

Philadelphia eagles lay eggs and make history

The John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge is the most urban wildlife refuge among the Northeast Region's 72 refuges. The eagle nest is located in the metropolitan heart of Philadelphia, across the highway from the Philadelphia International Airport, amid oil refineries, a network of commuter rail corridors and along Interstate 95. The noise created in the area from trains, planes, trucks and automobiles makes it all that more a success story for the pair of young eagle parents who unsuccessfully tried to nest last year in the same location. According to Refuge Manager Gary Stolz, eagles are normally very sensitive to urban noise and have been known to abandon nests in urban environments. "These two seem to be very tolerant," he said.

Stolz said the eagles are looking good, stretching their wings and helping out the refuge by eating invasive carp. According to Assistant Refuge Manager Larry Woodward, the eaglets were likely hatched sometime during the final days of March and beginning of April. Refuge staff noticed the pair sitting on their nest in early March and suspected they were incubating eggs. Recently Bill Buchanan, a refuge staff member, took photographs of the nest showing one parent eagle sitting nearby on an adjoining branch and two small feathered eaglet heads poking up above the rim of the nest itself.

Woodward said this pair worked on the nest last year. They recently began building another nest in the area but eventually returned to their original nesting site where they finally succeeded in hatching eggs. While other eagles in the area use the refuge at different times of the year, these two eagles, identified by bands on their legs, appear to be the only pair of eagles to nest on the refuge. The nest is located a short distance from the refuge headquarters office in the impoundment area on Oak Island in one of the biggest oaks in the area.

Woodward said the parent activity at this point is constantly guarding and feeding the chicks. "One is always at the nest," Woodward said, "and the other is out fishing. The eaglets are growing so fast they're constantly feeding them." With warmer weather the

parent eagles do not need to protect their chicks from the cold, and the eaglets are moving around the nest. He estimates they could begin flying within the next 30 days.

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