

Recent Eagle Nesting History at Royal Botanical Gardens

Eagles have always been seen as migrants at Cootes Paradise and historically nested there, however no nests were recorded in the 20th century. The 21st century ushered in a change. Starting in 2004 young eagles were regularly seen making a living within the RBG marsh areas. The first attempt at nesting at RBG was in Cootes Paradise Nature Sanctuary property in 2008, but the nest was not successful. Successful nesting finally occurred in 2013 with two chicks fledged. Since that time the local eagle population has continued to rise with both adults and juvenile birds regularly seen.



June 2022

Eagles have successfully fledged two young! The eaglets will continue to feed by the adults for the rest of summer and will continue to be in the area of the nest. The nest was a new nest in a pine tree well into the untrailed nature reserve area—and not visible. The birds themselves are visible with binoculars flying in the general area of Cootes Paradise. Please remain on RBG trails and respect the privacy of these beautiful birds!

June 2021

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June 2020

Eagles have successfully fledged one young! The eaglets will continue to feed by the adults for the rest of summer and will continue to be in the area of the nest. The nest is the same nest as 2018, about 1000 feet west of the Marsh Boardwalk —well into the untrailed nature reserve area—and is visible with the naked eye. The birds themselves are visible with binoculars. Please remain on RBG trails and respect the privacy of these beautiful birds!

June 2019

Eagles have successfully fledged two young! The eaglets will continue to feed by the adults for the rest of summer and will continue to be in the area of the nest. The nest is the same nest as 2018, about 1000 feet west of the Marsh Boardwalk —well into the untrailed nature

reserve area—and is visible with the naked eye. The birds themselves are visible with binoculars. Please remain on RBG trails and respect the privacy of these beautiful birds!

May 2018

The eagles remained all winter but chose to relocate the nest to yet another new tree (#5) over a kilometer from the 2017 tree. They have returned to the original nesting area in the Hopkins Wood Special Protection Area of Cootes Paradise. The new tree is again a large White Pine overlooking marsh and is easily visible from the Marsh Boardwalk, and just two trees over from the 2013 nest. The nest, while about 0.5km from the boardwalk is easily visible, and binoculars allow clear viewing of the birds. Trail access to the boardwalk is available by parking at the Arboretum and following the nature trails. Trail maps are available online, and trailheads include large maps of the area. One eaglet is in the nest.

April 2017

The eagles remained all winter but chose to relocate the nest to a new tree over a kilometer away from the past nesting area. The new tree is again a large White Pine overlooking Cootes Paradise Marsh, but this time adjacent to the Spencer Creek Special Protection Area on the south side of the marsh. The nest was remarkably close to the urban area. Ultimately the nest was abandoned by mid-April. It is unknown if the significant change in location and ultimate abandonment of the nest was due to a loss of one of the adults and a new pair bond attempting their first nest, or if human disruption in the area drove them away.

June 2016

Once again, two eaglets have fledged from the nest at Cootes Paradise, taking flight during the first week in July. The eaglets are expected to remain around the marsh until September, at which point their parents will send them off to find their own territory. The total fledged over the past four years is now up to 8 eaglets.

February 2016

The eagles have again remained all winter and have chosen to use the 2014 & 2015 nest tree again. The tree is a large White Pine overlooking Spencer Creek in the Hopkins Woods Special Protection Area. Eggs are suspected to have been laid in mid-February. The nest site is hidden, and can only be viewed from the water (canoe/kayak), or by looking north across the marsh from the Chegwin Trail, however its large size (estimated at 6ft wide x 4ft high) makes it easily visible from a distance without the aid of binoculars.

June 2015

Once again, two eaglets have fledged from the nest at Cootes Paradise, taking flight during the last week in June. The eaglets are expected to remain around the marsh until September, at which point their parents will send them off to find their own territory. The total fledged over the past three years is now up to 6 eaglets.

February 2015

The eagles have again remained all winter, and have chosen to use the 2014 nest tree again, a large white Pine overlooking Spencer Creek in the Hopkins Woods Special Protection Area. The nest has been substantially enlarged from 2014. The nest site is hidden, and can only be viewed from the water (canoe/Kayak), or by looking north across the marsh from the Chegwin Trail, however its large size (estimated at 6ft wide x 3.5ft high) makes it easily visible from a distance without the aid of binoculars.

