

Stanley Park Heronry Annual Report

July 2015

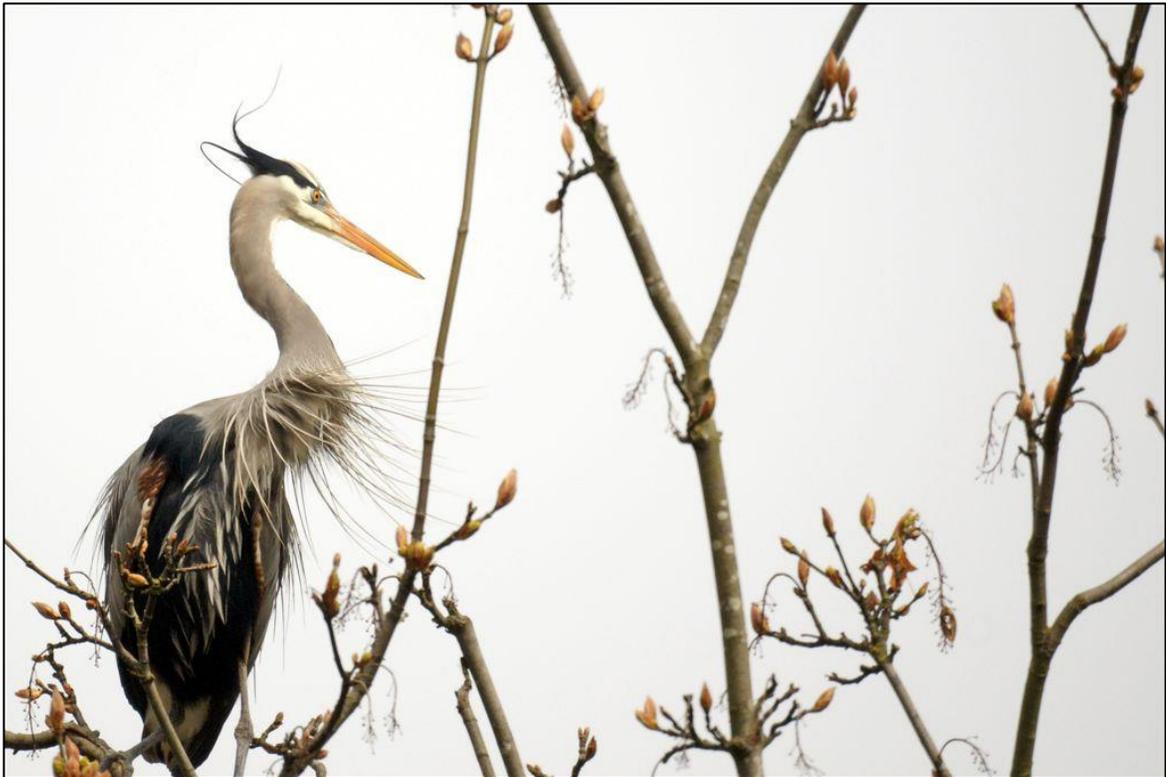


Photo: Martin Passchier

The Stanley Park great blue heron colony nesting season is almost complete as most of the young birds have fledged the nest and can now be seen congregating at nearby feeding grounds such as Iona beach and Boundary Bay.

The colony has benefitted from a productive year and an early spring, and the trees are now quiet, earlier than usual. In years with many eagle attacks, second and third nesting attempts have been common, but this season, with little pressure from the eagles, the herons have finished nesting earlier on.

This year, thanks to the Park Board's new heron camera initiative, Stanley Park Ecology Society heron monitors were able to get a closer look at several nests and watch them on a more regular basis. This also helped to test some of the

assumptions we had been making during our traditional method of monitoring the herons from a nearby rooftop. The data collected this year were from camera observations of 17 nests over 33 survey sessions, as well as observations that were made from a nearby apartment of 37 nests scattered throughout the colony during five survey sessions. Both sets of data have very similar results, which helps in validating the regular rooftop monitoring methods that have been employed since 2004.

