

# Eagle cam gears up for spring

By [Bill Trotter](#)

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HANCOCK COUNTY, Maine — For many winter-weary Mainers, the month of March involves at least three annual events that inspire thoughts of warmer weather to come.

One is St. Patrick's Day, which for many is a sign that the cold and snow soon will be gone. March also is the time of year when people start making syrup from the sap of maple trees as the trees begin to emerge from winter dormancy. And, for a few years now, the month has heralded the attempts of two adult bald eagles to hatch offspring in a nest in coastal Hancock County.

All birds experience behavioral changes with the shift in seasons, but most don't have their nesting habits made available for all to see on a Web camera mounted in a tree. For the past two years, two eagles that live in the area year round have become seasonal Internet stars as visitors to [www.briloon.org](http://www.briloon.org), a Web site maintained by Gorham-based Biodiversity Research Institute have watched them nest, mate and sometimes raise young into the summer.

In 2006, the first year people could watch the birds over the Internet, the pair hatched three eaglets and successfully raised two of them. Last year, the eagles hatched two baby birds, neither of which survived the harsh Patriot's Day storm on April 15.

A failed attempt to raise young sometimes can result in birds not hatching eggs the next year or in one of the birds finding a new mate, according to Wing Goodale, the Biodiversity Research Institute scientist who manages the project. But this year the birds seem to be trying again, he said.

"They haven't laid an egg yet," Goodale said Thursday. "[But] so far, the signs are quite encouraging."

Goodale said the birds have been exhibiting typical behavior for mating eagles. They have brought material to the site to help supplement the nest, which is about 10 feet deep from more than a decade of use. They have defended the nest from other eagles, and they have copulated in an effort to make the female pregnant. The female has been viewed practicing her incubating skills by sitting in the nest as if she already had laid the eggs, he said.

"We've seen all those things last week," Goodale said. "Spring is definitely in the air. Birds are getting ready, and so are the eagles."

In the past two years the birds have laid eggs in early March. Eggs appeared on March 5 in 2006 and on March 6 in 2007.

Goodale said the lack of eggs so far this year is not a cause for concern. The eagles have a window of a couple of weeks in which to lay their eggs, he said, and the telltale sign that eggs have appeared will be if the female stays in the nest all night.

The exact location of the nest is not revealed in order to help prevent anyone from interfering with the wild birds.

The eagles have generated interest online that extends far beyond Maine's borders. According to Goodale, the Web site's visitors are spread across the country and many have viewed the nest from as far away as Peru, Australia, India, Taiwan, China and Singapore. Visitors have posted comments such as "God bless the Maine eagles!" on a blog that is linked to the site. Recorded footage of the nest also can be found on the Web site YouTube.

The BRI site is so popular that computer technicians at the organization have had to beef up their server to handle the Internet traffic, Goodale said. The site received 4,300 hits daily before the eagle cam was brought online in 2006. After chicks were born last year it attracted approximately 8.5 million a day.

Last week, the Web site was getting 53,000 hits a day. As anticipation of nesting activity has grown, that figure has increased to 250,000 a day, he said.

"Ironically, it's a good problem," Goodale said of the Web site traffic. "There's a lot of great interest."