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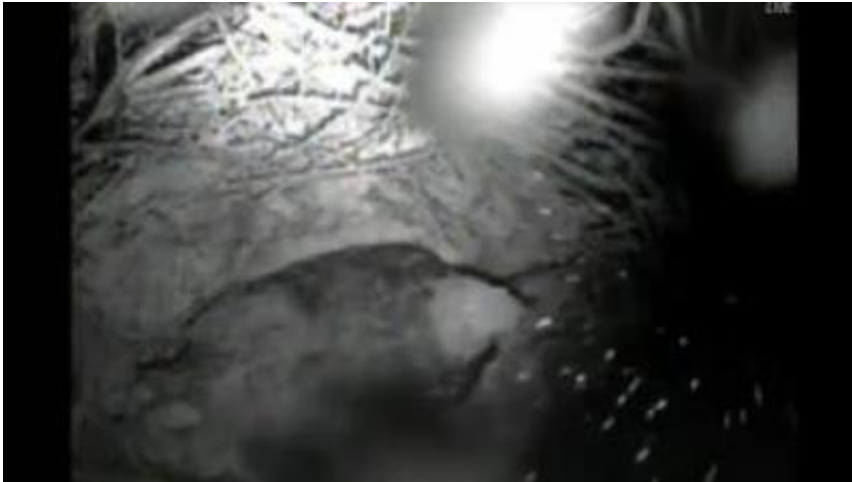
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[Home](#) / [news](#) / [local](#) /

Virginia shows why the eagle is the nation's symbol

By Rex Springston



Virginia, the Richmond Eagle Cam's mother bird, is proving to be a fierce defender of her two eggs.

She scared off an intruder — possibly a great horned owl — during two recent nights.

And during last Sunday's snowstorm, she took an unusually long, 20½-hour stint on her eggs before turning the duties over to her mate, James, at 7:30 a.m. Monday.

During the storm, a layer of snow piled up on Virginia's back.

"The female controls the incubation patterns," said Bryan Watts, director of the Center for Conservation Biology, a research group. "If she doesn't want to leave, she doesn't."

When the nighttime intruder approached, Virginia — the bigger of the two eagles — warded off the animal with a threatening display that included opening her wings to look even larger.

You couldn't see the intruder on the Eagle Cam, but great horned owls often try to chase eagles off their eggs so the owls can use the nest. Great horned owls don't build their own nests.

The Richmond Eagle Cam is a project of the Richmond Times-Dispatch and the center.

If all goes well, the eggs should hatch between March 12 and 16.

People are viewing Virginia and James from across the U.S. and 93 other countries, including El Salvador, Kuwait, Thailand and Yemen.

"We're big in Iceland," Watts said.

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