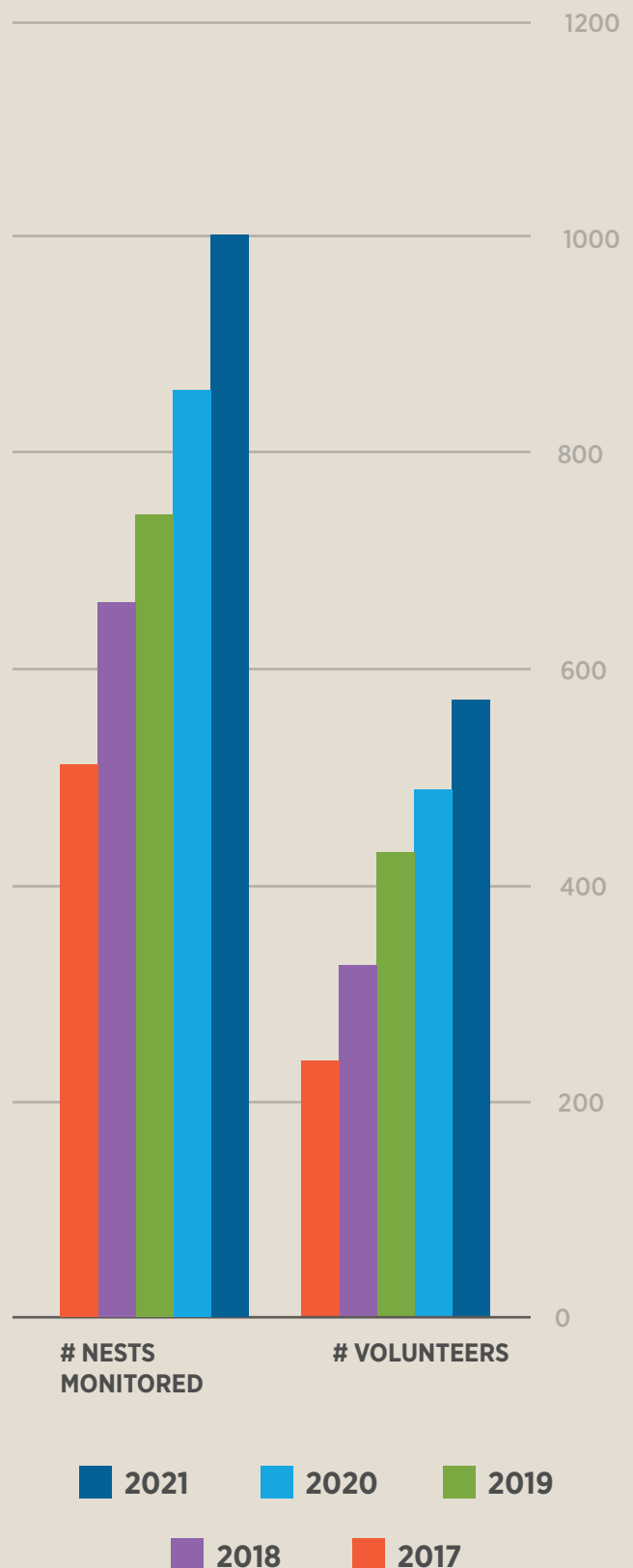


And the eagles showed us yet again how resilient they are, carrying on to nest in often less-than-ideal situations and posting productivity numbers that are consistent with a stable population in our state. The challenges they face persist: with your support, EagleWatch will continue to be on the front line, collecting vital data that will act as a bellwether for future concerns and ensure the future success of this species.

*Shawnlei Breeding*

Shawnlei Breeding, *EagleWatch Program Manager*  
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## EagleWatch Program Growth







Eagle building nest in a dead tree.  
Photo: John Johnson

## Bald Eagle Populations are on the Rise!

In March of 2021, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) released a new technical report indicating that the Bald Eagle population in the lower 48 states has quadrupled since their last estimate in 2009. Using data collected by aerial surveys in 2018 and 2019, combined with community science data extracted from eBird, USFWS created new estimates for both the number of breeding pairs and total population size: 71,467 breeding pairs and 316,700 individuals in the lower 48 states.

