



# Eagles begin to appear all around Alton

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ALTON - All eyes are on the sky as the Great Rivers & Routes region prepares for the annual winter migration of the American Bald Eagle. Every January, experts anticipate as many as 1,000 bald eagles will migrate to the area reclaiming their winter roosts along the Meeting of the Great Rivers National Scenic Byway.

To celebrate the return of this majestic bird, the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau along with the Audubon Center at Riverlands will host the Alton Audubon Eagle Ice Festival, Saturday, Jan. 5 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Free family-friendly activities, and a live American Bald Eagle will be on hand at the Alton Visitors Center, 200 Piasa St. The Audubon Center at the Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary, 301 Riverlands Way, West Alton will feature a live raptor, educational booths, eagle watching shuttle tours sponsored by Argosy Casino and the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau, crafts, viewing stations, eagle trails and more.

Start your day of eagle activities in downtown Alton by watching ice carvers create an eagle from a frozen block of ice. Or enjoy Itchy Brothers Chainsaw Art show off their carving skills as they create a bald eagle from a block of wood. Both carving events take place behind the Alton Visitor Center from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Then take part in the always popular ice cube crush giveaway where every participant is a winner when they choose an ice cube to crush. Each ice cube features a special offer from a regional business including: Argosy Casino Alton, My Just Desserts, The Loading Dock Ice Rink, Fin Inn, Old Bakery Beer Co., Grafton Winery & Brewhaus, Alton McDonald's, Weeping Willow Tea Room, East Alton Ice Arena, Riverbend Skate, Best Western Premier, Elsay General Store and more. Or take a chance to win a prize on the ever-popular Plinko game from Argosy Casino. Prizes can include discounts on merchandise and food or free gifts and gift certificates to area businesses. Enjoy a free donut courtesy of Duke Bakery or a cookie from Spoon Baking Co.

Liberty Bank will also take part in the kick-off event by sponsoring the Ice Putt Putt Golf contest for visitors. The bank's mascot, Sam the Eagle, will also be on hand to greet visitors to downtown Alton.

And, of course, there will be the star of the show: a live eagle meet and greet featuring an eagle from the World Bird Sanctuary at the Alton Visitors Center. All of these activities are free. Additionally, the CVB will offer Eagle Watching Shuttle Tours which will provide visitors with a guided first-hand look at several eagle watching hot spots in the region. All shuttles leave from the Audubon Center at Riverlands. The shuttles will be provided by Argosy Casino Alton. The cost for these 45-minute tours is \$5 per person and reservations may be made in advance at [www.visitalton.com/shuttle](http://www.visitalton.com/shuttle). Tours begin at 10:30 a.m. and the last Eagle Watching Shuttle Tour will depart at 1:30 p.m.

At the Audubon Center, located across the Mississippi River, visitors can enjoy the view of the mighty river and its abundant wildlife from the comfort of the state-of-the-art Visitors Center or immerse themselves in nature by walking the Eagle Loop Trail with education stations located around the center. Spotting scopes are available at indoor and outdoor viewing stations and there will be an opportunity for an up-close and personal look at one of the region's birds of prey presented by TreeHouse Wildlife Center. This year, visitors will also receive an Eagle Passport and can receive stamps from conservation partners on site at the Audubon Center. Once the passport is completed, visitors can redeem the passport for a s'more freshly roasted at one of three bonfire stations. Representatives of area attractions and conservation organizations including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Charles Parks & Rec, St. Louis Audubon Society, Gateway Arch NPS, Missouri Department of Conservation and others will also be at the center hosting family-friendly activities. Food vendors from Poputopia, LuciAnna's Bakery and Dam It Joes will also be on hand to satisfy any hunger pangs. Chances are visitors will also be able to see the hundreds of Trumpeter Swans who make the Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary their winter home. All activities, with the exception of the food vendors and the shuttle tours, at the Audubon Center are free.

The weekend also kicks off the annual Alton Eagle Watcher T-Shirt Giveaway, which is open to eagle watchers of all ages. This giveaway encourages visitors to stop by the various Eagle Watching Hot Spots. Visitors who go to five of the specified hot spots (Pere Marquette State Park, Two Rivers National Wildlife Refuge, Alton Visitor Center, Audubon Center at Riverlands, National Great Rivers Museum, TreeHouse Wildlife Center, The Post Commons, Lewis & Clark State Historic Site, Elsah General Store, Willoughby Heritage Farm, Columbia Bottom Conservation Area or the Grafton Visitor Center) and have their card initialed by a representative of that site will receive a free eagle t-shirt by returning their completed card to the Alton Visitors Center. T shirts are available while supplies last. The contest is sponsored in part by Alton Memorial

Hospital and Phillips 66. For more information on this contest go to [www.VisitAlton.com/EagleWatcher](http://www.VisitAlton.com/EagleWatcher).

Every day visitors can travel along the Meeting of the Great Rivers National Scenic Byway to visit the “**Eagle Watching Hot Spots**” featured in the ***2019 Eagle Watcher’s Guide***. Again this year, the **Alton Eagle Watching App** will guide visitors during their eagle watching adventure. The free app, available for iPhone and Android, will lead visitors to the eagle watching hot spots, provide information on upcoming events and festivals, allow visitors to share their eagle photos, offer deals from restaurants and shops, as well as a list of the shops, restaurants, attractions and lodging found along the byway.

Annually, the opportunities for eagle watching continue to grow in the Alton region. Visitors can head out to view the eagles on their own, or they can take part in some of the traditional eagle watching events in the region, including eagle meet & greets, eagle watching tours and live bird demonstrations. Events take place nearly every weekend and throughout the week, from January through March. Plus, most of the events in the region are free of charge. A full list of events can be found online at [www.VisitAlton.com/Seasons/Eagle](http://www.VisitAlton.com/Seasons/Eagle) and in the ***Eagle Watcher’s Guide***.

For visitors who would like to make eagle watching a winter getaway, there are numerous eagle packages and specials available at hotels and bed & breakfast inns in Alton, Grafton and Elsah. Alton is the place to be for the best eagle events and the largest concentration of American Bald Eagles in the state of Illinois. **For the latest eagle watching updates or to receive your free *Eagle Watcher’s Guide*, call 1-800-248-6645 or go to [www.VisitAlton.com](http://www.VisitAlton.com).**