



Audubon | FLORIDA

EagleWatch

Annual Report 2024 - 2025



Bald Eagle.
Photo: Dave Wilson/Audubon Photography Awards

Behind the Binoculars

Each EagleWatch season brings new stories of resilience—both for Florida’s Bald Eagles and for the dedicated community that monitors them. This year was no exception.

We faced significant challenges: Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) returned to Florida’s eagle population, hurricanes at the start of the 2024-2025 season battered nests along Florida’s West Coast and Panhandle, and federal take permits for general disturbances became available (read more about the permits below). Unfortunately, Florida led the nation with 158 permits issued—far more than any other state. Against this backdrop, our data reflected lower productivity and fledge rates, though the average brood size (number of fledglings produced per successful nest) has remained steady.

Amid these challenges, we celebrate important wins. EagleWatch launched its first-ever telemetry study, tracking two juveniles whose journeys took one bird all the way to Canada and another to New York. We also continued our auxiliary banding study, banding and releasing 15 juveniles this season for a total of 137 since 2017.

None of this work would be possible without the extraordinary dedication of our volunteers and supporters. This year, 770 volunteers and partners contributed 13,538 hours in the field, submitting 25,739 nest observations. Thanks to you, EagleWatch continues to be one of the most comprehensive Bald Eagle monitoring programs in the nation and a powerful voice for protecting these iconic birds.



Together, we are making a difference for Florida’s eagles—and for future generations who will look to the sky with the same wonder we feel behind our binoculars.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shawnlei Breeding".

Shawnlei Breeding, *EagleWatch Program Manager*
eaglewatch@audubon.org

2024-2025 BREEDING SEASON BY THE NUMBERS



1.2

EAGLE FLEDGLINGS
PER OCCUPIED NEST
(1,172 FLEDGLINGS
976 OCCUPIED NESTS)



1,318

NESTS MONITORED IN
53 COUNTIES



89%

PERCENTAGE OF
NESTLINGS THAT FLEDGED



137*

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

**INCLUDES 15 JUVENILE
EAGLES BANDED AND
RELEASED THIS SEASON*

Florida Bald Eagles at Risk With New USFWS Permit Process

In 2024, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) instituted a new *General Bald Eagle Nest Disturbance and Nest Take Permit* process. With a term of one year or less, these general permits allow for disturbance during the nesting season or nest removal for a list of approved activities or purposes. Applicants apply online, self-identify that they meet the qualifying criteria, and receive automatic approval for the permit without USFWS review.

Since inception, more than 500 general permits have been issued across 45 states. Florida leads with 158 general permits, far ahead of the next highest state, Washington, with 31. By contrast, 34 states have received 10 or fewer general permits.

In addition to the new general permits, USFWS continues to offer *Specific Permits for Disturbance or Nest Take* for projects that don't qualify for a general permit. All specific permits are reviewed by USFWS staff before approval. EagleWatch does not have access to a complete list of specific permits, but is currently aware of 143 active specific permits in Florida.

While Bald Eagle populations have recovered to the point that they are no longer considered endangered or threatened, these general permits represent a big change, and the number of permits issued in Florida this first year has been significant. Over the next few seasons, EagleWatch's statewide nest monitoring program will provide important insight into productivity trends in this new regulatory landscape, to help evaluate whether this rate of permitted "take" is sustainable.

EagleWatch volunteer Jerry Hook photographed this eaglet on the ground after Hurricane Ian, noticing it wasn't in its nest that he monitors on Pine Island. He brought the eaglet to a local rehabilitator where it was treated and later released. Photo: Jerry Hook



Being an EagleWatch Volunteer: Challenges and Joys

With around 750 EagleWatchers in our program, there are bound to be similarities among them (beyond having a passion for Bald Eagle monitoring). We caught up with two EagleWatchers at different points in their volunteering careers: a veteran and a freshman, and we were surprised to learn how much they had in common.

Jerry Hook is a veteran EagleWatcher in Southwest Florida. Five years ago, he was out birding at Pine Island when he met EagleWatcher Michele Murphy looking for eagles. They talked about their shared interest in the species, and Murphy effectively recruited him to EagleWatch. Hook and Murphy remain friends, and they share data about the nests in their area.

Pam Miller became an EagleWatch volunteer in December 2024. Like Hook, she came across an EagleWatcher in her area: While out cycling in her neighborhood, she saw a car with an EagleWatch magnet on the door. A lifelong bird nerd, she went home and eagerly looked up the program online, and the rest is history. She submitted her first report on December 30.

Hook and Miller both watch multiple nests. Hook's record is 17 nests in a season, though after Hurricanes Ian, Helene, and Milton, his most recent count is 14. All are within eight miles of his home. Miller monitors four nests, the farthest about ten miles from her home.

The geography of Hook and Miller's regions is about as different as it can get in Florida. Hook observes nests on Pine Island, a large island made up of rural

and agricultural land in Lee County on the Gulf Coast. Miller lives in rapidly urbanizing Seminole County, home to the Little Big Econ State Forest and part of the Econlockhatchee River in Central Florida. Both volunteers cite the same issue as the most challenging thing about being an EagleWatcher, the reality of development causing habitat loss for Bald Eagles. Additionally, hurricanes pose an additional threat to large nesting trees.

