

The John Bunker Sands Wetland Eagle Roost
Journal of Our Eagles
by: John DeFillipo, Director

Eagle Roost – May 2013: The Original Eagles

The American Bald Eagle, a once endangered species, has found the East Fork Wetland a suitable and inviting habitat for the past several years. In 2011/2012 a pair of Eagles began building a nest in the outstretched arm of a transmission line tower overlooking the southwestern portion of the wetland. We waited with anticipation for the possibility of eaglets, (young eagles) but they never appeared. Fast forward to winter of 2012/2013 and the pair of Eagles returned, reinforced the nest and were successful in hatching and rearing two Eaglets over the past 5 months. We are pleased to report that the Eaglets have fledged the nest and are staying close to the tower learning to fly, gaining body weight and strengthening their wings. In the next few weeks after they have gain sufficient strength and mastered the art of flying, the Eaglets along with their parents will journey northward for the summer months and hopefully return to the wetland once again in the fall. We will keep you updated in future newsletters.

American Bald Eagle Facts: (from *Texas Parks and Wildlife* website)

- Males Eagles measure 3 feet from head to tail, weigh 7 to 10 pounds, and have a wingspan of 6 to 7 feet
- Female Eagles are larger, some reaching 14 pounds with a wingspan of up to 8 feet
- Adults have a white head, neck, and tail and a large yellow bill. Eaglets have a brown/black head, neck, body and tail. Their white head and tail feathers will come in by their fourth year.
- They are opportunistic predators. They feed primarily on fish (piscivore), but also eat a variety of waterfowl and other birds, small mammals, and turtles. Studies in Texas have shown that eagles commonly eat coots, catfish, rough fish, and soft-shell turtles.
- In Texas, Bald Eagles nest from October to July. Nests are constructed primarily by the female, with the male assisting.
- Peak egg-laying occurs in December, with hatching primarily in January. The female lays a clutch of 1 to 3 eggs, but the usual clutch is 2 eggs. Incubation begins when the first egg is laid and usually lasts 34 to 36 days. The young generally fledge (fly from the nest) in 11 to 12 weeks, but the adults continue to feed them for another 4 to 6 weeks while they learn to hunt. When they are on their own, young Bald Eagles migrate northward out of Texas, returning by September or October.
- Since 1981, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has conducted extensive aerial surveys to monitor Bald Eagle nesting activity. The 2003 survey identified 117 active nests which fledged at least 144 young. This compares with only 7 known nest sites in 1971.

Eagle Roost – Fall 2013: The Nest Must Move

Ever since the construction of the East Fork Wetland in 2009, Bald Eagles have found this habitat a great location to forage and survive. This past year we had two juvenile Bald Eagles successfully raised in a prominent nest south of the Wetland on an active electric transmission line tower. This tower is owned and operated by Oncor Electric Delivery and supplies over 325,000 volts of electricity to south Dallas. The presence of the nest on the electric tower could possibly pose a threat to the health and safety of the returning Eagles as well as delaying or impeding the supply of electricity to over a quarter of a million people. For these reasons, we decided it was in the best interest of the Bald Eagles to relocate the existing Bald Eagle Nest to a new tower on the Wetland property.

Oncor Electric Company has worked hand in hand with the US Fish & Wildlife Service to secure a relocation permit in order to undertake this amazing endeavor. The entire fabrication, construction, and installation of the new Eagle Nest Tower is being sponsored by a solid partnership with Oncor Electric Delivery and Falcon Steel Company. During the next few weeks in August, Falcon Steel Company, located in Kaufman, Texas, will begin the construction of the new tower located about 1200 feet from the original nest site. This will bring the tower about 1 mile away from the Wetland Center and slightly closer for ground observation. Falcon Steel will also install a high definition camera, solar panels, and a wifi network to help us in future monitoring and observation of the returning eagles. After the tower is erected by early September, Oncor Electric Delivery will begin the exciting stage of relocating the eagle nest to the new structure. Oncor plans to remove the existing arm of the transmission line tower with the eagle nest intact, carefully place it on a flat bed truck and drive it to the new location. Once the nest is at the new location, we will fully inspect it making sure the nest is sturdy and intact. After the inspection, Oncor will slowly lift the nest arm by crane, almost 100 feet into the air, and reattach the nest arm to the new tower structure. The Wetland Center is very appreciative to our partners in this huge undertaking! We thank you beyond words for your in-kind financial commitment and support to this wildlife project.

The entire process of relocation of the eagle nest should be complete by October 15, 2013 and ready for the hopeful return of the Bald Eagles to the Wetland this fall. There is a 50% chance that the same pair of eagles will return this year to occupy the existing nest on the new tower. Once this process is complete, Oncor will release the maintenance, operation and monitoring of the Eagle Nest Tower to the John Bunker Sands Wetland Center. The continued success of this storybook conservation effort will be successful from the continued support of our donor, members, family and friends. Please stay tuned for the next chapter of the Bald Eagle Nest Tower.

