Celebrate July 4th with Bald Eaglets – Live on the Web!

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Celebrate the 4th of July this year by watching live bald eaglets on your own computer screen, just a few weeks before they fledge from the nest. You can see two bald eaglets being fed and cared for by their eagle parents live from a nest off the coast of Maine, online at the National Wildlife Federation's website.

"The remarkable recovery of our nation's symbol can be celebrated this July 4th because of the success of the Endangered Species Act," says Doug Inkley, Senior Science Advisor for the National Wildlife Federation. "The bird's numbers are soaring in the U.S. thanks to the Act's protection." The bald eagle has been proposed for delisting from the Endangered Species Act's threatened species list.

The bald eagle pair featured on the NWF web cam

(www.nwf.org/eaglecam) has successfully raised chicks in this nest for the past decade, raising 16 – 17 chicks. The nest is located near the ocean in Maine in a large pine tree, and is six feet across and 15 feet in height. Adult male and female eagles look alike, although the female is slightly larger.

It has already been a dramatic nesting season for the eagle family. Although three eaglets hatched, only two survived. In a not uncommon "survival of the fittest" occurrence, the weakest eaglet was pecked to death by one of the others.

Despite being severely impacted by DDT and now threatened by mercury pollution, Bald Eagles have made a dramatic comeback in the lower 48 states. where there are now over 7,000 nesting pairs.

National Wildlife Federation is also spearheading another eagle web cam project in Vermont. Vermont is the only state in the lower 48 states where bald eagles are not yet successfully breeding again. National Wildlife Federation is working is working to reestablish the eagle in the state, in partnership with Central Vermont Public Service, a Vermont utility company, as well as several other partners. The other partners include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, Outreach for Earth Stewardship, and US Senator James Jeffords. Six-week old eaglets have been transplanted from nests in Maryland, Maine, and from captive breeding facilities in Massachusetts and New York to a "hack site" in Vermont –a caged artificial nest, where they are being fed and watered and given a chance to fledge at about 12 weeks old. The eaglets at this hack site may be viewed at www.cvps.com/eagles. Three eaglets have already fledged from the hack site this season, and seven more should fledge during the next several weeks. At the completion of this 3-year project, nearly 20 fledgling eagles will have been released in the state. While the eaglets are growing at the hack site, they learn to think of the area as "home" and should

return to nest in the area once they are 5 or 6 years old. Reestablishment in Vermont would be a major victory for the bird.

”Our work to restore eagles in Vermont has been a huge community effort,” says Margaret Fowle, National Wildlife Federation’s Northeast Office Raptor Project Manager. “The success of the project is due in large part to the dedication of its partners and volunteers. The Vermont community is looking forward to the day when we have a breeding population of eagles in the state.”

Despite the eagle’s strong comeback, the species still faces major threats. Eagles are threatened by mercury pollution as they eat fish contaminated with the toxin. Mercury is released into the environment from power plants and incinerators around the country and accumulates in our fish, waters, and wildlife. New England has a number of mercury “hotspots” where high levels threaten the viability of many fish and wildlife species. In addition to eagles, other fish-eating birds such as osprey and kingfishers also have high mercury levels. Birds that do not eat fish, such as forest songbirds and coastal sparrows, have also been found in some cases to have high levels of mercury in their bodies.

“While DDT has appropriately been banned, mercury pollution is still a real threat to our nation’s symbol,” says Felice Stadler, Senior Manager, Clean the Rain Campaign, National Wildlife Federation. ”We hope that by seeing a bald eagle family in the wild with this web cam, you'll have a new interest in reducing the mercury pollution that threatens our treasured wildlife.”

Mercury is a neurotoxin for wildlife, inhibiting the bird’s ability to function well. They have difficulty flying, walking, and catching prey. Birds with high mercury levels are not as successful in reproducing – because of a range of mercury-related problems including thinner eggshells, fewer eggs laid, and overall hatch rates. Parents are not as

adept at caring for chicks. Chicks are not as able to survive. The birds easily become fatigued and are less able to cope with the stresses of life.

Bald eagles normally lay two or occasionally three eggs. Eggs are incubated for about 35 days, typically starting in March with chicks hatching in April. The chicks stay in the nest growing bigger until August. From April to August, the parents will bring lots of food to the chicks, so you might be in for an interesting array of prey by watching the Web cams! Much of the food will be fish, but it can also include seabirds or seals.

The chicks take their time leaving the nest. Gradually, they will work their way out on the branches near the nest after they are about 12 weeks old. Then they will fly from the nest but stay in the area. For many months they will continue to be dependent on their parents for food as they learn to forage on their own.

Young eagles are on their own until they are about five years old, when they'll look for a mate. They may return to their old nest to visit their parents, but it is often difficult to tell if a returning juvenile is related to the parents unless it is banded.

The National Wildlife Federation web cam is available because of cooperative agreement between the National Wildlife Federation and the Biodiversity Research Institute of Maine.

Source: National Wildlife Federation (NWF)