The main difference in results between the two survey samples was in overall nest success (the number of nests that successfully produce chicks). The rooftop sample of 37 nests had a nest success of 92% while the camera sample of 17 nests had 100% success. This may be due to the fact that the camera sample nests were chosen to be featured because they were known to remain visible throughout the year, and had shown to be productive in past years. The rooftop sample, on the other hand, was made up solely of nests that would remain visible (not based on previous productivity). The productivity – number of fledglings produced per successful nest – between the two samples was identical. Both the camera and rooftop samples produced an average of 2.3 chicks per successful nest. They also both produced an average of four eggs per nest and three chicks hatched per clutch.



Herons rely on feeding grounds around Vancouver, such as Spanish Banks.

Photo:
Martin Passchier

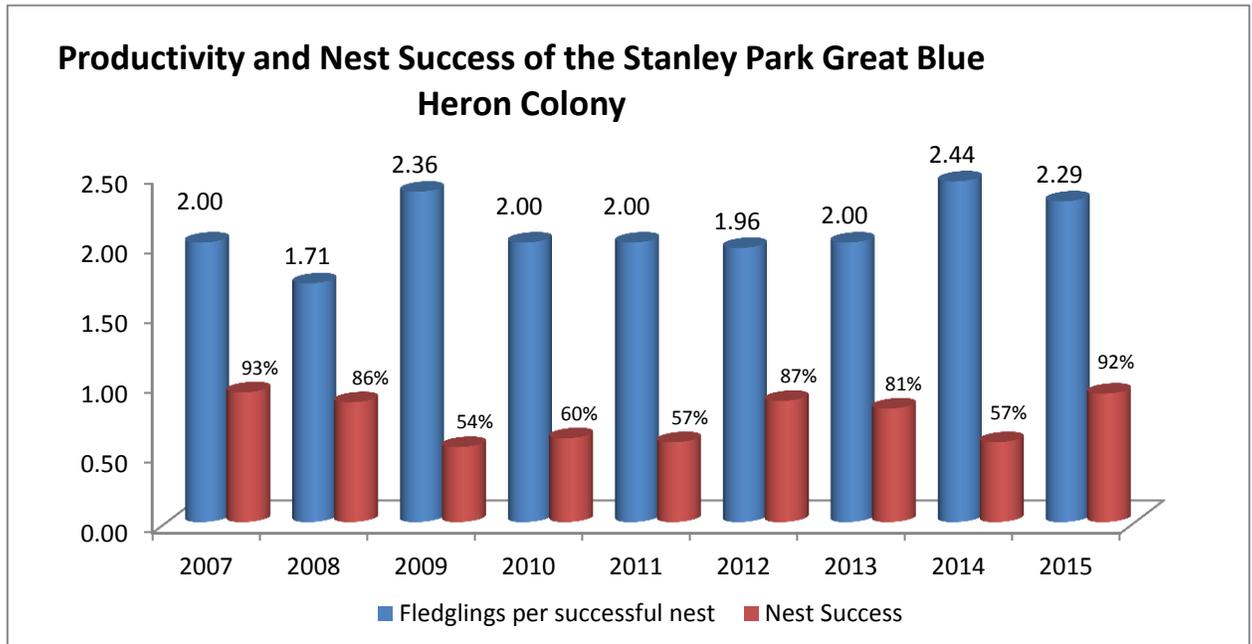


Figure 1: Productivity and nest success of the Stanley Park great blue heron colony 2007-2015.

The nest success we saw this year was the highest we have seen since 2007 (see Figure 1 - red columns). The cause for this is not certain but it could be due to the early spring weather, the reduction of predation from eagles and/or a good year for forage fish that the herons rely on. The productivity (number of eggs laid) resulted in many fledges being produced this year.

During the peak of the season there were a total of 108 nests in the trees. However, the number of active nests remained constant at 83. This is lower than the most productive times for the colony, but also consistent with the observations of the last couple of years. Based on the monitoring data, we estimate the colony produced a total of 175 fledgling herons (see figure 2 below).



