



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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NATION'S BALD EAGLE BREEDING PROGRAM AIDED BY DU PONT SUPPORT

Many more bald eagle chicks will be finding homes in the wild soon as a result of a major grant to the Government bald eagle breeding program by the Du Pont Company.

The financial commitment to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will enable the Interior Department agency to more than double the number of eaglets produced in captivity at its Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Maryland. The eagles are released in States where bald eagle numbers are low.

In a January 20 ceremony at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Fish and Wildlife Service director Robert Jantzen said that Du Pont's support would be "a lasting contribution toward the restoration of the bald eagle. It will make it possible for more of these majestic birds to exist, and we hope, to breed once again in places where their numbers had dwindled almost to the brink of extinction.

"When Du Pont first approached us in search of an appropriate endangered species project to support, I was very impressed by its desire to make a serious corporate commitment to wildlife conservation," Jantzen added. "It is unusual for the Fish and Wildlife Service to receive this type of support from a private company for a project that has no direct business benefit to the company's activities. I am greatly encouraged by this, and I hope that other companies will follow Du Pont's lead in helping Federal and State wildlife agencies to conserve our nation's wildlife heritage."

Robert J. Richardson, executive vice president of Du Pont, said that the company's efforts on behalf of the bald eagle would extend beyond the financial support for the captive breeding program.

"We regard this as more than a grant," Richardson said. "It is a corporate commitment on behalf of wildlife conservation. We will be carrying out a variety of public information activities on behalf of eagles, and through our family companies--Remington Arms, Conoco, and Consolidation Coal--we will also be involving employees in eagle conservation."

Researchers at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center began breeding eagles in the mid-1970's and presently have eight pairs--the largest captive bald eagle breeding colony in the world. Since 1977, the Center has supplied 44 healthy young eagles to replenish eagle populations in 9 States--New York, Virginia, Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maine, Georgia, Tennessee, and Ohio.

The eagles are returned to the wild through one of two techniques. In the "fostering" method, 3-week-old eaglets are placed in nests built by wild eagles that laid no eggs or whose eggs failed to hatch. The eaglets are quickly accepted and cared for by their unsuspecting foster parents. In "hacking," slightly older chicks are placed in lofty towers constructed in a wild area and are fed by attendants (who remain out of sight) until the birds learn to fly and hunt for themselves.

Although a record 13 eaglets were produced in 1982, the Patuxent program still could not provide as many eaglets for release as were requested by State wildlife agencies. The Du Pont grant will be used to restore a number of large eagle enclosures and to add personnel to care for eagles. As result, the captive breeding colony will be enlarged to include 12 pairs of breeding birds. Through husbandry techniques developed by Patuxent researchers to increase the rate of reproduction, such a breeding colony could potentially supply as many as 36 eaglets to the wild each year.

Patuxent is the largest wildlife research center in the world and is well known for pioneering research on the effects of contaminants on wildlife, studies of bird populations and habitat, and field research on endangered species such as the California condor, as well as for captive breeding of whooping cranes, Andean condors bald eagles, and other endangered species.

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