Nature's Art Wildlife Journal

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Rescue and Release

Comments by the Editor

Conservation and preservation of our wildlife is a challenge that touches all of us.

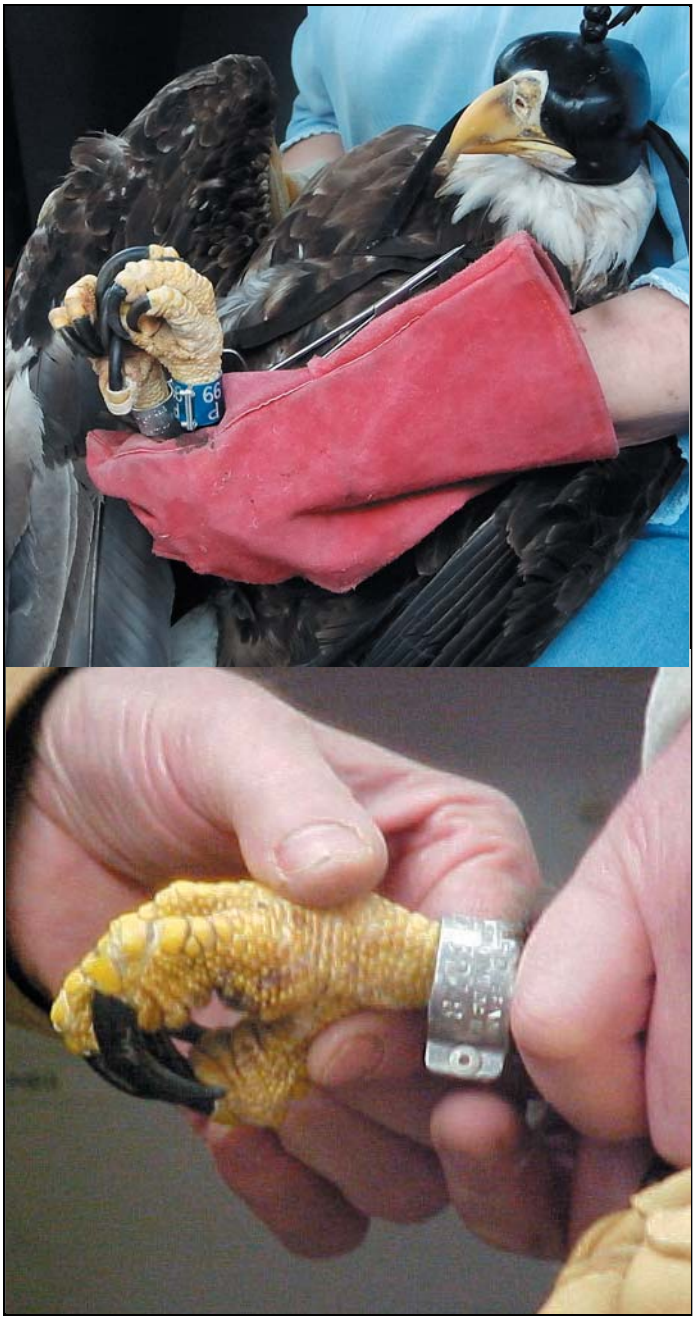
The Wildlife Journal is committed to raising awareness and understanding of wildlife and the environment and the issues impacting them. Our current issue features articles by, or about, individuals and their organizations from our region. We have come to know them in our travels throughout the country documenting, through photography and video, endangered and threatened wildlife.

Bill and Stephanie Streeter of the Delaware Valley Raptor Center, Dr. Len Soucy of the Raptor Trust, Diane Nickerson of the Mercer County Wildlife Center, the Avian Wildlife Center and the many individuals and volunteers working with them, are all dedicated and making a difference – rehabilitating injured wildlife and returning as many as possible back to the wild.

We applaud their efforts and successes and hope you will enjoy reading about their efforts as much as we have enjoyed working with them.