To read more, visit:  
[www.fws.gov/birds/news/210324eagle-population.php](http://www.fws.gov/birds/news/210324eagle-population.php)

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## 2020-2021

### BREEDING SEASON BY THE NUMBERS



1.32

EAGLE FLEDGLINGS  
PER OCCUPIED NEST



1002

NESTS MONITORED IN 50  
COUNTIES IN 2020-2021



92%

1,021 OF 1,105  
NESTLINGS FLEDGED



70\*

JUVENILE EAGLES BANDED AND  
RELEASED SINCE THE START OF  
THE STUDY

\*22 JUVENILE EAGLES BANDED AND RELEASED IN 2021



Cell Tower rescue in Tampa, FL  
Photo: Louise Roy

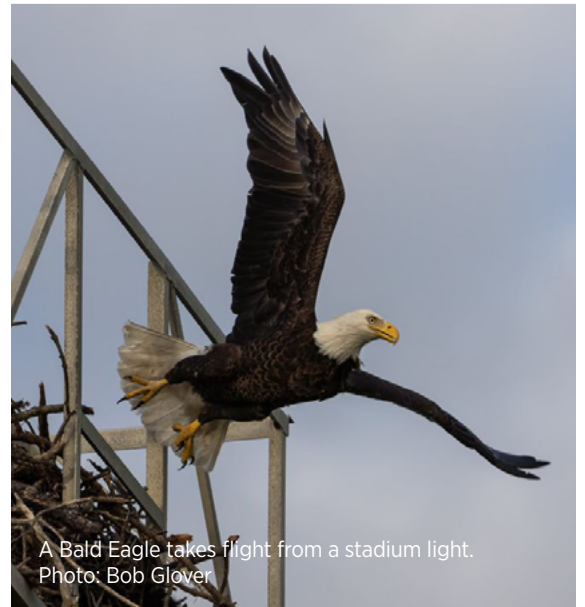
## Partnerships are Key to Success for Eagles Nesting on Man-made Structures

Roughly 20% of the nests monitored by the EagleWatch Program in Florida are built on man-made structures, including cell towers, powerline towers, stadium lights, and osprey platforms. While other states may have a few eagles nesting on these structures, the majority still nest in more traditional locations in trees or on rocky outcrops. Florida is unique in the higher prevalence of this nest site choice by eagles.

Each season, we look at the productivity data collected by EagleWatch volunteers to determine if our eagles nesting on man-made structures are as successful as eagles nesting in trees. The data shows that for the last five seasons the number of fledglings produced per occupied nest is fairly consistent across nest structure type.

To ensure the future success of eagles nesting on man-made structures, EagleWatch works closely with the utility and communication companies that own the structures, providing nest status updates based on data collected by our volunteers to guide the timing of scheduled maintenance, and, in some cases, working to alleviate safety concerns or even rescue injured eagles on these structures.

As one example, this season a subadult eagle visited a nest on a cell tower in Tampa. Unfortunately, its wing became stuck between two metal bars. A local business owner saw the eagle hanging from the tower in distress and quickly called the EagleWatch volunteer they knew who



A Bald Eagle takes flight from a stadium light.  
Photo: Bob Glover

monitored the nest. The volunteer called the cell tower company, who in turn quickly arranged for a crew to climb the tower to extract the bird. After an initial assessment by a local raptor specialist, the eagle was transferred to the Center for Birds of Prey for rehabilitation.

This eagle underscores the importance of the web of relationships that support and protect a nest, from local business, to residents and landowners, to volunteers, to the companies that own the structures on which the eagles nest. Thanks to the quick action of the network of people associated with this nest, this immature eagle made a full recovery and was released back into the wild. The EagleWatch program is grateful for the strong relationships we have with these companies who share our dedication to protecting Florida's nesting eagles and work with us to ensure that eagles nesting on their structures are set up for success.

