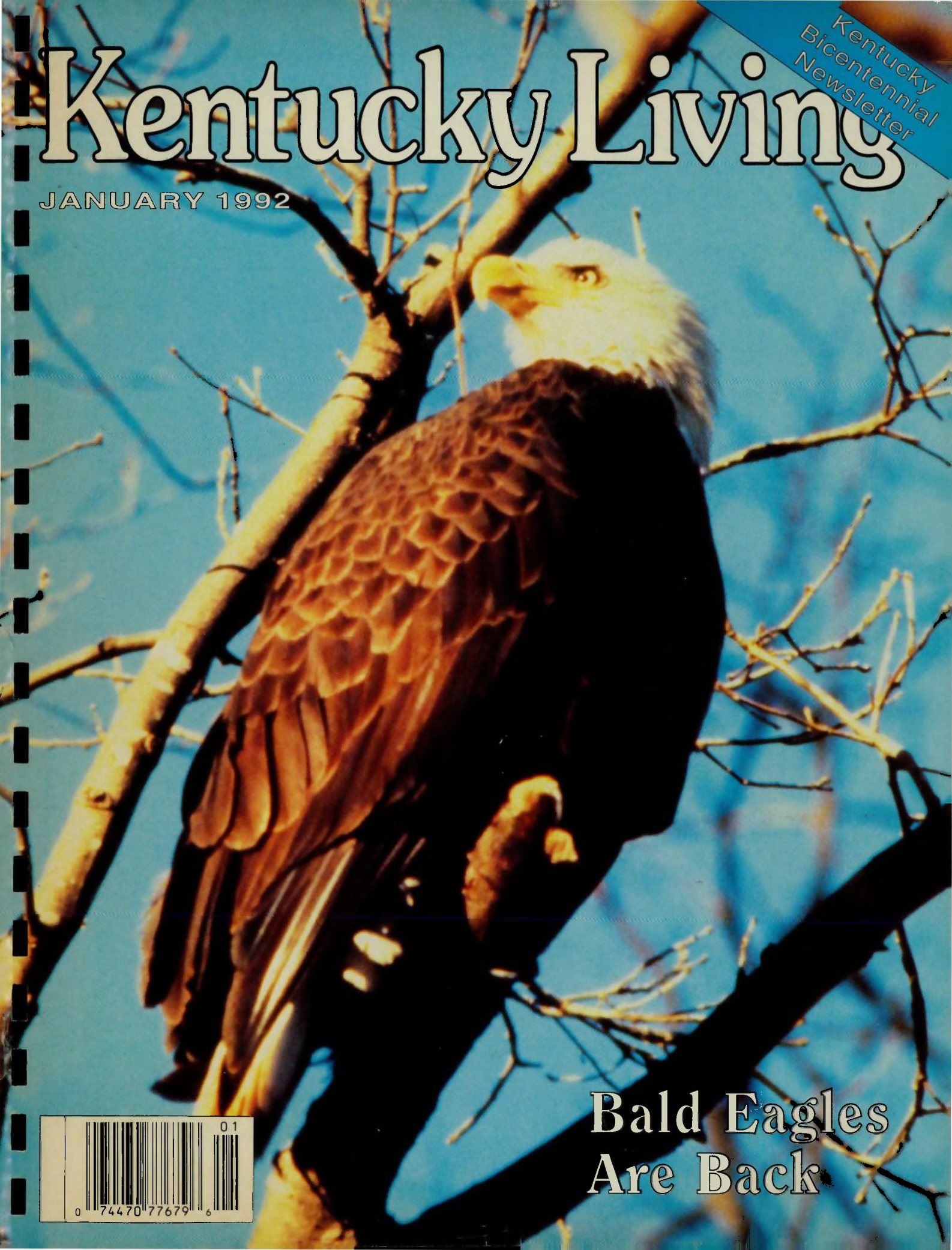


# Kentucky Living

Kentucky  
Bicentennial  
Newsletter

JANUARY 1992



Bald Eagles  
Are Back



# Bald Eagles Are Back

BY GAIL KING

*The majestic birds are  
nesting in Kentucky  
again, and dedicated  
birdwatchers are  
flocking to see them*



**Y**ou can hardly turn around these days without spotting a bald eagle; the Postal Service, the U.S. Army, a cigarette company and various wildlife preservation organizations all use the majestic bird's piercing stare or soaring wingspan to catch the public's eye. In Kentucky, at least 20 high schools and one university compete in sports as "Eagles."

The real thing, however, is harder to find.

Years ago eagles nested along waterways throughout western Kentucky, but as the national eagle population started a fast decline in the late 1940s, so did Kentucky's. While several factors contributed to the decline of bald eagles nationally, the two that most affected Kentucky's population were brought about by post-World War II prosperity. Huge tracts of wilderness were plowed over for increased agriculture or subdivided for vacation homes, making less available for nesting. And increased use of the pesticide DDT caused eagle eggs to develop improperly.

