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SUCCESSFUL NESTING OF THE BALD EAGLE IN EAST-CENTRAL OKLAHOMA

By LOYD D. ISLEY

The national bird of the United States of America, the Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), has recently received world-wide attention for the smaller, more southward-ranging of its two currently-recognized races has become so rare as to be considered "endangered" — i.e., threatened with ex-



BALD EAGLES AT NEST

Photographed by Harry Smith Jr. at Robert S. Kerr Reservoir, east-central Oklahoma, on 7 June 1977. The mouth of the young bird (at left) is wide open: only the maxilla (upper part of the bill) shows in the photo; what appears to be the mandible (lower part of the bill) is actually the tongue.

tinction. The fact that Bald Eagles have wintered in steadily growing numbers in Oklahoma during the past quarter century has focused attention upon the species' behavior, habitat preferences, and food requirements in winter in this part of the continent.

Favored spots for Oklahoma's wintering Bald Eagles have been certain large impoundments, notably Grand Lake, in the northeastern corner of the state (Johnson, 1960, *Southwestern Naturalist*, 6: 107-108; Lish, 1973, *Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc.*, 6:25-30), Comanche and Grama lakes in the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge, in southwestern Oklahoma (Halloran, 1960, *Proc. Oklahoma Acad. Sci.*, 40:120), and the main reservoir at the Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge, in north-central Oklahoma (Lish and Lewis, 1975, *Proc. 29th Ann. Confer. Southeastern Assn. Game and Fish Commissioners*, pp. 415-73).

At the Robert S. Kerr Reservoir in east-central Oklahoma, personnel of the Ranger Staff have recently paid special attention to the Bald Eagles. Much of the reservoir is within the confines of the Sequoyah National Wildlife Refuge where, on 27 December 1975, Robert Stratton Jr. *et al.* counted three adult and 16 immature Bald Eagles (1976, *Amer. Birds*, 30: 496). This population dwindled as spring advanced, but a pair of adults remained in the area, built a nest in a dead tree along Sans Bois Creek about 2 miles west of the town of Keota in Haskell County, and were observed by members of the Kerr Reservoir staff as late as 10 May 1976. What the nest contained was not known, though an eagle presumed to be incubating eggs or brooding young was photographed while on it on 1 May. Later that same week several storm fronts with strong wind and heavy rain tore part of the nest away and the eagles left the area (Carmichael, 1977, *Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc.*, 11: 4-7).

In the fall of 1977 the Bald Eagle population at the Sequoyah refuge was not very large: on 18 December of that year B. Anduss *et al.* counted only two adult and five immature birds there (1978, *Amer. Birds*, 32: 759). Bearing in mind the eagles' unsuccessful nesting in 1976, we of the Kerr Reservoir Ranger Staff continued to watch them closely. On 9 March 1978, John Carmichael and Billye J. Morris found a nest, with two Bald Eagles on it, again along Sans Bois Creek not far from the place at which the nest had been in 1976. The nest was in a dead tree that stood in water about 3 feet deep.

Determined to protect the eagles, we of the Ranger Staff checked the nest almost daily, approaching it quietly, never getting very close, and making no attempt to climb the tree. At almost every visit we saw one bird on the nest — not standing on the rim, but settled down as if brooding eggs or young. We made no attempt to investigate from a helicopter for fear the noise and excitement would cause the birds to desert.

From mid-April to mid-May most observations were made by Ranger Terry L. Lyons. On 21 April, Lyons reported that one of the eagles was "moving something about deep in the nest." On 18 May, he reported seeing "something smaller than the adult inside the nest and moving about." On 24 May, he

saw "an animal about 8 inches in diameter, light brown in color, moving about in the nest." He was almost certain that this "animal" was an eaglet, but since he was at least 500 yards away, he couldn't be sure.

When we at the office learned of the "animal" that Lyons had seen, everyone was excited. During the following two weeks many trips were made to the nest-tree. On some of these, observers approached to within about 100 yards. On 7 June, Harry Smith Jr., Engineer Technician, and Jack P. Welch, Survey Boat Operator, eased up close enough to get photographs of the old bird and its progeny with Smith's camera and 800 mm. telephoto lens. On that date the eaglet appeared to be about three-quarters the size of the adult. It was well feathered and "solid dark brown" all over. Several pictures taken that day show the old birds feeding the young one and watching the intruders in the boat.

On 15 June, I took Robert J. Farris of Tulsa, Oklahoma to see the nest. Our flat-bottomed boat approached to within about 100 yards of the nest-tree. The eaglet lay quietly in the nest as we watched it through our binoculars. The old bird circled above us several times, never threatening to attack, but giving a series of clucking sounds that ended in a sort of whistle.

On 26 June, Harry Smith and Robert Foster observed what may well have been the young eagle's first flight. The eaglet climbed a branch to a point about 2 feet above the nest, glided back to the nest on widespread wings, and "ground-looped" on landing. It fed from time to time on items that were in the nest. One parent, a very large bird that we believed to be the female, stayed close by, but did not feed the eaglet. The other parent did not come at all close to the nest.

On 28 June, we noted that the eaglet's feet were quite yellow. This foot-color had been noticed before, but on 28 June it seemed to be conspicuous. One of the old birds was perched in a tree not far away. On 1 July, the young bird was standing on one side of the nest and a parent was perched in a tree not far off. On 2, 5, and 8 July, the young bird was not on the nest but on a limb somewhat above the nest.

On 9 July, the eaglet was perched not on or near the nest but in the top of a dead tree about 75 yards from the nest-tree. We had no way of knowing, of course, whether it had moved that far in one flight. On 10 July, the young bird and one of its parents were perched in separate trees, each about 75 yards from the nest-tree. Even as we watched, the fledgling made a 200-yard flight to another perch. "A little awkward but not bad" were the words that I scribbled in my notebook.

At evening twilight on 14 July, the young eagle and one of its parents were about 100 yards from the nest and well apart, the former to the south of the nest-tree, the latter to the east. Though we looked for the eagles on 19 and 21 July, we failed to find either a young bird or an adult. We still do not know how many eggs had been laid in the nest, nor have we ascertained what the old birds brought to the eaglet as food. But we view with great pride the fact that a

Bald Eagle was actually fledged at the Robert S. Kerr Reservoir in the spring of 1978.

RAMMIS COURT 'E', SALLISAW, OKLAHOMA 74955. 15 AUGUST 1978.

A SNOWY OWL AT OKLAHOMA CITY'S AIRPORT

BY WESLEY S. ISAACS

During the winter of 1976-77 a Snowy Owl (*Nyctea scandiaca*) lived at the Will Rogers airport in the southwestern part of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma County, central Oklahoma. I watched the bird on several occasions between 4 December and 23 February. Habitually it spent several daylight hours (from about 1000 to 1630) at one of two spots on the ground. At these spots I picked up a total of eight pellets, each of which contained fur and bones of Hispid Cotton Rats (*Sigmodon hispidus*) chiefly. The owl was conspicuous when on a fencepost or another of its favorite perches, a shaded lamp about 30 feet above ground along one edge of the airport.

When I first saw the owl, at 1400 on 4 December, it was on the ground at one of the two spots above mentioned. At 0605 on 16 December I could see it fairly well despite the semi-darkness. It was perched on one of the posts of a chain-link fence whose woven wire extended downward to within a foot of the ground. About 25 feet away, under the same fence, crouched a Black-tailed Jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*). Even as I watched, the owl tried to catch the rabbit, which



SNOWY OWL SWALLOWING COTTON RAT

Photographed by Wesley S. Isaacs at the Oklahoma City airport on 10 February 1977. The owl swallowed the rat whole.