

Stanley Park Heron Colony History

“The Stanley Park heronry has during the past few weeks become one of the points of interest in the park, and hundreds of residents of this city as well as visitors now stop to have a look at the curious bird colony, none of the members of which appear to be in the least disturbed, however many people gather about to watch them.”

- Kenneth Racey circa ~1921

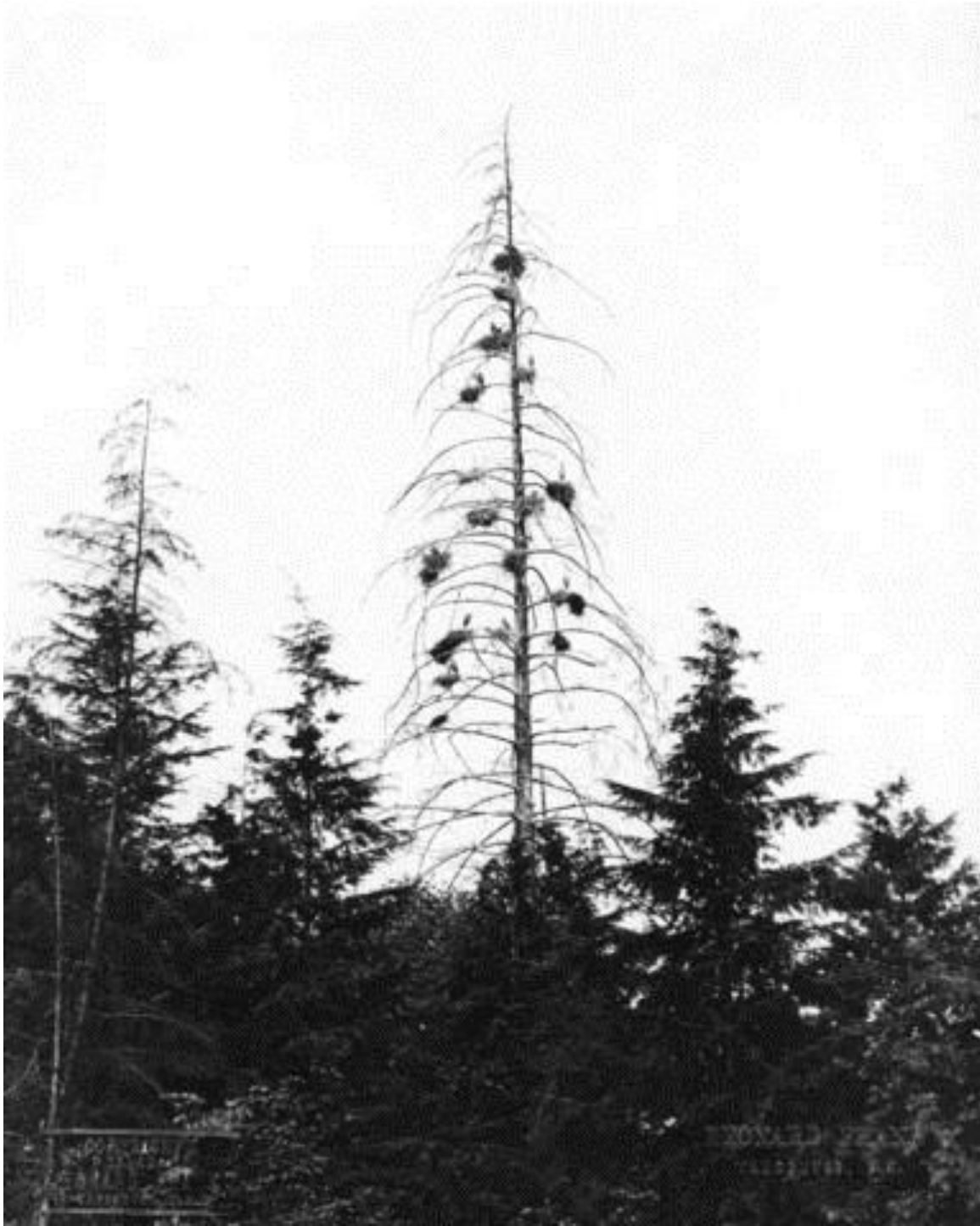
That year also marks the beginning of record keeping for great blue herons breeding in Stanley Park. At that time, the heronry was located at Brockton Point. These birds have now nested in the Park for nearly 100 years, and in 2001 they established the current colony on Beach Avenue amidst tennis courts, apartment buildings and parking lots. Usually this species is highly sensitive to human disturbances, but in this case the birds have become habituated to the noise of the city.

