The Bald Eagle That Would Not Quit

Full Transcript

0:00:05.000,0:00:15.000
That particular bald eagle was found by a rancher about four or five miles west of Cedar City, Utah.

0:00:15.000,0:00:25.000
The eagle was on the ground, the rancher was a little concerned because the eagle looked like it was tame, it would just sit there.

0:00:25.000,0:00:30.000
The eagle sat there for a couple of days, then the rancher decided to give me a call.

0:00:30.000,0:00:35.000
That the eagle just wasn't moving and wondering if the eagle might be sick

0:00:35.000,0:00:39.000
When I first saw the eagle it was sitting under a group of cotton wood trees

0:00:39.000,0:00:42.000
Well you're standing, that's a good sign

0:00:42.000,0:00:53.000
No apparent injury, it was quite a ways from power lines and quite aways from roads.

0:00:53.000,0:00:59.000
So not really understanding what could be causing the eagle to just be sitting there

0:00:59.000,0:01:04.000
I carefully approached the eagle and the eagle refused to move

0:01:04.000,0:01:12.000
Hi, how are you? You're sure a pretty thing.

0:01:12.000,0:01:20.000
And I scooped the eagle up and gave it a quick check over and it was incredibly skinny.
Which is a bad sign it hasn't been eating for a very long time

Probably hadn't had a meal in two, almost three weeks.

So obviously it went from a mild concern to a really critical condition

We determined that lead poisoning was the issue, because we couldn't find any physical injuries

the eagle had severe neurological issues

You treat the symptoms, you want to make sure the eagle gets lots of food, lots of fluids

subcutaneous IVs are in order, fluids, feeding tubes, medications

As far as being able to identify the issues, that really comes with experience.

You know I've been caring for these animals for the past 48 years

and I've got a pretty good handle on a variety of illnesses, diseases, injuries that occur

I really hate when they're too sick to bite.

All of the animals that come to our rescue center, at least almost all of them, are in absolutely critical condition
and it's a really bad thing when the animal just sits very quietly in the transport kennel and won't move and won't fight back

0:02:45.000,0:02:50.000
and those kinds of things, so I have to reach in a grab him

0:02:50.000,0:02:54.000
if he just lays there or sits there and acts tame

0:02:54.000,0:03:00.000
we know that eagle is in really poor shape

0:03:00.000,0:03:03.000
and so immediately we bring him out of the kennel

0:03:03.000,0:03:07.000
as quickly as possible get food and fluids into him

0:03:07.000,0:03:11.000
give him a thorough health examination

0:03:11.000,0:03:18.000
and then start to plan the treatment that the eagle will receive

0:03:18.000,0:03:20.000
in hopes of saving its life

0:03:20.000,0:03:23.000
and so that's kind of the point

0:03:23.000,0:03:28.000
any time that you see an animal, an wild animal that appears to be tame

0:03:28.000,0:03:30.000
it is deathly ill.

0:03:30.000,0:03:34.000
They do not want to socialize with us, they don't want to be a part of us
They just want to be back in the wild and left alone.

This particular eagle was in absolute critical condition.

It had lost more than half its body weight.

It probably was not going to survive.

No matter what we did to help this poor animal.

and I'm a little bit sensitive to not wanting to videotape what I call dead eagles.

and so my wife Susan says let's go video tape this.

and I say, no, no, it.

it probably wasn't going to worth the time to videotape it.

this eagle has a very, very slim chance of survival.

and so with extreme intensive care.

for 11 days.
where the eagle couldn't stand, couldn't move

and like I said feeding tubes and everything we could do

just to try to keep the poor little thing alive

after 11 days Susan approached me again

and says what about taking some videos

and very very reluctantly, I said okay.

and so from the video of me acquiring the eagle

and getting it out of its airport kennel

to the very first video you see of me feeding the eagle

there was an 11 day period in there where I truly didn't believe the eagle would survive.

hey little guy

we're going to start off with some fluids

By the 11th day, the bird was standing which was a good sign
and it was the very first time that it was able to stand on a very very low perch

it was exciting that he was able to step up onto a perch

my little guy, how are we doing this morning? You want to bite, that's a good thing

Please understand, I have had animals make it even further than that in the recovery

and still not survive.

So there was a little glimmer of hope

we couldn't allow ourselves to hope too much

because the disappointment if we lost that eagle

would have been severe

that's my boy, okay, there's your fluids and your medicine

Do you want to try to do this standing on your own or should I hold you?

Let's see if we can do this with you standing on your own, sweetheart.

