

For the Love of Eagles: Protecting Raptor Habitat on Denman



The eagle tree was snapped in two today by the wild winter wind. I know I'm not the only Denman Islander mourning the loss of this iconic piece of wildlife habitat. Ever since moving to Denman, my eyes and heart have lifted every time I drove by this magnificent snag on East Road, looking for the Bald Eagles that often roosted there. One day, during the herring run, I counted seven!

The forces of nature were ruthless, as is their right and their custom; humans can choose not to be. One way we can help make this island hospitable for Bald Eagles, Great Blue Herons, hawks, owls and other birds of prey is to protect their habitat, and in particular, their nests.

Eagles and other raptors usually nest at or near the top of large, older trees (usually Douglas fir), within one kilometer of water. People who own land close to water may be privileged to have nests on their properties, and to be treated regularly to the sight of these majestic birds soaring, fishing, and raising their young.

For these birds, much like many island human residents, their nest is a long-term home that has taken a lot of energy to build. Most pairs use one nest for their entire breeding life, and also establish territory around the nest. Although most raptors can deal with some human activity near their homes, they can be sensitive to disturbance during the nesting season. It's not easy to raise a baby eagle successfully: less than half of eaglets survive their first year of life, and only one in five reach adulthood.

Here are some **tips for protecting raptor habitat**:

- In the early stages of planning for your property, **identify the location of nest trees, as well as trees and snags** that could be used for perching, and commit to protecting them.
- Where possible, **retain groups of trees** rather than single trees to provide an interlocking canopy.
- Where you find a nest, **establish and maintain a protective buffer** around it where nothing is built and vegetation is not disturbed. This puts a

nesting pair at ease and reduces the impact of human activity. The province of BC recommends a buffer of at least 200 metres in rural areas.

- **Limit human activity and loud noise** near these areas, particularly during the breeding and nesting season (for Bald Eagles, January to September; for Ospreys, April to August; for Herons, January 15 to September 15).
- **Locate trails, buildings, and roads** away from known nesting, perching and foraging areas.
- **Avoid draining or filling wetlands or coastal marshes**, or interfering with coastal habitats where the birds may feed; essentially, leave things as they are.
- If you'd like to protect bird habitat on your property into the future, **consider creating a conservation covenant**, a formal commitment that binds future owners to the same measures you've taken, meaning the landscape will be protected forever (more information at www.islandstrustconservancy.ca/initiatives/privateconservation/conservation-covenants/)

Hopefully, the thrill of watching these birds, and the sense of respect they engender, is motivation enough for people to treat them with care. But just in case anyone needs a nudge, take note **that it is an offense to possess, take, injure, molest or destroy a bird or its eggs, or the nests of birds** when occupied by a bird or an egg, according the BC Wildlife Act, Section 34. If you see someone violating wildlife protection laws, you can report this (anonymously, if you choose) to the BC Minister of Environment's Report All Poachers and Polluters hotline at 1-877-952-7277. Reports can also be made on-line (Google "Report All Poachers and Polluters").

The East Road eagle tree may be diminished, but the local raptors don't need to be, if we practice a bit of restraint and foresight. For more info, go to www.islandstrustconservancy.ca/how-do-i/protectnests/