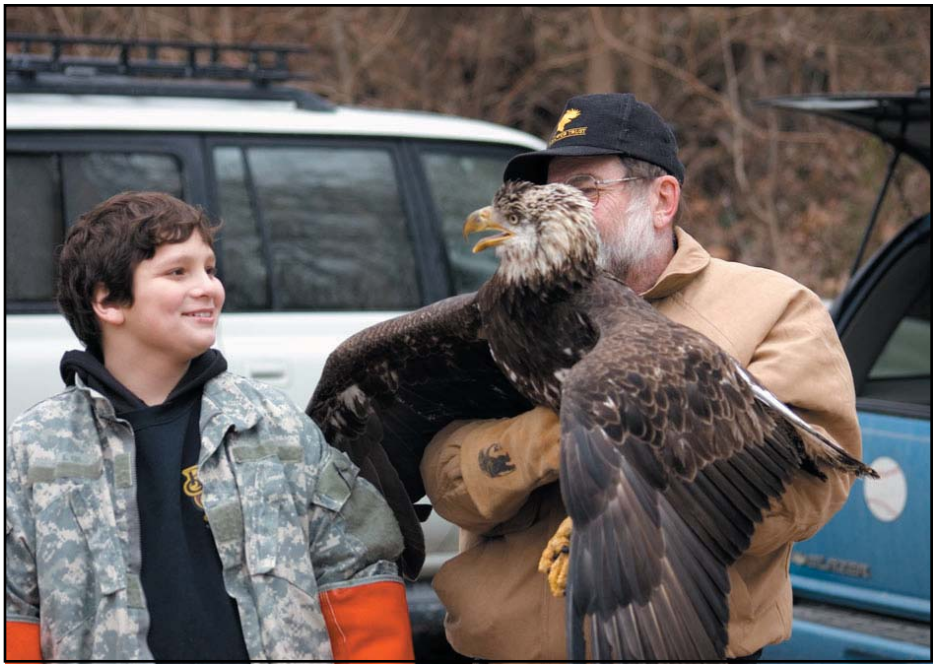
Yoke Bauer DiGiorgio

Inside This Issue



"Rivet" bands are used when banding band bald eagles. Note that New York State (top) uses a colored blue band and New Jersey (bottom) does not.

Bird Banding article on page 6



Dr Len Soucy with Dylan Stokes ©2007 Photograph provided bythe Raptor Trust

Soaring Recovery for a Rare Patient

by Lauren E. Butcher

Lauren E. Butcher is the Education Director at the Raptor Trust, Millington, NJ.

The Raptor Trust is a wild bird rehabilitation center founded by Dr. Len Soucy and his wife Diane Soucy almost 40 years ago. The center currently cares for approximately 3200 birds each year, with the goal of returning as many as possible back to the wild. The Raptor Trust also offers educational programs about birds of prey and about the natural world that we share with them.

www.theraptortrust.org, 908-647-2353

As usual, Robert Blair was working late one afternoon last January. He was sorting through dead mice and rats, lining them up in a bucket, and waiting for the daylight to fade so that he could begin to feed the owls. Hearing the familiar sound of tires on the gravel drive outside, he probably sighed…a late arrival, most likely a pigeon. But when he greeted the animal control officer who had just pulled up to the Raptor Trust's infirmary, he knew by the man's excitement that it promised to be something different. Peering inside the cardboard box that the officer was holding, Robert was surprised to find that the large, dark bird hunched inside was not a pigeon, or a vulture, or even a red-tailed hawk, all regular patients at the Raptor Trust. Instead, it was a bald eagle.

Though bald eagle populations in the east have made an inspiring recovery in recent years, it is still rare to get one at our avian rehabilitation center.

The Raptor Trust has treated over 63 thousand wild birds in the past 24 years. Only ten of our previous patients however, had been bald eagles. This bird was number eleven, and it was in rough shape: in shock, eyes closed, and unable to hold up its head or stand. It didn't even resist as Robert lifted it out of the box and situated its lax body in a warmed intensive care unit. Given its relatively small size and mottled head, Robert figured it was a male bird, probably between 3 and 4 years old.

