

HIGH DESERT MUSEUM

W I L D L I F E *and* L I V I N G H I S T O R Y

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High Desert Museum Says Goodbye to Bald Eagle Kokanee

Aging raptor euthanized after his health rapidly deteriorated

BEND, OR — Kokanee, an aging, flightless bald eagle who lived at the High Desert Museum for more than a decade, was humanely euthanized Friday. The Museum's professional caretakers and veterinarian had determined that the raptor's health was fast declining after a struggle with age-related ailments.

"Kokanee was majestic and a longtime favorite of Museum visitors," Museum Executive Director Dana Whitelaw said. "In his time at the Museum, Kokanee served as an ambassador for his species, educating many thousands of visitors about the story of eagle conservation and recovery from near extinction."

Kokanee came to the Museum in 2005. He was found on the ground in Florida with an injured wing on an unknown date. He underwent a partial wing amputation, rendering him flightless and unable to survive in the wild. He then spent time at two other wildlife sanctuaries before coming to Bend.

"Because Kokanee had reached adulthood by the time he arrived at the Museum, we cannot know exactly how old he was," Museum Curator of Wildlife Jon Nelson said, noting that bald eagles are known to live for decades in the wild. One monitored bird lived to be 38. "But all indications are that he was an older bird based on his appearance and behavior."

In the last year, Kokanee lost some mobility and eventually his eyesight. His condition was being monitored daily by wildlife staff and veterinarians, and he appeared to be in no pain or discomfort and was eating well. Very recently, however, Museum caretakers had observed that he was losing weight and his condition deteriorated. The decision to euthanize was not made lightly; Museum curators, together with the Museum's contract veterinarian, made the decision Friday based on Kokanee's vitality and quality of life moving forward.

Kokanee shared his habitat at the Donald M. Kerr Birds of Prey Center with Charisma, a female American bald eagle who arrived at the Museum shortly after him. The Museum's bald eagle habitat is designed for the safety and comfort of flightless eagles and is intentionally smaller in size, with plenty of low perches. It also offers a water feature and deciduous shade trees.

The two birds did well together in the habitat. In 2016, Kokanee and Charisma produced two unfertilized eggs. Wildlife caretakers removed the eggs and replaced them with replicas, which Kokanee diligently incubated. Egg laying and incubation are signs that the birds are well cared for and comfortable in their environment.

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Kokanee loved the water feature in his exhibit and except in the coldest weather swam in it every evening at about 5:30 pm — so precisely that you could almost set a watch to it. His favorite foods were rats, salmon heads and rainbow trout.

“While we’re not actively looking for an eagle, the Museum strives to be a refuge for wildlife that can’t survive in the wild,” Whitelaw said. “If another eagle needed a good refuge and we thought it would thrive in the habitat with Charisma, we would consider it.”

Bald eagles are found throughout North America. They range in weight from 6.5 to 14 pounds with a wingspan of up to 8.5 feet. Females are generally larger than males. Their food sources range widely, from fish to carrion.

When Kokanee joined the High Desert Museum, he was considered a species under threat. Bald eagles were removed from listing under the Endangered Species Act in 2007 after a remarkable recovery. Their numbers had dropped precipitously, in large part due to the use of the pesticide DDT. Once it was banned in 1980, populations began to recover.

In addition to educating and aweing Museum visitors, Kokanee contributed in other ways. More than 1,000 of his molted feathers were supplied to the National Eagle Repository during his time at the Museum.

“He was a sweet and gentle bird,” Nelson said, “and we will surely miss him.”

ABOUT THE MUSEUM:

THE HIGH DESERT MUSEUM opened in 1982 and brings regional wildlife, culture, art and natural resources together to promote an understanding of the natural and cultural heritage of North America's high desert country. The Museum uses indoor and outdoor exhibits, wildlife in natural habitats, and living history demonstrations to help people discover and appreciate the high desert environment. The Museum is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization accredited by the American Alliance of Museums and is a Smithsonian Affiliate.

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