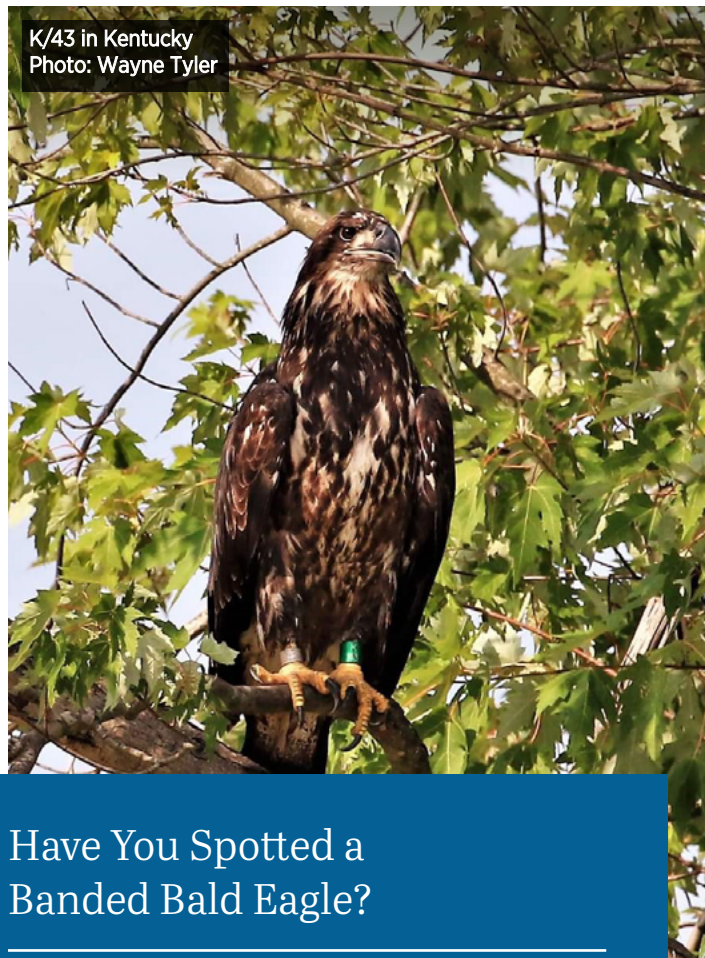


Rehabbed cell tower Bald Eagle takes flight.  
Photo: Louise Roy



## From Rescue to Resighting, Two Eagles are Soaring High

Amy Dougherty began April 27 by checking the Bald Eagle nest she had monitored all season. As a volunteer with Audubon EagleWatch, Dougherty makes semi-weekly checks on this nest and was concerned when she found the eaglet on the ground below the nest tree. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission staff arrived to rescue the juvenile eagle, transporting it to the Center for Birds of Prey for a check-up. The bird was treated for internal parasites — which is fairly common in wild birds — and issued a clean bill of health.



K/43 in Kentucky  
Photo: Wayne Tyler



K/48 resight  
Photo: Steve Thornhill

Before her release on May 25, Center staff applied two bands to the bald eagle's legs as part of a long-term, cooperative study on nest site preference: a silver federal band and a green K/48 band. Green bands denote the chick hatched in a natural nest while black signifies the chick hatched in a nest on a man-made structure. Audubon began this study to determine if the type of nest structure an eagle hatches in influences the type of nest structure it chooses as a breeding adult. This information will also help in future management and protections for Bald Eagles in Florida.

In mid-July, Nancy Barnhart and Steve Thornhill spotted green K/48 perched hundreds of miles away at the Hog Island Wildlife Management Area in Virginia!

The K/48 resight was the first of the season, but not the last. Another eaglet was rescued in mid-April from a parking lot by her nest in Orange County, FL. After receiving treatment and care at the Center for Birds of Prey, K/43 received a green auxiliary band of her own. Just a few months after her release, K/43 was spotted at a park in Kentucky.

From 2017 through July 2021, Audubon has banded and released 70 fledgling Bald Eagles as part of the ongoing study. Each eagle that is rescued and released gets a second chance at life and the opportunity to contribute to the future of the wild population.

“Banding resights like these bring us one step closer to understanding the future of Bald Eagle nesting habits,” explains Shawnlei Breeding, Program Manager for Audubon EagleWatch, “We depend on community scientists to help us track these majestic birds.”

Thank you to all who were involved in the rescue, treatment, and release of the 22 juvenile eagles this season and the photographers for reporting the bands.

### ▶ Have You Spotted a Banded Bald Eagle?

Make note of the band color, alphanumeric code if visible, and which leg the band is on, and report this important information to the U.S.G.S. Bird Banding Lab. This data helps researchers track longevity, migratory habits, habitat usage, and other vital population parameters.

**To visit the U.S.G.S. Bird Banding Lab click here:**  
[www.usgs.gov/labs/birdb-lab](http://www.usgs.gov/labs/birdb-lab)



# Celebrating the 2021 Bald Eagle Nesting Season at the Center for Birds of Prey in Maitland

The 2021 nesting season saw an unusually high number of Bald Eagle admissions to the Raptor Trauma Clinic at the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey. Luckily, our team was ready! Thanks to the support of donors and Center volunteers, as well as the dedication of our amazing EagleWatchers, the season proved to be a great success. This multi-media presentation encapsulates the highs and lows of the eagle season at the Clinic, with graphs, charts, great photos, and more. Inside:

- Map with details for all Bald Eagle rescues in 2021
- Update on auxiliary band study and resightings
- A happy ending to the story of one eaglet rescued from Anclote Key

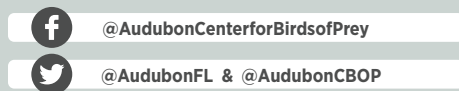
*Enjoy the story in its brand new, multi-media format:*  
[bit.ly/3kyPcYS](https://bit.ly/3kyPcYS)



Eaglet chicks with adult.  
Photo: Gerald Hook



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It is with the generosity of our donors and supporters we are able to accomplish so much.

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The Batchelor Foundation  
The Felburn Foundation  
Cheryl Merz

Will you support our work? Visit [cbop.audubon.org](https://cbop.audubon.org) to make a gift today!