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One of the golden eagles being rehabilitated in Cayucos flies to his perch inside the rehabilitation enclosure.



Kelly Vandeneuvel moves a visually impaired golden eagle from his perch to a shallow pool inside the rehabilitation enclosure.



Kelly Vandeneuvel feeds a mouse to a visually impaired golden eagle at her ranch in Cayucos. It costs up to \$15 a day to feed each of the large predators.

Group lifts eagles up where they belong

Pacific Wildlife Care recently had an unprecedented three golden eagles to rehabilitate; one's already back in the wild

By David Sneed

Three golden eagles, which were injured in unrelated incidents, have been rehabilitating in a flight cage on Kelly Vandeneuvel's Cayucos ranch.

Normally, it's a rare event when someone brings a golden eagle to Pacific Wildlife Care for rehabilitation. But in recent weeks, volunteers with the group have had three of the majestic birds in their care.

The birds—two females and a male — were injured in separate, unrelated incidents. One was shot, another was likely hit by a car and the third slammed into something so hard its retina was detached, an injury that will prevent it from ever being released back into the wild.

“To have three eagles at one time has never happened in the 25 years I've been involved with the organization,” said Kelly Vandenheuvell, who is rehabilitating the eagles in a flight cage at her Cayucos ranch. “Typically, we get one eagle every five years.”

Earlier this week, the group released one of the eagles near Adelaida. Its wing had been grazed by a .22-caliber bullet.

But the other two are still in captivity.

The eagles are putting a considerable financial strain on the nonprofit group. It costs between \$10 and \$15 per bird per day to buy the rats and mice that are fed to them.

Dani Nicholson, Pacific Wildlife Care president, estimates that the group will spend \$10,000 on raptor food this year.

Vandenheuvell hopes to release a second eagle in a couple of weeks. That bird was found Aug. 23 lying on the ground near Harmony with its legs in the air.

It was heavily infested with scaly leg mites and was near death.

Nicholson suspects the eagle was hit by a car. To add insult to injury, it was also sprayed by a skunk.

The Harmony eagle is gradually regaining its strength by flapping from perch to perch in the flight cage. The Audubon Society will attach a band to the bird before its release so it can be identified in the future.

Vandenheuvell is planning what animal rescuers call a soft release. She will open a gate in the flight pen, allowing the eagle to fly away when it wants to and return to eat if it needs to.

That leaves the visually impaired eagle. Veterinarians have said it could never survive in the wild.

The otherwise healthy eagle would make an excellent educational bird. The volunteers are searching nationwide for a zoo or wildlife conservation facility willing to take it.

Until that happens, the eagle will stay in Vandenheuvell's flight cage.

To find out more about Pacific Wildlife Care or to donate money to help feed the eagles, go to the group's Web site at www.pacificwildlifecare.org.