



June 2015

2015 continues to be a very busy year for the American Eagle Foundation, as we endeavor to further our vision of “Keeping America’s Eagles Flying Strong and Free” through the four pillars of Education, Repopulation, Conservation, and Rehabilitation.

As one of the foremost Bald Eagle conservation organizations in the United States, we provide a myriad of hands-on programs and activities, such as public birds of prey shows, a Bald Eagle breed and release program, rehabilitation of injured raptors, and the daily care-taking of 70 non-releasable resident birds.

Since 1991, AEF has educated millions of people at the Dollywood entertainment park and at schools, conventions and events throughout the country. We have successfully performed more than 30,000 “free flight” birds of prey education programs using non-releasable, permanently disabled trained birds of prey.

A significant contribution to public education efforts has been the use of AEF’s live HD video cams, which focus on Bald Eagle nests in Dollywood and Northeast Florida, enabling thousands of individuals to observe eagles in their natural habitat.

This newsletter focuses on some activities we’ve been involved with in the last few months, in hopes they will inspire you to join us as we advocate for the American Bald Eagle.



### **NASCAR Daytona 500 - Feb. 22, 2015**

On February 22, 2015, tens of thousands of spectators cheered as Challenger the Bald Eagle flew majestically over the speedway as part of the pre-race show before the start of the Daytona 500.

As he always does, Challenger, flew with precision and grace, captivating the thousands of people who watched from the Daytona track, as well as millions of others who watched on national TV. This was yet another

opportunity for people to experience the awe and grandeur of our National Bird.

**Challenger is truly an Ambassador for his species, symbolizing those values we as Americans hold so dear.**

## Nesting Season With Our Non-Releasable Bald Eagles at Dollywood ~ Spring 2015



Nesting season is in full swing inside the American Eagle Foundation's 400,000 cubic foot Eagle Mountain Sanctuary aviary located at the Dollywood park in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. Inside that aviary, you will find our famous Bald Eagle pair non-releasable pair, "Independence" and "Franklin."

Both Dollywood and AEF are celebrating their 30th anniversaries this year, and it turns out that Indy and Frank are raising their 30th eaglet! Since 2002, this pair has successfully raised 29 eaglets that have been released into the wild to help repopulate Bald Eagles in the United States. This year, the three eggs Indy laid did not hatch. One was accidentally broken by a stick, and the other two were infertile. However, Indy and Frank still got to be parents this nesting season. They were given an eaglet that hatched in an incubator on May 6th from an egg produced by another Bald Eagle breeding pair at AEF. The egg was found on the ground in Eagle Mountain Sanctuary, and despite the AEF's concern that the egg might have missed adequate incubation from its parents, it was still transferred to an incubator, where it miraculously hatched 36 days later. Indy and Frank were given this little one to foster, and they have accepted it as their own! The reason Indy and Frank were given the eaglet instead of the eaglet's biological parents was because the biological parents had stopped incubating and would probably not have accepted the eaglet.

You can enjoy special moments from the nest by watching our HD video cams at [eagles.org](http://eagles.org).

Eight other eaglets have been hatched from our non-releasable eagles this season, plus two 6-week-old eaglets were brought from the Wildlife Sanctuary of Florida to be released from our Hacking Tower. The Florida eaglets, along with the 9 that were hatched at AEF, will be released into the Great Smoky Mountains when they are approximately 13 weeks of age.

Since 1992, the AEF has released 135 eaglets into the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains, and nearly 400 have been released statewide since 1980.



## Celebrity Fight Night - An Elite Charity Event - March 29, 2015

One of the most recognized and respected charity events each year is spearheaded by former boxing great Muhammad Ali. During the past 20 years, **Celebrity Fight Night** has raised \$100 million for the Muhammad Ali Parkinson Center at Barrow Neurological Institute in Phoenix, as well as other worthy charities. It's a star-studded evening replete with A-list athletes and celebrities, coming together for a common cause, a fight to find a cure for Parkinson's disease.

For several years, the Bald Eagle Challenger has appeared at this event, inspiring those attending with his signature flight over the audience. Photos below are some of the famous guests with the celebrity eagle!