The eagle had been found earlier that afternoon by 12-year-old Dylan Stokes, while walking his dog at a park in Rockaway Township, NJ. We were to learn that Dylan first saw the eagle standing on the ground, apparently eating a rabbit. Dylan ran home to get his camera, perhaps not even expecting that the massive bird would still be there when he returned. But it was, only now he noticed that its head was hanging down, its eyes were closed, and it looked dazed or ill. Realizing that something was wrong, Dylan and his father contacted Animal Control Officer Dan McDonald, who brought the ailing bird to our facility.

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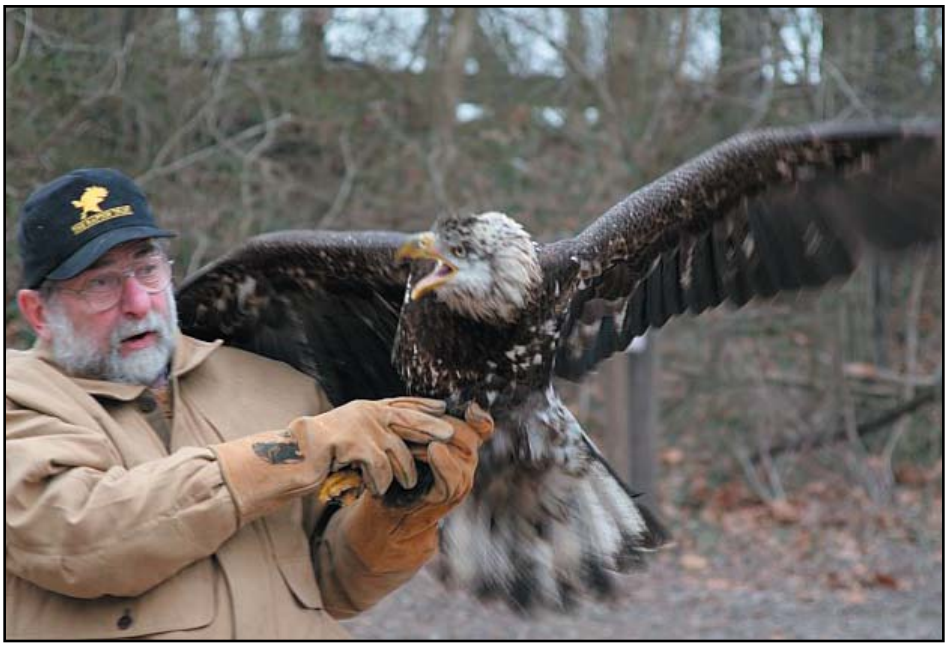

Dr Len Soucy getting ready to release the eagle. ©2007 Lee Ann Hurley Photographer

A Double Eagle Day

by Stephanie Streeter

Bill and Stephanie Streeter are the co-founders of the Delaware Valley Raptor Center (DVRC), Milford, Pa.

The DVRC is a private, not-for-profit, tax-exempt state and federally licensed rehabilitation organization dedicated to the rehabilitation and conservation of birds of prey. DVRC goals are to provide humane professional care for orphaned, ill, and injured raptors so they can ultimately be returned to the wild, healthly and no longer dependent upon humans for survival.

www.dvrcolone.org, 570-296-6025

When I started working with birds of prey 27 years ago, seeing a bald eagle in the wild, let alone treating one, was as likely as a snowstorm in June. By the late 1960's, the pesticide DDT had decimated the U.S.'s bald eagle population by causing wide-spread nest failure. The chemical, which was used from the early 1940's until it was banned in 1972, accumulated in the eagles' bodies causing females to lay eggs so brittle and thin-shelled that they broke when an incubating bird sat on them. Year after year of nesting failures left Pennsylvania with a low of three nesting pairs by the 1980's, New York with one pair by 1976, and New Jersey with one pair by the mid 1970's.

In the late 1970's and 1980's, hack projects to reestablish the eagle population were undertaken by many states. These reintroduction programs were so successful that in 1995, the US Fish and Wildlife Service upgraded the bald from endangered to threatened on the Endangered Species List. Many state wildlife agencies have done the same at the state level or are planning to do so in the near future. As of October 3, 2005 the bald eagle was reclassified as threatened in Pennsylvania.

Currently, Pennsylvania and New York have an estimated 100 pairs of nesting eagles each and new Jersey has over 50 pairs. Each year the numbers are up.

As the bald eagle population has increased, so too has the number of balds we see for treatment at the Delaware Valley Raptor Center. This past summer, we had two rehabilitated eagles ready for release on the same day, June 24th. Both birds were young, one, a year-old juvenile, the other a three or four-year-old immature.

The one-year-old was transferred to DVRC by Pete Nye, the head of the endangered species unit of the NY DEC, from a New York rehabilitation center for flight training and conditioning. The bird had wedged a wing between tree branches and was hung up until it was rescued. The wing sustained a fracture that healed quickly and well, but after seven months at the NY center, was still reluctant to fly. Less than two months after its arrival at DVRC, the eagle was ready to be returned to the wild.

©2007 Lou Buscher NY DEC Photographer

Bill and Stephanie Streeter preparing both eagles for release.

The three or four-year-old eagle was found along the side of a New York road, unable to fly. Transferred to DVRC by Scott Van Arsdale of the NY DEC, the bird was found to be emaciated, soaking wet from an extremely violent rainstorm, but had no fractures or sprains. After a month of weight gain and flight conditioning, the immature eagle was also ready for release.

On June 24, 2005, both birds were measured, documented and banded by Pete Nye then given their freedom along the banks of the Delaware River in Tunsten, New York. Both releases were flawless; it was a perfect double eagle day.

HELPING BIRDS IN TROUBLE

©2007 Diane Nickerson Photographer

MERCER COUNTY WILDLIFE CENTER

Titusville, New Jersey

Director, Diane Nickerson writes:

"The newest addition to our education outreach program, a fledgling bald eagle, arrived on June 6, 2006. Volunteer nest watchers had found her and her nest mate (a male) on the ground a few days after their nest had fallen. State officials from the Endangered Species Unit were called and arrived with a man-made structure to replace the fallen nest. The male was unharmed and returned to the man-made nest where his parents continued to care for him until he fledged. The female had injured her wing and was transported to Dr. Erica Miller, DVM at Tri-State, in Newark, DE for an examination. She had fractured two bones in her left wing during the fall. Although Dr. Miller was able to surgically repair the fractures, they did not heal well enough for the fledging to sustain flight.

We have been working with her since her arrival to socialize her and prepare her for her life as an ambassador for her wild counterparts. A bird that large (fourteen pounds!!) needs to be very comfortable around people so as not to be a danger to herself or her handler. Our goal is to have her ready for Freedom Fest over the Fourth of July weekend at Mercer County Park."

The Mercer County Wildlife Center is a state and federally licensed facility and is dedicated to native wildlife rehabilitation, conservation, education and habitat preservation. An estimated 2,000 patients come through the Center each year. These animals are provided medical treatment and a temporary refuge before being released back into an appropriate wild habitat.

Services provided are free of charge. Donations are greatly appreciated and tax deductible.

For more information contact Diane Nickerson: 609-883-6606

AVIAN WILDLIFE CENTER

Wantage, New Jersey

Located in northern New Jersey, the Avian Wildlife Center (AWC), is a privately operated, tax-exempt organization. AWC is licensed by the State of New Jersey's Division of Fish, Game and Wildlife and the US Fish and Wildlife Service with a mission to rehabilitate wild birds. AWC accomplishes this through:

- Rehabilitation and medical care of orphaned and injured wild birds
- Information and advice about birds
- Educational presentations for all ages
- Field research

No fees are charged for rehabilitation services. Funding comes from donations and all donations are tax-deductible.

For more information contact Giselle Chazotte Smisko: 973-702-1957; E-mail:avianwildlife@aol.com

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Soaring Recovery for a Rare Patient

Later that evening, when Robert went back to check on the eagle, it was so still that he thought it was dead. Then he heard it breathe: a gurgling, rasping sound. There had been vomit in the carrier—rabbit redux?—and Robert worried that if the bird was trying to bring up more of its last meal it was so weak that it would choke. He called the Trust's veterinary technician, Shelley Spanswick, at her nearby home to come back in to help. Even an eagle in such a debilitated state can't be safely or securely handled by one person. The two carefully swabbed the eagle's mouth and throat to clear its breathing passages, set it up again on a heating pad, and left for the night. Neither expected the bird to survive until morning.

Happily, though, when Shelley opened the ICU cage the next morning, she found the eagle sitting back on its hocks, very much alive. It was strong enough now that she and fellow rehabber Kristi Ward could examine the bird to try to determine what had laid the eagle so low in the first place.

One likely possibility was trauma due to impact. Perhaps the eagle had been clocked by a car when it had stooped on that rabbit. As Shelley and Kristi examined the bird, however, they found no obvious signs of such a collision—no fractures, lacerations, swelling, or broken feathers. They administered fluids and arnica, a homeopathic treatment for trauma, just in case.

Another reason for the eagle's sickened state, however, could have been that it had ingested some kind of toxin. Had the eagle been vomiting to get rid of a poisoned rabbit? Or was it perhaps suffering from lead poisoning, a fairly common fate for eagles? But when the bird was standing on its feet by early afternoon--and even more alert by four--the possibility of poisoning also began to look less likely. In most cases, and particularly in the case of lead poisoning, it would have taken more time for a bird to recover from a toxic reaction.

Ultimately, we wouldn't know the reason for this eagle's weakened state. Over the next few days, as our patient continued to respond well to fluid therapy and supportive care, the cause of his disability became less important.

We were able to confirm that, at eight pounds, the bird was small for a bald eagle, and thus most likely a male. A large female bald eagle can weigh up to 13 pounds, but since our largest hawk patients, red tails, are usually in the neighborhood of 3 ½ pounds at most, this guy was still a big bird for us. And an impressive bird by any measure.

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Soaring Recovery for a Rare Patient

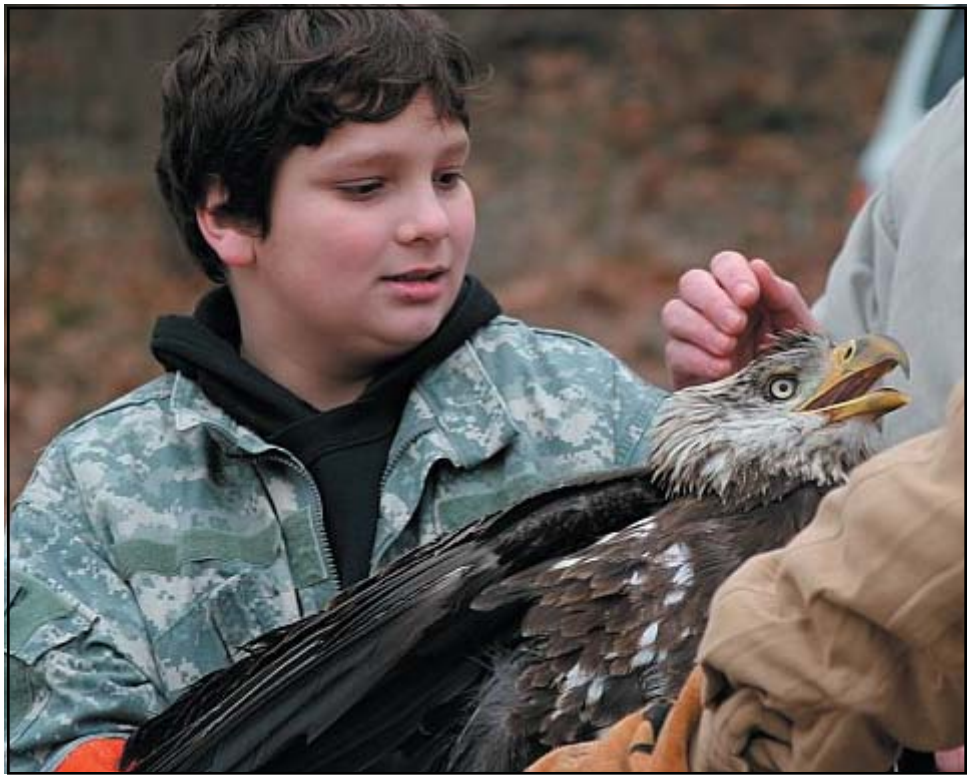
By the fourth day of his recovery, the eagle was well enough to eat solid food (chopped fish!), which our senior rehabilitator, Cathy Malok, used forceps to feed him by hand--until he heartily began to help himself from the plate she was holding. On the fifth day, he became more finicky, and only had eyes for quail. But on his sixth day with us, when he was moved to a large flight cage to begin to stretch all six feet of his wings, the eagle went on a committed hunger strike. Fish, quail, rat—nothing would do.

