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Wildlife webcam viewership more than doubles; 2 screech owls nuzzle and more surprises



MARY ANN THOMAS | Saturday, April 24, 2021 8:47 p.m.



COURTESY OF PIXCAMS

Screech owls in Murrysville grooming each other in a nest box, captured on a live webam in 2021.

Two screech owls in Murrysville were caught on video nuzzling or rather grooming each other, a clutch of bluebird eggs have hatched and tired migrating birds are stopping at a drip bird bath in Key Largo, Fla.

All are sights anyone can access in seconds and on demand. Apparently more people are tuning in to PixCams in Murrysville where the number of webcam views have increased tenfold this year over

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There's a similar trend at Cornell Lab of Ornithology in Ithaca, N.Y., which offers up one of the country's most popular slate of wildlife webcams with nesting barred owls, hawks and bird feeders in exotic locations. The number of views have almost doubled since last year while the amount of time people watch any Cornell bird cam and the number of unique viewers have doubled in the last year. Depending on the season, Cornell has between five to 15 bird cams broadcasting at any time, with the most cams online in April and May.

"I think last year's lockdowns took their toll on peoples' ability to experience nature, and that our cameras (and others) offered that access as well as a way to share experiences across online communities," said Charles Eldermire, Cornell's Bird Cams Project leader.

"I also think that watching birds offers hope even during some pretty dark times, and new life entering the world is an inherently hopeful thing to feel like you're a part of it," he said.

PixCams in Murrysville has had the best spring ever for its 25 live webcams — most are nests, although new nature surveillance cameras in Key Largo are trained on feeders and a "drip" bird bath that attracts migrants and other birds.

"Everything is popping, and popping early," said Bill Powers, PixCams' owner. Bluebirds laid eggs in the first week of April; the osprey couple at Moraine State Park in Butler County have three eggs. Powers updated the screech owl and bluebird box webcams with high-definition cameras. The screech owls were caught what looks to be nuzzling on screen.

PixCams is editing videos so the public can access the highlight of the day, or they can watch any PixCams webcam and rewind to a section where there is activity.

"People are getting exposed to things they didn't know were there," Power said.

A number of local educators are using the webcams, especially the bald eagle webcam, in the classroom for remote learning.

And the reach of PixCams' images goes far beyond Western Pennsylvania.

Watchers from France and the United Kingdom wrote to Powers about their excitement of seeing bluebirds hatch this year.

"They don't have bluebirds in Europe," Powers said. "It's fantastic to see people taking advantage of these webcams no matter where they are."

Watch the wildlife

Cornell Lab of Ornithology bird cams include the barred owls, hawks, feeders and more.

PixCams offers local wildlife cams and others such as the new feeder cams in Key Largo. Here are some snippets of video captures by PixCams:

- Eastern screech owl mutual preening in nest box

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- Gray squirrels nursing
- Yellow-bellied sapsucker at log feeder
- Bluebird takes swipe at red squirrel
- Male American redstart at Key Largo Drip Bath
- Painted bunting female at Key Largo Drip Bath

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