

JUST A WASTE OF SPACE:

Destruction of the Bald Eagle nest on Croydon Drive, Surrey and the debate about the value of wild spaces in our urban environments.



The fallen Croydon Bald Eagle Nest Tree – and why the “Outrage”

*“.... you don't know what you've got 'til its gone.
They paved paradise and put up a parking lot.”
Joni Mitchell*

Background. *The Croydon Eagle Outrage!*

The recent destruction of a Bald Eagle nest at Croydon Drive in Surrey, is not a minor issue raised by a bunch of tree huggers who are out of touch with modern economic realities. This is a vital question for anyone living in a growing urban environment. If you want to live in a place that enriches your life with green spaces and wild animals, then your voice must be raised in protest. Silence from citizens allows the spurious arguments of efficiency and density to guide city growth, resulting in profits for a few and a soulless concrete jungle of high-rises and endless malls for the many.

We still have wild areas that can be saved from development and protected for future generations but urgent action is needed now. If citizens become involved then that loud voice will help persuade decision makers to avoid short term gains in favour of more enlightened far sighted policies. This short review is intended to provide interested citizens essential background knowledge concerning urban wildlife and their need for protected living space. It uses the destruction of the Croydon Drive nest as a perfect example of the results of unregulated development driven by nothing other than a desire for more money.

Effects of the Croydon Drive nest vandalism.

Bald Eagles mate for life and this particular pair had built and maintained a large nest in a Cottonwood tree near Croydon Drive in Surrey that had stood for at least 10 years. By the time of its destruction, the nest had likely grown to a weight around 300 pounds. It was easily visible from Highway 99 and was well known to local residents. On 24 July, it was reported that the trunk had been severely damaged by recent deep chain saw cuts. The tree had not been completely cut down but the trunk had been so badly damaged that the tree, and its nest, had to be felled for safety. No permits had been issued for the removal of the tree so this act of thoughtless destruction contravened the Wildlife Act and was clearly illegal. It is not yet known who instigated and carried out this act of vandalism.

Each breeding season, local observers watched as the pair mated, hatched and then raised, at least two new chicks. The first flight of the new chicks was anticipated every year and made a memorable sight for all observers. Over its life span, the mating pair had likely raised over 20 chicks. Unfortunately, if a nest is invaded, the pair will often fail to return so that unbroken line may have come to an end. This act is wrong at so many levels that it is difficult to know where to start. Apart from the simple illegality of the vandalism, there is the loss of healthy chicks needed to rebuild eagle populations that are still recovering from the decimation caused by DDT. There is also the less quantifiable but still very real loss to local people whose daily glimpse of wild nature enhanced their urban lives. No-one who has seen free flying Bald Eagles will forget the experience.

Necessary background information on Bald Eagles.

It is not widely appreciated how many wild animals have now moved into urban areas. Many are familiar with racoons, skunks and coyotes but the full list is much longer. If you look carefully in any large wild area in the Lower Mainland (particularly those near a pond), it is common to see beavers, otters, and unusual bird species such as Peregrine falcons, Owls and other raptors. These animals allow us to maintain our awareness and connection with the wilderness that is so easy to forget during our frantic modern lives. Anyone who has seen an eagle or otter during a weekend stroll in the park, will remember that sight. Urban wildlife, and the remaining wild spaces they inhabit, are immeasurably valuable additions to our lives and must be protected.

Bald Eagles are no exception to this wildlife migration to urban areas. When local biologist, David Hancock, first started studying eagles over 50 years ago, he could only find one single nest in the whole Lower Mainland. After DDT was banned in 1973, this picture changed steadily. There are now dozens of active nests across Delta and Surrey with more adventurous eagle pairs turning up in surprising places. For

example, there is an active nesting pair on East Hastings, right next door to the crowds at the PNE – just look upwards next time you are queuing for a ticket.

The breeding cycle usually starts in October when the parents return after a short migration up the coast to Alaska following salmon runs. They repair their nests and then settle in for winter. Timing varies but eggs are laid in February and March, then hatched 35 days later. Chicks grow rapidly and are the size of their parents in only 3 months. Youngsters take their first flight in late July then they, and their parents, leave the nest separately for Alaska, only to return in October to begin the process again. Trying to understand the mentality of someone who could break this ancient and unknowable mystery with a chain saw, is an impossibility.

While eagles have moved into town, they are still very wary of humans. Since their nests can grow to the size and weight of a VW Beetle, they need strong trees. These are in short supply – the Cottonwood that was destroyed at Croydon Drive was the only suitable tree in that area so any nest replacement strategy will have to be based on an artificial platform. They need to be close to water plus a food source and, above all, they should be left undisturbed.

Recommended actions.

Any response to the vandalism of the Croydon nest must be based on a good understanding of Bald Eagle biology. As noted above, if eagles are to nest and breed successfully, there are some basic requirements that must be met. The most important of these is that any rebuilding efforts must be completed before the birds return in early October. If they see human activity where their nest used to be, it is unlikely that they will stay in the area so a sense of urgency is essential. Our recommended responses to the loss of the Croydon nest are as follows:

- Politicians need to hear a loud voice from citizens. This link to the Hancock Foundation website [\[\[LINK\]](#), leads to further information such as contact addresses for local politicians plus a petition where people can register their outrage about the nest destruction.
- Eagles have used the current site for a decade so access to water and food presumably meets their needs. Privacy remains an issue, so we are asking people to join together to insist that a protected eagle reserve is established in the undeveloped Croydon Drive space of at least 10 acres. The buffer area around the new nest will need to be replanted with suitable vegetation.
- The proposed eagle reserve must be free of future development. No new laws are needed – it is simply necessary to enforce the Wildlife Act that already exists.
- There are no suitable trees in that area so nest rehabilitation will require significant investment to cover the cost of erecting an 80 foot support pole topped by an artificial nest

Respectfully,
Dr. Mike Seear

Map to Croydon >>>



Map of how to get to the Croydon Eagle Outrage gathering September 9, 2PM ,



Artificial pole in Richmond BC in 2018 with 2 young – a project of the Hancock Wildlife Foundation.

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