This year, a branch of Tree U fell during a day of high winds. Unfortunately, it contained a nest with four chicks which all perished. It is uncommon for branches to fall like that, and Park Board forestry crews check trees regularly to ensure there are no safety concerns.

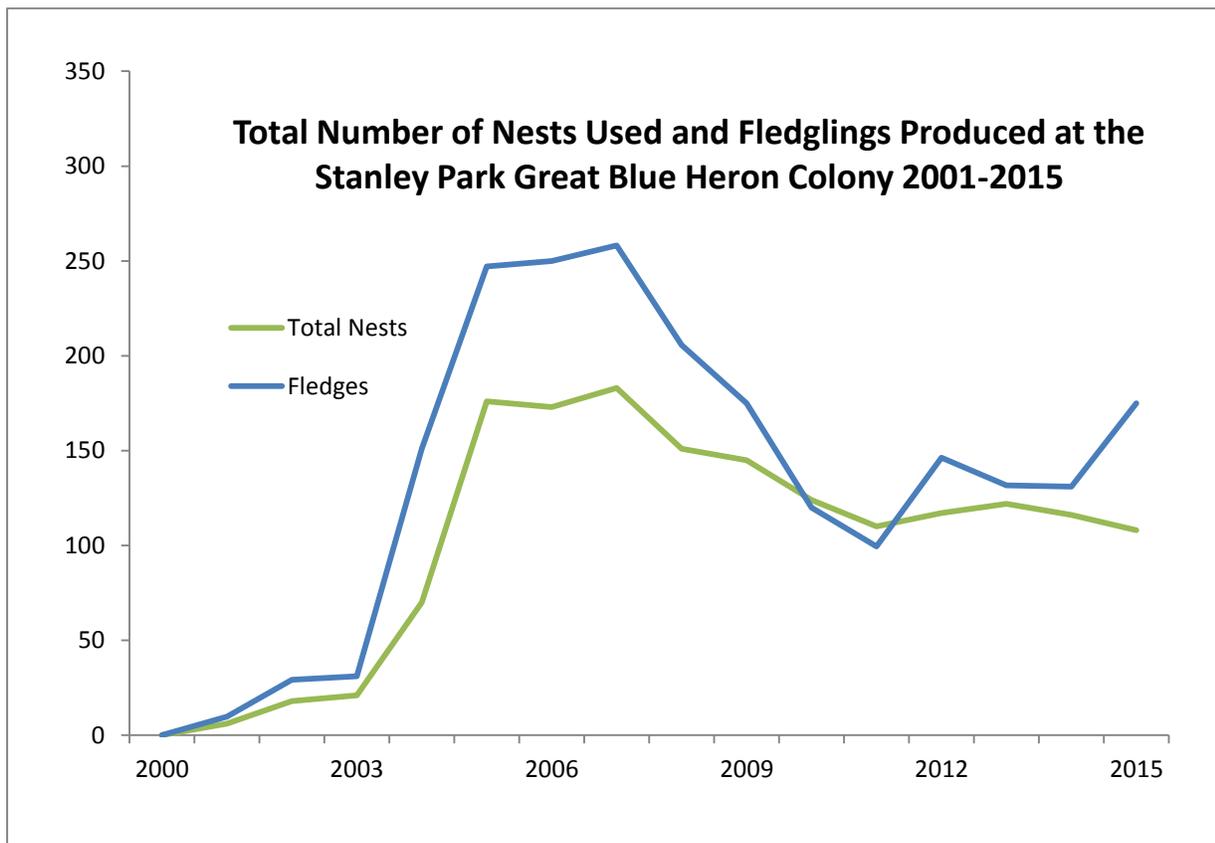


Figure 2: Colony totals for the Stanley Park great blue heron colony (2000-2015).

The Park Board webcam allowed the story of the herons to be broadcasted to a larger audience. The camera was on 24/7 until breeding season ended in late July. The web page allowed viewers to control the camera for short periods of time by scrolling through different pre-defined views, and directed them to an 'ask an expert' email service for answering questions about the herons.

