

[From Spring 2008]

Eagle Cam Update

In this technology based society of ours, many people subscribe to a familiar notion highlighted in a recently published news article. In that article Randolph E. Schmid made the assertion that "Nature is giving way to virtual reality." His basic premise is this. People are losing touch with nature because of the massive amounts of time they spend communing with technology.

With the help of the Chincoteague Natural History Association, we are trying to reverse these trends by using technology to get people outside where they can really enjoy nature.

In recent months, refuge visitors and staff alike have been exploring nature through video images in a positive way. It has sparked a connection that has renewed their affinity for bald eagles, the mesmerizing habitat in which they live, and the conservation mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. At the risk of sounding like a cliché, I must echo the all too familiar saying, "a picture is worth a thousand words!"

This past December, a new eagle camera was installed in a pine tree, resting approximately 6 feet above an existing bald eagles nest. Fiber optic cables connecting the camera to a television screen in the Herbert H. Bateman Educational and Administrative Center now provides hours of wildlife entertainment and education for all who take time out of their busy schedules to watch.

This project was completed just in the nick of time. The very next week after final installation, a pair of bald eagles occupied the nest and immediately began preparations for the breeding season. Currently, there are 3 eggs in the nest, and we are all waiting anxiously for the young hatchlings to appear.

After watching the live video images, visitors are encouraged to walk, drive, or take a bike ride along the Wildlife Loop Trail. The nest itself is located about a 1/4 mile up on the right hand side, when traveling counterclockwise. There, eager visitors with a keen eye or nifty pair of binoculars may view the eagles as they fly back and forth from the nest.

The striking, real time images of bald eagles tending the eggs and nest has left a lasting impression upon most everyone. However, none of this would have been remotely possible without the careful planning, cooperative spirit, and generous donation of funds provided by the Chincoteague Natural History Association. Because of their dedicated efforts we may, once again, experience the live action of eagles, through the lens of a camera and a video screen.

Once it's all said and done, technology isn't such a bad thing after all.