



## **Brunswick Wildlife The Eagle and I**

For several years, there has been an active Bald Eagle nest above the beaver pond at Brunswick Community College. This is the story of my interaction with these magnificent birds over the past two years.

The all dark eagle above is a juvenile and the other is its parent, pictured flying in to guard the little one. It will take five more years before the juvenile achieves the familiar adult plumage.

In 2006, I was treated to this rare photo opportunity, photographing the juvenile and both parents. This year, I made more visits and started much earlier, yielding unique observations; however, I was only able to photograph one of the adults.

In mid-January 2007, I witnessed a ritual new to me. I watched an adult eagle land on and break off a dead limb and then carry it to the nest. Soon both the male and female were involved. They were repairing the nest for this year's clutch of eggs. Both bring in sticks; however, the female generally places them.

Females begin laying eggs shortly after the nest is ready, with an incubation period of approximately thirty-five days. During this time the female does the majority of incubation but the male helps. In the first couple of weeks after hatching, the male provides most of the food for his family. The young generally fledge in about two months; however, the adults will continue to care for them afterwards.

In early February I saw wings stretch up...for just a second...as the female adjusted her position. The "guard eagle" was on a tree behind the nest tree less than a hundred feet away.

In mid-February, I watched an eagle fly in with a long snake trailing from its talons. Unfortunately, my camera was hanging down from my neck and I missed taking that photo!

With wildlife photography, you miss approximately a third of those “to-die-for” shots so I did not stay upset for long...just a short temper tantrum followed by a bit of whining and sniveling. Little did I know the mother of all missed opportunities would come later!

I visited in mid-March, hoping to photograph a nestling with its head above the nest. No, it was not possible...the nestling was now a fledgling! It was perched on the dead tree just behind the nest tree. Another eagle flew by and landed. To my surprise, it was another fledgling! Both were too far away to photograph but it did my heart good to see these guys sail across the beaver pond! In 2006, there was only one fledgling...it probably had a sibling that died.

On April 1, I was treated to my wildest eagle encounter ever. One juvenile flew in and stationed itself in the dead tree near the nest. It perched there for the next twenty minutes while I watched other events...such as a Green Anole eat a damselfly and Brown-headed Nuthatches coming in and out of their cavity in a dead tree out from the blind.

An adult eagle then flew in from the west...and pandemonium broke out! Suddenly there were two juveniles shrieking and begging. I had not seen the second juvenile waiting in the nest.

The adult brought the prey to the nest not to one of the young and both begging juveniles jumped up to nest edge. I think the young were expecting a late delivery. Unfortunately, I could not make out the identity of the prey and there was literally no time for a photo.

To see juvenile eagles begging like song birds was fantastic! What happened next was equally fantastic! An immature eagle flew across the beaver pond and tried to get in on the picnic...only to be rebuffed twice by the adult before it flew off. My theory, given eagles generally use the same nest year after year, is that the third youngster was last year's fledgling.

Now this missed photo op caused major wailing and gnashing of teeth! I will probably never get that opportunity again but you can bet I'll try again next year!

If you go, November through April is the best time. After April, the adults and immature eagles will usually disperse, hunting and roosting around the county. Please stay behind the blind for viewing since the Bald Eagle is a protected species plus you will get better looks at other birds such as Wood Ducks and woodpeckers. The college is a site on the NC Birding Trail and details for all Brunswick County sites may be found at:

[http://www.ncbirdingtrail.org/TrailGuide/Guide\\_Southeast.pdf](http://www.ncbirdingtrail.org/TrailGuide/Guide_Southeast.pdf).

If you hear loud weeping as you approach the blind, just know that I missed another great photo.

John Ennis