Initially there was three or four feedings a day
and in the process of the feeding I would
check the bird's weight and not use a scale
but I would take my fingers and feel its keel bone, its breast bone
and as the eagle regains strength
and weight, that breast bone, the muscle around the breast bone,
starts to cover more and more of the bone so the bone doesn't stick out as far.
Each feeding, three or four feedings a day, each feeding
would last about ten to fifteen minutes
and again, this is not an animal that I want to socialize with
this is not an animal that's a pet
this is an animal we want it to be wild
and so the less human contact, the better.

It would take about twenty minutes to a half hour
to prepare the food and fluids and medications for it

the food that we would start off using

because it would have a difficult time digesting

we wouldn't use whole animal carcasses

what we would use is either jack rabbit meat, cotton tail meat

pigeon breast, quail breast,

again, natural foods, and as the eagle continued to get stronger and stronger

then we could start giving what we call casting material

and that would consist of whole mice

for the eagle so that it would not only get a more complete diet

it would then be able to regurgitate the pellets to help clean out its digestive system

and then once the eagle is able to feed itself

then it would get whole carcasses of rabbits,
quail, pigeons, rats, mice, and the eagle would be allowed to free feed, or feed itself.

Our bald eagle, this morning, actually turned around on its perch.

That might not sound like a big achievement to most of you.

But in his weakened condition,

him being able to turn around on a perch...

remember, all of you who were in gymnastics, and you

and you practiced on the balance beam

and how difficult it was to turn on the balance beam?

Well these guys live on a balance beam their whole life.

and for him to have the strength and coordination to turn himself around on a perch

in his condition was a huge achievement

and so we're very very excited about that

this guy right here was incredibly ill
all indications were lead poisoning

he's got some neurological issues

he may have some vision issues

and we have saved his life

we are able to feed him, he's able to perch

and whether or not he will be able to become

physically fit enough to be able to return to the wild

we won't know that for months

but that's the goal, to get this guy back to the wild

Now here's the sad part, by federal law

if we can not return this eagle back to the wild

the eagle can be placed in an educational program

or the eagle must be euthanized.
and that, that just tears me apart

I've been caring for these guys for 47 years

and it just terrifies me thought

of working with this eagle for six months

and he not be able to be releasable

and that I will have to euthanize him

and I promise all of you that will be an extremely bad day for me.

That is why it's so very very important that we get the Cedar Canyon Nature Park up and running

The Cedar Canyon Nature Park will be a place

where non-releasable wildlife can be placed in natural habitats

and be used for wildlife education

well the first thing I want to do this morning is I want to check and see how much weight he's gained

and instead of using the scale, I will feel his keel bone, his breast bone
and, again, don't do this

this can be very dangerous

eye do bite

yes you do, huh sweetie

oh that's a good boy, that's my baby, shhh

now see I'm distracting him here to let me get my hands up under here and feel his breast bone

there's my baby, oh such a good boy

oh you're doing better

he's got more weight on his breast bone right here

which means that he is putting on weight

so that's very very good

now that beak right there

is designed to rip large chunks of flesh
so he could certainly rip a big chunk of flesh out of my hand

but I am keeping him very calm here and he's doing okay

the next thing you have to worry about is his feet

these feet right here

600 pounds per square inch of crushing power in those feet

that's what he kills with

and he could drive those talons

through my hand and crush the bones of my hand

so when your dealing with wild animals

don't approach them. If you think they're sick

please call police dispatch, do NOT call 911

911 is for human emergencies

Call police dispatch, they will dispatch
a wildlife rehabilitator like myself or

a conservation officer who is skilled in handling these animals

and let them deal with it

because if you try to handle an animal like this

you may have to call 911 because it may very well turn into a human emergency

try to get you to a hospital with an eagle hanging off your arm

So please do not pick up or approach sick or injured wildlife.

Well it's time for his breakfast

and we're very pleased with how he's eating.

I've got a bag full of mice here

these are domestically raised mice here

that we order by the thousand to feed these guys

please understand these are like two bucks a piece
so feeding these guys is extremely expensive

and I use a pair of forceps to keep my fingers a little bit further away

so he eats the mouse instead of my hand

there you go, that's my boy

yes, now you know it's breakfast time, huh?

It's very important to feed them whole animals

not just meat

basically they need the fur, they need the feather, they need the bones

they need everything in order to help with their digestive system

and so this guy will put down a pretty good sized meal this morning

and that's really really good. Like I said he's gaining weight

he's got sufficient balance, he was able to turn around on his perch

but he's still very much a long ways from out the woods
he's got a lot of healing to do still

before he can be returned to the wild

k, you 'bout got a full crop there kiddo?

you had enough?

okay, that's a pretty good meal, that's almost a whole bag

okay, one more time, let me check you out here

yes, I know

okay, that's a pretty good sized meal that you've got in crop right now

So you're doing all right

we'll give you a dinner feeding a little later

you ready for some breakfast big guy?

are ya? you ready for breakfast?

