

Massachusetts-Hacked Bald Eagle on the Mississippi Coast

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On 15 October 1983, an immature Bald Eagle (Haliaeetus leucocephalus) was discovered in a Biloxi, Mississippi neighborhood, very close to Biloxi Bay. The eagle had a blue tag on the right wing and was observed by numerous birders following announcement on local television stations of the presence of the bird. It remained in the area for at least a week. On 24 October it was photographed in a tall pine in Evergreen Cemetery, across Biloxi Bay in Ocean Springs. That photo was published in the Ocean Springs newspaper (The Record, p. 24, 27 October 1983). There were no confirmed sightings of the bird after 24 October, although an eagle was seen flying over Ocean Springs neighborhoods on at least three occasions during the next few days.

Data provided to Jackson by the Bird Banding Laboratory, Laurel, Maryland, indicated that the eagle was one marked by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. Swedberg, director of the Massachusetts eagle hacking program, was able to identify the individual as one of two eaglets in a nest in a jack pine (Pinus banksiana) near Bissett, Manitoba. It was removed on 13 July 1983 for the hacking program by U.S. and Canadian biologists. Its nest mate was left to fledge naturally.

The eaglet was banded with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service band number 629-13924 and was equipped with a radio transmitter and fitted with a light blue tag on its right wing before being released near New Salem, Massachusetts, on 16 August 1983. When it was released, it flew north for a few miles, then disappeared. It was next seen in Mississippi. Two of the other birds released in the Massachusetts hacking program in 1983 were still near their release sites as of early February 1984.

The presence of the eagle in a residential area in Mississippi and its apparent lack of response to human observers

suggest that it might have been in a weakened condition and/or that it was partially imprinted on humans. Although tolerant of observers, at no time did it approach humans.

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