

Project Overview

Wessex Heron Colony: Live Conservation Cam

Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre

April 2018

Project Overview

The largest Pacific Great Blue Heron colony on Vancouver Island sits in the Wessex Ravine in Cowichan Bay, situated next to the Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre. Considered a species of *Special Concern* (COSEWIC 2008), they are threatened by habitat loss, eagle presence, and human disturbance.

The Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre is a nature education and stewardship organization dedicated to connecting the community with nature, especially within the Cowichan Watershed and Estuary. A recent bequest to the Nature Centre has been earmarked with an interest in Pacific Great Blue Heron conservation and education, using a live Conservation Cam to observe the birds in their habitat while reducing human disturbance and foot traffic to the rookery.

The proposed camera would be installed in the Fall/Winter when there is zero risk of disturbance. A tall pole (approx. 30 ft) with a camera and solar battery pack affixed to the top would be installed on CVRD Parks Land next to the Wessex Ravine (see image below). This would be located approximately This camera would stream 'live' to the Nature Centre website where it would be internationally accessible to the public and would include information on the species and conservation, putting Cowichan Bay and the Great Blue Heron 'on the map'. This live feed would also be used by the Nature Centre in school programming, and to educate visitors to Cowichan Bay about our special Heron rookery and the importance of protecting this important and vulnerable species.

High quality solar battery packs would ensure that no maintenance would be necessary during the months when Herons are present in the rookery. The camera pole would be designed as to not be an attractive perch for eagles, and would be located at least 20ft from the nearest nest. With increased support, the data from the heron cam could be recorded and used for research purposes.

The nature of the livestream means that the public may witness an unpleasant natural event (ie. eagle predation of egg or chick). We will include a disclaimer immediately below the camera online with wording that advises the public of the nature of these events. We have reached out to the Stanley Park Ecology Society (who currently operate a live Heron Cam) for advice on how they address this issue.

The Nature Centre has consulted with live cam experts and is looking for input and support from the Province of British Columbia and Cowichan Valley Regional District to help complete this exciting conservation and education project.

Approximate timeline:

Spring 2018 – Consult with FLNR and CVRD

Summer 2018 – Hire contractors for pole installation and livecam streaming online infrastructure setup

Fall 2018 – Begin installation at least 1 month after last Heron seen in the Bay (which is usually September)

Winter 2018/2019 – Test cam and troubleshoot any issues that require accessing the camera pole

Completion: January 2019 at the latest



Contact:

Haley Guest
Coordinator, Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre
haley@cowichanestuary.ca 250 597 2288