

# Stanley Park Great Blue Heronry Annual Report 2013

December  
2013



Close portrait of a Pacific great blue heron. Photo by Martin Passchier

Although it has been months since the young herons of Stanley Park fully fledged and departed in preference of better feeding grounds, SPES is taking this chance to give you one last report of the herons before their return in late February/early March 2014. Some major events at the colony this year included disturbances from filming crews, marathons and - most of all - opportunistic bald eagles feasting on young herons. Overall, despite these perils, we are glad to report that the fledgling population continues to rebound from lows we have seen in previous.

To learn more about the Stanley Park Ecology Society's heron monitoring program please check our website for more information:  
[stanleyparkecology.ca/conservation/urban-wildlife/herons/](http://stanleyparkecology.ca/conservation/urban-wildlife/herons/)



A bald eagle at the Stanley Park heronry. Photo by Martin Passchier

### Associative Nesting with Bald Eagles

Normally bald eagles are one of the great blue herons' fiercest predators, yet roughly 70% of all nests in the Fraser Valley and Lower Mainland are within 200 m of an active bald eagle nest (Butler et al., 2012). Could it be that herons actually benefit from nesting in close proximity to bald eagle nests? Recently published research focused on heron colonies in

the Fraser Valley and Lower Mainland shows a strong correlation between nesting success and association with nearby bald eagles (Butler et al, 2012). By both observing and simulating bald eagle attacks, researchers noted that those bald eagles nesting within 200 m of heron colonies repeatedly showed territorial, defensive behaviours in order to deter other attacking eagles as well as other raptors.

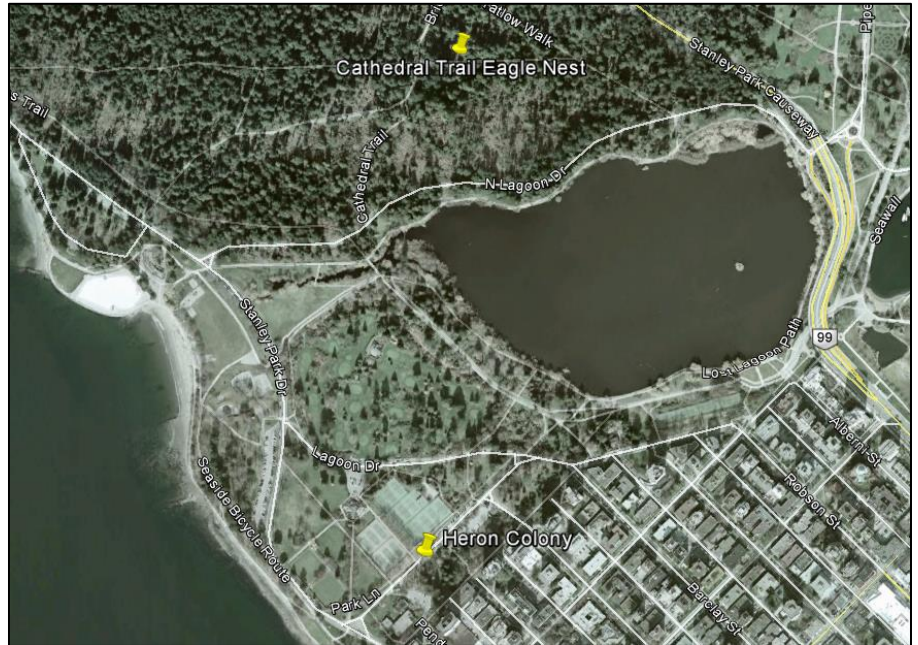
Nesting success of heron colonies located near a bald eagle nest was considerably higher than those that were not near active bald eagle nests (1.78 fledglings per nest versus 0.99 respectively in 2005 and 2006). The comparison indicates that predator protection is worth 0.5–0.7 (or 28-44% increase) fledglings per active nest. This is no small amount and is actually a phenomenon that repeats itself commonly in nature.

