

# American Bald Eagles Right Here In Our Back Yard

by Cassie Loveless  
June 24 2022 10:22 AM



LITCHFIELD - I am a huge animal lover and have spent my whole life in Litchfield, IL. I have always been curious about our local wildlife. One of the main birds of prey in this area is the American Bald Eagle. They are our country's national symbol but they are also an attraction in my small community. Eagles represent strength, and are very predictable and majestic creatures.

As part of an honors English project, I began to research American Bald Eagles. I did a survey of my freshman class and it was interesting to discover that so many students don't know that eagles live right here among us. We don't need to travel far to see the majesty of the American Bald Eagle that we see on everything from our state flag to our money. A family of bald eagles have lived on Litchfield's Lake Lou Yaeger since 2004.

If you haven't seen eagles before, you should start by looking near lakes and rivers. Eagles make giant nests in the tallest trees. On Lake Lou Yaeger, there are a few older nests that can still be seen from the water. The nests are made of branches, trees and leaves but unlike birds in your backyard, eagles make nests that can be several feet in diameter and they keep the same nest for several years.

Bald eagles were once considered endangered but through the help of amazing people who have worked hard to protect them, eagles are now a protected bird of prey. They can be found in every state across the United States, except Hawaii. At the top of the food chain, eagles have no predators but are essential to the ecosystem. Their primary food source is fish which is why they tend to make their homes near water. They also eat rabbits and other small animals.

Our two local eagles showed up 17 years ago and were named Martha and George because they were the first ones ever spotted in our area. They have been of interest to the people of the lake since they got here. Some of whom watch them carefully, keep tabs on them, search for nests and inform the public of their presence. Andy Furman is a local resident who has been responsible for both tracking the eagles and educating the community since their arrival. He wrote a book entitled *The History of Lake Lou Yaeger 1872-2020* in which he included a chapter about the local eagles and one key incident involving Martha in 2017.

Eagles are very territorial and often live as couples, not in large groupings. In April of 2017, Martha fought a male eagle to the end. Although she won the battle, she was badly injured during the fight. A lady from Honey Bend found them in a field and quickly called an IDNR officer. Martha was taken to the Treehouse Wildlife Center in Dow, IL, to be cared for until she could be released back into the wild. Her injuries were mainly cuts and scratches but they were worried about infection and she was unable to fly.

Martha stayed at the Treehouse Wildlife Center was from April 2017 to January 2018. During that time George could be heard crying for her. He most likely never knew what happened to her. Eagles mate for life and at the time of her disappearance, they had two babies to care for. George called in relatives to help him raise their young until Martha returned.

Martha's stay at the treehouse was long and boring for her. Birds of prey can't be released from captivity until they can fly 100 feet and land safely. The Treehouse Wildlife Center had a flight cage that was seriously damaged. Martha was in captivity longer than necessary while she waited for it to be repaired. Mike Mulhern, Andy

Furman and other members of FOLLY, which stands for Friends of Lake Lou Yaeger, helped to repair the flight cage which took a couple of weekends. Martha's release was scheduled for January 20, 2018.

Andy Furman and Sarah Waggoner, Litchfield's tourism director at that time, were in charge of organizing the release and informing the public. On that day it was cold and windy but about 500 people showed up to see the release of Martha, including George. He showed up in the parking lot circling an hour before the release. Andy Furman and a leader of the Treehouse released her and she flew to a tree across the lake where she met with George.

Since Martha's incident, George and Martha have built a new nest closer to Litchfield's Shoal Creek. We thin it's because they are more fearful of people now but they can still be seen perched in trees along the lake. With an average life span of 30 years, hopefully they will stay in Litchfield for a long time so we can continue to enjoy them.



Although I began researching American Bald Eagles as part of a school assignment, my time researching them has made me very passionate about helping to preserve these amazing creatures in nature. It is our job to help protect the eagles by picking up litter and by keeping the lake clean. Eagles main prey is fish and if the lake becomes polluted it will ultimately affect the eagles. The story of Martha and George shows the difference one person can make even when you do something as simple as pick up your phone and get help for an animal. Please be kind to nature so we can continue to see the beauty of bald eagles.





If you see an animal in trouble, please call the Treehouse Wildlife Center at 618- 466-4990 or your local animal rescue center. More information about Treehouse Wildlife Center can be found at [www.treehousewildlifecenter.com](http://www.treehousewildlifecenter.com). They are a non-profit organization and rely on fund raisers and donations to continued operating and saving wild animals.

And if you happen to visit Lake Lou Yaeger this summer, look for Martha and George perched high in the trees. Finally, next time you're outside, look up and see what you can see. You never know what you might find!

*Cassie Loveless is a freshman at Litchfield high School, the daughter of Abe and Jenny Loveless. She loves animals, especially horses. She also enjoys reading, boating and camping and is in the high school band.*

THIS STORY ORIGINALLY RAN IN THE JUNE 2022 ISSUE OF THE PRAIRIE LAND BUZZ MAGAZINE, <http://www.thebuzzmonthly.com>