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# Summit and Valley Girl, Akron's newest bald eagles, nest in former Valley View golf course

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A bald eagle couple found some prime real estate along the Cuyahoga River, and now call Akron home.

Summit and Valley Girl, the eagle couple nesting in the former Valley View golf course, are back for the second year. The perch gives them a great view of the water, a quiet place away from people and a gateway between parks on Akron's north side.

They're not the only ones flocking to Summit County. Summit Metro Parks biologist Marlo Perdicas said it's the newest of five active nests they know of in the county, and eagle nests are popping up more and more across the state.

"That's pretty impressive considering they were on the brink of extinction," Perdicas said.



Two decades ago bald eagles, were a rare sight in Summit County, Perdicas said. In the late 1960s, the amount of nests across the country was in the 400s.

The bald eagle nearly disappeared from the United States. They were put on the endangered species list in 1978, and several laws were passed to protect their population.

Today, Perdicas said there are more than 700 bald eagle nests in Ohio alone. The birds have flourished in recent years, and in 2007 they were taken off the endangered species list. Many of their protections are still in place.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimated that there were just under 10,000 breeding pairs of bald eagles in 2006. As the birds have become more common, there's been less of an effort to get full counts of them nationally, Perdicas said.

Perdicas said DDT, a now banned insecticide, was partly to blame for the bald eagle's devastation. The chemical would pollute rivers and then get into birds via the fish they ate, leaving the eagle's eggs with thin shells.

In 1969, the Cuyahoga River caught fire and garnered national attention, sparking the birth of the Environmental Protection Agency. As the river improved, so did the bald eagle population that nested alongside it.

"It's kind of a recovery story of both the Cuyahoga River and the eagles," Perdicas said.





Valley Girl and Summit built their nest south of the Big Bend Trailhead, between the Erie Canal Towpath and the Cuyahoga River. Onlookers can see the nest from the towpath, but there's no public access near the nest because Valley View is still under construction.

The metro parks wanted to give the birds that best chance of staying and laying eggs, so Perdicas said park officials laid low and didn't spread word about the birds.

Predatory birds often have trouble producing hatchlings their first year, so metro parks officials said they were holding out hope that a baby bald eagle would come.

Bald eagles tend to get together right around Valentine's Day to lay eggs, although this couple waited until mid-March last year, Perdicas said.



The couple had one eagle hatch April 18 last year, which volunteer Jerry Cannon nicknamed Solo.

Cannon is tasked with keeping an eye on the birds, who he said are likely in a holding pattern. So far, there are no new eggs spotted in their nests.

The two have been back for a few months. He said they've built up and remodeled the nest from last year. They're likely stalking it to see if a hawk or owl has taken over while they were gone.

Cannon said he saw baby Solo in January, although the parents seemed to think it was time to grow up.



“They kind of told him he’s not welcome anymore,” Cannon said.

Perdicas said bald eagles will mature for four or five years before they pair off with another bird. They live an average of 20 years.

The birds are mostly monogamous, she said. The eagles will pair up in the fall, and if one of them hasn't died since last Winter, they'll stay together and reclaim their last nest.

Bald eagles are year-long residents, Perdicas said. She said they're pretty sure these are the same eagles from last year, but they can't be 100 percent certain.



Perdicas said bald eagles are also fans of co-parenting. The male and female eagles will split duties. The male will bring food to the female when it's incubating an egg.

“In other instances, he may get on the eggs and incubate and give her a break,” Perdicas said. “Both male and female spend a lot of effort raising the young together.”



The eagles are in a sort of greenspace highway between Akron’s northern parks.

Perdicas said acquiring Valley View was important to Summit Metro Parks because it connects the two halves of Cascade Valley Metro Park and Sand Run Metro Park.

It’s important for animals, like eagles, bobcats and others, to have ways to get from park to park.

Part of what hurt many ecosystems is that lack of connection between greenspaces, Perdicas said. While Northeast Ohio is filled with urban areas, it's also filled with these greenspaces that aren't connected.

"While these animals are native to Ohio, they were mostly nonexistent because the landscape was so fragmented," Perdicas said.

Parks have spent the past few decades trying to reconnect those greenspaces, allowing the larger wildlife to come back to places like Summit County, Perdicas said.

"That has created a big connected corridor, primarily along the Cuyahoga River," Perdicas said.

On Monday, Summit was chilling out on a walnut tree near the river, close to where a covered-bridge connected parts of the course.

Cannon said he was happy the park system had taken over the golf course. Otherwise, the land could have been filled with lots of new homes, instead of an eagle's nest.

People already have started posting about the bald eagles on social media. They've picked a spot where people can see them from the towpath.

But there's enough natural barrier that people can't get too close, Cannon said.

"They picked a good spot to be kind of isolated," he said.

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