

## Letter from the Editor

### Eagle Winter Habitat in Illinois Being Threatened

In 1993, I researched an article for *Meadowlark* on the Bald Eagle in Illinois. At that time, the eagle was a federally endangered species, and research was showing that this bird's survival in winter depends upon it having the proper habitat in which to feed, perch, loaf, and roost. Thanks to research as well as the banning of the egg-thinning pesticide, DDT, and the protection of critical habitat, the Bald Eagle is no longer endangered.

That does not mean, however, that we can rest on our biological laurels and forget all the work done to protect these birds. Indeed, the Bald Eagle is being threatened right here in Illinois, which now hosts the second largest wintering population of eagles in the nation.

Plum Island, a quiet 55-acre island at Starved Rock State Park where Bald Eagles winter, is being slated for development. Don Barclay, a developer, seeks approval to build a 250-room hotel and convention center on the island. He needs permission from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Don Goerne, President of the Starved Rock Audubon Society, said Bald Eagles come to Plum Island in winter to get away from people, and to fish the waters below the dam, which remain open in winter. Building the proposed hotel will drive these birds from their preferred perches, he said. The developer, of course, says he promises that won't happen. Of course, the developer is not relying on science, but rather dollar signs to make his promises.

While a hotel/convention center would at first benefit the people of Utica, as far as jobs and growth are concerned, it would disturb the eagles' habitat, and eventually destroy the very reason many people go to Starved Rock in winter — to view the eagles.

Surely another place for the hotel can be found. Surely we don't want to undo all the efforts made to save the Bald Eagle from extinction.

To make your voices heard on this important matter, contact Don Goerne at [dgoerne@yahoo.com](mailto:dgoerne@yahoo.com). He can send you petitions asking Gov. George Ryan, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to permanently protect Plum Island from development so that eagles can continue to winter here.

— Sheryl De Vore

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## About the cover

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Peter Olson drew the cover art of breeding Painted Buntings (see page 2 for an article on the first documented successful nesting of this species in Illinois). Olson is the Preparator at the Northern Illinois University Art Museum. His work has been showcased in more than 100 art exhibits in the past decade. You can see his art at the Birds in Art show at the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum in Wausau, Wisconsin. The show opens September 8, 2001.

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