

FACT SHEET

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BALD EAGLES IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO

During the early years of this century Bald Eagles nested commonly along the shoreline of Lake Erie and near rivers and streams throughout the entire region.

In the 1940's a significant change was taking place with eagle reproduction. Nesting success decreased dramatically. Scientific studies indicated that pesticide build-up within the bodies of the parent birds was causing egg and eggshell abnormalities resulting in almost no production of young. As old pairs died off with no replacements within the local population, the loss of nest sites was evident. Today there are only five active Bald Eagle nests in all of southwestern Ontario.

In recent years the Ministry of Natural Resources has taken an active roll in monitoring the remaining Bald Eagle nests in Southwestern Ontario. Since 1960 only three young eagles have been raised in Elgin County.

THE JONES-PORT TALBOT NEST = *Mrs Mrs Lyle Jones on the 10th
Concession Township of Amwick*

About 1983 some sticks appeared in the top of a slender beech tree in the Jones woodlot. For the next two years a pair of Bald Eagles worked on the building of this nest. Late in the winter of 1986 activity around the nest increased and it became evident that the pair were becoming serious about nesting. The female did in fact lay at least one egg and proceeded to incubate. Expectations ran high when a small head appeared above the nest at feeding time during late April. These hopes were dashed by an act of nature during a violent storm that cut a swath through the nest areas on the afternoon of May 6th and blew the young eagle out of the nest. The young bird was killed from the fall. On a positive note, efforts by MNR biologist to have the young analyzed for pesticides revealed that the pesticide levels have been significantly reduced since the 1970's.

The adult eagles returned in 1987 and successfully raised one young. On December 15th 1987 another tragedy occurred at this ill-fated nest. A severe windstorm removed about half of the nesting material, leaving the nest looking quite lop-sided. Both adult eagles were observed in the trees near the nest on Christmas Day and have appeared from time to time during most of the winter.

Nest rebuilding was observed around February 15, 1988. The eagles were successful in rearing one young in 1988 which was observed with the adults until late fall. The nest has been topped up during late winter of 1988-89 and at the time of this release, March 15th, the female is incubating again. With the cooperation of the landowners, the general public and a break from nature itself, perhaps more healthy young eaglets will be produced at this nest site and successfully placed into the wild.

Nesting adult eagles are solitary in nature. They will not tolerate human interference at nesting time. Consequently we are requesting that everyone stay a safe distance away. Through the courtesy of landowners Lyle and Mary Jones, we invite you to enjoy the rare experience of watching from the roadside, Bald Eagles in their natural setting.

With the aid of eagle management techniques, reduction of pesticides in the environment and a greater appreciation of eagles by the general public, we hope to reclaim some of the former populations for the enjoyment of future generations.

Author: M. Field
Hawk Cliff Raptor Banding Association

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Dave Ward
Lands and Mineral
Resources Supervisor
Aylmer District
Ministry of Natural Resources
353 Talbot St. W.
Aylmer, Ont.
N5H 2S8
Telephone: 519-773-9241

Pud Hunter
District Biologist
Aylmer District
Ministry of Natural Resources
353 Talbot St. W.
Aylmer, Ont.
N5H 2S8
Telephone: 519-773-9241

The nest tree at Essex County Site 1 has been in an advanced state of decay so it was not possible to climb and examine the contents of the nest. A first for the Ministry of Natural Resources eagle monitoring and management program was the decision to erect an artificial nesting platform in a nearby tree. The platform with some base nest material was put in place on October 3, 1988. The entire project was achieved through the cooperation of the nest site landowner, the Hawk Cliff Raptor Bander Association, Ontario Hydro (Western Region), and the ministry of Natural Resources Aylmer and Chatham District & Regional office. The ultimate goal here would be to have this pair of eagles transfer their nesting activities to this new platform before or after their present nest is lost due to decaying support limbs.



The Bald Eagle population of Southern Ontario is still extremely fragile. These minor population increases are hopefully a reflection of a gradual improvement in the environment of the Lake Erie community.

Involved members of the Hawk Cliff Association have expressed their satisfaction with the Ministry's cooperative program thus far. They wish to inform the public that the nest site locations are protected to assist the eagle's nesting cycle.

Protection of eagle nests are everyone's concern. The Port Talbot bald eagle nest site has an interpretative viewing program co-hosted by the landowner, Ministry of Natural Resources, St. Thomas Field Naturalists, and the Hawk Cliff Association for public viewing of the eagles without interference of the nesting cycle. The safe interpretative, viewing principles used there, apply to all other nest sites.



Resources Report • Rapport sur les ressources

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BALD EAGLES OF SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO

Welcome to the Talbot Creek-Jones-Nest Site. This is one of nine active bald eagle nests in southwestern Ontario (Table 1, attached). It is a site that, the Ministry of Natural Resources Aylmer district (OMNR) with the consent of the landowners Lyle and Mary Jones in cooperation with club members of the St. Thomas Field Naturalists and Hawk Cliff Raptor Banding Station; offers interpretative viewing opportunities to the public of bald eagle nesting behaviour.

