

February - Week 5

Early Nesters

It's February and some of Minnesota's birds of prey are beginning to build nests, lay eggs, and incubate their eggs. The earliest nester is the Great Horned Owl, who (yes, who!) lays their eggs and begins incubating them as early as the second week of February. Their nests are generally located in tree cavities, many of which form when a large branch breaks off leaving a cavity or nesting platform.

Bald Eagles also return to their old nests in February and begin adding new sticks and branches to them. They use the same nest for many years. Their nests are typically constructed in the tops of tall trees near a lake or river. In Northern Minnesota they prefer White Pine and in Central and Southern Minnesota Cottonwoods are often used as nesting trees. In February, they lay 1 to 3 eggs and begin incubation.

Have you seen any Eagles this month? Have you seen or heard any Great Horned Owls this month? Do you know of any good nesting locations for either of these species in your area? Think about a location where eagles or owls may construct their nests near you. What habitat would draw them there to build a nest and raise a family? If possible visit a woodland or forest and look for tree cavities that an owl may use or look for large nests made by eagles. If you are not able to observe these nesting sites, look in the trees and shrubs in your yard, park, or forest. Bird nests made out of a variety of materials by a variety of species from the previous year may be found. Bird nests may be observed anywhere from 4 to 30 feet high in trees or shrubs. After a snowfall they may be easier to find as they can look like "snow cones" in the branches.

Sketch a picture of a nest you find. Add a short narrative about why you think birds like the Great Horned Owl or Bald Eagle would want to begin nesting in February when most other birds wait until spring or summer to do so.

Eagles frequently add to the same nest each year.

