

long enough, a Pileated Woodpecker. Soaring eagles are a common sight above the opposite river bluffs visible 3.5 miles distant, across the full expanse of the Illinois River Valley.

If Lake Chautauqua freezes, the ducks move to other areas in search of open water. Most of the eagles also move to other areas, but many may still be found perching in trees along the Illinois River. Even on the coldest subzero days, though, with the wind screaming off the lake, a few lone eagles may still be found standing on the ice, stoically enduring the full force of the wind and cold. It is a mystery why these individuals do not move on to areas of open water found on the Illinois River, which rarely freezes entirely for extended periods, or to the shelter of a daytime perching area with other eagles.

Because the lake may freeze and appear as bleak as any arctic landscape, the best time to visit Lake Chautauqua for eagles and overwintering ducks is probably

late December to early January, while there is still some open water. The easiest way to reach Lake Chautauqua is to travel to the town of Havana via U.S. Route 136, and follow the Manito Blacktop Road north from the town several miles to a sign indicating directions to the refuge headquarters. Then proceed north on County Road 1950E to the refuge

entrance gates. At the headquarters, maps and information on access to other parts of the refuge will be available in addition to a nature trail, viewing platforms, and permanently mounted spotting scopes.

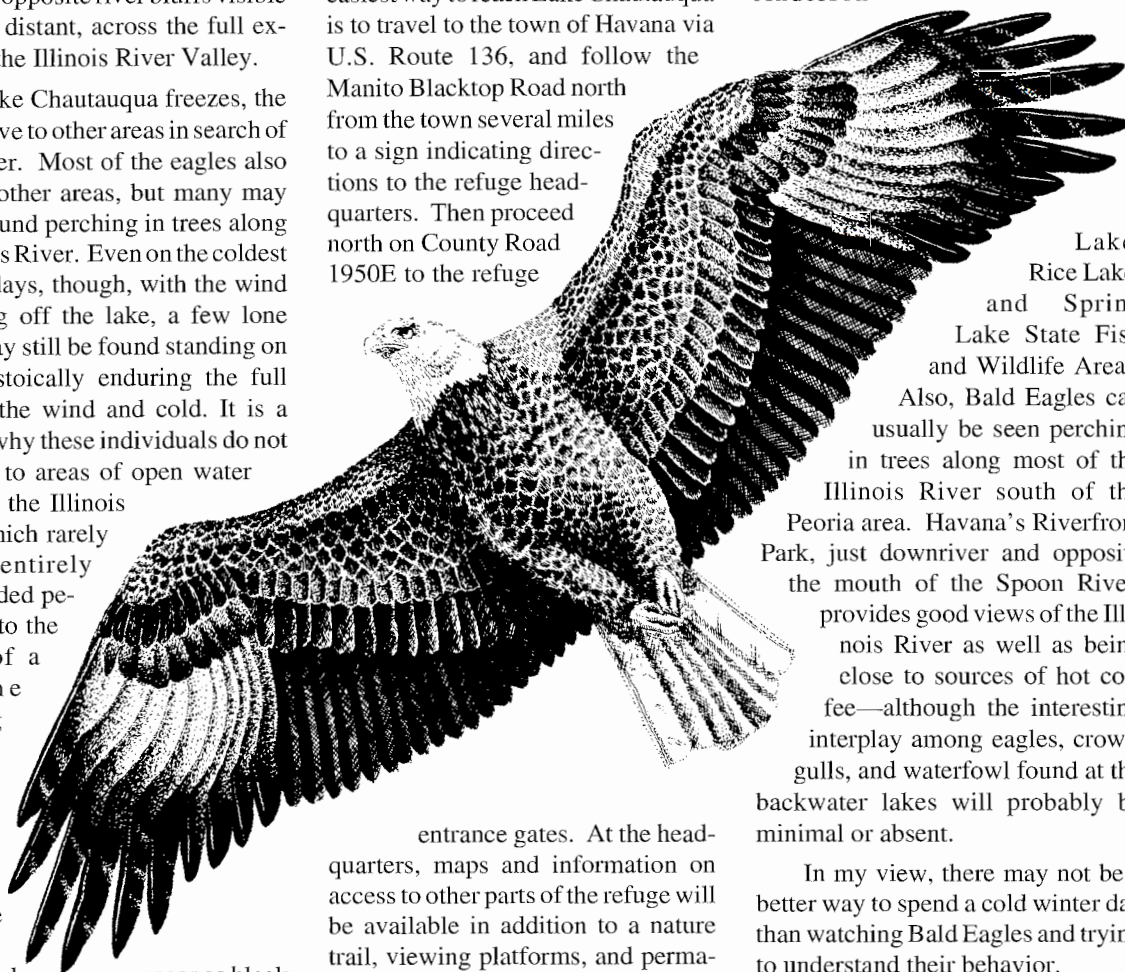
If Lake Chautauqua is frozen with few birds about, there are several other Illinois River backwater lakes nearby

which may have open water with waterfowl and eagles. These include Anderson

Lake, Rice Lake, and Spring Lake State Fish and Wildlife Areas. Also, Bald Eagles can usually be seen perching in trees along most of the Illinois River south of the Peoria area. Havana's Riverfront Park, just downriver and opposite the mouth of the Spoon River, provides good views of the Illinois River as well as being close to sources of hot coffee—although the interesting interplay among eagles, crows, gulls, and waterfowl found at the backwater lakes will probably be minimal or absent.

In my view, there may not be a better way to spend a cold winter day than watching Bald Eagles and trying to understand their behavior.

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Eagle Identification Key

- 1A Head and tail white, body dark go to 2.
- 1B Head and tail other than described above go to 3.
- 2A Head and tail pure white, body dark Adult.
- 2B Head and tail dirty white (some dark feathers present), body dark Transition, 4th year.
- 3A Head, body, and tail generally dark, very little white in feathers 1st year.
- 3B Head and body has some (or too much white), especially in belly area go to 4.
- 4A Head has brown hood, belly; wing coverts very white 2nd year.
- 4B Head and breast brown; some white on belly; wing coverts with a scattering of dark in white 3rd year.