In 2006, an eagle nest in close proximity to a Chilliwack heron colony blew down just after herons had laid their eggs, providing a fantastic opportunity to demonstrate the effect of associative nesting. The number of successful fledglings per active nest at the Chilliwack colony decreased from 1.62 fledglings per active nest in 2005 with associative eagle nesting down to 1.11 in 2006 without the eagle nest (Butler et al, 2012).

To support ongoing heron conservation, please consider adopting a heron nest.

For more information: [stanleyparkecolony.ca/get-involved/adopt/adopt-a-heron-nest/](http://stanleyparkecolony.ca/get-involved/adopt/adopt-a-heron-nest/)

Research shows that the positive effects of associative nesting quickly dissipate when proximity is greater than 200 m (Butler, 2012). Since Stanley Park's heron colony is roughly 750 m from the nearest bald eagle nest, the Stanley Park herons presumably do not gain the advantages of associative nesting in their current location. However, it may be that its close proximity to the downtown core affords the Stanley Park heron colony a similar sort of 'protection'.



Heron colony in relation to the Cathedral Trail bald eagle nest.

### Stanley Park Heronry Results

In 2013, a total of 122 nests were counted with 81 of these nests being occupied by heron pairs throughout the season. This was the lowest number of active nests since 2007 (see Table 1). However, a subsample of 27 visible nests monitored from a nearby rooftop to assess nesting success and productivity showed that 26 of these nests produced fledglings, the highest



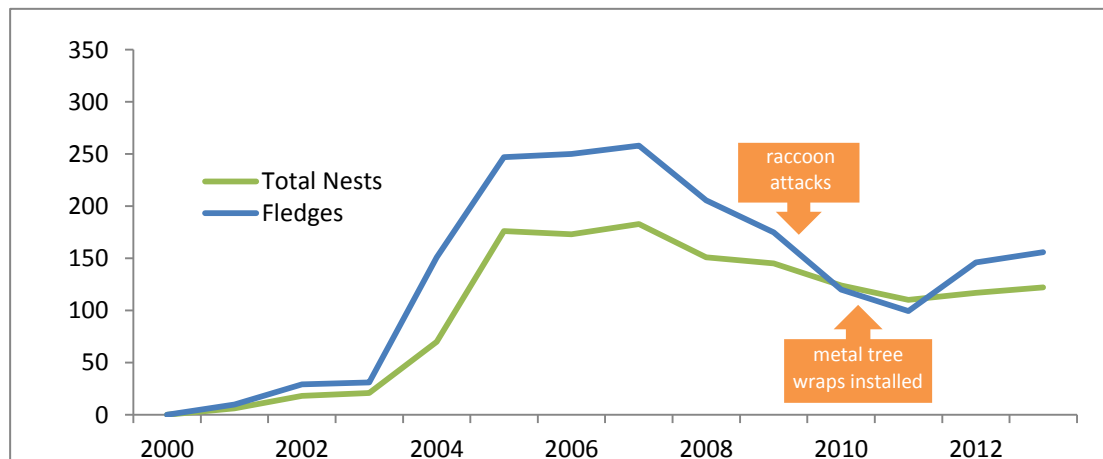
Stanley Park heron colony from afar - mid-March 2013  
Photo by: Martin Passchier

nest success rate SPES has observed thus far (from 2007 – 2013). Within these 26 nests, a total of 52 fledglings were counted towards the end of the season.

**Table 1 Number of active nests, successful nests and total number fledges from 2007 – 2013 at Stanley Park’s Heron Colony**

Year	# Active Nests	Nest Success	# of Fledges
2007	139	93%	258
2008	140	86%	206
2009	138	54%	175
2010	100	60%	120
2011	87	57%	99
2012	86	87%	146
2013	81	96%	156

In total, an estimated 156 young herons fledged in July 2013. The rebound in total number of fledges continues, producing fledges at a level more comparable to those prior to 2010 (Figure 1). It is likely that this increase in fledgling population can partly be attributed to the metal tree wraps that SPES installed in January 2010 to deter raccoons from climbing the trees and eating heron eggs. Our observations have also revealed that the herons have become adept at re-laying clutches of eggs taken by eagles; sometimes one or even two times per season.



