

# The Eagles Have Landed

By Jeri Packer



**Editor's Note:**

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Bird enthusiasts all along the St. Clair River have been reporting a very special event - sightings of the great bald eagle. These majestic birds with their snowy-feathered (not bald) head and white tails have been spotted at a number of places along the river including Harsen's Island.

Wild Life Technician John Darling, who works out of the Department of Natural Resources field office here on Harsen's Island, said eagle sightings have become fairly frequent here. He knows of one nesting pair of bald eagles on the Island and another pair on Dickenson Island. There is some talk of golden eagles in the area but he hasn't spotted any yet. In the winter, bald eagles tend to congregate in the St. Clair Flats area he said where there is a good source of fish and ducks.

Darling doesn't see any negatives about having eagles in a community. "They are popular with the bird watchers," he said. "They're also an important part of the life cycle of the ecosystem. They are predators and will finish off a deer that a coyote hunted down and then left behind. They clean up the animals the other predators leave."

Darling said residents don't need to worry much about having the royal bird, which is part of the hawk family, in their neighborhood. They don't get into much mischief, he said, but if their nesting area is discovered in a tree, Darling advises people to let the birds have their privacy. Their nests, seen the best by small plane, can be as big as 13-feet deep and eight feet across, he said. The females generally lay two eggs a year and one of the eaglets has a good chance of not making it.

The population, according to sightings this winter, seems to be on the rise after eagles almost died out. Back in the 1970s, municipalities sprayed for bugs with an insecticide called DDT. They didn't realize the sad fallout for that mistake and the bald eagle was soon on the endangered species list. "It made the shells of the eagle eggs soft and they wouldn't hatch", Darling said.

These birds nest in big old trees like the cottonwood. Their nests are made of good-sized sticks and underneath the nests will be found the bones all from their prey.



Bird watchers and hunters have seen these bald eagles. Photographers like Michael Gronley of Virgs Photography have seen them too. He said don't look at the tops of trees for eagles. Look at the middle, where there are heavier branches to hold their 16-pound frame. Eagles stay brown until they're 10 years old and then they get the brighter white head and tail. These magnificent birds grow to be as round as a telephone pole, three feet tall with up to a seven-foot wing span.

Clay Township supervisor Artie Bryson said, when he was in Alaska, he was able to see quite a few of these large birds of prey. Now, in Clay Township, he's seen at least five of them this year. Bryson said they like to eat on the ice, so it's not uncommon to see them riding an ice flow or just perched on some jagged ice that has formed in the St. Clair River.

Facebook fans put up a page for eagle spotters called St. Clair County Eagle Watchers. And they are pleased to report that indeed, "The Eagles Have Landed." ■



**EAGLE PHOTOGRAPHER MIKE GRONLEY**

*Michael Gronley is a resident of Clay Township and his hobby and passion is fishing and photography. He started getting serious about photography about two years ago when his wife bought him a Sigma 150-500mm lens to help him capture his love of birds. He was extremely excited to learn about the eagles in Algonac and on Harsen's Island and it was then that he was determined to capture these beautiful animals with his lens. You can check out some of his photos at [www.facebook.com/MichaelGronleyPhotography](http://www.facebook.com/MichaelGronleyPhotography)*



**EAGLE PHOTOGRAPHER STACY WILLIAMS**

*I am a mother of four children and my family has had a cottage on Harsen's Island since 1937. As a child, my father John Kracht, bought me a camera every Christmas, that is where my love of photography began. I started a business: Twin Photography [www.twinphotography.com](http://www.twinphotography.com) and here you can find many of the photos I have taken of the Island. Generally, I photograph in a journalistic style. For my own pleasure I photograph nature.*