We've had steady progress with the eagle
He's now jumping up on a perch that is about two and half feet off the ground

able to turn around, able to perch well

his balance is coming back, he's still very very weak

we are feeding him whole animals

but he still can't, doesn't have the physical strength to stand on a carcass and tear it apart

to be able to feed himself so we're still hand feeding him

how you doing sweetheart?

yeah, that's my boy, you've got a lot more meat on you

you were so skinny when we gotcha

you're feeling so much better

you start with three or four feeding a day and as the eagle starts to gain strength

and abilities to swallow and to feed itself

then it goes down to a single feeding a day
where you put a large portion of food in and allow the eagle to feed itself

Susan: what is a casting? Tell us what a casting is.

a casting is what is undigested

you can see right here

what we're feeding him is whole mice

and he'll eat the whole thing

and then whatever he doesn't digest, the fur and bones and that kind of stuff

he'll regurgitate into a pellet that comes out

people are more familiar with owl pellets

but all birds of prey cast pellets

here's a pellet, right here

and this is basically fur and bone and whatever else is not digestible

and they regurgitate that about 24 hours after they've eaten
and I gave him an evening meal last night

and so he might not have brought it back up yet

so he doesn't want to eat and put food on top of his casting so he can cast a little easier

and when I bring my hand in here what I'm doing is I'm feeling for his keel bone and basically I don't want to pick him up and put him on a scale everyday

and so I can check and see if he's gaining weight by feeling the keel bone right here

and he's really put on a tremendous amount of weight since I first got him in

So that's what I'm doing there is just checking his weight.

Once you start to eat then you go

You just have to get him to start

but as I've told everybody before

he's not out the woods yet

he's still very weak
yes I know, we'll feed you a little later after you've had your casting

after your casting has come up, we'll give you some breakfast

you're all right, that's my boy

the basic rule is that these are wild animals, these are not pets

and the less human interaction, the better.

and so we try to minimize all human contact as much as possible.

Where you're dealing with wildlife

once they start feeling better and healthier, they do not want to be in captivity

and that's kind of a point where things get a little bit dangerous

because you walk in there and you need to continue the physical examination of the bird

but they don't want to touched

as you saw in the earlier videos the eagle just sat there, I could touch his head and touch his chest

and make sure that he's putting on weight
once they get to the point where you walk in the chamber

and they fly across the chamber, they do not want to be touched

they do not want you to grab them, to hold them

then it becomes a point where

you take a pole net

you still have to do the examinations

you take a pole net and you walk into the chamber and you net the bird

grab the bird's feet, watch out for the beak

because he will certainly at this point and time bite you viciously

the bird has regained its wild sense of independence

and it doesn't like the idea of having to socialize with a human

and so it's a really, really good sign when that eagle flies back and forth across the chamber

and I have to go net the eagle
to give it its physical examinations

and make sure the eagle is getting close to ready for release

Here's what's going to happen now, I've got to go in and I've got to catch him

This is a completely wild eagle

We've had him for a couple months, we want to get him back in the wild

and I'll be really honest with you, we don't want him to like me

we want him to be afraid of humans

when he leaves he'll fly far away and stay away from humans for the rest of his life

that's a good thing

Now the net allows me to get him as quickly and efficiently as possible

So I'm going to step in, I'm going to grab him with the net

and grab a hold of him then we'll walk him over to the car

There's my boy
Shh, shh, shh, shhh

There's my boy

gotcha

sorta got ya

oh we love that

like I said, he's not tame, he's fighting like mad

that's really good, we like that

He's ready to go back to the wild where he belongs

Let's get a hold of his feet here

there we go, there's my boy

for those of you who have seen the previous videos of this eagle

you can recognize that he is 100% feisty

and fighting and he wants to go back to the wild so bad right now
so that is wonderful, he is ready

if he wasn't fighting with me, I'd be worried

since he wants to fight, that's terrific, we are going to get this guy released

that's the goal to get them back in the wild as quickly as we can

and efficiently as we can if I can him to let go the net here

little bit of a hassle but we're almost there

One more talon to let loose

There we are, there's my boy

Oh I know, you can bite me, that's all right

There's a common belief among many native peoples

that if you say your prayers to an eagle feather the eagle will carry your prayers to god

so when I have an eagle that's ready to return back to the wild

we will frequently seek out individuals or organization that could use some extra prayers
and give them the opportunity to release the eagle

herein lies the problem

by the time I can say okay the eagle is healthy enough

it's ready to be returned back to the wild

the eagle is fighting with me

the eagle does not want to be in captivity

the eagle could injure himself in captivity

and so when I call an individual or organization and say

we need to an eagle release

the vast majority of times

they say well okay can we do it next month?