**Figure 1 Total Number of Nests and Fledges Produced at the Stanley Park Great Blue Heron Colony 2001-2013**

Beginning in late February/early March, it is expected that the herons will return to establish nest sites and breed for their 14th year at the Stanley Park Beach Avenue location. The future is always uncertain, however, so cross your fingers that they are still fond of this site and will grace us with their presence for another year.

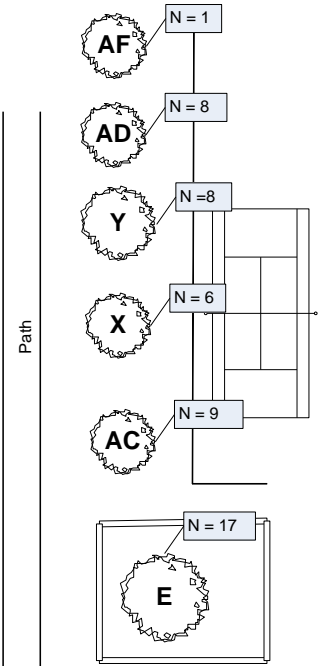
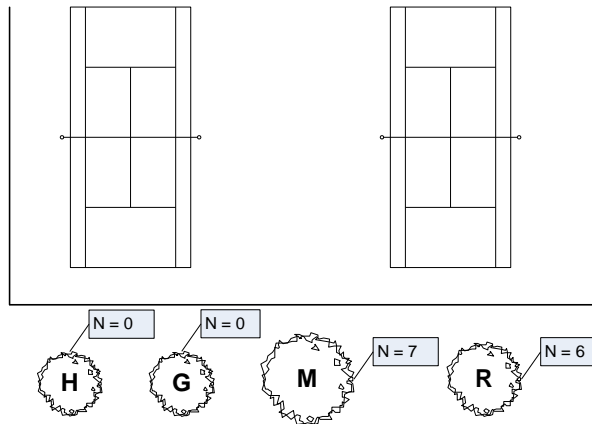
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More information: [www.stanleyparkecology.ca](http://www.stanleyparkecology.ca)

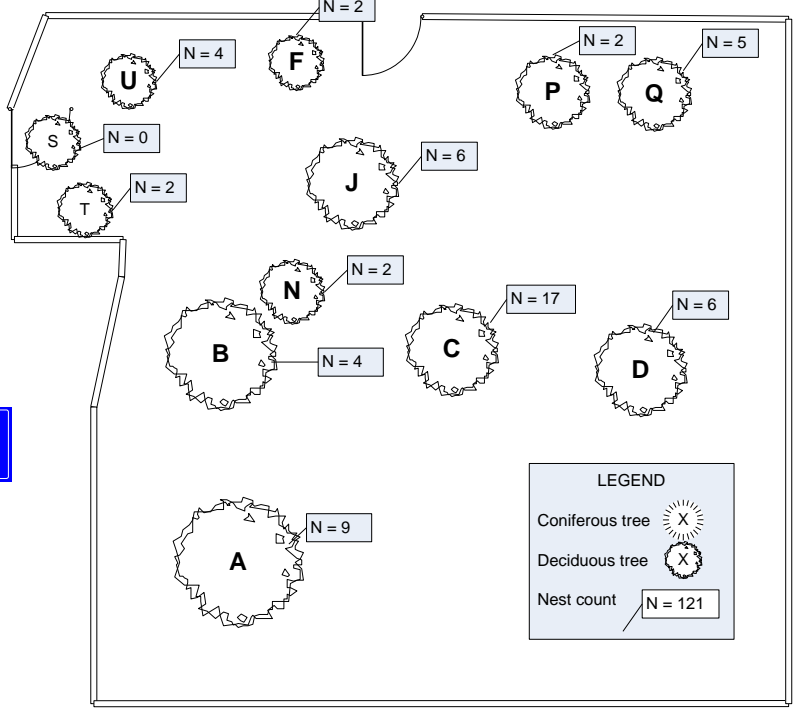
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STANLEY PARK HERONRY 24 April 2013

DIAGRAM NOT TO SCALE



Stanley Park Drive



**LEGEND**

- Coniferous tree
- Deciduous tree
- Nest count