

The season of cherished eagle watching has begun

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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The excitement of eagle watching was in full force Saturday as several hundred turned out for the annual Alton Audubon Eagle Festival at Riverlands in West Alton, Mo.

Gail Mauretto of Glen Carbon was one of the eagle enthusiasts present and said the event was very worthwhile and she wished she had brought her grandchildren.

“This is the real stuff and I am inspired now to take them eagle watching,” she said. “It is very valuable to talk to people who know about the eagles.”

Lane Richter, senior ecologist with Riverlands Wildlife Center, said every day on his job there brings a new experience. He said he always enjoys the eagle-watching kickoff to bring in all the partners in the region together for people to see.

He said the eagle watching should begin to hit its peak in the area soon as the weather changes.

“We are in the transition and as we get cold weather, we will see an increase in bald eagles,” he said. “We saw three today and five this week. As weather improves we will see more. As drivers go up the Great River Road they can take advantage of pullout spots and see eagles using islands. Other good viewing spots are here, the Nature Institute and the Two Rivers Wildlife Refuge.”

Harvey Russell of Ice Visions provided ice sculptures and demonstrations to add to the ambiance of the event.

Brett Stawar, president of the Greater Alton Convention and Visitor’s Bureau, was on hand on Saturday and he said this is a great way to kickoff the eagle-watching season.

“We love to showcase all of our partners. We do this through mid February,” he said. “Some are more educational focused and conservation focused and others more into the tourism attraction of eagles. This lasts until late February and is one of biggest wintertime economic activities that keep tourism alive. We are lucky enough to have the majestic bald eagles to bring people to the region.”

Larry Reid, an outdoors talk show host for WBGZ Radio in Alton, was on hand and said his goal is to promote Riverlands and eagle watching to young people and parents.

“This is a great day and we try to keep people abreast of events that happen over here every Sunday at noon longest running outdoor program start its 30th year in March,” Reid said. “The outdoors is my passion.”

Julie Watson, environmental education specialist for Riverlands, said it was great to see the different organizations working together in partnership and the people turning out for the day.

She adds, “Eagles are something that everyone has a place for in his or her heart.”