Since monitors were able to check on the nests at any time, and because the public were also watching, the activities of the nests most visible from the camera were well documented. A few individual nests' stories are illustrated below:

Positive Feedback from Heron Cam users:

- "Has been an amazing opportunity to see into the life cycle of this intriguing bird".
- "We love the "Jackson 5" [nest B3] and all the Herons".
- "We will be sad when they go, but we look forward to the next season. More eggs, more babies to name!"
- "Really enjoying the heron cam. Thank you! You've really stimulated our curiosity".
- "I am addicted to this site!"
- "The heron cam is wonderful. Thanks to the people who made it possible".
- "Thank you, these are wonderful birds!"

Nest B5

This nest is one of the most visible in the colony and was chosen to represent SPES's Adopt a Nest program as well as to be featured on the home page of the webcam website: vancouver.ca/heroncam.

- This nest is often one of the very first occupied in spring and this year the adult pair that claimed this nest were active from March 2.
- However, they took their time laying their first egg which was finally seen on March 27. The second egg was seen two days later, and a total of four eggs were documented on April 10.
- The first chick was seen on April 26 and two more hatched by May 2 for a total of three. The parent was observed tossing eggshells out of the nest.
- By around May 25, one of the chicks appeared to have been pushed or to have fallen from the nest, as is common in the species.
- The two remaining chicks were seen exploring the outer edges of the nest and nearby branches on the 21st of June, and two weeks later they had both fledged.



Nest B3

This nest was another highlighted by the camera because of its highly visible location. It was different than the other nests because it had one of the largest successful clutches we've seen – five chicks fledged which one viewer dubbed “the Jackson 5”.



- The adults had claimed the nest by March 11 and laid their first egg only three days later.
- The five blue eggs were first seen on March 22 and the first chick was seen a month later on April 12.
- The adults left their large brood alone for the first time, about three weeks later on May 1.
- By June 18, four of the five chicks had fledged and the last holdout finally took the plunge three days later.

Nest E1

Nest E1 was not the easiest to see of all the nests, but it was the only nest to be predated by eagles and required a second nesting attempt.

- Like B5, these adults were seen on the nest by March 2 and laid two eggs by March 14.
- A total of four eggs were discovered on April 2, but by April 16 there were none and the adults had stopped incubating. We assume the nest was predated, likely by eagles, as attacks were observed regularly by neighbours during this time.
- The adults did not give up though and about two weeks later, two new eggs had been laid. A total of four eggs were laid in this second attempt.
- The first hatching occurred on May 27 and three chicks successfully made it to fledging age.