Country Music Artist Blake Shelton, AEF President Al Cecere, Bald Eagle Challenger



American Idol winner Kelly Clarkson, AEF's Julia Cecere, and Challenger



Julia Cecere, Music and Television Star Reba McEntire, AEF Bird Curator Madison Abell, and Bald Eagle Challenger

## Challenger Flies at NCAA Men's Basketball Final Four - April 6, 2015

Before the final game of the NCAA Men's Basketball Final Four on April 6, 2015, the air was electric with excitement inside Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. Duke Blue Devils vs Wisconsin Badgers - both teams poised to claim victory.

The anticipation grew - and the pregame ceremony made it more than special. This is the memory that thousands who attended, and millions watching by TV, will keep in their hearts for years to come.



USA Today said it best: *"The great anthems involve military bands playing the song of the country for which they fight. And that's why the U.S. Army Herald Trumpets from the U.S. Army Band's Pershing's Own, joined by musicians from three major Indiana universities (Ball State, Indiana, Purdue) played a flawless anthem before a flawless game between Duke and Wisconsin. Oh, and it never hurts to have a bald eagle flying around either."*

We know that eagle. There is no other like him. Special beyond words, his name is CHALLENGER, and he is a Living Symbol of our country! [Click to play video.](#)

## Horatio Alger Awards - April 10, 2015

Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C. was the scene of the 2015 Horatio Alger Association's Award Ceremony, honoring new inductees to their organization. Established in 1947, the [Horatio Alger Association](#) encourages young people to achieve the American dream through perseverance and hard work. It's mission is to provide scholarships for highly motivated but economically disadvantaged young people. Since its inception, the Horatio Alger Association has awarded over \$110 million in scholarships to more than 20,000 students.

This year, MC-ing for a crowd of about 1000 people seated in the hall were Tom Selleck and Lou Dobbs.

The evening opened with the National Anthem, sung by Broadway performer Hugh Panaro (Phantom of the Opera). As the National Anthem reached its conclusion, the Bald Eagle Challenger, who has been a part of this celebration for many years, was released to soar over the audience.

Watch a short video of the flight on Facebook by [clicking here](#).



*AEF President Al Cecere with Bald Eagle Challenger outside Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C.*



*Prior to the Horatio Alger awards, we ran into veteran CBS Evening News and Face The Nation host Bob Schieffer. His face reflected pure joy at meeting Challenger face to face!*



*Dressed for the big event in Constitution Hall, AEF staff members Madison Abell, Christian Knatt, Julia Cecere, and Bald Eagle Challenger pose on the steps prior to the ceremony.*

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## AEF President Al Cecere Seeks Congressional Support for “American Eagle Day”

On June 20th, 1782, our nation's Founding Fathers placed the majestic Bald Eagle, which is unique to North America, at the center of the Great Seal of the United States.

Since 1995, the American Eagle Foundation has been at the forefront in establishing June 20th as “American Eagle Day,” an annual commemorative day to celebrate the Bald Eagle's symbolism to Americans and its dramatic recovery from the brink of extinction. Since the founding of our country there has never been a “national day” set aside to recognize our country's inspirational bird and the important role that it has played in our lives, past and present.

“American Eagle Day” has grown significantly since its inception; however, it will remain an annual effort until a Joint Resolution has been passed by U.S. Congress. This resolution would require the President to annually proclaim “American Eagle Day” each June 20th. As of today, Governors from



46 states have recognized “American Eagle Day” with Proclamations and special documents, giving the USA’s National Bird its own “official day” in their states. The United States Senate and House of Representatives have unanimously passed several resolutions for “American Eagle Day” since 2007.

On a trip to Washington, DC in April, in order to garner support for “American Eagle Day,” Al Cecere met with several members of Congress, the Secretary of the Interior, Director of the USFWS, and others who showed interest in lending their voices to make “American Eagle Day” a permanent fixture on the U.S. Calendar.