A BRIEF HISTORY

At the beginning of this century an estimated 35 pairs or 70 adult eagles nested throughout southwestern Ontario. In the 1940's pesticide and metal pollutions began building up in southwestern Ontario's ecosystem. The pollution residues accumulated in adult eagles causing eggshell thinning abnormalities and resulted in a dramatic population decline.

By 1980 the remaining population of four adults had zero production of young at their two active nest sites.

Unfortunately, this story's experience was repeated in other bald eagle populations throughout the Great Lake basin in Canada and United States.

During these declining eagle population trends, governments throughout North America instituted laws prohibiting such unfriendly environmental chemicals as DDT, PCB or mercury and laws regulating indiscriminate use of industrially needed chemicals. As well, the bald eagle was given special status considerations by governments as exemplified in 1973 when Ontario declared the species "endangered" under the provincial Endangered Species Act. The Act gave Ontario bald eagles special species and habitat protection considerations.

In the early 1980's a residue decline was noted in eagle egg analysis for some chemicals such as DDT and mercury.

With an apparent improvement in some of the environment's habitat, eagle reproduction showed signs of increasing. This was best demonstrated in Elgin County when in 1983 after 15 years of no production an eaglet was hatched and fledged.

That year OMNR initiated its Southwestern Region (SWR) Bald Eagle Rehabilitation Project through its Community Wildlife Involvement Program (CWIP).

CWIP encourages active and voluntary public participation in wildlife management. Through the 1980's CWIP developed to include many volunteers participating locally and internationally in its eagle rehabilitation project. Today's volunteers include:

- . eight landowners monitoring nine southwestern Ontario nest sites,
- . sponsor groups:
 - Hawk Cliff Raptor Banding Station
 - St. Thomas Field Naturalists
 - Lake Erie Salmon and Trout Club
 - West Elgin Naturalist Club
- . Ontario Hydro Western Region, London Office and Essex Area Office
- . Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto: Departments of Ornithology, Mammalogy, Herpetology and Ichthyology (respectively the study of birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles, fish)
- . Canadian Wildlife Service, London and Hull Quebec
- . International Joint Commission, Windsor
- . Great Lakes Institute, Windsor
- . United States Federal Fish and Wildlife Service
- . United States Michigan State University

However, the good news about the increased hatching of eagle eggs gave way to a new unknown issue that had been previously hidden by the DDT residues. The new issue was an abnormally high occurrence of biological deformities in water dependent wildlife populations in the Great Lake Basin. Most noticeable to scientists were waterbirds containing high pesticide - PCB type chemicals.

Due to their sensitivity to contaminants as well as their ecological position as top wildlife predator in the Great Lake Basin ecosystem's food chain, bald eagles are now being considered as indicators of environmental health for the Great Lake Basin.

As of the 1990 season, the known SWR population has remained along the north shore of Lake Erie and continued to increase to nine active nest sites (Table 1, attached). The most recent addition was the building in 1990 of a nest in Haldimand Norfolk County in a historic eagle nest site woodlot. It is noteworthy that there was an active nest in the same woodlot during the 1950's. In an attempt to protect the 1950's nest site, the particular nest tree was purchased by the Federation of Ontario Naturalist. Although the new nest was completed in March 1990 there was no evidence of egg laying.

After three consecutive years of nest failure and continued tree top decomposition, Essex County Nest Site # 1 came back into production in 1990.

Regular observers at this site suggested that there had been an adult change during 1989-90 season. Eagle researchers indicate that this nesting behaviour ('on - off - and on again production after an adult change') is characteristic to other Great Lake populations that have accumulated high pesticide residues in their bodies. After the single young had successfully left the nest, an August 1990 windstorm caused the decayed tree top with the nest to snap off and fall to the ground.

Concerned about this type of an event happening, OMNR in October 1988 in cooperation with the landowner, Ontario Hydro Western Region and Essex Area Offices and the Hawk Cliff Raptor Banding Station placed an artificial nesting platform in a suitable adjoining tree. After the 1990 blowdown, a visit to the site in September revealed that the eagles had initiated nest construction on the platform. At the time of this release a new nest had been fully constructed on CWIP's first artificial platform. It appears that artificial nest structures can play a role in bald eagle management.

TALBOT CREEK-JONES-NEST SITE

For a second consecutive year, this active nest did not produce young in 1990. Both adults did nest repair and remained on site into April. After abandoning, the adults continued infrequent visits to the site through the summer. Other nest site histories, such as Essex County Nest Site # 1, indicate that it is not uncommon for pairs to be out of production for a few years before returning, perhaps after a mate change to nesting success.