June 2014

For the second year in a row, two eaglets are fledged from the nest at Cootes Paradise, taking flight during the second week in June. The eaglets are expected to remain around the marsh until September, at which point their parents will send them off to find their own territory.

Feb 2014

The eagles have chosen to build in yet another tree, another large white Pine overlooking Spencer Creek in the Hopkins Woods Special Protection Area. Eggs were actively being incubated as of the end of February. The nest site is hidden, and can only be viewed from the water (canoe/Kayak), or by looking north across the marsh from the Chegwin Trail.

June 2013 - Eaglets Fly

After 11 weeks in the nest, the two eaglets hatched in March on the shores of Cootes Paradise Marsh have taken to the air. Eaglets can fledge as early as nine weeks after hatching, or as late as 12 weeks. Early in the morning of Wednesday, June 5, no eaglets were seen in the nest, indicating that they had taken to the air. After a number of hours of monitoring both eaglets were observed in flight for a short time, with one returning from the south side of the marsh and the other circling from near the nest area. Each was accompanied by a parent, and both landed in a tree hidden from view behind the nest tree. The eaglets are now adult size, but easily differentiated from the parents by their brown plumage and mottled underwings. The trademark white head and tail feathers will not appear until they reach maturity at four to five years of age. The two young will remain around the marsh and be looked after by the parents until they are adequately skilled in both steady flight as well as catching fish. A recent photograph indicates that the white mottling on the two young birds is unique enough to separate the two. This photograph reflects the typical view a visitor will see, the birds perched on easy to land on large dead tree along



the shores of Cootes Paradise Marsh. A visit by canoe or kayak will offer the best chance to catch a glimpse of the birds during the summer season. Currently a public naming contest is being considering by RBG

March 2013 - First Day of Spring Brings Baby Bald Eagles

After several years of nesting attempts the bald eagles of Cootes Paradise Nature Sanctuary have managed to hatch young. The first eaglet was noted during monitoring of the nest site on March 22, 2013, with a second observed on March 23. The nest has been monitored weekly from the nearby trail since the eagles were first spotted on the nest back in mid-February. Given the egg incubation time of about 35 days it is entirely possible egg was laid on Valentine's Day. At present it is unknown how many eggs are in the nest. The nest, located in [the Hopkins Woods Special Protection Area](#) can be viewed at a safe distance, from the Marshwalk Boardwalk, accessed from the RBG Arboretum. These are the first bald eagles to be hatched on the shores of Lake Ontario since bald eagle populations throughout North America collapsed decades ago. The hatching of the eaglets not only coincides with spring but also a fresh supply of fish to eat in Cootes Paradise Marsh, with the Cootes Paradise Fishway also beginning operation the same week. The Cootes Paradise Fishway allows fish into Cootes Paradise Marsh each season while excluding carp from entering. Operation begins once the ice melts from the marsh. The melting of the ice and elevated river flows triggers the spring migration of spawning fish into the shallows from Lake Ontario. The Fishway is open to the public during [operating times](#), and is accessed from RBG's Princess Point parking lot and a short walk along the waterfront trail.

February 2013

As of mid-February the eagles have again taken up residence in the nesting platform constructed in a white pine in 2009. The eagles were noted as on the nest, and likely sitting on eggs during a helicopter survey for deer on Feb. 13 by the Ministry of Natural Resources. The platform tree is located on the east side of a large ridge and is about 300m into the woods west of the MarshWalk boardwalk, and is fortunately observable from the boardwalk about halfway along this boardwalk. Optimism is high that the birds will finally successfully hatch some young in 2013. The estimated hatching date is the last week of March.

August 2012 - Empty Nest

Biodiversity Programs staff visited the Eagles nest this past summer and found that the eagles, not surprisingly, have a remarkable view of Cootes Paradise Marsh, however there was no indication of eggs or any materials that might be associated with a nesting eagle, only a an old plastic water bottle and a carp skeleton. The eagles continue to be seen at Cootes Paradise Marsh, and we are ever



hopeful that spring may bring a successful nest.

May 2012

Again this year the bald eagles have given up on the nest, but continue to be seen around the Hopkins Wood Special Protection Area on the north side of Cootes Paradise, as well as regularly cruising across Burlington Heights to Hamilton Harbour. The RBG will be working with the Southern Ontario Bald Eagle Project Team in an attempt to determine what issues may be limiting the breeding success of the birds. The George North and Marshwalk platforms provide the best opportunities to see the birds. Similar trails providing additional vantage points include Chegwin Trail and Sassafras Point Trail, accessed from the South side of the Cootes Paradise Sanctuary. Canoeing in Cootes Paradise provides a different vantage point, with a launch available from Princess Point.

