
Stanley Park Heronry Monitoring Report 2004



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A Summary
Of Great
Blue Heron
Nesting
Activity

Prepared by:

STANLEY PARK
ECOLOGY SOCIETY

In Partnership With:



The 2004 heronry in 100 words

2004 was the most productive year ever recorded at a Stanley Park heronry. There were more chicks in more nests, in more trees than ever previously noted. This is even more remarkable considering the unusual proximity of this heronry to human activity. The Stanley Park Ecology Society documented 151 chicks fledging from 60 nests in 10 trees adjacent to the Vancouver Park Board offices at 2099 Beach Avenue. Although this year was a successful one for Great Blue Herons in Stanley Park, the future of this provincially designated “species at risk” remains uncertain. Future heronry growth or reduction is unpredictable.

Great Blue Heron, Nest and Tree Notes

- Courting herons were first observed at the heronry on February 22, 2004. All of the juveniles had left their nests by September 27, 2004
- There were 68 nests in the Heronry this year, more than double each of the last two years, and the highest number ever recorded in Stanley Park. The earliest record of a heronry in Stanley Park is 1921
- 151 heron chicks fledged from 60 successful nests this year. Two nests were not successful. The SPES was unable to monitor six nests as leaf growth impaired the view. It is estimated that only 20-30 percent of heron chicks survive their first year
- Approximately 20 dead heron chicks were collected from underneath the heronry, a low rate considering the number of nests and chicks
- The herons selected 10 trees to nest in: (see map on page 4)
 - 1 Cedar (Tree K)
 - 2 Oak (Trees G and H)
 - 7 Big Leaf Maples (Trees A, B, C, D, E, J, and L)
 - The tree designated as “F” was not used by the herons
 - Tree designation “I” was not used due to data collection protocol
 - 2004 was the first year that herons nested in trees G, H, J, K, and L
- 2004 was unique because there were two nesting cycles from two distinct groups of herons. The first cycle began in late February, and the second started in June with the arrival of a second group of herons. The overlap resulted in nests of full-grown and soon to be departing chicks being directly beside nests with newly laid eggs



- The juvenile herons most likely dispersed to local feeding grounds such as Lost Lagoon, Beaver Lake, the Stanley Park shoreline, Coal Harbour, False Creek, and the coast line from Jericho to Wreck Beach. Other herons likely moved to Ambleside Beach, the West Vancouver coastline, the inner area of Burrard Inlet, the Fraser River, Iona Beach and some of the islets and islands off the mainland
- The herons born in 2004 will reach maturity (breeding and nesting age) in 2006
- The herons have nested adjacent to the offices of the Vancouver Park Board since 2001. Prior to that, they nested near the grounds of the former Stanley Park Zoo and Brockton Point
- Great Blue Heron nesting colonies are fragile. It is not known how many of the provincially designated “species at risk” herons will return to the Stanley Park Heronry next year. The herons are likely to return in late February 2005 to begin the nesting process all over again. They will select a mate, then either refurbish an existing nest or build a new one, lay and incubate eggs, and begin the arduous hunting and feeding process as their young grow, develop, and fledge
- Stanley Park Ecology Society volunteers contributed more than 200 hours to heron monitoring

Herons and People

- The herons’ selection of the current nesting site is an odd one. Great Blue Herons are known for their secretive nesting habits, and are generally easily disrupted by human activity. Stanley Park’s herons seem undisturbed by the levels of human activity around them
- The *Celebration of Light* fireworks competition was the largest and loudest event held near the heronry, but it did not cause any herons to abandon their nests or chicks in 2004
- The herons benefited from the installation of the fence surrounding one section of the heronry, and were seen, for the first time, foraging for dropped nesting material on the ground beneath the heronry
- Though there were a handful of heron-related noise complaints made by West End residents, the vast majority of residents and park users were intrigued, amazed, and thankful for the experiences and memories generated by the heronry in Stanley Park



Pedestrians walking beneath nesting herons.

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