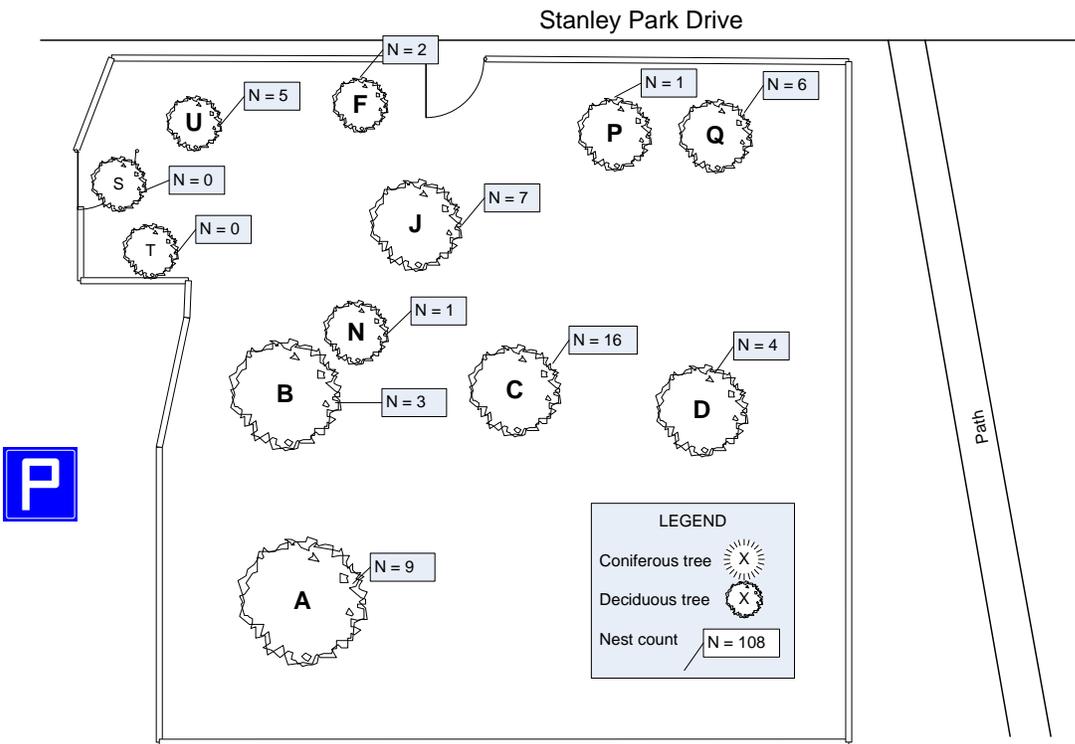
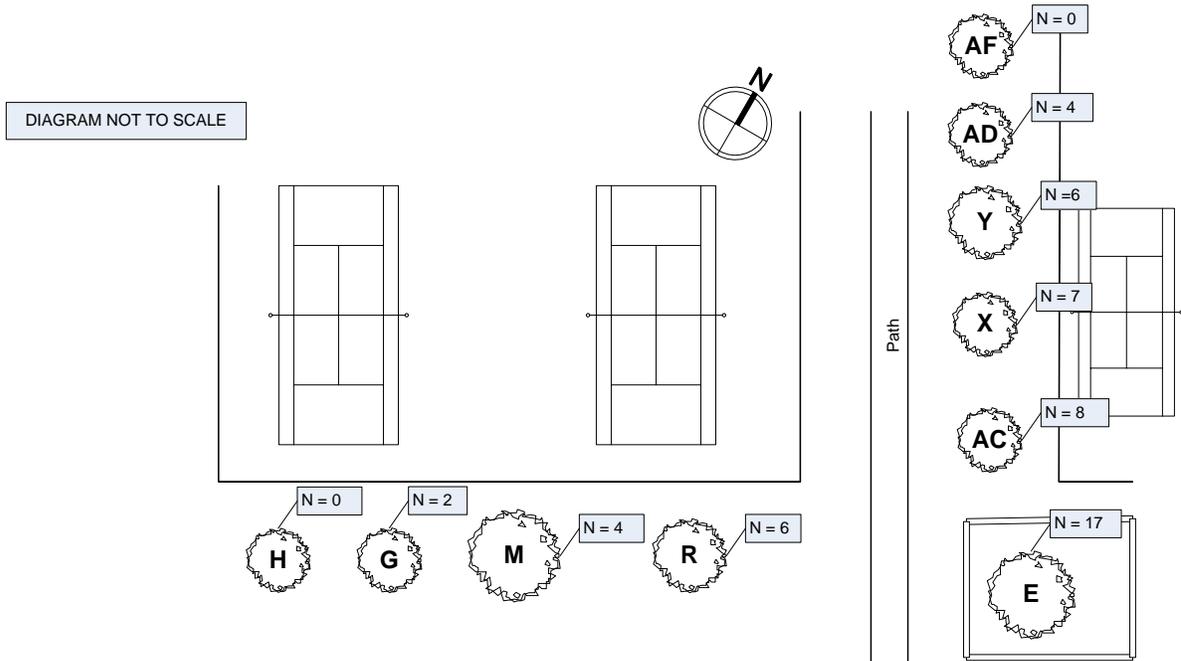
If you've adopted a heron nest this season, thank you for your support. Your contribution enables us to maintain our heron monitoring program and help conserve this blue listed species at risk. We will send out a reminder in early 2016 in hopes that you will once again contribute to the heron adoption program. For more information on adopting, please [visit our website](#), and share this opportunity with others.

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STANLEY PARK HERONRY 06 March 2015



Heron Colony map supplied by Dalyce Epp