



PEACEFUL
PARKS
COALITION

For Immediate Release - November 25, 2004

Herons Abort Nesting At Presqu'ile - Ontario Parks Doesn't Care

In 2003, Ontario Parks implemented a strategy to remove nesting double-crested cormorants from High Bluff Island at Presqu'ile Provincial Park near Belleville in eastern Ontario. In 2003, they removed nests using fire hoses. In 2004, they shot over 6000 nesting cormorants. Their stated objective is to increase the number of herons nesting at High Bluff Island. Ontario Parks claims there are too many cormorants, and they are displacing other birds.

But data released by Ontario Parks last month shows that both black-crowned night herons and great blue herons experienced high rates of nest failure after park officials began shooting double-crested cormorants.

Black-crowned night heron nests dropped from 80 in 2003 to 59 this year. The nest count for great blue herons increased from 38 nests in 2003 to 63 this year, but the nest failure rate increased. Forty percent of nesting great blue herons failed to produce young chicks this year. Last year, 34% of nests failed. Ontario Parks has no data for natural nest failure rates-failure rates naturally occurring without human disturbance -- but 34% or 40% are generally considered to be very high. .

Nonetheless, Ontario Parks is hailing their lethal program a success; regardless of the fact they are losing birds. The increase in great blue heron nests is proof their strategy is working even though all colonial birds were increasing more rapidly prior to government intervention.

"Before they began managing this colony, the number of nesting birds was rapidly increasing along side nesting cormorants. In fact, many arrived at High Bluff Island after cormorants arrived," says AnnaMaria Valastro of the Peaceful Parks Coalition.

"In 1998, there was one great blue heron nest at High Bluff Island. In 2000, the number of nesting great blue herons increased five-fold to 5 nests. The nest count almost tripled the next year to 14 nests, and more than doubled in 2003 to 38 nests. Once Ontario Parks began interfering, herons began aborting. If their objective is to increase the number of herons nesting at High Bluff, then they would have had more birds if they had just left them alone," says Valastro.

For more information,

please contact AnnaMaria Valastro at 416.537.3212

Note to the Editor:

The Peaceful Parks Coalition believes double-crested cormorants are being shot at High Bluff Island because the objective of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources is to enhance the sport fishery in Lake Ontario. Double-crested cormorants are fish-eating birds that are vilified by anglers.

Members of the scientific committee that approved the shooting of cormorants last spring were selected entirely from the Fisheries Section of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources except for one representative from Ontario Parks and one from the Canadian Wildlife Service.

press release

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The Ministry conducted fisheries research during the shooting of cormorants, both aquatic and aerial surveys, and dead birds were sent to New York State for stomach content analysis. The results will be presented at the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission Conference this spring.

Tree nesting cormorants will eventually kill the host tree through the deposit of their guano. The process of killing trees prematurely is a naturally occurring process found throughout the natural world. Beavers kill trees by damming creeks and flooding forest areas. Natural wildfires also kill trees.

These trees eventually become “snags” providing habitat for a different array of wildlife, and eventually breakdown into soil.

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