

Wildlife that Breed in Stanley Park: 2023 Highlights

This report serves as a peak into the surveys and wildlife monitoring conducted by the Stanley Park Ecology Society (SPES). Such efforts would not be possible without the generous assistance from over 60 passionate conservation volunteers who assisted SPES throughout the year. Here we highlight some wildlife that breed in Stanley Park, and present some of the results of our observations over the 2023 calendar year. These records are used and analyzed as bio-indicators for the decennial State of the Park's Ecological Integrity (SOPEI) reports.



When working in what it now known as Stanley Park, it is essential to keep in mind the history of this land, and what has led us to this point in time to put our work and presence into context. 'Stanley Park' is a land which has been inhabited for generations by Indigenous families, where people were able to steward and sustainably live off the natural resources here for over 3,000 years. The colonial establishment of this land as a park displaced the people who called this place home, including immigrant Hawaiian and Chinese workers and their families. The impact of colonization is something that we should all consider and keep in mind when visiting and working on this land. This Park is situated within the traditional and unceded territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.



Photos: Marisa Bischoff

Barn Swallow numbers continue upward trend in 2023



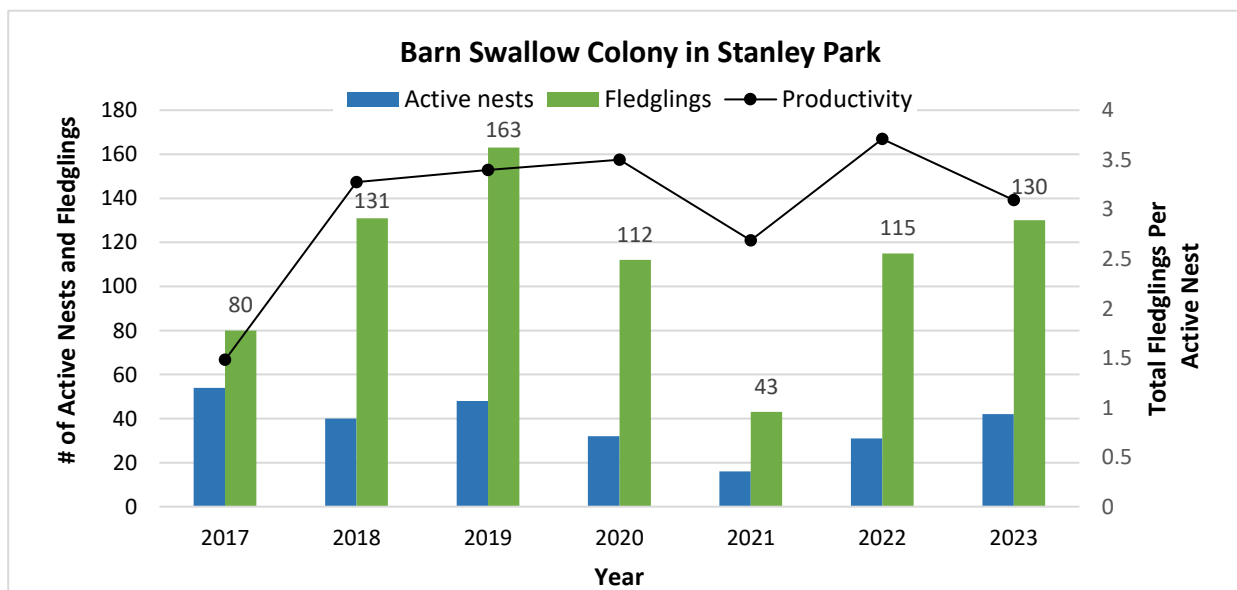
A Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) colony returns to Stanley Park every spring to the Vancouver Police Department horse barn and Vancouver Parks Board (VPB) service yard. They migrate northward in the spring from their over-wintering habitat in Central and South America. Barn Swallows build mud cup style nests, and a colony will mostly use the same nests from year to year with some repairs. A few new nests are built every year, while some nests fall apart or are no longer suitable.