*The American Eagle Foundation’s Bald Eagle “Challenger” and president Al Cecere met with Tennessee Senators Lamar Alexander and Bob Corker. Senator Alexander has been the primary proponent for passing “American Eagle Day” resolutions in the U.S. Senate since 2007.*



*Congressman Pete Sessions from Texas, an Eagle Scout and Chairman of the US House of Representatives Rules Committee gave us his support in helping with future American Eagle Day legislation.*



*Challenger the Eagle met with USFWS Director Dan Ashe while visiting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Headquarters in Washington D.C. to spread awareness about American Eagle Day.*



*Al Cecere and Bald Eagle Challenger met with Secretary of the Interior, Sally Jewell, to talk about the importance of American Eagle Day. Photo by Tami Heilemann.*



*Tennessee Congressman Phil Roe continues to be a staunch supporter for American Eagle Day.*



*US Congressman John Duncan from Tennessee...an Eagle Scout...gave us his full support for the passage of future American Eagle Day legislation.*

## **Electrocution Continues to be a Significant Cause of Death for Bald Eagles & Migratory Birds**

While in Washington, D.C., the American Eagle Foundation’s Al Cecere and the Bald Eagle Challenger attended a **WIRES** meeting. WIRES is a non-profit group that serves as the voice of electric transmission owners, investors, and customers in the North American energy market. During the meeting, **Stantec Inc.**, an international professional services company in the design and consulting industry, gave a presentation on Avian Protection and Management in the power industry. Stantec’s presenter, Brian Bub, provided information on the ways in which birds interact with electrical infrastructures, the applicable federal laws that protect birds, and resources that are available to help electrical utilities minimize impacts to birds.

To bring the presentation to life, Al and Challenger were introduced to the assembled group. Their presence made a strong statement about the importance of conservation. One attendee said, *“Challenger is such a beautiful and majestic bird—and I thought he wanted to communicate with us so badly to let us know the dangers of transmission wires. I think everybody got the message!”*

In addition, Bob Nixon from [Earth Conservation Corps](#) presented a video about the life and raptor conservation work of the late [Morley Nelson](#), a pioneer in raptor / power line research.

There are millions of birds—including Bald and Golden Eagles, owls, and hawks that are estimated to have died from electrocution each year as a result of unfortunate power line interactions.

Some companies are now taking steps to make power lines safer for raptors. We applaud these efforts, and hope that others companies are inspired to do the same.



*It is estimated that perhaps millions of birds, including Bald and Golden Eagles, owls, and hawks die each year as a result of power line interactions. Photo used with permission © Debi Shearwater*



*Alliant Energy worker attaches tri- angular pieces of plastic designed to stop large birds from perching along a stretch of power lines where an eagle was electrocuted. Republished with permission © 2015 Iowa SourceMedia Group, Cedar Rapids, Iowa*



*Attendees at the WIRES spring meeting share a photo op with American Eagle Foundation president Al Cecere and Bald Eagle Challenger*

## High Point University Commencement - May 9, 2015

The American Eagle Foundation's Bald Eagle Challenger was once again invited to participate in [High Point University's commencement](#). This year, distinguished journalist Tom Brokaw served as commencement speaker. At the end of the ceremony, Challenger [soared over the crowd](#) to symbolize the ideals of free enterprise, independence and the ability to pursue new opportunities in America. He has been part of HPU's Commencement tradition since 2008.



*AEF Board Member Spencer Williams catches Bald Eagle Challenger following Challenger's flight.*



*Challenger soared over the crowd at Commencement. Prior to the flight, High Point University President Nido Qubein provided an excellent educational message about Bald Eagles and Challenger's mission to spread awareness about his majestic species.*



*Commencement speaker Tom Brokaw with AEF president Al Cecere and Bald Eagle Challenger.*



## **“Bandit” the Bald Eagle - A Story of Hope, Courage, Betrayal, Misfortune, Perserverance, and Victory!**

It’s a general truth in the realm of Bald Eagle biology that Eagles mate for life (unless a faithful companion should die—in which case, they will choose a new mate). However, there have been known accounts of infidelity and “divorce.” This is one of those instances, pertaining to an eaglet that the AEF released into the wild years ago.

On June 8, 2005, a young eaglet, hatched in the Birmingham Zoo on April 26, was transferred to the American Eagle Foundation, placed in our Hack Tower on Douglas Lake, and subsequently released on July 24, 2005 with an identifying wing patagial tag and leg band. In a nationwide contest, the eaglet was named “Dolly” in honor of Dolly Parton.

