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EAGLES TAKE FLIGHT IN ILLINOIS
Rare opportunities to view bald eagles this winter

CHICAGO (December 19, 2002) - Enthusiasts of birding – now the fastest growing activity in the nation – should be flocking to Illinois this winter for great views of bald eagles. From Grafton's Pere Marquette State Park to the upper Mississippi riverbanks in Rock Island, Illinois offers many places to view these majestic birds in their natural habitats.

During the winter, bald eagles migrate to Illinois' riverbanks to find unfrozen waters and fish. Hundreds of brown-feathered juvenile eagles and white-feathered adult eagles can be spotted in Illinois now through mid-March. Last year's population was estimated at more than 2,500. Peak viewing times typically occur during January and February and the best time of the day to view eagles is in the morning, when they are soaring high above the locks and dams searching for food.

Located off the Great River Road on the Illinois and Mississippi rivers, Grafton's **Pere Marquette State Park** in southwestern Illinois is home to many wintering bald eagles. McAdams Peak, the highest observation deck inside the 8,000-acre park, allows birders to look down upon bald eagles flying over the Illinois River, Swan Lake and Stump Lake. Another premier spot is the nearby Two Rivers Wildlife Refuge, known to locals as *the* place for viewing large eagle nests. Visitors who want to learn more about eagles and why they migrate to Illinois should sign up for **Bald Eagle Days**, a series of tours hosted by the Pere Marquette Visitors Center. Available through late-February, the tours are guided by state park site interpreters who share spotting tips and the history of this national symbol.

Alton in southwestern Illinois is another popular destination for eagle viewing. In fact, so many eagles flock to this area that the town observes the pilgrimage with an annual month-long celebration in January called **A Day in Eagle Country**. Among the festivities are the popular **Bluff City Tours**, eagle-watching excursions using high-powered viewing scopes. Starting with an orientation, the daylong motorcoach tour guarantees eagle sightings at countless viewing areas along the Great River Road National Scenic Byway. After seeing eagles from afar, visitors can view them up close at the Greater Alton/Twin Rivers Convention and Visitors Bureau. Every Saturday in January and February, experts from the World Bird Sanctuary will host demonstrations where guests can learn about eagles' striking physical features.

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The northern region of Illinois attracts wintering eagles as well, due to the abundance of rivers in the area. At **Starved Rock State Park** in Utica, eagles roost in the shoreline forests and bluffs of the Illinois River. Visitors can observe eagles from Starved Rock's Lover's Leap and Eagle Cliff overlooks, both offer unobstructed views of the lock and dam where eagles hunt for food. On January 25 and 26 during Utica's **Outdoor Awareness Weekend**, the Starved Rock Lodge and the Illinois Audubon Society host **Bald Eagle Days**, where visitors can attend raptor awareness presentations and observe live feedings. Also during this weekend, Audubon Society members will be on hand at Ottawa's **Bald Eagle Watch Weekend**, held at the Illinois Waterway Visitors Center, to answer questions. Additional activities throughout the weekend include outdoor tours, seminars and awareness programs given by the Wildlife CPR Rehabilitation Center.

In the western region of the state, the Mississippi River Visitors Center on Arsenal Island in Rock Island offers eagle-watching tours every weekend in January and February. Visitors can take a 30-minute tour with a local guide to Lock and Dam 14 in Hampton where bald eagles can be seen roosting in nearby wooded palisades. The 17th annual **Bald Eagle Days Environmental Fair and Wildlife Show**, on January 11 and 12 at the Quad City Conservation Alliance Expo Center in Rock Island, features live wolf and birds of prey demonstrations, and offers free tours to Lock and Dam 14.

Winter Travel

The Illinois Bureau of Tourism offers several ways to help travelers plan eagle-watching expeditions. Travelers can call **800-2CONNECT** to talk with an Illinois travel counselor or visit the Illinois Bureau of Tourism's Web site at **www.enjoyillinois.com** for more information on eagle-watching destinations and events. Also available is *Illinois Now!*, a seasonal magazine devoted exclusively to travel throughout Illinois. Eagle watching is highlighted in the winter issue along with many other travel ideas for January and February. For a free copy of *Illinois Now!*, travelers can call 800-2CONNECT or visit www.enjoyillinois.com.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Captioned slides and b-roll of eagles are available immediately upon request. Please contact Rebecca Olchawa, 312-729-1710, for assistance.

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs (DCCA), Bureau of Tourism manages industry efforts that result in sustainable and significant economic and quality of life benefits for Illinois residents.