The following outlines major occurrences at the colonies for ever time period that there are records.

1921	Records of Stanley Park Heronry start. A newspaper article in the Province shows a tree located between Brockton Point and Lumbermen’s Arch. The tree was said to be deteriorating due to the buildup of guano. Young were said to hatch in May and fledge in August/September. Total nests = 39 (Vancouver Province, 1921b)
1921-1960	Limited Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) data indicates the herons at one time built a new colony at Beaver Lake. CWS records also describe 37 nests in a single large spruce tree at Brockton Point in 1967.
Late 1960s-70s	The heronry moves to Aquarium area; Maximum number of nests recorded was in 1978 (44 nests.) Eagle predation is significant at this location.
1980s-1999	Records are sporadic through 1980s-1990s. The Canadian Wildlife Service conducts some toxicology studies on eggshells during 1980s.
1992	An observation blind was constructed in a tree adjacent to the large Douglas fir that held the majority of nests. The signage created for the zoo was later installed at 2099 Beach Ave.

1999	The herons abandoned the zoo area. Some attributed the zoo abandonment to intrusive construction activity at the zoo, but no formal studies were made regarding other sources of disturbance or habitat loss at that location (VPB, 2006).
2001	Heronry moves to Park Board office area; No regular monitoring takes place.
2002	Regular monitoring of site starts by volunteer. Some nests in the maple near Nelson St. suffered repeated eagle and raccoon attacks and later abandoned. Multiple eagle attacks also recorded on tree E
2003	Regular monitoring by volunteer. Nelson Street tree abandoned. One eagle attack reported. The fencing was installed in winter 2003.
2004	SPES staff join volunteers to monitor the colony regularly from this year on. Two separate groups nested this year – one at the regular timing and a second group that arrived in June. No eagle attacks observed. In June 2004, the heronry experienced an influx of herons that coincided with reports of abandonment of nests at the Point Roberts and Pacific Spirit Park heronries, which at different times were each considered the largest on the West Coast (VPB, 2006). Soil sampling and remediation measures were employed in October 2004 including the application of dolomite lime to the soil beneath the heronry and removal of the accumulated guano-coated twigs and debris from the ground.
2005	The colony more than doubles in size from 70 to 176 nests and from 10 trees to 25 trees occupied. At least 8 eagle attacks observed by the Cathedral Trail nesting pair. The fencing is enlarged to enclose the growing number of occupied trees. More soil sampling conducted, but deemed inconclusive. In October 2005 a test wash was done to remove heron excrement from foliage.
2006	January 14 arrival date is the earliest on record. No eagle attacks recorded. The Vancouver Sun Run (with 54,000 runners passing the colony) which caused stress on the herons is rerouted for the 2007 season. More fencing is added.
2007	Heronry arrive on Valentine's day. The highest number of nests recorded (183) and trees used (24) with an estimated 350 successful fledglings. Up to 20 nests fell during winter windstorms in the months leading up to this season. No eagle attacks were documented. A heron webcam is installed by the David Hancock Wildlife Foundation and was located inside the SPES volunteer's apartment.
2008	The Canadian Wildlife Service collects several eggs to perform toxicology studies on the shells. Eagle, owl and raccoon predation documented. SPES volunteers and staff conduct a study at the colony, to determine feeding locations of breeding adults.
2009	Higher than normal levels of nest predation by raccoons (Up to 32% of active nests predated). April a large bunch of balloons drifted into the colony and lodged in tree H. It seemed that the ocean provided an abundance of food this year, as there was a high within-nest survival rate this season. Many nests, if they avoided predation, produced 3 to 4 large chicks.

2010	Predator guards installed on nest trees – raccoon predation decreases dramatically.
2011	A poor year for herons with bad spring weather and near-constant eagle predation throughout the season from early April until July. (UBC colony abandons this season). By late April, at least 22% of the sample nests had already been predated by eagles.
2012	CWS collected five eggs from the heron nests in April, as part of their long term program to monitor contaminants in Great Blue Herons in southwestern BC. Also a substantial amount of eagle predation, particularly early in the year.
2013	The colony saw the highest nest success since monitors had begun documenting it at 96% of active nests producing offspring. Bald eagles invaded the colony regularly. Film crews accidentally disturbed the colony with floodlights at the Fish House restaurant.
2014	Bald eagles invaded the colony regularly.
2015	Heron webcam installed by Park Board on nearby building.



Stanley Park heron colony, 1921. City of Vancouver Archives