



These Bald Eagles Have Their Own Reality Show

Watch the drama unfold.

[Bekah Wright](#) | May 13, 2015



From *The Real Housewives of Atlanta* to *Keeping Up With The Kardashians*, reality shows have the voyeuristically inclined tuning in to watch real-life drama unfold.

Holding others rapt 24 hours a day is a show of another sort, this one streaming live from California's Channel Islands. On view simultaneously are six eagles' nests. This is the [Institute for Wildlife Studies](#)' (IWS) [Live Eagle Cam](#), a component of the Channel Islands Bald Eagle Restoration Program.

The stars of this season's "series," listed by island: seven breeding pairs on Catalina, one on Anacapa, nine on Santa Cruz, two on Santa Rosa and one on San Clemente. The 40 adults are keeping watch over 15+ chicks until they become fledglings.

And, spoiler alert: "It's a soap opera," said IWS Wildlife Ecologist, Dr. Peter Sharpe.

Sharpe and the IWS staff add the human element to this reality show. The eagles' take on these encroachers? "They don't like me too much," said Sharpe. "They know my truck, the hat I wear and they recognize faces."

The IWS staff means the eagles no harm, of course. The ecologists' long-term investigations into the islands' wildlife provide insight into the biology of various species, along with helping to maintain biodiversity, habitat management and maintenance of the populations.



Sharpe bands a fledgling

The Channel Islands' eagle population was wiped out in the mid 1960s as a result of the industrial pesticide DDT (dichloro-diphenyl-trichloro ethane) being dumped into the Pacific Ocean 16km off Catalina. The

IWS began restoring eagles to the islands in the 1980s. The impact of DDT was evident in eggshells, which broke before chicks could hatch.

A foster program was put into place, along with a procedure involving fake eggs.

“Because of the location of the nests, mostly on cliffs, ridges and in trees, staff members would need to be lowered by helicopter to switch out real eggs for fake ones,” he explains. “Once healthy chicks hatched, they’d be placed back in the nests.”

Since 2007, eggs have begun remaining viable within the nests.



Sharpe prepares a load of fake eggs

At his post since 1997, Sharpe gets closer to the eagles than most. When babies reach eight weeks – full-grown, but not yet able to fly – Sharpe climbs into the nests to equip chicks with bands and wing markers.

“Because of our cameras, more people are aware we exist,” he said. “They recognize our wing markers and report sightings from San Diego to Central British Columbia.”



A camera keeping watch on nest

Fans also keep an eye on things at the nests. Some groups, like [Channel Islands Live](#), submit reports of activities. “This allows us to go out and research nests that don’t have cameras,” said Sharpe. “We scan the reports in the evenings to make sure the chicks are being fed and that nothing strange has occurred.”

By 2005, solar cameras were streaming online, with images refreshed every five seconds. Now, technology allows for 24-hour, live stream, high-definition, full-speed cameras with night vision.

The IWS eagle cams have a growing fan base.

“We’re a completely different environment than most other field cams,” said Sharpe. “We’re a desert island, with not a lot of potential human impact, no big roads and not too many power lines. This makes for more natural nesting.”

Cameras let people get an intimate view of what goes on at the eagle nests.

“Eagles don’t mate for life,” said Sharpe. “In fact, there’s quite a turnover at nests.” One nest even housed a trio with two females sharing incubation duties.



A chick contemplates its newfound celebrity

Though there's year-round nest activity, it's at its peak from late February, when eggs are laid, to the end of June, when chicks leave the nest.

Who the fans are clamoring to see? Yes, there are favorites out there. One of the first was Wray and her mate Superman. To this day, Wray's fans are questioning her disappearance. Superman has since gone on to breed with other females. Then there's Cruz, beloved as the first chick to hatch on the islands after 50 years. As for that soap opera Sharpe mentioned – Cruz breeds with her brother.

The buzz this morning on the nests' social feed? As reported by sandpiperCMNJ, "Twins trying their hardest to get on 82's rock."

And the soap opera continues.