

Fractured wing lands bald eagle at local raptor center for recovery, rehabilitation

By Megan Harris

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A 22-year-old bald eagle is settling in at the Mid-South Raptor Center for a long recovery of its badly broken right wing, probably injured in a collision with a vehicle.

The bird was found June 27 on a roadside in rural Perry County, which is about halfway between Jackson, Tenn., and Nashville along Interstate 40. The county, which has both the Tennessee and Buffalo rivers running through it, offers perfect hunting territory for fish-loving eagles.

A Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency agent recovered the eagle and delivered it to local veterinarian David Hannon the next day. From there, the bird was taken to Knox Martin at the Mid-South Raptor Center near Agricenter International.

"It will be three to four months before we'll know if it can be released," Hannon said. "Birds of prey have to be 110 percent to survive in the wild."

A fracture of this nature is probably going to require six to eight weeks to heal, he said.

"Then comes physical therapy to regain motion in the elbow, and finally flight training to make sure it can still hunt and kill prey."

This eagle was identified by a leg banding, attached when it was a chick in July 1986, as one of 73 eagles released in Indiana during a five-year eagle restoration project.

Most eagles live about 28 years in the wild. This bird, which is believed to be the longest lived of those Indiana eagles, has probably stayed in the Tennessee area most of its life, officials believe.

Martin, the center's operator, understands the bird's physical limitations, but keeps high hopes for its recovery.

"We still have several options," Martin said. "Ideally, the eagle will be released but if that's not possible it could find a home at the Memphis Zoo, in Dollywood or even here with me in our educational program, but so far nothing has been seriously discussed."

Hannon, who has worked with the center for more than six years, admits the bird's status as an American symbol makes it a special case.

"I don't think he's going to die from this, but it's a pretty nasty break," he said. "If it were anything but an eagle, like a red tail hawk, we probably would've euthanized it, but eagles are much more ecologically and educationally valuable."

Martin will bring the bird to Hannon every two weeks to keep up with its overall progress, check how well the fracture heals and to adjust antibiotics.

"The eagle's doing fine, eating really well -- sometimes it's hard to get them to eat," Martin explained. "He's really a very laid-back bird."

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How to help

Volunteers run the nonprofit Mid-South Raptor Center near Agricenter International. Private donations pay for food, medicine and supplies. The mailing address is 1176 Dearing Road, Memphis, TN 38117.

An American symbol

The bald eagle's scientific name, *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*, means "white-headed sea eagle" and it is the only sea eagle that inhabits North America.

Bald eagles eat mainly fish, but they also feed on carrion, birds, small mammals and reptiles.

Adult bald eagles are about three feet from head to tail and weigh 10 to 12 pounds.

As in most birds of prey, female eagles are larger than males.

