



Audubon | FLORIDA

EagleWatch

Annual Report 2022 - 2023



Behind the Binoculars:

NOTES FROM THE EAGLEWATCH PROGRAM MANAGER



After studying the negative effects of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) on Bald Eagle nest productivity during the 2021-2022 season, I approached the start of the 2022-2023 Florida Bald Eagle nesting season with trepidation.

Thankfully, documented cases of HPAI were almost nil this year, but Florida's eagles faced another formidable foe in the form of Hurricane Ian that made landfall on our southwest coast. My heart broke to see the photos of homes and nests lost to Hurricane Ian, but then later, was equally inspired by the resilience of our volunteers and the eagles that returned to rebuild. Volunteers were eager to resume monitoring and provided critical data to document which nests had been destroyed, which nests had been rebuilt, and any newly discovered nest locations.

Our valuable monitoring data from the 2022-2023 season revealed that roughly 150 Bald Eagle pairs lost their nests to Hurricane Ian, but 70% of those pairs rebuilt and made a nesting attempt. The efforts to rebuild, along with the inferior condition of many remaining trees, took a toll on nest productivity for pairs affected by the hurricane. Fewer of the rebuilt nests (66%) fledged chicks compared to the non-hurricane-impacted nests (80%), but we still celebrate the 109 chicks that the impacted eagle pairs successfully raised.

While hurricane and disease outbreaks may be unpredictable, the greater and more persistent threats to eagles in Florida include the steady loss of habitat to development, the rise in environmental toxins in the ecosystem that affect food resources, more intense storms from climate change, and other human related impacts, including car strikes and electrocutions. Thanks to the tireless efforts of our volunteers and the support of our donors, the EagleWatch Program will continue to work on the front lines of Bald Eagle conservation, documenting, monitoring and protecting nests in order create a bright future for Florida's Bald Eagles.

Shawnlei Breeding, *EagleWatch Program Manager*
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2022-2023 BREEDING SEASON BY THE NUMBERS



1.22

EAGLE FLEDGLINGS
PER OCCUPIED NEST



1,231

NESTS MONITORED IN
57 COUNTIES



92%

1,071 OF 1,170
NESTLINGS FLEDGED



105*

JUVENILE EAGLES BANDED AND
RELEASED SINCE THE START OF
THE AUXILIARY BANDING STUDY

*INCLUDES 19 JUVENILE EAGLES BANDED
AND RELEASED THIS SEASON

Cover Photo: Donald Christian/
Audubon Photography Awards



Tracking Florida's Bald Eagles

Approximately 20% of the 1,200 nests monitored by the Audubon Florida EagleWatch Program are built on man-made structures, such as cell towers or power line transmission towers. EagleWatch studies how these nest decisions impact nesting success and nest site choice through the analysis of monitoring data as well as the Auxiliary Banding Study, which began in 2017. The goal of the Auxiliary Banding Study is to determine if the type of nest structure a chick hatches in influences its future nest site choice once it reaches maturity and begins nesting.

All juvenile eagles treated and released by the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey's Raptor Trauma Clinic are tagged with a colored leg band with an easy-to-read, unique alphanumeric code before release back into the wild. The color of the band indicates the type of nest where the chick hatched: green bands for chicks that hatched in natural nests and black bands for chicks that hatched in nests on man-made structures.

SEASON	BANDED
2017	17
2018	13
2019	10
2020	8
2021	22
2022	16
2023	19
TOTAL	105

The Auxiliary Banding Study is a multi-year project, with banded birds added to the research initiative each successive nesting season. Since its inception in 2017, the study has banded and released 105 juvenile eagles.

Auxiliary band release and resight locations are mapped to visualize movement of the eagles. To date, EagleWatch has received 55 band resight reports, with 14 resights coming from out of state as the juveniles migrate north over the summer.

The initial cohort of fledglings banded in 2017 reached sexual maturity during the 2023 nesting season. We were eager to see if one of our banded birds would be resighted at a nest. And we weren't disappointed!

Volunteers who monitor a natural nest in a local park north of Tampa reported seeing banded eagle female K/05 defending the territory with a male, our first record of an aux-banded eagle occupying a nest territory!