The 1972 ban on DDT and an emphasis on wildlife refuges and hacking programs helped bring eagles back to Kentucky. (Hacking relocates eaglets and thereby imprints a new "home" to which they will return to nest. Forty-four eagles were hacked in western Kentucky between 1980 and 1988.)

Generally eagles don't breed until they are at least four years old, so it was big news when #K01, a bird hacked at the Tennessee Valley Authority's Land Between the Lake area, returned in 1984 at age three to build a nest and produce eaglets in the Tennessee section of LBL. Five years later, one of his offspring built a nest in the Mammoth Furnace Creek area and hatched the first Kentucky-born eaglet since the 1940s.

Eagle watching has become increasingly popular as the eagle population has grown. "Eagle weekends" at LBL in January and February celebrate the eagles' resettlement in Kentucky. Bald eagles aren't social creatures, and each year the mystery remains — do they know there's a party in their honor? Will the honored guests show up?

Generally they do, although the numbers

vary from year to year. Susan Mueller, a science teacher from Henderson, recalls a bonanza year. "We remember it as the Eagle Beach Party," she says. "We were on top of Silo Overlook when we spotted a mature one in a mud flat eating away. The longer we stayed the more eagles came to that flat. There would be 10 or 15 at a time. A big old carp had washed up and they put on a show for us, grabbing and snatching pieces from that fish and from each other."

On a beautiful February Saturday last year, I joined a group of eagle watchers at Barkley Lake Lodge. "Ironically, beautiful weekends bring boats that frighten the eagles," our guide Scott Seiber said. "We often get better sightings in bad weather." Will the eagles mind our caravan of bright yellow school buses and vans of assorted colors? "One small boat in the water is more threatening than a yellow bus load of people on land," Scott assured us. "Busloads of people do not have the capacity to violate the eagles' space or scare away their lunch. Generally we stay across a bay, at least three to four hundred yards away."

We started our hunt on the Kentucky Lake side of LBL because Scott got a clue there might be eagles in Clay Bay.

No eagles.

Then word arrived that we should try Byrd Bay.

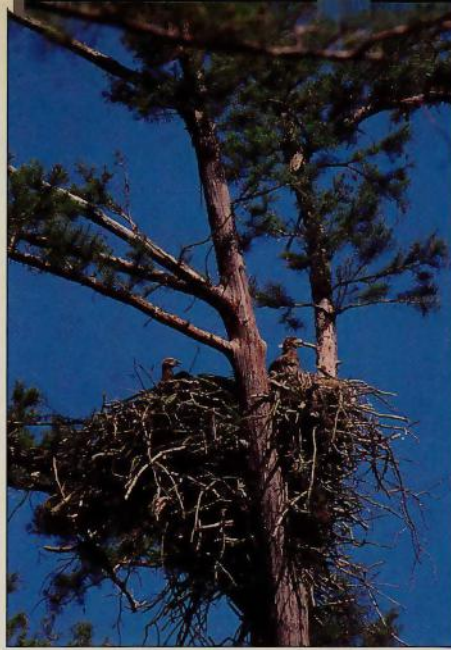
No eagles there either, but between Clay and Byrd, we got a good eagle education.

Of the more than 250 bird species that frequent LBL, the bald eagle is the giant, with a wingspan that can reach seven feet. Named for its bald (an old English word for white) head and feet, it is exclusive to North America, a fact that inspired the founding fathers to name it the national bird. (Its preference for carrion and its proclivity for stealing food from other birds led to some objections: "For my own part, I wish the bald eagle had not been chosen as the representative of our country," wrote Benjamin Franklin. "He is a bird of bad moral character; he does not get his living honestly ... Besides he is a rank coward; the little king-bird, not big-

ger than a sparrow, attacks him boldly and drives him out of the district." Franklin, who preferred the wild turkey, did not win that round, and the eagle remained our national symbol.)

At Byrd Bay, the caravan lines up for a disappointment. The eagles have been frightened away by a small boat that illegally invaded the inlet bordered with buoys marked "EAGLE NESTING REFUGE — CLOSED TO ALL ACTIVITY." Someone got the boat's number; its occupants could be subject to a \$100 fine for accidentally disturbing nesting eagles. (Fines of up to \$50,000 and jail terms of up to 12 years can be enforced for killing or possessing any part of a bald eagle.)

Regrouping at Byrd Bay, we peered at a nest through 20-power spotting scopes and got a brief lesson on eagle households. Eagles bond for life, building huge nests in tall trees near water. They begin the nest (or start adding to an old one) in January or February and produce one to three eggs sometime in February. After 13 weeks the eaglets hatch. They are dependent on Momma



Baby eagles in Ballard County check out the view from their nest near the top of a cypress tree.