Eagle Roost – Winter 2013: Plan A, Plan B...Plan Eagle

We'll there is plan A, plan B and now we have plan Eagle... nature always has a time and season of its own. The adult American Bald Eagles return to the existing nest in mid-September 2013, one month earlier than we expected. Apparently they did not get the memo that we were in the process of relocating their nest to a safer location. Working with our partners, Oncor and Falcon Steel, we selected a solid design for the new nest tower and an attractive location within 1200 feet of the original nest. The surveyors sighted the footings for the new tower one week before the Eagles returned. My first day back from summer vacation on September 15th, I sighted the male on top of the existing tower and the

female followed shortly afterwards. In light of their return, Oncor erected bird deterrents on adjacent towers and trimmed the hanging branches under the nest to avoid contact with the live electric lines. While they were maintaining the tower and nest, they were able to capture a few images inside the nest itself... amazing predator carnage! (Insert picture of the inside of the nest)

To encourage another successful year of eaglets, we decided to postpone any future preparations to relocate the nest until they clear the tower in the spring of 2014. Several visitors and student groups have observed the Eagles building up the nest walls a little bit higher and lots of feeding and courtship activity around the nest sight. In the meantime, the Wetland Center and Falcon Steel are working with Oncor's staff of biologist to monitor the Eagles and ensure a safe relocation effort this coming year. Please keep posted to our website and newsletter for any exciting updates.

Eagle Roost Spring 2014: Waiting...by Chris Jackson

It was a long hard wait for the Eagles this weekend. I arrived at 10:00am on Saturday, February 15th and had planned to leave by no later than 12:00pm. But by 12 O'clock there were still no Eagles.

The nest is now so big and deep that it is impossible to verify if it is occupied or not in the field unless you actually see an Eagle enter or exit. Even zooming in on images recorded on my camera did not help. So, I waited. At first I gave myself an extension to 1:00pm. When 1 O'clock came and went and there were still no Eagles, I bumped that deadline up to 2:00pm. And at 2 O'clock, I moved it out to 3:00pm. After already stayed too long, it becomes very difficult to justify leaving without getting at least some pictures. So, I waited.

In the end I was glad I stayed. When the relief Eagle finally showed up at 2:20pm—after four and a half hours of waiting—the two adult birds put on a really nice show for me, including some very unexpected behaviors. It was the big female that returned to the nest today...that was my first surprise. I know that both the male and female Eagles share in the incubating duties, but I was under the impression that the female was responsible for the lion's share. In that scenario, I wouldn't have expected her to be gone for 4.5+ hours!

As the female approached the tower she did not go directly to the nest as I might have expected her to. Instead she landed at the top of the transmission tower and stayed there for several long minutes without making a move for the nest. Further, I could not detect a reaction to her arrival in the nest.

After several more minutes the big female took to the air and flew off to the east, quickly disappearing from view. At this point I became a little worried because I really expected her next move to be toward the nest. I was briefly afraid that this behavior meant that the nest had failed.

But, almost immediately the male Eagle sprang from the nest and chased after her. He had been on the nest the entire time! The male also soon disappeared, but within a couple of minutes both Eagles were back tracing out lazy circles in the sky above my head. After a few minutes of this behavior, they both again drifted off to the east and vanished behind a distant tree line. It struck me as odd that they would leave the nest unattended for so long, I do not remember seeing this kind of behavior last year. But the weather was balmy and there was no need for concern...the eggs would be fine through a short absence.

When the female Eagle returned roughly 5 minutes later she surprised me again. Even though she had left the nest heading east, she returned to the tower from the west. She must have flown a huge circle around the Wetland Center! I think she was messing with my mind! After this amazing display of behavior, the female Eagle finally settled back in the nest for another long stay.

This newsletters Eagle Roost was taken from the www.dfwurbanwildlife.com blog written by Chris Jackson. Please keep posted to his blog for the next series of observations. Thanks Chris!

Eagles Roost Summer 2014: Eagle Family #2 and the Future

As I pen this article the morning of May 16th, one of the Eaglets from the nest has already fledged and is awaiting his/her sibling to follow shortly. Juvenile Eagles will fledge from the nest usually 4 to 5 days apart, so by the time you read this article both juvenile Eagles will have successfully flown from the tower to begin their life of freedom. It is amazing that the breeding pair of Eagles have confidently raised their second set of eaglets from this live transmission line tower without any mishaps or interruption of power to Dallas. Oncor's staffs of biologist have been monitoring this Bald Eagle nest on a 345,000 volt transmission tower in Combine, TX for the past two years. Their efforts to relocate the nest during the summer of 2013 were delayed because the Eagles returned to the site earlier in the fall than expected. Oncor has been working with the Wetland Center, Rosewood Ranches, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service while following the National Bald Eagle management guidelines to ensure the safety and well-being of the Eagles and to ensure reliable service.