Nesting adult eagles are usually solitary in nature. Human interference, especially when eggs are being incubated, could cause nesting failure. Consequently, we request that everyone stay a safe distance away. Through the courtesy of landowners Lyle and Mary Jones, we invite you to enjoy the rare experience of watching from the roadside, bald eagles in their natural setting.



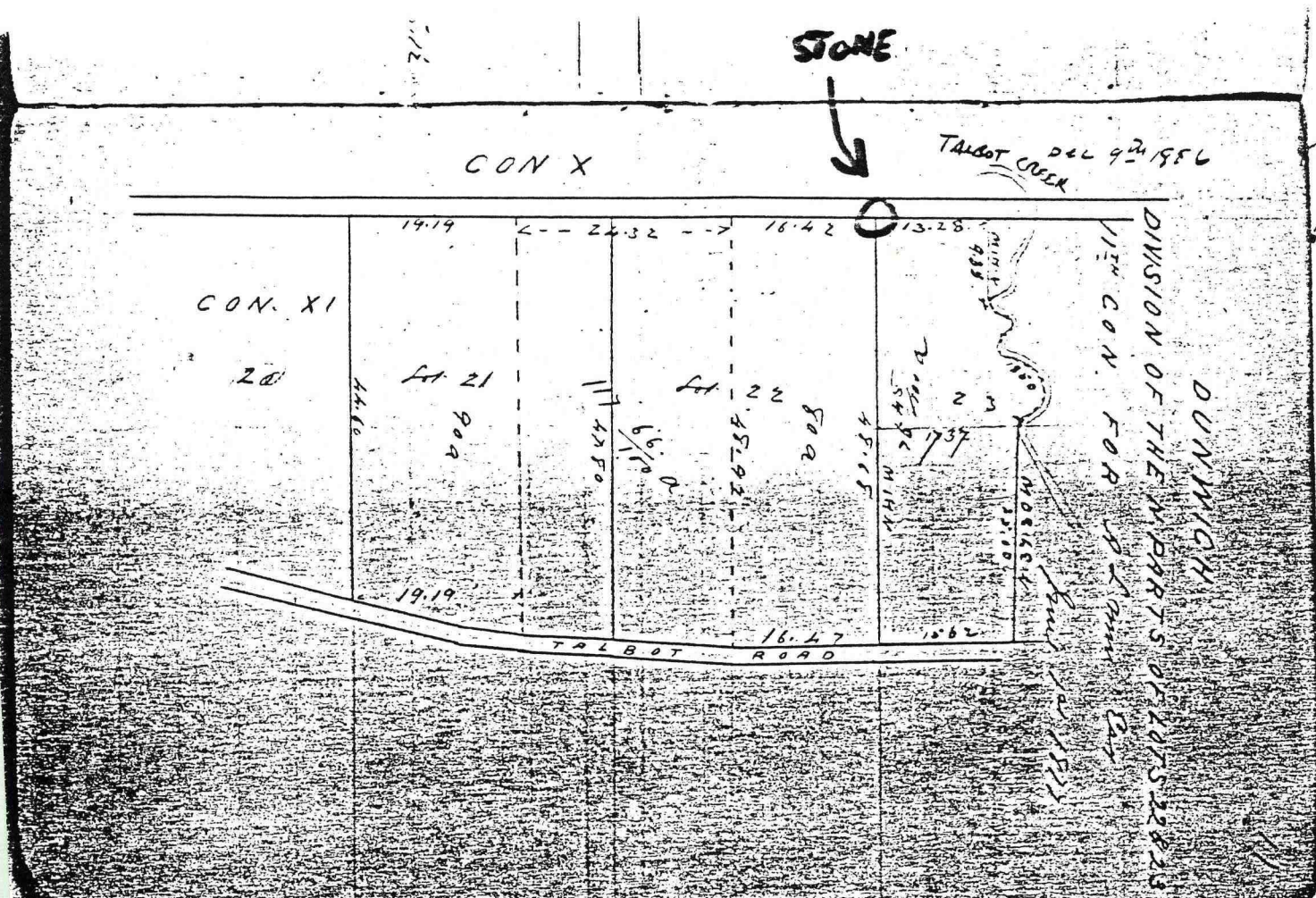
Two Bald Eagles
at their nest.

Jones - Nest Site on the 10th
Concession Township of Lennoxville.
Photo taken by Bob Gun in 1987.



"John Stone" (Corner ^{Stone}) 1877.
 Was put into ^{the} ground, to
 survey 2 lots of Land.
 This Stone is on Herle Lunn
 Farm on Fingal Road.

Photo taken Oct 27/1988 by
 Helen Van Breuk.



- COPY OF ORIGINAL NOTES BY JAMES A. BELL
 JUNE 1st 1877 BOOK #3 PAGE 1
- DISTANCES IN CHAINS
- SURVEY ALSO FOR LOT 23 ON DEC. 9th 1886.
 ON THIS NOTE PAPER