Glory's Story

In the United States Government’s effort to recover the species, it initiated an arduous recovery plan. The bird pictured was taken as an egg from a nest site in the Florida Everglades by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service special agents. Before you become overly alarmed, because of the long breeding season in Florida, the parent birds immediately laid additional eggs and therefore this activity did not negatively impact the local population. Once taken from the nest, these soldiers of stewardship quickly placed the cherished eggs in a warmed box and made the long departure for the Sutton Research Center in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. Given a safe arrival, the eggs were quickly whisked to the Research Center where the incubation period continued uninterrupted.

After a total of 35 days, Glory completed the most difficult task of introducing herself to the world. The process of breaking out of the shell is called “piping.” It is hugely taxing and many birds do not succeed. However, with a fighting spirit, Glory made her way into the world.

So small that she could fit in the palm of your hand, and without the benefit of wild parents, the job of caring for this young eaglet was in the hands of man. Critical in the first 25 days is the process of “species identity.” Like the television documentaries with geese and whooping cranes, young fowl will identify themselves by imprinting to the first objects they see during this critical period of development. To ensure that Glory would know herself to be an eagle, the human caretakers meticulously fed this pint-sized raptor by use of an eagle puppet. In addition, and at the appropriate age, Glory was coupled with other eagles of similar age. Throughout the rearing process, there was no association or knowledge of the efforts being made on her behalf by man.

Like all birds capable of flight, her growth was extraordinary. In little more than 40 days she went from a bird that could fit in the palm of your hand to the size that she is before you. She was now ready to make introduction into the wild. Through a coordinated effort overseen by the Federal Government it was determined that she, along with many others, would be released in Gulf Shores, Mississippi. The science revealed that introducing many eagles of a similar age at the same time would give the species a greater chance of finding a mate when reaching sexual maturity.

At the nest site, man’s helping hand continued. Glory, along with the others, was contained for several weeks atop of a release tower... also known as a “hack site.” The human guardians (hack site
attendants) kept careful vigil and fed these birds during this critical phase. Though imprisoned, these young eagles were for the first time allowed to view their vast surroundings.

One fateful day, the enclosure was opened and freedom was before her. As she honed her prowess as North America’s largest and most powerful predatory bird, food continued to be delivered by her human guardian. As in nature’s plan and to the joy and sadness of her guardians, one day she failed to reappear. She was now free and on her own, as a champion of her species. Though she was unaware, Glory bore great expectations on her wings. It was hoped that she would reach sexual maturity, which is noted by the white head and white tail that is so ingrained in the minds of the American public.

We know all these facts because the only thing that separated her from her more wild counterparts was the presence of a band around her leg and a small plastic tag on her wing. One can only wonder what her life must have been like…from the time that she left the hack site until she next encountered man who had served as her guardian throughout the process.

Ironic it is that man was what would break Glory’s spirits. What follows is sketchy but this much we know. She was likely in migration and traveling over Georgia when she was shot down from the sky. The X-rays clearly showed the presence of lead pellets from a shotgun blast. Considerable efforts were made by a veterinarian to salvage the wing, but to no avail. Ultimately, and at the hands of man, half of the right wing required amputation.

Records have indicated that eagles are able to live as long as 45 years, making them one of the longest lived species of any bird. The loss of Glory affected all of her progeny that could have followed. Glory is living proof of man’s great capacity for change. Today she is an ambassador not only of her species or of Georgia Southern University, but is a powerful and regal symbol of this great nation!