

# Eagle Season officially kicks off in Alton with Eagle Fest

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer  
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**ALTON** - Winter in Alton means one thing above almost all else - eagles.

The Riverbend area holds one of the largest wintering populations of American bald eagles in the United States, according to a release from the **Alton Regional Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB)**. Eagle season lasts from late December through the month of February. To celebrate the season, the Alton CVB has partnered with the **Audubon Center in West Alton** since 2012 to host educational, informative and fun events for people to enjoy the eagle-watching season.

On Saturday, Jan. 7, from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m., the Alton Visitor Centers, located at **200 Piasa St.**, and the Audubon Center at Riverlands, located at **301 Riverlands Way** in West Alton, Mo., hosted a joint festival to kick off the season featuring live raptors (birds of prey, not *Jurassic Park* villains), games and giveaways.

The Audubon Center featured raptors from the **TreeHouse Wildlife Center** in Dow, and the Alton Visitor Center featured a live bald eagle from the World Bird Sanctuary. **Alton CVB Executive Director Brett Stawar** said several hundred people had already come to the festival early in the afternoon, despite frigid temperatures.

"This is our opportunity to kick off the season," he said Saturday afternoon. "We've partnered with the Audubon Center since they've opened, and we've done this joint festival. It's been good. Last year was flooded out, but this year we've had 600-700 people come inside and it's been a constant flow of people."

Stawar said groups from places like Springfield, Ill. had come to the festival; some of them were even staying the night in Alton in rented hotel rooms.

"We had the shuttles, and those all sold out earlier this week," he said. "We have a live eagle meet and greet here, which is very popular, all the nice festival games and the live eagle ice carvings just wrapped up. They were very popular."



Both the Alton Visitor Center and the Audubon Center at Riverlands will host live eagles each weekend throughout the duration of January. The eagle will be in Alton on Saturdays and West Alton on Sundays.

"Really, the most eagle-watching programs in the entire Midwest happen here in Alton," Stawar said.