



David Perry/Staff

A bald eagle sped from the scene after hearing the rumble of a boat engine at Dale Hollow Lake, which is on the state line between Kentucky and Tennessee.

## Spot for eagle-eyes

### DENSE FOG SLOWED DAY OF BIRD-COUNTING ON DALE HOLLOW LAKE

By Marc Zarefsky

HERALD-LEADER STAFF WRITER

**DALE HOLLOW STATE PARK** - The conditions were not ideal to spot the symbol of America.

The fog was so thick that the group of five people could barely see a thing outside the windows of the tiny police boat. Weather forecasts said there would be sunny skies and temperatures in the mid-60s, but early Thursday morning on Dale Hollow Lake, the temperature was just above freezing, and the fog consumed the boat.

The group was on a mission, though. Trooper Craig Sutton manned the wheel as the others scanned the shoreline trees. Finally, once the fog had burned off, they found what they were looking for: a bald eagle.

With the sun now shining bright, the team saw a young, immature eagle perched alone on a high branch, its brown belly and lack of white head- or tail-feathers differentiating it from its elders. Later on the trip, the group saw a pair of adult eagles resting near each other on separate branches before gliding off. Soon after, two young eagles were spotted circling above the treetops. By the end of the day, the group observed 14 eagles.

This group was Team Two of four teams counting the eagles in Dale Hollow State Park. The four teams combined saw a total of 30 eagles. The park is one of 15 nationally recognized spots in Kentucky with representatives tallying eagles between Jan. 4 and Jan. 18 to come up with an annual midwinter count. Only 18 percent of the lake is actually in Kentucky; the remaining 82 percent is in Tennessee. Fourteen of the 30 eagles were seen on the Kentucky side.

"This overall figure is down significantly from previous years, probably due to the fact that there was a dense fog during the a.m. hours, and also due to the fact this has been a very mild winter," said Mark Willis, park ranger at Dale Hollow.

In 2005, 67 eagles were spotted at Dale Hollow Lake, 19 of which were on the Kentucky side.

The counting "gives us an idea of the population," said Shawchyi Vorisek, avian ecologist for the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. She said the number of eagles present each year is dependent on what the weather is like in the northern part of the country.

"Up north, when the waters freeze over and they can no longer get the fish, the migratory birds will travel south for the winter," said group member Sondra Carmen, environmental protection specialist and park ranger for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Typically, Carmen said, Dale Hollow Lake has the second-largest wintering population of eagles in Kentucky and Tennessee, mainly because the lake is so big that it does not freeze.

The bald eagle has been America's national symbol since 1782, a time when more than 100,000 eagles roamed the country's skies. It was placed on the endangered species list in 1967, when fewer than 1,000 remained, said park ranger Jamie Summers, stationed at Dale Hollow. According to the National Wildlife Service, the bald eagle's classification as endangered was switched to threatened in 1995. Today, there are nearly 10,000 bald eagles in the United States, Summers said.

For more than three decades, Kentucky State Parks have held "Eagle Weekends," devoted to the observation, education and conservation of the bald eagle. Over the next three weekends, four state parks will host the events, allowing the public to take open-barge tours to observe and learn about the symbol of America.

The Dale Hollow Lake Eagle Watch Weekend will include a two-hour boat ride around the lake, informational sessions about both the lake and the eagles, and an optional hike to Eagle Point Lookout.

All tour participants should bring warm clothes, rain gear and binoculars.

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## Eagle



There's a joke about a photographer using a tripod on a boat. Good luck keeping it steady! But I did make use of a monopod when photographing this bald eagle on Dale Hollow Lake this month. It helped steady the composition when we spotted an eagle perched in a tree. I was in a covered 5-passenger State Police boat. When someone spotted a bald eagle, I'd go out the front door, stand on a small deck, and train the lens on the bird. The engine would be turned off in the boat. The monopod worked pretty well until the bird started flying. Then I had to use the 'pod as a grip and try to track it. Luckily, we spotted 8 bald eagles in the 3 hours I was on-board. With the magnification inherent with Nikon digital, the view ended up at about 20x with the rather large lens I was using.

You too can have a chance at photographing these birds at Dale Hollow and elsewhere (See Jan. 16 Herald-Leader City/Region section). It's pretty expensive to use the rig I used. Now, I haven't tried it, but you might check out this digital camera/binocular combination by Pentax at <http://www.opticsplanet.net/pendigdbbinw.html>. I consider this camera as just a toy. However, it might be fun to use if you bird watch, go to Keeneland, photograph your pets, watch your kid play sports, etc. But it won't yield much of a print past 5 x7 inches. - Dave Perry.

Tech info: Nikon D2H, 500mm f4 autofocus with 1.4x teleconverter (700mm equivalent focal length), 1/1250 sec., f8; white balance: