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MAJESTIC RAPTOR: THE BALD EAGLE

BY JACKIE FONDREN

Adopted as the United State's national emblem in 1792, the bald eagle has long fascinated Americans. As with all fascinations, a little fancy and folklore follows the truth about this raptor, but I will attempt to share the facts as I have learned more about this majestic bird of prey.

The solid white head, dark brown body and wings of the adult bald eagle make it easy to distinguish from other raptors. Eyes, cere (base of beak, including nostrils), bill, legs and feet are yellow; tail is white and claws are black. It takes five years for this eagle to reach full adult plumage. Identifying an immature at Cachuma can be tricky as they can be confused with the golden eagle who also has a dark brown body with varying degrees of white mottling. The immature bald eagles don't have feathers on their legs and feet and the undersides of the wing can have white patches where the wings meet the body. The female is the larger of the two, with an average wingspan of 71/2 feet to her mate's 6 feet. When seen in flight from head on, the extended wings are held level with the body.

Bald eagles' breeding range extends from the Alaskan coast and down through the Pacific Coast to Northern California. Smaller populations can be found in the southern regions of California, Arizona and a few have even been spotted in Baja California with a cactus as it's roost! In the eastern United States, bald eagles reside along coastal waters south into Florida and along the Gulf Coast.

Water is essential to the bald eagle so where lakes, free flowing rivers, and reservoirs are located, there is a good chance one might be found perched on a nearby snag. Having three foveae in each eye, gives the raptor a visual acuity 2-3 times greater than a human's. Two circular foveae are directed forward for overlapping vision that gives the bird telephoto vision as well. It is here from his perch above the water that the magnificent raptor uses his acute vision to watch for fish swimming

near the water's surface. He swoops down to catch his prey in his talons and returns to the perch. The eagle would be in danger of drowning if he had to enter the water with the fish in his talons and be pulled down by its weight. His thieving behavior and penchant for eating carrion may be one reason why the bald eagle is considered more an opportunist than an industrious bird. They can frequently be seen stealing fish from the opsprey's grasp or feeding on chum salmon dying after spawning. The bird is actually omnivorous and if fish can't be found, will eat small mammals, reptiles, carrion and even garbage. Somehow the sight of this bird eating garbage doesn't fit the majestic image.

The graceful soar of this eagle is largely dependent on the thermals, for he is not a strong flier. A non-nesting bald eagle actually spends more than half his daylight hours roosting and only a little time in flight. He leaves the roost an hour or so after dawn for his favorite feeding perch located over water. Within thirty minutes of arriving, our eagle makes short flights over the water. He spends the rest of his time preening his feathers. On dull gray days he leaves the roost to search for fish one hour before dusk.

February through July is the breeding season for bald eagles and most pairs appear to mate for life. Although pairs who were unable to reproduce after one season together, were known to seek a new mate the following season. Courtship behavior involves preening and pecking at each other and, in some cases, aerial acrobatics are performed. One of the eagles may perform undulating displays of rising and falling curves in the air or the birds may whirl and spin with their claws locked. In this cartwheeling display, the birds may fall several thousand feet before releasing their hold on each other.

Nests are typically found 10 to 200 feet above ground in large old growth trees with open branches and can get rather large. Since bald eagles frequently return to the same nest year after year, it's not uncommon for layered nests to become 7 to 8 feet across and as much as 12 feet deep. Great horned owls and mice have been known to inhabit the lower layers of the massive older nests.

BALD EAGLES CONT.

Two eggs are typically laid annually, incubate for 35 days, and the eaglets remain in the nest for 70 to 98 days. Both parents participate in the parenting. I have read where in some cases, the stronger eaglet will kill its sibling. Disturbance by humans, especially during the early part of the nesting period, has seriously affected reproduction.

The population decline of bald eagles outside of Alaska has occurred because of habitat loss and reproductive failure due to pesticides and heavy metal in their diets. DDT and DDE sprays cause residue build-up in the tissues if waterfowl eaten by the eagles and can poison the birds. Lead gun pellets have also killed birds when mistaken for food. Add power poles and illegal hunting of America's national emblem, and it is easy to see why the bald eagle was put on the endangered list in 1978. Although recently delisted in many states, we must be vigilant in preserving our majestic raptor.

NATURE CENTER EXPANSION

The Nature Center is the proud owner of a new modular workshop building, purchased with grants from the Santa Barbara Foundation and Wood-Claeysens Foundation from G. E. Modular Space of Bakersfield. The 24 X 40 foot building is located adjacent to the permanent Nature Center building and will house tools, materials and equipment for building exhibits and maintaining the premises.

The Towbes Foundation provided funding for materials for steps, a ramp, landing, and storage shelving, which were built by docents.

The building is one large, open room with two standard doors and a garage-type roll up door for moving in and out large pieces of wood and construction projects. With several windows and finished interior, the building offers a much lighter and dryer work environment than the old garage. A white exterior and sixteen-light windows help to blend the style of the building with that of the Na-

ture Center.

Don Wimpres, Daryl Rutherford, Bill Hodges, and Dick Cofell are enthusiastically building storage inside the building and moving power tools from the garage, and hand tools and supplies from the workroom inside the Nature Center to their new digs.

The late Helen Logan, former member of the Board of Directors, was the driving force behind the acquisition of this building.

NEW DOCENT/VOLUNTEER TRAINING

Starting in February the Nature Center will be offering training classes for prospective new docents and volunteers. The classes, presented by local experts, will be held at the Recreation Hall on Tuesdays from 9:30-12:30 starting on Feb. 5 and continuing every other week through June 11. Those who wish to participate are expected to attend seven out of the ten classes, two of which must be the first session and the Orientation session. The classes, subject to change, are as follows:

Ecology	Feb. 5	Mike Williams
Geology	Feb. 19	Bob Norris
Birds	Mar. 5	Mark Holmgren
The Lake	Mar. 19	Liz Mason
Nature Center Orientation	April 2	Docents
Plant Ecology	April 16	Don Wimpres
Mammals	April 30	Mike Masson
Reptiles and Amphibians	May 14	TBA
Entomology	May 28	Marion Schlinger
Chumash History & Culture	June 11	Helen Osenga

Graduation & Potluck following June 11 Session.

Enrollment in these classes carries a commitment of fifty hours of service following completions of training. Those interested should contact Linda Taylor at 693-0691 or clnatctr@sbceo.org



**IT'S OFFICIAL!!!
LINDA TAYLOR EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR FOR CACHUMA
LAKE NATURE CENTER**

Santa Barbara resident and long time Nature Center volunteer Linda Taylor has been hired as the Executive Director of Cachuma Lake Nature Center, as a result of grants given to the organization by Santa Barbara Foundation and Wood-Claeysens Foundation. Focus of the position is a Campaign to Increase Volunteer Involvement and Funding.

The Director's initial efforts are in the organization and publicizing of a new volunteer training program to begin February 5. Individuals interested in this program should call 693-0691 to register for this series of ten informative classes.

Mrs. Taylor, a volunteer at the Nature Center since 1988, has served as Exhibit Chairperson and grant writer; she has also worked on the Trout Derby Committee. Soon after becoming a docent at the Center, Linda married Neal Taylor, retired Cachuma Naturalist, at the Fireside Theater at Cachuma Lake with a reception held in the backyard of the Nature Center.

Her goal for the Nature Center is to increase the number of volunteers to enable the Center to be open to the public Wednesdays through Sundays, as well as increase funding to hire a staff member on an on-going basis.

LOOKING UP

WITH HELEN OSENGA



Dominating this winter's sky are two bright planets, Jupiter and Saturn. Pure white Jupiter the brightest object, other than the moon, is found in the constellation Gemini. Yellowish Saturn can be found in the constellation Taurus the Bull near the orange star Aldebaran, the eye of the bull. The reddish planet Mars is still visible in the early evening western sky through January and February although it has faded from it's brightness of early summer.

Winter is the starriest time of the year. Look above Saturn and Aldebaran and a little to the right for the star cluster, the Pleiades, or the Seven Sisters. This is a great binocular subject as the fainter stars around the naked-eye cluster are brought into view. Look to the lower left of Jupiter for Pollux and Castor, the heads of Gemini, the twins. Below Jupiter is Procyon, the bright star in the constellation Canis Minor, Orion's small hunting dog. To the lower right of Procyon is the brilliant star Sirius, the main star of Orion's big hunting dog also known as the "dog star". And then we have the centerpiece of the winter sky, the bright stars of Orion, the Hunter, and his famous belt which are seen between Sirius and Saturn.

CACHUMA LAKE NATURE CENTER

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The Nature Center can be reached at 805-693-0691, or clnatctr@sbceo.org.

I WOULD LIKE TO BECOME A MEMBER OF THE CACHUMA LAKE NATURE CENTER

NAME: _____

MAILING ADDRESS: _____ BOX NO. _____

CITY: _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

Enclosed is my check for a donation of \$20 ☐ \$40 ☐ \$100 ☐ Other ☐

A donation of \$20 entitles you to all of the Nature Center mailings. A \$100 donation entitles to you to all of the mailings, as well as a year-round pass to Cachuma Lake and Jalama Recreational Areas.

Whether or not you decide to make a donation, if you would like to become a Docent or Volunteer, check here ☐.

Mail to: Cachuma Lake Nature Center, Inc., Cachuma Lake, HC 58, Santa Barbara, CA 93105



**CACHUMA LAKE NATURE CENTER
CACHUMA HC-58
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