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WHAT'S NEW FROM THE CATALINA ISLAND CONSERVANCY

Bald Eagles Hatch on Catalina Island

Eleven bald eagle chicks have hatched this spring in seven Catalina Island nests. These new additions to the Island's eagle population continue one of Catalina's outstanding conservation success stories. Eagle cams placed at some of the nests make it possible for the public to watch the birds on their personal computers. The live feed can be found at www.iws.org.

According to Peter Sharpe, Ph.D., wildlife biologist and research ecologist of the Institute for Wildlife Studies (IWS), which has worked with the support of the Catalina Island Conservancy to save the big birds of prey. "Adults need to produce one chick per nest per year to maintain a stable population. Catalina's population has been producing chicks above that level, so the population should continue to grow."

With the lack of extensive roads and power lines as compared to the mainland, and less people in general on the Conservancy-maintained wildlife refuge that covers 88 percent of the Island, the eagles have space to soar. The average eagle lives from 15 to 20 years, but one on Catalina is ancient by comparison: 27 years old.

Declaring War on Invasive Plants

Tony Summers, who developed a love of nature while growing up on 16 acres of woods and farmland in the Wisconsin countryside, has taken on the role of "invasive plant buster" on Catalina Island. Recently named Supervisor of the Conservancy's Invasive Plants Program, Summers, who holds a Master's Degree in environmental science from

Oregon State University, heads up the Catalina Habitat Improvement and Restoration Program, or CHIRP. It is comprised of Conservancy staff and volunteers and devotes nearly 20,000 man-hours a year toward managing nearly 75 species of invasive plants on the Conservancy's land, which encompasses 88 percent of the Island. "Long-term goals are eradication of species like pampas grass, tamarisk, and artichoke thistle,” Summers said. “Right now, these plants aren't causing widespread ecosystem damage, but we know they will in the future, given what they do in many places across mainland California."

Airport in the Sky Hangar Gets Facelift

The Catalina Island Conservancy's hangar at the Airport in the Sky was treated to a fresh coat of white paint and general refurbishment. “The pilots are pleased,” said Jorge O'Leary, director of airport operations. “It's very attractive and goes a long way in keeping the airport spiffed up.” The hangar overhaul follows runway repaving conducted last year. Painting and landscape improvements around the terminal building have also been implemented this year. The hangar's five original weather-beaten front sliding doors were replaced with new, galvanized steel panels. “Welcome to Catalina Island” now greets visitors in blue retro-script style over the doors.

Don't Complain About Fog; the Plants Need It

Yes, the sunshine is wonderful, but we should also celebrate foggy days on Catalina Island. Fog and the moisture contained in the marine layers that envelop the Island add significant water to the island ecosystem. When fog comes in contact with vegetation, such as shrubs or oaks, the water condenses and covers the plants. Eventually the water collects and drips down, watering the plants, the ground and the surrounding habitats. This process is known as “fog drip.” Some plants get as much or more of their moisture from fog as they do from rain. A recent study done in California on habitats similar to Catalina's showed that a single oak can pull as much as 10 inches of moisture out of the fog in a year. Other studies put that figure even higher. And on an island like

Catalina, where our annual average rainfall is just over 12 inches, an additional 10 inches can be really significant.

Digging Into Catalina's Prehistory

A team of researchers from Northern Arizona University, led by Scott Anderson, Ph.D., visited Catalina Island recently to lead a study on reconstructing the prehistoric ecology of the island. The research team spent three days carefully excavating a vertical soil sample, known as a core sample, from the middle of Echo Lake, Catalina's only natural body of freshwater. The lake has likely been there for centuries, collecting sediments over time. They contain clues to Catalina's past. "By examining remains in the lake sediments, such as pollen and charcoal, Anderson's team can piece together what Catalina was once like as well as better understand how major changes, such as human colonization, affected the ecology of the island," said John R. Clark, Ph.D., the Conservancy's senior plant biologist and herbarium curator. Samples taken by Anderson and his team will be analyzed, and results from their study will provide insight into changes in plant communities and fire frequency on the island. By understanding the past, the Conservancy can better manage these same communities now and also prepare for inevitable changes in the future.

Island Fox Is Ready for Its Close-up

The annual Island fox survey and vaccination effort was filmed by world-renowned conservationist and photojournalist Chris Weston and former BBC film producer/director John Beck for a *Wonders of Nature* TV segment in Britain. On a visit to the island, they documented the success of the trap-and-release aspect of the Catalina Island fox recovery program. "Each fox that is captured receives a health examination," said Julie King, director of conservation and wildlife management. "And, if not already in place, a microchip is implanted just under its skin in the scruff of their neck, similar to those used implanted into domestic dogs and cats. We administer vaccines, record the foxes' weights and ages, and note if there are any particular health conditions." The subspecies of fox, once imperiled by an outbreak of canine distemper, was saved from

extinction through the Conservancy's work with the Institute for Wildlife Studies, which included a captive breeding program.

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