March 2012 – Time to Settle Down?

The eagles have relocated their nest this year, and have taken up residence in the nesting platform constructed in a white pine in 2009. As of March 7 the eagles are sitting on the nest, with mating activity observed two weeks previous. This nest site/platform tree is much more wind sheltered than the 2011 nest site, with the platform tree located on the east side of a large ridge. This location undoubtedly served them well during the previous weekends 90+km/hr west wind gusts. This location is about 300m from the MarshWalk boardwalk, and is observable from both the Marshwalk Platform as well as from a position about halfway along the boardwalk. Optimism is high that the two now fully mature birds will successfully hatch some young in 2012. The estimated hatching date is the second week of April.

January 2012 – A Year for Optimism

Staff at RBG are filled with optimism and anticipation when it comes to 2012, the eagles and nest success. Both birds have continued to remain at Cootes Paradise throughout 2011 and have continued to work on the nest, and more importantly, another year older and fully mature. Sightings of eagles are regularly made by visitors and staff, most commonly from the north shore trails of Cootes Paradise, particularly the Marsh Boardwalk Platform, as well as from Burlington Heights near the Rock Garden. The birds regularly travel between Cootes Paradise and Hamilton Harbour, perhaps on a daily basis, a range of about 10km and so a little luck is required to encounter the birds. However with ice eliminating much of the open water in Cootes Paradise Marsh, we anticipate the eagles will be spending an increasing amount of time hunting waterfowl in the waters that remain open in Hamilton Harbour, lower Spencer Creek and around the Cootes Paradise Fishway.

2011 – Oh, So Close

The eagles spent considerable time working the nest, but ultimately with no success. The reason for this is not yet known, but it is suspected that the young male wasn't quite mature enough. It looks like it will be a wait until 2012 for Lake Ontario's first home grown birds in decades. Cootes Paradise Marsh now has plenty of fish to feed the eagles, and they will be busy hunting the marsh for the season. Thanks to restoration efforts of Project Paradise, and an up close look at the fish is possible at the Fishway. The nest (in a solitary white pine) is

located on the north shore of Cootes Paradise, about 400m directly west of the Marshwalk Observation Platform, with the nest tree set in the middle of the Hopkins Wood Special Protection Area.

2009 – A Room with a View

In March 2009, conservation staff with assistance of a local tree management company built a platform in a 100-foot-tall white pine in the hopes that the eagles would make the space their own, modify it into a full-fledged aerie, move in, set up house and raise a family. After all that, the eagles picked a tree two doors over and built their own pad. Go figure. Still the main thing is they're nesting, and we hope that leads to the next logical step.



To see our bald eagles nesting territory from a distance that doesn't disturb them, travel to the Arboretum and Nature Sanctuary, located on the north shore of Cootes Paradise Marsh. Observation points include Bull's Point Tower, George North Tower, and the Marsh Boardwalk. Trail maps area available at the Nature Center and the RBG Centre.

Background – Bald Eagles and Lake Ontario

The Ontario Natural Heritage Information Centre (NHIC) has historical records of Bald Eagle nesting at five sites in the Canadian portion of Lake Ontario, all in the eastern basin, and none more recent than 1955. From oldest to most recent, the general locations and last year of nesting are: Simcoe Island, Frontenac Co. (1900), Point Traverse, Prince Edward Co. (1930), Timber Island, Prince Edward Co. (1938), Horseshoe Island, Frontenac Co. (1952), and Amherst Island, Lennox & Addington Co. (1955). Aside from the breeding site in the Thousand Islands (location technically in the Lake Ontario basin), there was no evidence of breeding anywhere on the Lake Ontario shoreline in Ontario during either the first (1981-1985) or second (2001-2005) Ontario breeding bird atlases. Along the New York shoreline of Lake Ontario seven nests were known historically, all but two of these in the eastern basin, and none of these active more recently than 1955. During the most recent New York State breeding bird atlas (2000-2005) Bald Eagle was confirmed breeding at only a single site on the shores of Lake Ontario: on or near the Point Peninsula, Jefferson Co. Bald Eagle had not been detected breeding anywhere on Lake Ontario during the first New York atlas (1980-85).