

Majesty in recovery:

Injured eagle is recuperating at local wildlife facility

The female eagle's wings are being rehabilitated after she was discovered tangled up in a fence

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Fifteen years ago, a female eaglet was released into the Big Sur wilderness. On Sunday, the same eagle, now a spectacular breeding adult, was found entangled in a fence on Fort Hunter Liggett in Monterey County.

The eagle, known as 5M, is now recuperating in a flight cage on Prefumo Canyon Road in San Luis Obispo. The bird has abrasions at the base of each of her wings from struggling with the fence.

The eagle's left wing droops from the injuries, but otherwise appears in good shape, said Kathy Duncan of Pacific Wildlife Care, the Morro Bay group rehabilitating the bird. Those caring for the bird hope she will be ready for release in 10 days to a week.

The eagle will recover in a series of large cages, called a mews, operated by Pacific Wildlife Care volunteer Jeri Roberts. She will be fed a diet of rats and fish and will be treated with antibiotics to hasten her recovery.

They are anxious to release her as quickly as possible because she has a mate and a nest waiting for her in the wild. "I'm bummed out to see the left wing," Duncan said. "I'm hoping this is going to be a fast recovery."

5M is unusual in several respects, Duncan said. First, the group rarely gets bald eagles. Second, because she was introduced to Big Sur by the Ventana Wildlife Society, a detailed history of her is available.

Her legs have several identification bands. She even had a radio transmitter strapped to her back.

The transmitter allowed her movements to be tracked for her first two years in the wild. It was designed to fall off after the batteries ran out but never did, something



that evidently did not affect her survival, said Kelly Sorenson, executive director of the Ventana Wildlife Society.

5M was collected from a nest in the Tongass National Forest, near Juneau, Alaska, on July 22, 1993. Her first flight in the wilds of Big Sur was on Aug. 1 of that same year, part of the first batch of four eagles to be released there after the species was extirpated from the wild earlier in the century.

Using the transmitter, biologists were able to track her as she moved about Big Sur and wintered at Lake San Antonio and Nacimiento Lake. The transmitter gave out late in 1995.

5M was one of 70 bald eagles released in Big Sur. Since the program began in 1993, 143 chicks have been produced. Last year, 12 pairs nested in the wild and raised 23 chicks.

"The story of eagle 5M is extraordinary and one that shows just how successfully a grassroots reintroduction effort in combination with a wildlife rehabilitation program can work well together," Sorenson said. "Bald eagles are once again breeding in the Central California region, after a 60-year absence."