

Bald Eagles on the Verde River

by

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Arizona is home to the entire known population of desert nesting bald eagles in the United States. This southwestern population of bald eagles nests primarily along the Salt and Verde Rivers in central Arizona. Both Federal and State governments classify the population as endangered. Currently, a total of 42 known bald eagle breeding areas (an area containing one or more nests within the range of one mated pair of birds) exist in the state. Sixteen of the 42 breeding areas occur along the Verde River. The breeding eagles can be observed along the river from late November through June. Beginning in February, nest watchers from the Arizona Bald Eagle Nest Watch Program monitor the eagles. The nest watchers compile data on bald eagle behavior and activities from incubation through fledging. They also inform the public of seasonal breeding area "closures" and monitor the effects of human disturbances in the breeding area.

In the Verde Valley, there are currently 3 bald eagle breeding areas; Towers, Oak Creek, and Ladders. Both the Towers and Ladders breeding areas have seasonal closures to protect the bald eagles during the nesting period. Recreational activity is not permitted in bald eagle closure areas from December 1 through June 15. News releases are published in the local newspapers each year to inform the public when closures go into effect and when closures are reopened.

The current known nesting population of Arizona bald eagles is small, but is expanding. Continued protection and monitoring of this unique population of desert-nesting eagles is needed in order to recover the birds to a healthy viable number. The bald eagle is given full legal protection under the Endangered Species Act. It is illegal to kill, harm, harass, possess, or remove protected animals from the wild. In addition, entering into "closure areas" may be a violation of the Forest Service Regulations. You can report any violations by calling the Arizona Game and Fish Department at (602) 789-3512 or (602) 789-3579 or by calling one of the local Forest Service offices at (928) 567-4121 or (928) 282-4119.

Bald Eagles - Breeding Versus Wintering in the Verde Valley

*By Janie Agyagos, Wildlife Biologist, Red Rock Ranger District, Coconino National Forest
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Most people don't realize that Arizona hosts two different populations of bald eagles – those that are wintering in Arizona but will migrate to the northern portions of North America to breed and those bald eagles that are a small subset of southwestern eagles that reside in Arizona year-round. Wintering bald eagles arrive in Arizona around October where they occur along streams and around lakes to forage on fish and waterfowl and along highways where they opportunistically feed on road-killed wildlife. Around mid-March, wintering bald eagles leave the southwest to return to their breeding grounds in the northwestern United States, Alaska, and Canada.



Janie Agyagos, Wildlife Biologist
with immature Bald Eagle

Arizona is home to the entire known population of desert nesting bald eagles in the United States. This southwestern population of bald eagles nests primarily along the Salt and Verde Rivers in central Arizona. Currently, a total of 47 known bald eagle breeding areas exist in the state. Seventeen of the 47 breeding areas (36%) occur along the Verde River. Breeding bald eagles can be observed in their breeding areas from late November through June. Our resident bald eagles have adapted to the harsh desert environment by beginning their breeding activities three months earlier than the main North American population of bald eagles. Breeding bald eagles in Arizona begin courtship in December with nest building or augmentation beginning in January. Eggs, often two but as many as four, are laid in February. The incubation period is 65 days and young hatch around the end of February and into March. Young are then fledged in June at which time they have the mobility to seek suitable shelter from the extreme heat conditions common in July and August.

Beginning in February, nest watchers from the Arizona Bald Eagle Nest Watch Program monitor eagles at selected nest sites. The nest watchers compile data on bald eagle behavior and activities from incubation through fledging. They also inform the public of seasonal breeding area "closures" and monitor the effects of human disturbances in the breeding area. Eagle watchers are trained in identifying emergency situations, such as when an adult leaves a nest with eggs for longer than 60 minutes, when fishing line has entangled an eaglet, or when eaglets have been affected by the parasitic Mexican chicken bug. Through this nest monitoring program, many nesting attempts would have resulted in failure without biologist intervention.

In the Verde Valley, there are currently 3 bald eagle breeding areas; Towers, Oak Creek, and Ladders. Both the Towers and Ladders breeding areas have seasonal closures to protect the bald eagles during the nesting period. Although foot and vehicle travel into these closure areas is not permitted, kayaking and canoeing is

allowed provided that boaters do not stop within the closure area. News releases are published in the local newspapers each year to inform the public when closures go into effect (December 1) and when closures are reopened (June 30, unless nests fail).

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Wintering bald eagles arrive the 2nd week of Oct, peak in numbers in February and stay until the 3rd week of April.