Oncor applied for and was granted an amended USFWS permit that would allow the relocation to be done this summer outside of the breeding season (June-August) and at least 10 consecutive days after the nest is empty and considered inactive. Once relocation begins, the tower cross arm that currently houses the nest will be carefully positioned a new structure 1200 feet away. The structure was donated by Falcon Steel specifically for the Eagle nest and is currently under construction. The relocation will take about two days in the month of June.

Once the transition is made, the Eagles will have a safe structure away from the danger of the power transmission lines. Our hope is that next breeding season the adult Eagles will return and have the ability to nest at the new location for life. The Wetland Center will monitor the progress via a tower-mounted camera. Biologist will also track breeding data in this area which has not been recorded since the Bald Eagle was removed from the endangered species list in the 1980's. We will provide an update mid-summer with our progress and successful relocation.

*portions of this article were taken from The Communicator and Oncor.

Eagles Roost Fall 2014

The nest has landed! After almost two years of conversation, coordination, and planning the American Bald Eagle nest was safely relocated to a new and improved tower provided by Falcon Steel Company. On the morning of July 12th, Oncor Electric Delivery worked with the power provider to reroute the power supply along other lines surrounding the Dallas county area. After the power lines were safely grounded, Chapman Group Contractors went into action and

secured the nest arm from above with a crane as they patiently wrapped the nest in green bubble wrap to protect all the nesting material inside. At about 11:30am the nest arm was unbolted from the tower and carefully lowered on a flat bed truck waiting nearby. The rest of the afternoon, Chapman Group installed a new arm on the old tower and secured bird deterrents to prevent the eagles from nesting in the unsafe location again. Early on the morning of July 13th the crew raised the nest arm and secured it to the new tower only 1,200 feet away. The bottom of the nest was reinforced with metal to ensure a solid foundation for future nest building. Falcon Steel is currently working with Oncor to install a closed circuit camera for monitoring efforts in the seasons to come. Now we patiently wait and hope that the American Bald Eagles return this fall and find the new nest location a suitable home for the next set of eaglets. We would like to thank the following partners and contributors in this amazing effort!

Oncor Electric Delivery
Falcon Steel Company
Chapman Group Contractors
Rosewood Ranches
The Rosewood Corporation
The Hunt/Sands Family
North Texas Municipal Water District
Volunteers & Staff of the
 John Bunker Sands Wetland Center
US Fish & wildlife Service
Texas Parks & Wildlife Department

Eagles Roost Winter 2014

The EAGLES have landed in the newly relocated nest! With baited breath all eyes were on the relocated nest in anticipation of the return of the American Bald Eagles to the Wetland. On September 1st we first observed the Eagles in the southern wetland area. Eagles normally return to a familiar nest due to the success of raising Eaglets the previous year, substantial food source and defense of established territory. Our Wetland Center Eagles are no different and their return signifies a successful and established location for the future of their offspring. Finding the new location should have been an easy task seeing it was only 1200 feet from the old location. But due to their focus on their previous territory, they returned to the old tower and attempted to rebuild a new nest. Our committed partners discouraged the nest building by removing 20-30 sticks every few days until the Eagles got the message. On October 9th, I looked out over the wetland to the new structure and saw one of the Eagles perched high on the new structure....Success?! We monitored the pair's progress over the next few days and confirmed that the Eagles were adding the original nest in the new location. I am ecstatic to report that we have beat the odds and the pair of American Bald Eagle have taken to the new location like a bird to flight. We are very grateful that this step in the successful relocation has taken place thanks to our committed partners and support from our community. We have installed a

closed circuit camera to monitor their progress and can be found at our website under the Wetland Center Eagles link. *Please note the camera is supported by solar power and has periodic technical difficulties due to the distance from the Center.*

Eagle Roost Spring 2015

The pair of American Bald Eagles has endured this seemingly mild winter by building up the nest and preparing it for eggs. After the beginning of 2015, all nest building preparations transitioned over to foraging for nourishment...mainly by the female for the incubation ahead. On or around Monday, January 26th the male watched guard over the female as she laid egg(s). Numerous ground observations indicate that the pair of Eagles are currently in the incubation period shared by both adults. This period will last 35-40 days before the eaglet(s) hatch the end of February or the beginning of March. This positive sign of taking to the new tower location is encouraging to all partners involved and the interested public. Many efforts were made to observe this detailed action with the web camera that was installed above the nest. We worked through many hardware and software glitches but were unable to reestablish the live feed before the incubation period began. After the eaglet(s) fledge in late spring we will be able to approach the tower again to work on the web camera. Our focus for the next four months will be observing and documenting the progress of the Eagle Family with ground observations.

Be sure to look at the **Changing of the Guard.pdf** link showing an amazing sequence of photographs by Bill Nance, Wetland Steward, including the male and female switching out incubation duties.