This year, **130 chicks were observed over 42 active nests**. This is an increase from 2022 where 115 chicks hatched over 31 active nests. The Stanley Park population abundance is currently trending upward after the lows observed in 2021 (the extreme heat that year likely contributed to those low numbers).



Photos: Marisa Bischoff

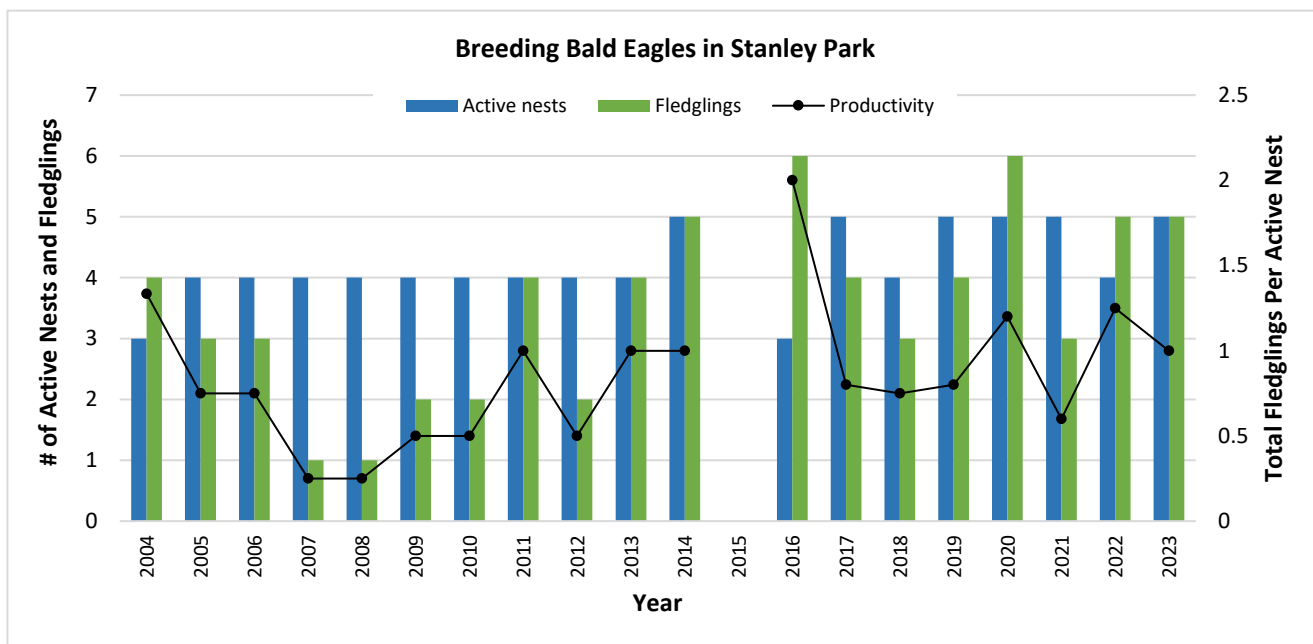
Barn Swallows are part of a taxonomic grouping of birds called “aerial insectivores”, referring to their method of catching and eating insect prey almost exclusively while in flight. Aerial insectivore populations in Canada have seen a roughly [60% decline since 1970](#), and as a result are classified as Threatened under the federal *Species at Risk Act*. These declines are attributed to loss of nesting and foraging habitat, declines in aerial insect populations, pesticide use, and climate change. In BC the conservation status of Barn Swallows is currently considered to be secure and not at risk of extinction.



Number of Bald Eagle fledglings remain stable in 2023

Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) pairs separate at the end of summer, then re-unite in the fall, forming the same breeding pair year after year. Mating can start as early as October upon return from migration. In general, a Bald Eagle's diet consists mostly of fish, but also carrion, mammals, gulls, waterfowl, and garbage. However, in Stanley Park, and the rest of Greater Vancouver, Bald Eagle diets consist mainly of other birds, such as waterfowl, and gulls (making up around 85% of their diet).

