



Bald Eagles attempt to nest near industrial park in Kane County

by Karen Lund

For the past four winters, a pair of Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) has been using the Fox River in the Carpentersville and Dundee area in Kane County. One morning during the winter of 2002/2003, as I crossed the Carpentersville Main Street bridge, an eagle flew low over my car and landed in a nearby tree where another eagle was perched. That was the beginning of my personal eagle watch. Occasionally, I would spot a pair (presumably the same pair) farther north by Fox River Shores Nature Preserve or farther south along the Trout Park River Trail (at I90) in Elgin. I believed that these eagles had migrated south to winter and were feeding on the Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*) that roosted on the open water of the river. I also thought the eagles would migrate back north with the geese and spring thaw. Thus, I was surprised when the eagles began exhibiting breeding signs in late winter 2004/2005.

On 1 February 2005 Anthony Friend posted on IBET (an Internet birding listserv) that he observed an eagle breaking off a 3-foot long branch from a tree and flying off with it, suggesting nesting activity. This occurred along Route 31 between Algonquin and West Dundee near Carpenters Dam and Raceway Woods Forest Preserve. Following up on this report the next morning, I observed a pair of eagles (one noticeably larger than the other) perched in a large oak tree in the middle of a field next to an

Figure 2: Photo above. Bald Eagle at the nest site in Kane County. Photo by Karen Lund.

industrial park. In the following days I continued to monitor that area; however, as time passed, there was no evidence of nest-building in that oak tree.

But then, Roger Hotham called me 16 February 2005 to say he had seen an eagle nest near where I had seen the pair. He gave me the location; and since he knew I frequently birded the river, he suggested that I may want to monitor the progress of this nest and the breeding status of this pair. The next afternoon following Roger's directions, I found the nest near the top of a white pine (*Pinus strobes*) in the early stages of construction. The tree was at the rear of a small backyard approximately 30 m from the house and 90 m from a strip mall at the back of the tree (Figure 1). Both birds exhibited adult plumage with a completely white head and tail.

The nest became more substantial during the next two weeks. Occasionally I would find one or both of them at or on the nest (Figure 2); though, more often than not, they were seen in the area upstream of the dam feeding on geese or fish. I continued this monitoring through the end of March. On 29 March, 2005 I sighted the pair over Fox River Shores exhibiting courtship behavior. The following morning one eagle flew over the intersection of Routes 31 and 72 in Carpentersville heading toward the nest. I had high hopes, but this was to be my final sighting for the nesting season. While courtship and nest building activity was observed, there was no other behavior suggesting advancement of the breeding cycle. It is believed the

nesting attempt was unsuccessful due perhaps to the age of the individuals (they were an inexperienced pair) or because of human disturbance in the area.

Eagles normally avoid nesting where human caused disturbances occur; thus, it was surprising to see a nest built so close to residential housing, industrial and commercial buildings. In Florida, eagles commonly nest in residential developments (Millsap 2004). Buehler (2000) stated that the minimum distance of nests from residential development may be as close as 100 m, but averaged greater than 500 m. This nest is much closer than the minimum distance reported by Buehler (2000). Land use is believed to be important to nest-site selection and in protecting eagles from disturbance (Buehler 2000).

Based upon the expanding urban nesting population in Florida (Millsap 2004) and at least upon this pair, isolation and human activity may not be as important as it was once believed. This pair selected an urbanized setting for their nest. If isolation was important, the forested landscape north of Carpenters Dam was infinitely more suitable and inaccessible to human activity, thus giving this pair a better chance of breeding success. Needless to say, the nest drew quite a bit of attention from the residents, local municipal workers and birders.

Apparently the eagles have bonded to this nest since a pair returned winter 2005/2006 and have been observed in the area since 21 December. They have been seen adding nest material