

AERIAL PREDATION OF A GREAT BLUE HERON BY A BALD EAGLE

Ivar Nygaard-Petersen

6872 Duncan Street, Powell River, BC V8A 1V2

On 20 April 2007, I witnessed an encounter between an adult Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and a Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) at Stillwater Bay, near Powell River, BC. The event occurred at 0640 hrs on a clear, sunny, and calm day with a rising tide near its maximum height of 4.7 m (15.4 ft).

I had just started up my boat and was letting it warm up when I noticed an eagle flush a roosting heron into the air. The birds flew around, with the eagle in pursuit, for about four minutes gaining altitude and rising to a height of approximately 76-92 m (250-300 ft). The eagle then suddenly grabbed the heron, killed it in mid-air, and tumbled with its prey landing on a log boom where the eagle proceeded to eat the heron.

The heron was obviously too heavy to carry and it appeared that the eagle purposely maneuvered its position over the log booms before it killed the heron. For me, the event was an interesting early morning lesson in natural history - class had started!

The predatory behaviour that I observed was similar to that described by Campbell (1975) of a Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) that flushed a Black Turnstone (*Arenaria melanocephala*) from Clover Point, BC. The falcon forced the turnstone high into the air, by flying beneath it, and then snatched its prey in mid-air. Bald Eagles usually soar overhead to visually locate prey before striking (Buehler 2000).

While the Bald Eagle is an opportunistic forager that eats a wide variety of animals; attacks on adult Great Blue Herons are rare (Buehler 2000). Forbes (1987), however, reported three attacks by Bald Eagles on adult and post-fledging Great Blue Herons foraging near Pender Harbour, BC, two of which were successful.

Literature Cited

- Buehler, D.A.** 2000. Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*). In The Birds of North America, No. 506 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA. 40 pp.
- Campbell, R.W.** 1975. Hunting tactics of a Peregrine Falcon on a Black Turnstone. Condor 77:485.
- Forbes, L.S.** 1987. Predation on adult Great Blue Herons: is it important? Colonial Waterbirds 10:120-122.

About the Author

Ivar was born in Denmark and moved to Canada in 1951. He soon moved to British Columbia and lived in Victoria, Dawson Creek/Arras area, and Canal Flats, before settling in Powell River. As long as he can remember he has been fascinated with all wild creatures and takes meticulous notes describing their occurrence and behaviour during his regular outings.
