



Tales from a
Sisters Naturalist
by Jim Anderson

Eagles really can get around

Ray Spencer, a old gallowt like me who works out of San Diego, California, loves to collect photos of birds. He sent me a photo of a baldy in one of his daily postings that about knocked my socks off. Not only is it a great image of a sub-adult bald eagle flying overhead, but the two orange patagial wing tags (with the number 41 printed on them) are really visible.

Ray started his “Shot of the Day” fandango on January 1, 2004, sending a daily email with a photo (or two) of wildlife — usually birds — to a couple of family members and friends. Over the years, his email list has grown to over 400 addresses, and the pictures-per-email has expanded to about 25. If you want to get on his mailing list, just send him

an email (spencerhud@aol.com).

Ray said, “This one seemed unique enough to send a special alert. The bird was seen today at Lake Hodges, Bald Eagle #41 so marked on its wings and carrying a fish. I tried to look it up on the Internet, but there is so much BS and mislabeled stuff there I made no headway; will see if Oregon Jim knows any resources to provide any true insight.”

Oregon Jim wrote back instructing Ray on how to access the information link on the USGS Bird Banding Lab’s website, as they are the federal outfit that’s in charge of managing any type of marking and/or banding of all native birds in the US of A.

All you have to do is go to www.reportband.gov. Follow the links to reporting a banded or marked bird. The person or agency conducting the marking project will be delighted to hear from you, and your observations will be added to the bird’s history.

The tags on #41 eagle are known as “patagial tags,” so named for the anatomical part of the bird’s wing that on us would be the part of our arm between shoulder and wrist. The colored marker is usually attached to both wings making the

birds very visible. (The best example being that method is used to mark all California condors in North America, captive or flying free.)

It’s also a popular method used by researchers wanting to keep a close eye on the movements and whereabouts of specific birds they are studying. In the case of bald eagle #41, it’s working like gangbusters.

We know — thanks to Ray’s images — it’s a sub-adult; it has a dark brown body with an almost pure white head with a few white feathers coming into the tail, and bright yellow legs, feet and beak.

From various curious people who reported the eagle to the Banding Lab, we know a lot about its movements and whereabouts from the time it left the nest near Seal Rock, OR, May 9, 2014. The date of the bird’s departure from the nest also supports its present age.

In addition to the two orange 41 patagial tags, we know it is a male, as it was sexed when the official USGS #9 band numbered, 709-03058 was placed on its right leg (which is visible in the photo; the same leg in which it is carrying a fish. It’s official number — K-41, and name is Kilakila (pronounced Key-la key-la). In



PHOTO BY RAY SPENCER

Bald Eagle 41, banded with a USGS riveted leg band and marked with patagial wing tags.

Hawaiian, Kila means “high place, strong and bold” and repeated means “majestic,” which fits eagles perfectly. Also from the Banding Lab we can trace K-41 back to his parents: K-25 and K-34.

Where he was from 2014 is anybody’s guess, as his first sighting after leaving the nest was on February 23, 2015, in Sequim, Washington, then on January 1, 2016, near Skokomish, Washington. The next time he was reported was at Big Bear Lake, Eagle Point, Washington, on July 2, 2016. In January and February of 2017 he was seen around Klamath Falls, and then popped up in San Diego to be photographed by Ray Spencer.

Why band birds? Bird banding data are used in both research and management projects. Individual identification of birds makes possible studies of dispersal and migration, behavior and social structure, lifespan and survival rate, reproductive success and population growth.

Every bander participates in studies of dispersal and migration by sending all their banding data in to a central site, the Bird Banding Laboratory. When banded birds are captured, released alive and reported from somewhere else the lab and researcher can reconstruct the movements of the individual bird.

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