

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **ILLINOIS ON THE FLY**

*From wetlands to urban landscapes, birds flock to Illinois this spring*

**CHICAGO** (February 26, 2003) – According to the U.S. Forest Service, bird watching – or “birding” as it is known to enthusiasts of this recreational sport – is now the nation’s fastest growing outdoor activity. This spring plenty of feathered friends will take flight right here in Illinois.

The Land of Lincoln hosts more than 420 species of birds, from the majestic Peregrine Falcon – an almost extinct species which now calls Chicago home – to the White Pelican – a tropical species which recently began “stopping over” in southern Illinois during spring migration. For experienced birders, outdoor enthusiasts and novice spotters, below is information about four of the most unique and unusual birds to look for in Illinois this spring.

### **Great Blue Herons**

*A large, mainly grayish wading bird with a pale or yellowish bill and greenish-yellow legs. Produces a loud, harsh squawk. Habitat includes lakes, ponds, rivers and marshes.<sup>1</sup>*

In late March through October, the Great Blue Heron settles in the wetlands of southern Illinois. Loss of breeding ground and nesting sites throughout the United States has encouraged this species to expand its habitat range into Illinois. The largest of the North American herons at up to four feet tall, these long-legged birds can be spotted feeding and nesting in southern Illinois’ swamplands, particularly in the southwest region of the state. One of the best places to see the Great Blue Heron is in **Cache River State Natural Area** near Belknap. A viewing tower inside this 12,956-acre wildlife sanctuary is the perfect vantage point for spotting these regal birds. Another great bird-watching spot is the six-mile **Lower Cache Canoe River Trail** that meanders through cypress swamps.

### **Worm-eating Warblers**

*A small, plain brownish songbird with conspicuous dark and light crown stripes. Produces a fast chirp that resembles an insect-like buzz. Habitat includes dry wooded hillsides.<sup>2</sup>*

The Worm-eating Warbler, a woodland songbird, often stops in the heavily forested hills of

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southern Illinois during spring migration from the Caribbean. Due to forest fragmentation and urban development, the warbler species has declined and strong community conservation efforts around the state are helping restore its habitat. Late March through early April is the best time to look for this small bird as they rest and refuel in the Land of Lincoln. A well-known southern Illinois destination for viewing the Worm-eating Warbler is the **Trail of Tears State Forest**, located five miles northwest of **Jonesboro**. At this 5,000-acre state park, birding enthusiasts can use spotting-scopes to view warblers and other migratory birds in the dense tree canopy.

### **White Pelicans**

*A huge, white bird with a long flat bill and black wing tips. Usually silent, however, often grunts or croaks during nesting periods. Habitat includes shallow lakes and lagoons.*<sup>3</sup>

Birders are discovering a new sight in Illinois – White Pelicans – due to the recent expansion of their migration patterns into the state. These beautiful large, white, web-footed birds visit in April to feed in northern and southwestern Illinois' open waters along the Mississippi and Illinois rivers while on their way to Alberta, Canada. Some of the most popular places to view White Pelicans are at **Utica's Starved Rock State Park** and **Grafton's Pere Marquette State Park**, where as many as 30 pelicans have been spotted in one day. Another excellent viewing area is in **Alton** near the **Meeting of the Great Rivers Scenic Byway**.

### **Peregrine Falcon**

*A large robust falcon with a black hood and wide black mustache. Usually silent, however often produces a raspy kack-kack-kack during nesting periods. Habitat includes open land near rivers and lakes.*<sup>4</sup>

**Chicago's** high-rise buildings – urban alternatives to the cliffs where this species naturally lives – provide a perfect nesting spot for the majestic Peregrine Falcon. The official bird of Chicago, these falcons live near the shores of Lake Michigan and can be found roosting on some of the tall buildings that line the cityscape. Peregrine Falcons reside in the city year-round, but spring is a great time to spot them. They are also frequently seen in the **Paul Douglas Nature Sanctuary**, near the Museum of Science and Industry on the city's south side. This 16-acre sanctuary features open woodlands where Peregrine Falcons nest and feed.

Chicago boasts many birding opportunities this spring. In fact, many birders are surprised to learn that the Windy City is a major refueling site and hosts more than seven million birds during migration seasons, including more than 300 different species. For more information about Chicago bird-watching locations, travelers can visit [www.cityofchicago.org](http://www.cityofchicago.org).

### **Spring Travel and Bird watching**

There are many other species of birds that live in or pass through Illinois during their migration. For more information about Illinois' native and migratory birds, as well as where and when to find them, log on to [www.dnr.state.il.us](http://www.dnr.state.il.us).

The Illinois Bureau of Tourism offers several ways to help plan spring excursions. Travelers can call **800-2CONNECT** to speak with an Illinois travel counselor or visit the Illinois Bureau of Tourism's Web site at **[www.enjoyillinois.com](http://www.enjoyillinois.com)** for more information. Also available is *Illinois Now!*, a seasonal magazine devoted exclusively to travel throughout Illinois. Free copies of *Illinois Now!* can also be obtained by calling 800-2CONNECT or visiting [www.enjoyillinois.com](http://www.enjoyillinois.com).

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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Captioned slides are available immediately upon request, as well as slides of birds mentioned throughout the press release. Please contact Jen Elving, 312-240-2813, for assistance.

*The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (prior name: Department of Commerce and Community Affairs), Bureau of Tourism manages industry efforts that result in sustainable and significant economic and quality-of-life benefits for Illinois residents.*

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<sup>1</sup> National Wildlife Federation (2003)

<sup>2</sup> National Wildlife Federation (2003)

<sup>3</sup> National Wildlife Federation (2003)

<sup>4</sup> National Wildlife Federation (2003)