K/05 was rescued as a prefledgling from a natural nest on a golf course in Orlando in 2017 and released a month later. EagleWatch received reports of K/05 as a subadult in 2019 in the Tampa area and then at a nature preserve in Central Florida in 2021 before she returned to the Tampa area to claim a nesting territory.


 [Click to see an interactive map of her travels.](#)

We look forward to receiving more reports of banded eagles nesting over the coming seasons. As we learn more about these nesting behaviors and eagle movements, we are working with the owners of these structures as well as state and federal agencies to modify policies and practices to better protect eagles now and into the future.

Top eagle photos: Rosemary Tolliver, John Dunne, and Alice Horst



 K/49 eaglet resighted at Circle B Bar Reserve in Lakeland. Photo: Kevin McFadden

 If you see a banded eagle, report the band to the [Bird Banding Lab](#) or to the EagleWatch Program at eaglewatch@audubon.org.

To learn more about the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey or the EagleWatch Program, visit cbop.audubon.org.

Volunteers Take Action to Halt Fireworks Near Active Nests

In March, Kim Rexroat, Eaglewatch volunteer coordinator for Pasco County, heard about an event happening just days later at the St. George Greek Orthodox Church in New Port Richey. The “America is Awesome” event promised live music, a car show, a raffle, silent auction, food and drinks, and one thing that fills every EagleWatcher with dread: fireworks.

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Bald and Golden Eagle Management Guidelines, fireworks shouldn’t be launched within a half-mile of an active eagle nest because the light and noise disturbs both the eaglets and their parents. Atop a cell tower on the church’s property sits PS040—a monitored nest that at the time was home to a seven-week-old eaglet. Rexroat contacted the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission as well as the event sponsors, Lucas, Macyszyn, & Dyer Law Firm, to alert them of the threat the fireworks posed to the young eaglet and its parents. The loud bangs and bright flashes of fireworks could scare the eaglet, potentially causing it to jump from its nest high above the ground. Because of its young age, it would not be ready to fly, and would sustain life-

threatening injuries or die on impact with the ground. Rexroat worked with the event sponsors and FWC to protect the eagles. Not only did the event organizers cancel the fireworks—they also made a \$500 gift to EagleWatch.

The eaglet successfully fledged a few weeks later.



▲ An adult eagle takes off from nest PS040. Photo: Steve Hyatt



In June, the Clearwater Threshers minor league baseball team planned a post-game fireworks display in honor of first responders. The team plays at BayCare Ballpark, just across the street from PI072—another monitored nest where EagleWatch volunteer Louise Roy watched two eaglets. Roy alerted the team to the threat their fireworks posed to the eaglets, and the day before the game, the Threshers released a statement announcing they would cancel the fireworks out of respect for the eaglets’ safety.

When event organizers are unaware of active nests in their area or of the risks that fireworks pose to them, EagleWatch volunteers give Bald Eagles a voice. Thanks to Kim Rexroat, Louise Roy, the Clearwater Threshers, and the Lucas, Macyszyn, & Dyer Law Firm for supporting Bald Eagle nesting in Florida.

▼ Tower nest PI072 is right behind a baseball stadium. EagleWatch volunteer Louise Roy alerted the team when planned fireworks could have disturbed the eaglet. Photo: Louise Roy



Audubon EagleWatch marked 30 years of nest monitoring during the 2022-2023 season, a conservation achievement. Our EagleWatch family celebrated throughout the year, including virtual events, [a special 30th anniversary issue of the annual report](#), and a small gathering of the Audubon Florida Board with a few special guests to celebrate the impact of this program.



