

Eagle Story from Rose Ragole

An Eagle's Story – Struggles for Survival

We met “him” on Saturday, July 9, 2016, after he crashed through our Oak Tree, lakeside. My sister yelled as the “baby” (actually a juvenile bald eagle) was hanging upside down, with one foot clinging to a branch. This began my “education” about eagles and the start of many calls to find out “what to do” and “how to help.” It did NOT help that this was a Saturday, Menahga's Midsummer festival and a very busy 'wildlife' day. Luckily, as I made calls, the eagle was able to “right” himself and sit atop the branch. I first called DNR Wildlife, then Menahga Police and was routed to State Patrol. Thanks to “Jeff,” I was given the number for the Raptor Center [612-624-4745], left a message, and then reached the University of MN Vet Emergency Center [612-625-9711]. The Center would try to get us help. Thanks to “Jan” (at Detroit Lakes State Patrol), a very helpful person, who encouraged us to “leave” the eagle “alone,” “watch” and, as long as the young eagle was “upright,” there was “nothing to be done.” We learned to “not feed” the eagle (as parents would likely assist). The eagle sat there for about 1½ hours and then flew away. We felt relieved that the eagle was flying and, hopefully finding his parents.

I later talked with a wonderful friend and neighbor, “Chuck,” who is a true “steward” of the lake, helping wildlife and people, in general. I learned that young eagles are often clumsy when they are first learning to fly. He shared some of his encounters with eagles. It had been many years since we had seen an eagle's nest on Lower Twin Lake. An eagle pair had returned, this year, to a large spruce tree across the Lake from our property. Earlier in the spring, we saw them sitting near their large, camouflaged nest and also fishing. Unfortunately, we had not seen the eagle parents recently and predictions for significant thunderstorms were on the way. We hoped that the young eagle would be safe.

On Sunday, Dr. McCullough from the Raptor Center (associated with the University of MN) called and thoughtfully assured me that I had “made all the right calls” and that they had a “particularly busy day yesterday.” She was helpful and concurred that it was best to leave the eagle alone (since it was flying and, hopefully, would be assisted by parents). Later that Sunday, the eagle returned. He was “drenched” from the rains (and more were predicted). He walked up on our front porch, finding a spot to “dry off.” After about an hour, he flew onto a concrete deer statue in the front yard. The young eagle eventually flew to the driveway and began walking toward the 'fairly busy' county road. We had been told to use an oar to gently encourage the eagle's movement off the road for his safety, as many eagles are killed by cars. My husband “Paul” sat patiently, oar in hand, and gently intervened to keep the eagle from walking into traffic. The young eagle eventually flew off again. I went online to learn more about eagles.

On Monday, I received a call from DNR Wildlife (Thank you "Heath"). We discussed the young eagle and what had occurred. Heath concurred with 'leaving the eagle alone' as long as it was flying. Later that afternoon, I saw the young eagle on the county road again, two houses away. I ran toward the eagle with a plastic bowl (as it would have taken me too long to get the oar, considering traffic). I was able to stop an oncoming car and the eagle flew atop a neighbor's garage. At least he was still safe and flying. I kept praying.

Tuesday brought terrible storms and winds. Later, when the rains stopped, the eagle again appeared in our back yard and was drenched. He was calling for his parents to no avail. We did not see any other eagles. My online resources discussed eagles as "scavengers," primarily looking for red meat (roadkill, dead animals) and fish to eat. We became concerned that the young eagle may not have eaten. He walked east to another neighbor's yard for awhile, continuing to call for his parents and jumping up "higher" onto wood piles (as if to be better visualized from afar). While he was 'traveling,' we put out a dish of water and some small strips of red meat (steak). Later, the young eagle returned, found the water and food, and ate and drank voraciously. Being lakeside, I had been surprised to read that dehydration can be an issue for young eagles. He later flew east to other neighbors.

On Wednesday, I happened to talk with another caring neighbor, "Devah," who related the eagle had been in her yard. She said the eagle had been sitting on sticks in their fire-pit (which actually resembled a nest). Devah had made many of the same calls for 'help/assistance' that I had. She had not observed the eagle eating and was also informed 'not to feed him.' Devah related a mature bald eagle flew near their dock for a fish, but that the young eagle had not been there at the time. We discussed our concerns and the torrential rains. Thursday brought more storms.

On Friday afternoon, the young eagle returned to our backyard. He was calling his parents again. The day became warmer. Sadly, at 5:05 p.m., the eagle started staggering with his wings flailing. He was having problems remaining upright and fell to his back. The eagle appeared to be having seizures, thrashing about and trying to get upright. He moved toward the water and fell in, nearly drowning. My husband got the oar and gently rescued him from the waters onto land. I started making calls again. This time I knew who to call first... the Raptor Emergency Center. A very special "Thank You" to "Renee" who referred me to the Garrison Animal Hospital [320-692-4180]. It was after-hours on a Friday night but the recording linked me with a wonderful veterinarian, "Dr. Debbie" Eskedahl. She listened and told me to "feed" the eagle (as it was 'likely starving') with small, 'meatball-size' pieces of "beef liver, bloody red" (preferably). I learned that we were to 'avoid feeding' young eagles as people often try to feed them the "wrong foods," like a 'roast beef sandwich' and do not try to replicate conditions 'of the wild.' It's also anticipated that the eagle parents will intervene, as that is 'their role.' On my second call

to “Dr. Debbie” (as my dear husband was running to every store in the area to find beef liver), she related small pieces of meat (steak, chicken liver) were acceptable while awaiting beef liver. With oar in hand, and the young eagle upright on the ground, I tossed him steak pieces which he ate. When my husband returned, the eagle ate nearly four slices of the beef liver (in pieces). It then laid down to rest.