This year, out of the five nests that were being monitored in Stanley Park, four nests were active, of which three produced successful offspring. **In total, five eaglets were observed to have fledged over three nests.**



*No data collected in 2015. More detailed information can be found online in the annual Eagle reports on the SPES website.

Adult incubating in the Merilees 4 nest



Two juveniles in the Cathedral trail nest



Juvenile in the Pipeline 3 nest



Photos: Marisa Bischoff

Updated survey protocol of Heron colony in 2023



The Pacific subspecies of Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias fannini*) is designated as a blue-listed (special concern), species per the province of British Columbia's Provincial Conservation Status. Almost 80% of BC's population of this subspecies is found in and around the Fraser River Delta.

The Heron colony is a popular attraction in Stanley Park, both in person and via the City of Vancouver's [Heron Cam](#), which captures many exciting moments of courtship, mating, nest building, incubation, caring for chicks, and fledging behaviours.

In 2023 SPES observed **77 active nests and an estimated 61 fledglings**. Prior to 2023, SPES only surveyed a subset of the heron colony population, using this sample to extrapolate the total numbers for the entire colony. This season, the survey

methods were slightly altered to include and record observations for every nest in the colony, with the hope that more accurate numbers can be produced. This resulted in some changes to overall metrics.

Previously, Heron nests were concentrated within the trees adjacent to Park Lane. Over time, due to the loss of some trees in that area, the Herons seem to have started to build more nests in the trees between the tennis courts. Many of these nests were outside of the original population sample surveyed by SPES. To address the shifting nature of the colony, our methodology was updated, bringing it more inline with other heron survey protocols around the Lower Mainland, which will allow us to better monitor the overall health of the colony.

For more information regarding the herons, we invite you to read through the [2023 Heron Report](#).



Photos: Frank Lin, Marisa Bischoff

Bat emergence counts from summer maternity roosts continue

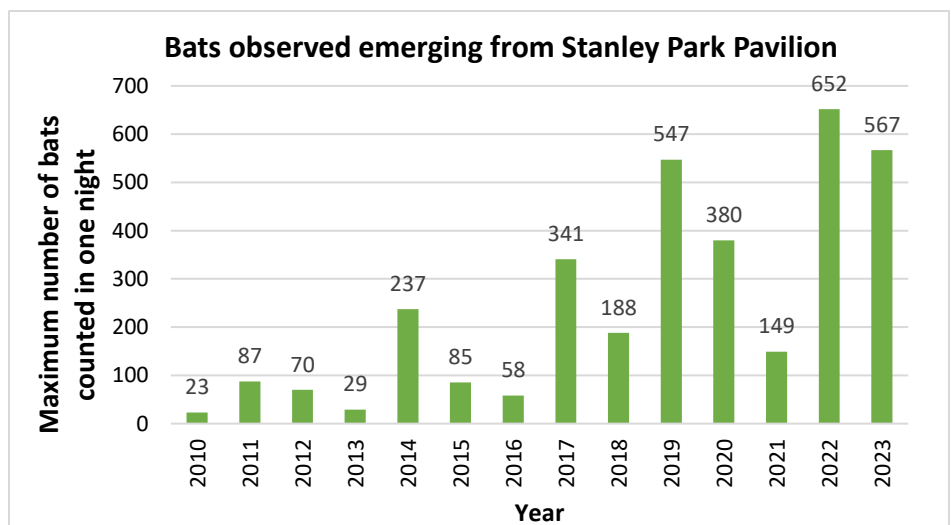
There are at least five confirmed species of bats that use habitat within Stanley Park during the late spring and summer months, including Yuma myotis (*Myotis yumanensis*), California myotis (*Myotis californicus*), Little Brown myotis (*Myotis lucifugus*), Big Brown bats (*Eptesicus fuscus*), and Silver-haired bats (*Lasionycteris noctivagans*). Female bats arrive at their summer roost site pregnant and give birth to their young in the late spring. Bats sleep during the day and leave their young at night while they emerge to forage. After emerging from their roosts, bats fly toward waterbodies and wetlands such as Beaver Lake and Lost Lagoon that attract small flying insects. SPES actively monitors two roosts in Stanley Park.



