

Observing Bald Eagles in Winter

by Reid Magney and Terri Melrose

Opportunities for spectacular viewing of Bald Eagles in Illinois exist during winter months. At the right time and right place, the observer can view dozens of eagles roosting in trees overlooking the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers. What follows is a sampling of excellent areas for watching Bald Eagles in winter and best times for viewing. Also included are locations that require permission to enter and telephone numbers. Several areas bordering Illinois are also mentioned.

When planning a day or weekend of eagle watching, keep in mind that eagles are most active between 10 and 11 a.m. when air movement is coupled with some sun, said Hal Cohen, professor at College of DuPage who has observed wintering Bald Eagles for 20 years. In fall any northerly wind will bring in eagles, he said. Unless otherwise noted, the best time to see eagles is in January and February when most of the river is frozen and the eagles gather near open patches of water to feed.

'The fish upon which eagles feed often get stunned near the dam areas making food easily accessible.'

Lock and dam areas provide good viewing spots. The fish eagles eat often get stunned near the dam areas making food easily accessible.

CASSVILLE, WISCONSIN

Where to go: Nelson Dewey State Park just north of Cassville as well as two power plants, one in town and one just north of town. You may also find eagles feeding in nearby fields.

When to go: Starting around the third week of September and early October until Thanksgiving.

DUBUQUE, IOWA

Where to go: Lock and Dam No. 11, Eagle Point Park, Julien Dubuque Monument, city flood wall, the Mines of Spain, Massey Station, and the sewage treatment plant.

Highlights: Dubuque Bald Eagle Days is the second Saturday in January. For more information call 319-557-9200.

BELLEVUE, IOWA

Where to go: Bellevue State Park, north and south sections. Just south of Bellevue, the north section provides a good overlook of Lock and Dam No. 12. The number of eagles at the dam decreases when boats and fishermen are present.

Highlights: Bellevue sponsors an annual eagle festival in January depending on weather conditions. Call the Chamber of Commerce at 319-872-4991 for more information.

SAVANNA, ILLINOIS AREA

Where to go: Mississippi Palisades State Park and the Savanna Army Depot 14 miles north of Savanna off Illinois Highway 84. Access is limited to groups with advanced permission. Call 815-273-8311.

Fulton Dam, 15 miles south of Savanna, is a good place to view eagles when plenty of ice cover exists, said Cohen. Also try the parking lot of Nancy's Bar along the river in Fulton a few miles south of the dam.

Highlights: Terry Ingram, who has been counting eagles for 30 years, said he has seen 85 eagles at one time on the east side of the river near Fulton Dam, which is much better for viewing than the west side. Cohen once saw 106 eagles in four trees near Fulton Dam.

CORDOVA, ILLINOIS

Where to go: Nuclear plant provides good access to riverfront. Use road near FS plant and 3M plant, but get permission from nuclear plant guards before entering.

QUAD CITIES AREA

Where to go: Lock and Dam No. 14, approximately 2 miles south of Interstate 80 on Illinois Highway 84; Lock and Dam No. 15 and the power plant at the Rock Island Arsenal; also Sunset Park Marina on the far west end of 18th Avenue in Rock Island.