

BALD EAGLE USURPS OSPREY NEST IN THE CRESTON VALLEY, BRITISH COLUMBIA

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In British Columbia, Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) nests are usually constructed in the crotches of mature to old-growth coniferous and deciduous trees, on supporting branches next to the trunk, and less frequently are saddled on branches a short distance from the trunk. Most are built in or near the crown of a tree. Occasionally old Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) nests are used. Nests are constructed of dead sticks, branches, and twigs; often becoming massive cup-shaped platforms (Campbell et al. 1990).

Individual nests are usually used year after year but alternate nests are built within the territory and a pair of eagles may switch nest sites in successive years, especially after nesting failures (Buehler 2000).

On 28 May 2008, an adult Bald Eagle was observed in a natural Osprey nest along the east shore of the main Kootenay River in the Creston valley, British Columbia. By 20 June, two brown feathered Bald Eagle nestlings were mobile in the nest actively stretching their wings. The young were large and appeared close to fledging (Figure 1).

The large stick nest occupied by the eagles was situated 14 m from the ground, supported by dead outer branches on the broken top of a live black cottonwood (*Populus balsamifera*) tree. The tree had a diameter at breast height of 130 cm.

Although Osprey had constructed this nest in 2003, it was not used during that breeding season. Osprey occupied the nest in 2004, 2005, and 2006, producing young in each of those years. In 2007, the nest was occupied by Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) early in the season and was found inactive on 5 May. On 12 June, an adult Osprey was sitting low in the nest as though incubating. On repeat visits the nest was unoccupied, although a single Osprey remained on territory.

A few adult Bald Eagles over-winter each year

in the Creston valley (Van Damme 2002) and some pairs have been observed perching within their nesting territory. Bald Eagles in British Columbia can initiate nesting as early as 12 February with 50% recorded between 20 April and 12 May (Campbell et al. 1990). In the Creston valley, Bald Eagles have been active at nest sites, and first observed sitting low in nests between 23 February and 25 March. This gives the eagles a distinct advantage of nest selection over the Osprey which does not arrive back on its breeding territory until mid-April (Van Damme 2002).

In 12 years of actively monitoring raptor nests in the Creston valley, this is the first incident I have observed of Bald Eagle usurping an Osprey nest.



Figure 1. Bald Eagle successfully reared two young to fledging in this nest built by Osprey. Creston, 20 June 2008 (Linda M. Van Damme).

Literature Cited

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