The following story of Bandit (aka Dolly) was shared by [Capt. Mike Ostrander](#), who has conducted eagle tours on the James River (in Virginia) for 6 years. He has been following Bandit’s adventures since November 2009, when he saw her for the first time on Hatcher Island on the James River. It took 3 years of observation and photos before all the numbers of her leg band were positively identified. Because she was “banded,” she was given the name “Bandit.”

Once her leg band was identified, Capt. Mike contacted the US Fish and Wildlife Service to find out where she came from, then contacted the Birmingham Zoo where she had hatched, and was able to speak to the caregiver who watched her hatch and who later delivered her to the American Eagle Foundation where she was released at 13 weeks of age.

*The following account comes directly from Captain Ostrander:*

**In year one** (her first breeding season in 2010), Bandit and her mate (Smokey) built two nests but both fell. If she laid eggs, they fell with the nest.

**In year two** (her second breeding season) Bandit laid her clutch, but 2 intruding eagles (another bonded pair) tried to take over her territory, landed in the nest, and crushed the eggs.

Later that year, the nest fell again; this was the fourth time the nest had fallen in less than two years. A second male had been hanging around for awhile, so there were 3 eagles in the territory: 2 males and Bandit. After the nest fell this time, Bandit changed mates. Now it was Bandit and The Duke. Smokey had been replaced and left the area.

Soon thereafter, there was a second female eagle in the area. The Duke was unfaithful, and spent his time between Bandit and the “other lady.” This went on for 3 years.



In breeding seasons 3 and 4, Bandit did not lay eggs, probably because there was not enough mating between Bandit and The Duke.

In breeding season 5, Bandit and The Duke became closer, and eggs were laid. But the other female was still in the picture. The other female flew into Bandit's nest and attacked her fiercely. Bandit disappeared for about a month, and during that time, the other female took over the nest and began to incubate Bandit's eggs. However, the other female grew tired of that, and stopped incubating, so the eggs did not hatch. But even after she stopped incubating the eggs, the female stayed in the area.

Bandit finally came back a month later and managed to regain her territory, although she was terribly beat up, feathers missing, plus a lame foot.

In the fall of 2014, another pair of bonded eagles, male and female, came into the territory, looking for a nest. They either killed or chased off The Duke, who hasn't been seen since.

After The Duke had gone missing, the two eagles teamed up against Bandit, who was again attacked. Bandit disappeared for two months. Capt. Mike recalled how he thought she was dead, but then on December 15, 2015, he saw her land high up in a tree where she began to vocalize loudly. The second day after returning to the area, Bandit flew to the nest tree, and somehow, over the next week, regained control of her nest. She ousted the female that was part of the pair that killed or chased off The Duke, and became the new mate of the male Bald Eagle. The new mate's name is "Trey" (so named because he was her 3rd mate.)

In 2015 (Bandit's 6th breeding season) Bandit and Trey bonded. They mated and an egg was laid. The egg was incubated for two months, but was not viable. Bandit "double-clutched," laying another egg (5 weeks behind other eagles in the area). This egg hatched, producing her first eaglet, now between 7 and 8 weeks old.

Knowing the full history of Bandit (aka Dolly), Capt. Mike named her offspring Dolly. ***We thank Capt. Mike for sharing this amazing story with us!***

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## The American Eagle Foundation Has Received Another 4-Star Rating from Charity Navigator



For the second year in a row, the American Eagle Foundation, a not-for-profit 501 (C)(3) charitable organization, has received a 4-Star rating from the leading charity evaluator in America! Only 19 percent of charities rated by Charity Navigator receive 2 consecutive 4-star evaluations, indicating that AEF outperforms most other charities in America. This "exceptional"

designation from Charity Navigator differentiates AEF from its peers and demonstrates to the public it is worthy of their trust.

For more information about the charitable organizations, associations, and federal & state wildlife agencies that endorse us, along with the professional memberships we maintain, click here.



# Celebrate **American Eagle Day** @ *Dollywood*



Love Eagles? Join us in commemorating the comeback of our Living Symbol of Freedom on American Eagle Day (June 20th) at Dollywood Family theme park in Pigeon Forge, TN.



[WWW.EAGLES.ORG](http://WWW.EAGLES.ORG)