

Maine News

Thursday, April 27, 2006

2:30 am

Rare set of eagle triplets
attract admirers online

Associated Press

©Copyright 2006
Associated Press. All rights
reserved. This material may
not be published,
broadcast, rewritten, or
redistributed.

PORTLAND, Maine — A new set of bald eagle triplets whose nest is perched 70 feet up a white pine in coastal Hancock County is attracting plenty of admirers on the Internet.

A live Web cam is providing viewers with glimpses of the fuzzy little chicks as they stick their heads up over the edge of their nest at feeding times. Even seasoned scientists are thrilled by the up-close and detailed view of an eagle family.

"What is incredibly valuable here is the level of detail," said Wing Goodale, research biologist for the BioDiversity Research Institute in Gorham. "To have this kind of view is truly unique."

The BioDiversity Research Institute mounted the camera in a tree about 40 feet away, and there's no indication that the eagles have caught onto the fact that they're being watched by so many people.

Visits to the Web cam _ at <http://www.briloon.org> _ surged to 20,000 a day when the chicks first hatched during the week of April 10, prompting the company hosting the site to add an additional server to handle the traffic, Goodale said.

The site provides a new still photo of the nest every 30 seconds. Because the tiny eaglets spend most of their time in the bottom of the nest huddled beneath their mother or father, viewers may have to exercise patience until they emerge.

One of the parents sat on the nest for more than an hour Wednesday before finally standing up and moving to the side. At that point, one small gray fuzzy head popped up, followed by a second. Finally, all three eaglets could be seen looking around their perch.

Eaglet triplets are not an everyday event, especially in places with a relatively harsh climate.

"It's a rarity in Maine," said Charlie Todd, biologist with the Maine Department of Fisheries and Wildlife. "Last year, we had 385 nests and only one had triplets."

Researchers wonder if triplets actually hatch more often than they expect, but that the third hatchling rarely survives.

"This insight is wonderful," Goodale said. "But it's also insight into the challenges these birds face. There's always the chance that one of these animals won't get enough food."