Gene Boaz

and Daddy for food and for protection against predators until they leave the nest sometime between June and August.

Steve Bloemer, an LBL wildlife biologist, explained that the great attraction for eagles at LBL is the annual shad die-

off that comes with low water temperature. "They swoop down, sometimes from twice tree-top level, to get the freshly dead shad," he says. Although a few eagles stay year-round, most of them come to LBL because waters farther north have frozen; therefore any winter population depends on how cold the weather gets farther north.

We moved on from Byrd Bay to Hughes Bay, where we learned that the resident couple had left before company arrived. Still no eagles. Then Scott got word of a positive sighting across LBL at Prior Bay on Lake Barkley. A parade of buses and vans beat us to the spot; we arrived to a line-up of high-powered cameras and 20-power spotting scopes.

An eagle!

It was sitting on the tip top of a tall tree across the bay, screaming. We could hear it faintly and see its throat and beak move. Veteran birdwatchers were impressed; generally eagles scream only to other eagles. Then people began to whisper and point — another eagle was sitting in a tree on our side of the bay, only about 150



Reservations fill up fast each year for eagle-watching field trips sponsored by the Tennessee Valley Authority and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

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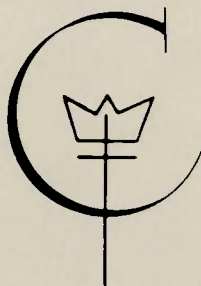
yards away. We watched it preen and then peer around. Suddenly it lifted from the branch and soared across the bay. A magnificent, glorious sight — that great swoop of wings soaring across a bay to meet its mate.

Masses of eagles never lived in Kentucky and probably never will. Birdwatchers must travel to Alaska to see great flocks. There, in the Valley of the Eagles near Haines, as many as 3,000 bald eagles congregate from November to February. (Three rivers come together in this valley; the water runs free and full of salmon throughout the winter.) Ruth Rudner described that gathering for The Wall Street Journal last year: "In town I walked along the harbor. A lone eagle circled, soared and circled, higher and higher, over the dark water. It's odd. Seeing hundreds of eagles at once is an amazing, almost incomprehensible event. Yet, seeing only one, in all this huge sky over the harbor and the town and the blue-white mountains, seemed graspably majestic. One eagle soared, and my heart soared with him."

Kentuckians' chances of seeing such an eagle get better every year. "They're liable to show up anywhere in the state, especially where you have a large body of water," says David Yancy, a wildlife biologist for the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. "The hot spots are LBL, Ballard County and Dale Hollow, but there are eagles most years at Laurel River Lake in Daniel Boone Forest and at Cave Run near Morehead." Eagles have also been spotted lately in Mammoth Cave National Park and in Marion, Laurel, and Franklin counties.

For information about eagle days and weekends at LBL, call (502) 924-5602 or write: LBL, 100 Van Morgan Drive, Golden Pond, KY 42211. (Weekend reservations fill up early from a November mailing; the single-day events that run through February 23, at Woodlands Nature Center may still have openings.) Woodlands Nature Center at LBL is open daily March 1, through November 3, with limited hours the rest of the year. The Corps of Engineers conducts an eagle day the third Saturday in January at Dale Hollow. Reservations are generally filled before January. Call (615) 243-3136 to get on the mailing list there.

**DREAM DREAMS AND SAY  
"WHY NOT?"**



Todd Hamilton had a dream to become a research chemist when he applied for admission to Cumberland College. However, to realize his dream, Todd knew that he would have to work to help pay



his way since both he and his twin brother, Tracey, were enrolled at Cumberland. So Todd developed a study routine and also worked 12-15 hours per week on the college workstudy program as a landscaper, as a teaching assistant, and as a tutor in the Chemistry Department.

But Todd's determination paid off when, in the summer of 1989, he was selected as 1 of 24 students in the nation to receive a fellowship for six weeks intensive study in Nuclear Chemistry on the San Jose California State campus. This fellowship was sponsored by the Nuclear Chemistry and Technology Division of the American Chemical Society. In addition, Todd, along with 2 other Cumberland College students, was selected to give a poster presentation at the National ACS Meeting in Boston, Spring, 1990, and was a 1990 state-finalist in Kentucky for the Rhodes Scholarship.

Cumberland College helped Todd to see his dream become a reality by providing him workstudy and scholarship opportunities. A modern chemistry department with state-of-the-art equipment along with our dedicated and qualified faculty members prepared him for graduate studies at the University of California, Berkley.

Todd has now completed the comprehensive examinations for a Ph.D. in Nuclear Chemistry and is continuing research toward his goal to become a research chemist!

At Cumberland College we do not dream dreams and say "Never." We dream dreams and say, "Why not?"

**Cumberland College**

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