The Stanley Park Pavilion hosts a maternity roost, where bats emerging from the attic of the building are counted every one or two weeks throughout spring and summer. This year, volunteers counted a single night high of **approximately 567 bats** on May 30, 2023. This is a slight decrease from last year's highest count of 652 bats which occurred on June 20, 2022. Emergence counts do not provide very accurate representations of the true state of the colony but consistent survey methods over years can show trends. Bats are very sensitive to various environmental factors, so large fluctuations in the short-term are not necessarily a cause for concern. An upcoming conservation issue for some species of bats in BC is the spread of White-nose Syndrome, a disease which has devastated affected bat populations in eastern North America. The Province of BC announced that *Pseudogymnoascus destructans* (Pd), the fungus which causes the syndrome was detected in the guano from a colony for the first time in BC, outside of Grand Forks in 2023.



Photos: Frank Lin, Marisa Bischoff

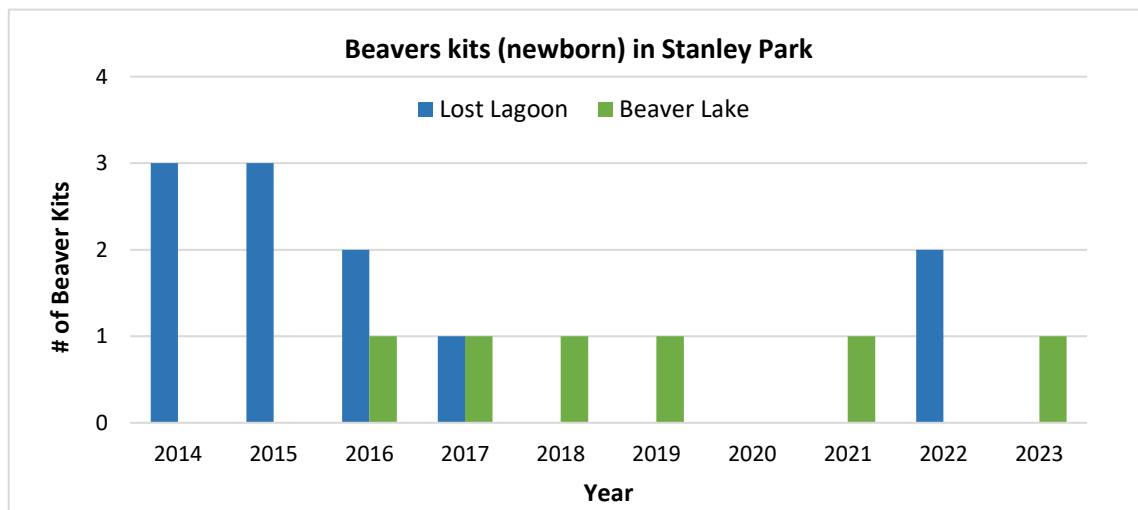
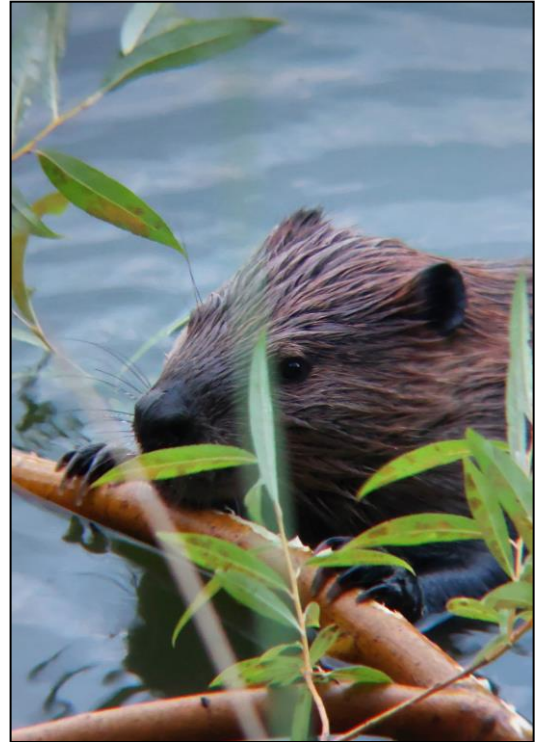


Monitoring Beaver families in Lost Lagoon and Beaver Lake

Beavers mate for life and will continue to use the same territory year after year, maintaining a lodge, damming water, and having offspring. A beaver family can consist of two adults/parents, kits (newborns), yearlings (1 year-olds), and juveniles (2-3 year-olds). The older offspring help raise the family until they reach around 2-3 years of age when they leave to find their own territories.

