

INSPIRED LIFE

Fans root for bald eagles determined to shield eggs from California storm

‘People have been worried about Jackie sitting in the snow,’ biologist Sandy Steers said about the eagle who is doggedly sitting in her nest



By [Cathy Free](#)

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In the middle of a [snowstorm](#) that slammed Southern California’s San Bernardino Mountains this week, a small white head poked up from a nest buried in fresh powder.

Jackie, a 12-year-old bald eagle that recently laid three eggs in the nest, suddenly rose and [shook off several inches of snow](#) before dutifully returning to her nesting duties near the top of a 155-foot pine tree.

“What an amazing thing to witness!” one fan wrote on the [YouTube](#) channel that has a live stream of the nest and more than 236,000 subscribers.

Around the world, thousands of people were delighted to see that she and her mate Shadow are faring well in the storm — which brought [record-setting rains](#), winds and prolific snow to California during a days-long onslaught that caused mudslides, widespread power outages and at least [nine deaths](#).

“People have been worried about Jackie sitting in the snow,” said Sandy Steers, biologist and executive director of the nonprofit [Friends of Big Bear Valley](#), which set up a 24-hour, solar-powered camera above the nest in 2015. “But she and Shadow have over 7,000 waterproof feathers, with down feathers under that. Basically, they’re each wearing a waterproof down jacket, so they’re doing fine.”

Heightening the concern for this year’s eggs is that Jackie has had a low rate of success over the years with her eggs, and last year, Jackie and Shadow [abandoned two eggs](#) when they didn’t hatch.

Jackie and Shadow, age 10, attract a flock of watchers to the live stream during nesting season, similar to the thousands of delighted fans who saw [three eaglets](#) hatch in the D.C. area. And last February, a [Minnesota eagle](#) went viral for sitting on her eggs while buried in snow.

During the recent storm in California, Jackie sat in a snow-filled nest for 62 hours until she flew away for a break and let Shadow take a turn as the storm let up, Steers said.

“When the weather is bad, she likes to handle the nesting — she doesn’t trust anyone to do it better,” she said. “If Jackie wants to take over, she’ll just move Shadow aside.”

Traffic picked up on the nest cam when it was discovered last month that Jackie had laid three eggs: One on Jan. 25, the second on Jan. 28, and the third on Jan. 31, Steers said, noting that the incubation period for the eggs is 35 days.

“That means that if everything goes well, we could see an egg hatch on Feb. 29 — Leap Day,” Steers said. “This is Jackie’s first clutch of three eggs, so everyone is very hopeful.”

Followers on YouTube, elated by the possibility of three fuzzy hatchlings, are gushing:

“I feel so privileged to witness these majestic birds in the wild. Good job, Jackie!” one wrote.

“You stay on all those eggs, Jackie!” another person commented. “The weather’s gonna be rough.”

“We’re all watching and hoping that the eggs hatch and the babies become successful fledglings,” said Steers. Baby eaglets usually leave the nest when they’re about three months old, she said.

Studies show that about 70 percent of eaglets now survive their first year in the wild, according to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. That’s a dramatic increase since 1963, when bald eagles were an endangered species, largely due to pesticides. Just 417 nesting pairs were known to exist. In 2020, government studies found there were an estimated 316,700 eagles nesting in the Lower 48 states.

Jackie has had a troubled track record with her eggs.

“Only three of her 13 eggs have resulted in fledglings leaving the nest,” Steers said.

“It would take an autopsy on the eggs to figure out why [they didn’t hatch],” she added. “Last year, ravens ended up getting the two eggs she laid. They hadn’t developed at all after 40 days, so perhaps they froze early in their development, or they weren’t fertilized.”

The Big Bear eagle pair have been together in their six-foot nest since 2018, when Jackie’s former mate, “Mr. B,” was chased away by Shadow, Steers said.

“When Shadow started coming to the nest, he stood his ground and wouldn’t leave,” she said. “He’s been a loving mate to Jackie ever since.”

The couple have been spotted tenderly nibbling each other’s beaks during breeding season, Steers said, and Shadow will often bring sticks and lay them on top of Jackie while she’s sitting on her eggs.

In some ways, they are similar to human couples.

“They have lots of personality and they also argue a lot,” she said. “It’s no wonder people love them.”