

The Audubon Center at Riverlands welcome back wintering eagles

by Steven Spencer, Staff Writer
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WEST ALTON - It's that time of the year when bald eagles swarm back to the Riverbend. To celebrate their return and to help educate the community on their habitat the Audubon Center at Riverlands held their annual Alton Audubon Eagle Ice Festival on Saturday.

"This is an event we've been doing with Alton CVB for maybe eight or nine years now," Center Director, Ken Buchholz said. "We have conservation partners throughout the room with various activities and games that people can play and learn about the eagles, birds, water and the river."

The story of the relationship between the Audubon Center and eagles is one that started several years ago Buchholz said.

"The Nation Audubon Society and the Environmental Defense Fund, back in the 60s and 70s sounded the warning on DDT," he said. "So the eagles recovery coincides with the banning of DDT. Many people in this room can remember growing up when we never saw eagles, it'd be a rarity to see an eagle in Missouri in 1975. Now we're celebrating them with Eagle Fest up and down the river, which is really a conservation success story. It kind of comes full circle."

Buchholz said this year has seen an incredible amount of birds at the center including a snowy owl and record setting numbers of trumpeter swans.

"We had a historically high weekly count of 1,375," Buchholz said. "So they're finding this habitat attractive and that's what so cool about Riverlands. It has a lot of diverse habitats so we're seeing all kinds of birds."

The event always attracts families, Buchholz added, but over the last few years he said there have been more young adults attending.

"We're seeing more and more little ones and older individuals, but we're also seeing increasingly more people in their 20s and 30s," he said. "I think there's a new wave of conservation efforts and we're excited about it because those are our next conservation leaders, we're really glad to see it."

The big show is always the eagles Buchholz said, which people were able catch a glimpse of on Ellis Bay Saturday morning.

Over the next month the Audubon Center will continue to invite the community to come catch a glance of the eagles at the Riverlands.

“Every weekend, through the first weekend of February, we will have Eagle Sundays and Raptor Saturdays,” Buchholz said. “There will be a live raptor here both days and on Sundays there will be an eagle. Apparently there’s a lot of eagles just north of here, so we’re hoping they’ll make their way down.”

Buchholz said the center encourages everyone to come out to the Audubon Center at Riverlands and make it one of their outdoor destinations. For more information on the Audubon Center at Riverlands visit www.riverlands.audubon.org.