This year SPES volunteers observed an estimated **three beavers at Lost Lagoon, and four beavers at Beaver Lake**.

Two of the beavers in Lost Lagoon are juveniles and are likely the two kits observed last year (2022), while the remaining beaver is likely an adult. Earlier this year, two beavers were found deceased, one in Lost Lagoon (11 Jan, 2023), and one near Second Beach (13 Apr, 2023). In Beaver Lake, the family consists of one kit, one juvenile, and two adults. These age classes are consistent with expectations from observations of the families in previous years.



*Years with no data indicate that no kits were born that year



Photos: Marisa Bischoff

Birds breeding in Stanley Park

Several species of birds breed in Stanley Park and SPES tracks breeding bird presence within the park via point count surveys. Observers stay still and silent for a consistent amount of time at each 'station' and record any birds seen or heard during that timeframe. Each survey is split over two days, and a survey is completed once at the end of May and once at the end of June.

A total of **43 species** were detected during the 2023 surveys, shown in **Table 1**. Species that were detected in both May and June surveys are highlighted in green, indicating a high likelihood that these species are breeding in Stanley Park. This does not exclude the possibility of other species breeding in Stanley Park. For example, it is known that Bald Eagles and Great-blue Herons breed in the Park, but were only detected in one of the two surveys, and therefore are not highlighted here.



Photos: Frank Lin, Marisa Bischoff



Table 1. Species Detected in 2023 Point Count Surveys

American Crow	House Finch
American Goldfinch	Killdeer
American Robin	Orange-crowned Warbler
Anna's Hummingbird	Pacific Wren
Bald Eagle	Pileated Woodpecker
Bewick's Wren	Pacific-slope Flycatcher
Black-capped Chickadee	Purple Finch
Black-headed Grosbeak	Red-breasted Nuthatch
Brown Creeper	Red-breasted Sapsucker
Brown-headed Cowbird	Red-winged Blackbird
Black-throated Gray Warbler	Song Sparrow
Canada Goose	Spotted Towhee
Caspian Tern	Steller's Jay
Chestnut-backed Chickadee	Swainson's Thrush
Cedar Waxwing	Townsend's Warbler
Common Raven	Warbling Vireo
Dark-eyed Junco	White-crowned Sparrow
Downy Woodpecker	Western Tanager
European Starling	Willow Flycatcher
Evening Grosbeak	Wilson's Warbler
Great Blue Heron	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Gull sp.	

* Bird species detected in both May & June surveys are highlighted in green

These highlights represent a snapshot into a select few species of wildlife that SPES monitored during the breeding season in Stanley Park in 2023. It is important to keep in mind that conclusions regarding the status of wildlife populations within the Park cannot be drawn from a single breeding season. However, consistency in methods over several years of data collection can offer insight into general trends even if absolute numbers are approximated or estimated. Data collected from these long-term studies can help us to develop a deeper understanding of the Park's ability to support a variety of wildlife as our climate continues to change. These long-term data-gathering efforts help SPES and the Vancouver Board of Parks & Recreation make conservation decisions and provides vital information to local researchers.

Thank you to all survey volunteers and donors for their passion and generosity!



Photos: Marisa Bischoff

If you would like more information on how to get involved, learn about the volunteer opportunities or to make a donation, please reach out to vols@stanleyparkecology.ca or visit www.stanleyparkecology.ca

Written by: Marisa Bischoff, SPES Conservation Technician

Reviewed by: Dacyn Holinda, SPES Conservation Projects Manager

More information: www.stanleyparkecology.ca