For the next two days, though his flight steadily improved, he did not eat. Concerned, Cathy called Kathy Clark, the chief zoologist for New Jersey Fish and Wildlife's Endangered and Nongame Species Program, who advised us to release him as soon as possible.

Force-feeding a bald eagle is not fun for anyone, especially the eagle. It involves two very experienced rehabilitators, a large net, a pair of arm-length, Kevlar-lined gloves, a padded catcher's vest, safety goggles, forceps, and a battle of wills. For the next three days, our medical staff finessed a daily feeding, working to ensure that the eagle was getting enough food to sustain his strength, without causing sufficient stress to compromise his recovery. Fortunately, in three days' time, the eagle was ready to go.

The founder and director of the Raptor Trust, Dr. Len Soucy, was able to make arrangements for a release in Titusville, New Jersey, a perfect eagle habitat along the Delaware River. At the release, Dr. Soucy helped Dylan, the eagle's young rescuer, launch our friend into the sky again.

After perching briefly in a tree to get his bearings, the bird sailed off across the river, just as wild eagles are wont to do.



Dylan Stokes assisting Dr Len Soucy in the release. ©2007 Lee Ann Hurley Photographer

A WILDLIFE LESSON

by Dylan Stokes

Dylan Stokes is twelve years old and attends Copeland Middle School in Rockaway Township. His favorite subjects are science and American history. He loves wildlife and enjoys playing sports, and walking his dog, a chocolate lab named Tyler.

"Wow, what is it??? It couldn't be. But what if it is???" That's what I was thinking when I saw the nation's bird, the Bald Eagle.

It was like nothing I've ever seen before, except in zoo books or at the zoo. My first reaction was to call my Dad and make sure I'm not just seeing things. It turned out I wasn't. It was a bald eagle. It was up to my thigh, about two and a half feet to three feet, tall.

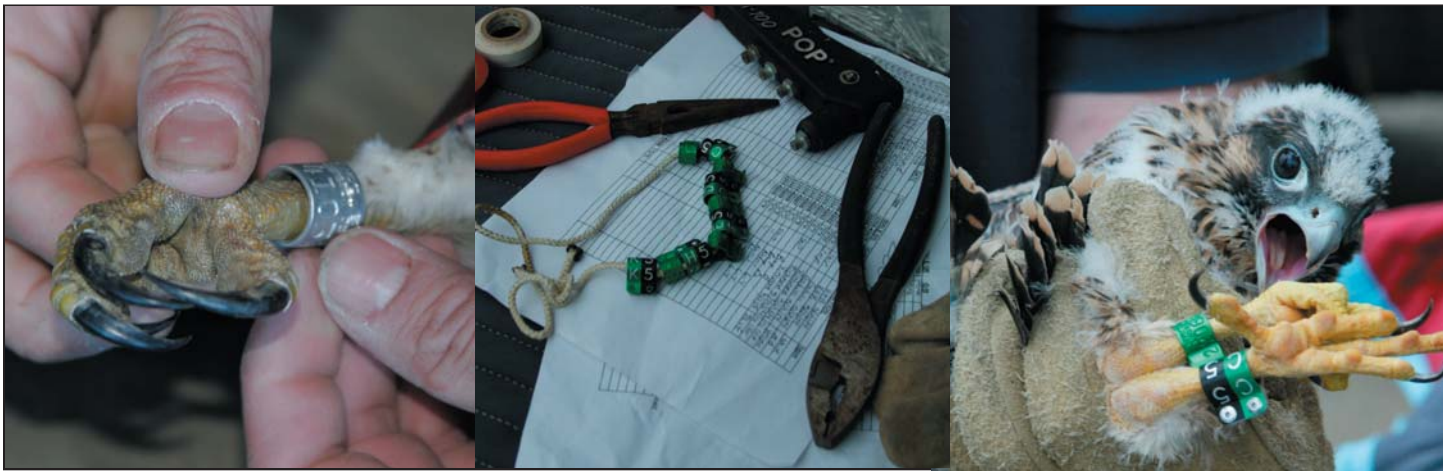
With razor sharp talons and an about six foot wingspan, it was so beautiful. When my Dad came, he said I wasn't crazy and called Dan McDonald, our animal control officer. He came down and took the bird to Raptor Trust.