EagleWatch is so much more than just watching nests. For most volunteers, it's the eaglets inside those nests that make it all worthwhile. "I'll never forget the first time I saw the head of an eaglet flop over the rim of the nest," Miller says. The happiest moment of her freshman season was seeing an eaglet venture outside of the nest to a tree branch, hopping around and flapping its wings in preparation for flight lessons. She often brings her husband with her to monitor nests, and it has been fun for them to do together. One of her nests is on an alpaca farm, adding even more animal viewing to the experience. With this first season under her belt, Miller says she's ready to grab her binoculars and spotting scope and start a new season.



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 EagleWatch, visit audubon.org/cbop

Photo: John Johnson

ARCI's Gina Holt checking a transmitter with David Fitzpatrick, raptor care assistant. Photo: Tim Barker



Kathleen Moreo releases BAEA 2025-0085. Photo: Tim Barker

Telemetry: Tracking Bald Eagles in Real Time

We often say that the science of bird banding is like putting a message in a bottle and throwing it into the ocean. Data can only be recorded if someone else “finds the bottle and reads its message,” or in other words, resights the band and reports its code. Banding data is limited by the likelihood of the bird being resighted. Now, the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey has partnered with researchers at the Avian Research and Conservation Institute (ARCI) in Gainesville, FL to employ an exciting tool to track Bald Eagles. This spring, we fitted two eagles treated and rehabilitated in the Center’s Raptor Clinic with GPS tracking devices to provide real-time data about the individuals’ movements after their return to the wild. The first GPS-tracked juvenile eagle in the study was released in Osceola County on March 22.


Florida is one of the fastest growing states in the nation. In the last 15 years, our human population has grown by 25 percent. In that same period, the Bald Eagle population here has doubled. With more eagles competing for dwindling habitat, GPS tracking will provide important insight into how movement and

migration patterns may be changing, informing eagle conservation actions and decisions. The Center for Birds of Prey will also continue the auxiliary band study to explore whether the type of nest an eagle hatches in—tree or man-made—affects the kind of nest it later chooses for breeding.

GPS tracking will give further insight into these choices. From now through 2028, up to four Bald Eagles per year will be fitted with backpack GPS units designed specifically for the species, weighing less than 2-3% of the bird’s body weight and modeled after a design that researchers have used successfully on Bald Eagles and dozens of other bird species for 30 years. Each eagle will be tracked for the life of the tag, which is about three years.

To launch this multi-year initiative, generous sponsors—Kathleen Moreo, Annie Bouchard and Kevin Bohne, Sylvia Gomez, Kathy Sayre and John Corbitt—fully funded the inaugural year of the project for the study of two adults and two juvenile eagles. The first tagged bird was Patient 2025-0085, a juvenile Bald Eagle that



 This map shows the paths of the juvenile male (orange) and female (green) after their releases this spring.

arrived at the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey's Raptor Trauma Clinic on February 23 after "fludging" (falling out of the nest before ready to fly) from his nest on a powerline tower in The Villages. After some TLC and flight conditioning, he was ready to go. Staff outfitted him with a GPS tag and released him near a lake in Osceola County with a large population of Bald Eagles to act as surrogate family as he learned the skills needed to survive on his own.


We held our breath as we waited for the first location reports and were relieved to see him exploring the local area in ever-widening paths before eventually striking out on a rapid flight west across the state to Honeymoon Island. From there he headed north, as expected, for his first migration up the Atlantic Flyway, eventually settling near Quebec, Canada where he remained for the summer. As of late September, he was in the Northeastern U.S. on his migration south for the winter.



BAEA 2025-0085 in flight with transmitter. Photo: Tim Barker

We released a second eagle, a juvenile female, in April and watched her travel as far as New York before migrating south again for the winter.

We want to thank the generous donors who sponsored the four GPS tags for this inaugural season, bringing to fruition a long-time goal of EagleWatch Program Manager Shawnlei Breeding.

 "I still have to pinch myself that this is finally happening! And I'm so grateful for our partnership with ARCI, and the wonderful donors supporting this vital research. I've felt like a proud parent watching our first tagged eagle thriving in the wild and following his instincts to head north for migration. I can't wait to see where he and the other tagged eagles go!"

— Shawnlei Breeding, EagleWatch Program Manager



EagleWatch relies on donors to support our work. Your gift supports research, monitoring efforts and data collection.

Contact Anny Shepard to make a gift
anny.shepard@audubon.org

Foster nest
trio. Photo:
Jim Lott



Rescue Highlight: A Successful Foster Nest

In April 2025, a fuzzy four-week-old eaglet fell out of his nest in Volusia County. Volunteers attempted to place him back in his nest, but because his sibling was much larger, it was not safe to do so—the smaller sibling would very likely be outcompeted for food, leading to starvation. It was clear this baby could not go back home.

EagleWatch to the rescue! The accurate nest data that EagleWatch volunteers collect all season long made it possible to find a suitable foster nest—a difficult prospect given how late it was in the season.

After reaching out to volunteers in several counties, a perfect family was found in Duval County. This pair of eagles lost their eaglet from their first nesting attempt. They tried again later in the season and had two eaglets that were the same size and growth rate as the foster baby.

EagleWatch team members sought the necessary federal, state, and landowner permissions to access the spacious nest, where an experienced, volunteer tree climber placed the eaglet. The eagles welcomed their new family member and, a few weeks later, all three eaglets fledged within 24 hours of each other.

Thanks to the resources of EagleWatch, this young eaglet received a new family and another chance to grow up and fledge in the wild.

VISIT [AUDUBON.ORG/CBOP](https://audubon.org/cbop) TO MAKE A GIFT TODAY



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

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2024-2025 NESTING SEASON

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