Can we do it in three or four weeks?

and the answer is no
the moment that eagle is ready to be returned to the wild

he has to be returned to the wild

okay, now this is a hood

and this is his stress protection

these guys their eyesight is so good, a lot of movement

especially transporting him in the car

will frighten them, they can injure themselves

and so we can put the over his head

and block his vision so he'll sit much quieter in the car, he'll be a lot calmer

this is his stress protection, this is the first time a hood has gone on his head

so he's never worn one before

there we go

this particular eagle release we basically just said
anybody that wants to go up to Brian Head

which is the ski resort northeast of Cedar City

and stand at the top of the mountain

and release the eagle, we're going to release the eagle back to the wild

and we offered everybody, adults, not children

any adult that was there, if they would like to be the person to actually release the eagle

we would put their name in a fishbowl

and draw a name and that's the person that releases the eagle

the reason that we make any wildlife release public

especially eagle releases

is the educate the public

when I first moved the Southern Utah as a volunteer wildlife rehabilitator

we were receiving about a dozen shot eagles every year
and it wasn't that the people of Southern Utah hated eagles, they just saw no value in them

and so they would drive out through the agricultural areas and say there's a big bird, let's shoot it

38 years of school programs

38 years of Scout programs

38 years of community events

38 years of wildlife releases for the public's education

we receive a shot bird of prey about one every other year maybe even less

and so it's the education, you know,

that eagle release will save more eagles than I will save in a year

because the general public gets to see how beautiful they are

how majestic they are up close and personal

and see their value and once the eagle is in the sky

I guarantee every one that attended that eagle release
when they go back out to eagle habitat

will be very careful not to injure eagles

the purpose for the release first is to return the animal back to the wild

that's the primary focus

the second is education

the third is always to help bring awareness to our volunteer wildlife rescue organization

and so people get the opportunity to see and understand the work that we do

and like I said, taking the animals out and just turning them loose without the public

is certainly easier for us, especially me

but we could release injured wildlife all day long

but if nobody knows we released them

and that we cared for them

then we'd have a very hard time raising money for our wildlife rescue center
the US Fish and Wildlife service will not allow us to band rehabilitation animals

now we can band, we can get a banding permit and we can band

baby eagles in the nest or we can band eagles on their migration

trap them and take measurements for scientific study

but they do not allow us to band wildlife rehabilitation animals

North of town here we have a

a roosting site where we have

as many as fifty bald eagles come in and roost in the evenings

Are any of those the eagles that I rescued?

maybe, but I have no way of knowing

I would like to say that this particular eagle stands out

because of its success and its willingness to fight for its life

and we were able to return it to the wild
but that's a story that has occurred in my life hundreds of times

we need a lot of help

probably the first and foremost that we need

is people who have the skills and abilities to raise the funds necessary to build the Cedar Canyon Nature Park

to build our wildlife rescue center

to build the visitor center, natural history museum,

to build the eagle flight cages

and to build the exhibits where non-releasable wildlife can be on display for the public to see and for educational programs

then I certainly need skilled individuals who are educators

to do wildlife programs, I need skilful individuals who are highly qualified in veterinary services

I need builders, I need contractors

I need custodians
I need people willing to roll up their sleeves and help to run the Cedar Canyon Nature Park and keep it running and beautiful.

I need people with botany experiences for the native plants.

There's a million things that I need and so, you know, I always say and this is so very true that everyone not only has skills that we could use but everyone knows someone that could help the Cedar Canyon Nature Park.

Everyone wants to play with the animals and I certainly understand that but these are wild animals and because we're working with wild animals.
there's a two year training program you have to go through before you can even volunteer

So if you really would like to help us

there's a lot of other avenues that we could really really use

and in the process if you're local in the Cedar City Utah area

and would like to eventually be able to work with the animals

I need you to volunteer in other areas

to help develop the Cedar Canyon Nature Park and our wildlife rescue center

and the people that help us do that

will certainly be first in line

to be able to work with the sick, injured, orphaned wildlife

as the nature park develops.

Susan Tyner: Visit our web site, gowildlife.org

We've got beautiful wildlife t-shirts
Martin is an amazing photographer and has beautiful photographs of all kinds of wildlife including this eagle.

If you would like to make a donation and receive some of his beautiful photography, we also have a wonderful book out called Healer of Angels. It's stories of Martin growing up in his youth and overcoming a lot of difficulties as a child. The wisdom of his grandparents, it talks about how he got into falconry and the first bird he ever got. All kinds of wonderful stories.

It's very inspirational and it will have you laughing and some of it will have you crying.
it's a great read, so any of those things

if you're interested in, it helps us to raise money to build the nature park

and take care of our wildlife rescue, thank you very much

Martin: and if anybody would like to make a $25 donation to the Southwest Wildlife Foundation

I will send you a beautiful head shot portrait of this bald eagle.

♪ acoustic guitar music ♪