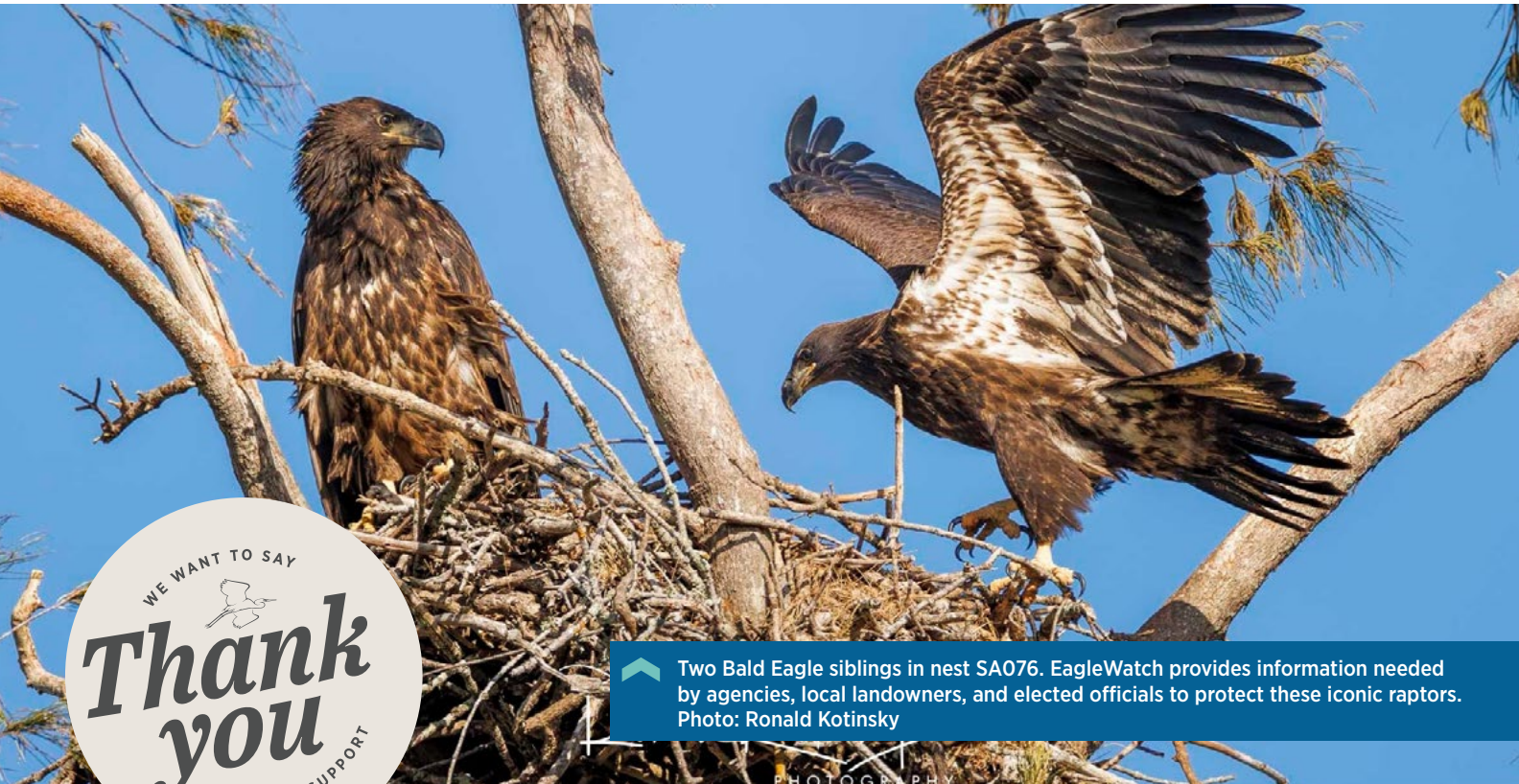
In Honor of Ann Harwood-Nuss

Audubon Florida, Audubon Center for Birds of Prey, and Audubon EagleWatch lost a dear friend, colleague, advocate, donor, board member, and EagleWatcher this fall. Ann joined EagleWatch in 2012 in Jacksonville, later becoming the county coordinator in that area. Her genuine interest in advocating for the protection and conservation of eagles was clear with every effort she made as she shared her passion and excitement with others.

In addition to our condolences for the friends and family of Ann, we would like to extend our thoughts to the friends and family of all the EagleWatch volunteers we lost this year. Each and every one of our volunteers has made the world a better place for Bald Eagles.

◀ Ann releasing the Center for Birds of Prey's 500th rehabilitated Bald Eagle in 2015.

Protecting birds and the places they need.



WE WANT TO SAY
Thank you
FOR YOUR SUPPORT

Two Bald Eagle siblings in nest SA076. EagleWatch provides information needed by agencies, local landowners, and elected officials to protect these iconic raptors. Photo: Ronald Kotinsky

Thanks to the generosity of our donors and supporters, we are able to accomplish so much.

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING AUDUBON EAGLEWATCH
2022-2023 NESTING SEASON



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