It was getting late. On my third call, “Dr. Debbie” discussed that the eagle could be checked “tomorrow” at the clinic. It would need to rest and be kept safe for the night. She asked about fox or coyote in the area. We'd seen “fox” in the past. “Dr. Debbie” related that the young eagle needed 24 hours to digest what it had eaten and would be unable to fend

off predators in it's current condition. He would 'likely rest' after eating, especially as the night became darker. She discussed using a blanket to envelop the young eagle and protect ourselves from his talons. Reportedly, the 'beak can be a problem, but not as much as the talons.' I did flinch a bit, thinking of 'securing' an eagle (never in my wildest dreams). A very large box (paper towel packaging) would be needed for the eagle. We were to duct tape the box and make air vents for him. While we did not have heavy, leather gloves, our mission was clear. My dear husband left again in search of boxes. A very special thanks to “Stephanie” and “Danita” at Coborn's [the only store with intact boxes available]

who provided one box and then unpacked a second box, on request, to help 'save' the eagle. Meanwhile, I found a large, quilted mattress pad, gardening gloves and flashlight while keeping an eye on the eagle. With an oar in hand, I stood watch as the night gradually became darker and 'bats' began to dance in the sky.

My husband returned with boxes and an excellent idea. We each took a box, on opposite sides of the eagle, gently moved together and then tilted the eagle into one box. IT WORKED!!! We quickly closed the lid just as the eagle realized it was contained (leaving a gap on top and holes on the sides for air). The young eagle was 'not happy,' but quieted down within minutes. We applied duct-tape, as instructed. We moved the box into the garage. The eagle and box did not weigh more than seven pounds. An eagle should not be put into a garage without being in a large box or carrier as it will damage itself (and, likely, many other items in the garage). It was now 11:00 p.m. We hoped the eagle would be alive in the morning. I was to call “Dr. Debbie” at 8:00 a.m. She was concerned about trying to arrange transport. I related I would bring the eagle to her. The other option would have been her trying to find a “volunteer driver” on a weekend.

I entered the garage at 7:00 a.m. on Saturday. It was very quiet. I went and gently moved the box. WOW! I felt the wings flap! The eagle was alive! At 8:00 a.m. sharp, I called “Dr. Debbie.” I did ask about transporting the eagle and she related the eagle would have plenty of air in a “covered” truck bed. (I had previous visions of the eagle riding in the cab and possibly getting out of the box in route). After a 90 minute drive,

we arrived at the Garrison Animal Hospital (near Mille Lacs Lake). The eagle was taken inside and tests would be done. Upon question, “Dr. Debbie” discussed her work, the Center, and how a young eagle can be paired with 'foster parents' to “teach” it to be an eagle. “Dr. Debbie” gave me literature about the hospital, their “Wild & Free” Wildlife Rehabilitation Program [see www.wildandfree.org], with 18-acre land tract, and newsletter, *The Trumpeter*. The eagle was in good hands. I drove home.

Later, I called about the young eagle. He was very weak, but alive. Sadly, on Monday, I learned the young eagle had lead poisoning. Lead is extremely toxic to the nervous system and other organs. Lead creates havoc in any body, even in small amounts. I learned that nationally more eagles are dying each year from lead poisoning. Lead comes from bullets and 'buck shot' used in hunting (I was dismayed to learn that lead is still a component despite other options). Being 'scavengers,' eagles often eat the remains of deer, birds or other animals. A single pellet or small lead fragment can be fatal when ingested. Tragically, eagle deaths from lead poisoning are considered “relatively common.” Lead can also be found in weights and lures. Loons dive deep and can die from ingesting lead in fishing tackle sources. Sadly, eagles and other wildlife that ingest lead can die despite treatment interventions. By Tuesday, I found out that the young eagle had died from kidney and liver failure. He had been through so much in his young life. We felt a profound sadness.

A few days later, we guided our boat to the other side of Lower Twin Lake. I wanted a closer look at the eagle nest.

Sitting proudly on a nearby limb, I saw family...a young 'brother or sister' eagle. At least one juvenile bald eagle had survived and was looking well. We will not forget the young eagle who came to our home, as he is forever etched in our memories. Maybe this will help more eagles and wildlife. To the eagles....Namaste.

~ by Rose Ragole ~

Positively, federal law bans the use of lead shot for waterfowl (instituted in 1991).

California is the only state which has banned the use of lead shot entirely. Will the Bald Eagle be a Minnesota legacy?