The magnificent bird stayed there to rehabilitate for nine days. On Jan. 27th I went to see "Charlie", my bald eagle, and see Raptor Trust's Dr. Soucy. He taught me many things that day. Some of which were that a two pound bird in a dive can go 200 miles an hour, and eagles average flying speed is about 35 mph. I felt that the most important thing he told me was I had saved a "crazy" bird. He had told me that because in rehabilitation, Charlie got his own cage and had crashed into the wall and bumped his head.

After the long ride and information from Dr. Soucy, we arrived at the Delaware River. There, I let my bird go and watched him as he flew away. About one month later, in our local newspaper, it said there had been a new bald eagle nest at the Delaware.

I really hope he is happy.

DISCOVERING NATURE



There are many different types and sizes of bands. Note the use of a colored band for the Peregrine chick - far right. ©2007 John A. DiGiorgio Photographer

BIRD BANDING

by Yoke Bauer DiGiorgio

Yoke Bauer DiGiorgio and her husband, John , established Nature's Art LLC and are dedicated to promoting awareness and understanding of the beauty and heritage of our wildlife through photography, video, writings and the events they organize.

www.naturesartllc.com, 973-361-4833

People have been banding birds for centuries. Bird banding is the universal technique for studying the movement, survival and behavior of wild birds. The US Department of the Interior and the Canadian Wildlife Service jointly administer the North American Bird Banding Program. In order to accommodate the variety of bird species in North America, there are many different types of bands that are used and they come in many sizes.

The most common type is the "butt-end" band. A round band made of a hard metal (like stainless steel) with two edges that butt evenly together when closed, butt-end bands are used on birds that would otherwise outlive their bands or are found in harsh environments like salt water.

"Lock-on" bands are used for birds like hawks and owls. They are specifically designed to prevent these birds of prey from opening or damaging the band with their strong bills. The band is like a normal butt-end band with two flanges of metal. The longer flange is folded over the shorter flange, effectively "locking" the band in place. The band is made of relatively soft aluminum and can be removed by the bander, but not by the bird.

"Rivet" bands, made of harder metal than the lock-on band (but not stainless steel), are used for eagles. These bands have two short flanges of metal that project out from the seam where the two ends of the band meet and are side by side when the band is closed with a hole for a rivet. The band is riveted in place.

Color bands are used to identify individual birds visually. The use of colored leg bands can be coordinated internationally between the US and Canada, or only locally depending on the species. Eagles and Peregrine Falcons may have colored leg bands with engraved codes.

Bird banding requires the capturing of a wild bird and placing a uniquely numbered band, or ring, on one of its legs. The bander records where and when each bird is banded, how old it is, what sex it is, and any other information and sends the data to the Bird Banding Laboratory. When banded birds are captured, released alive and reported from somewhere else, we can reconstruct the movements of the individual bird. For example, a species may go south in one pathway and return north by another pathway. Nesting and wintering grounds have been located for some species, and specific nesting grounds have been connected to specific wintering areas.

Banding provides important data on bird species and increases our knowledge and understanding of birds, their habits and assists in their management and conservation.

THE WILDLIFE JOURNAL

IS DEDICATED TO PROMOTING AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE BEAUTY AND HERITAGE OF OUR WILDLIFE.

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