



Lords of the Air

Birds of prey—also known as raptors—are a very diverse group of birds known for their incredible eyesight, agility, and speed. The open skies above Guntersville Dam are an excellent place for raptor watching, as resident species hunt nearby and migrant birds follow the river, as they have done for centuries.

Just downstream from the dam, Painted Bluff is known throughout the region as a prime site for watching migrating birds of prey. Winds blowing against the bluff create updrafts where these regal birds can soar for hours. The birds can also soar in thermals. Thermals are columns of warm, rising air that has been heated by cliffs, paved roads—even parking lots.

Visitors can launch a boat at the dam and float downstream to watch these raptors soaring high overhead. The best time for large numbers of raptors is September and October, although Bald Eagles and Osprey can be seen year-round.



Bald Eagle/Walt Burch

Eagles

Northern Alabama is home to a growing population of Bald Eagles. These majestic symbols of freedom are always a privilege to see. In late fall and early winter, Golden Eagles may also be seen near the dam. Golden Eagles only visit Alabama in small numbers and tend to stay in the wildest areas of the state.



Osprey/Walt Burch

Osprey

The Osprey is a regular sight around Guntersville Dam. This bird of prey is specially designed to hunt fish. Plunging feet first into the water with an impressive splash, osprey grab fish with their sharp talons. Watch as they struggle to get airborne after catching a really big fish.



Peregrine Falcon/USFWS, Craig Koppie

Falcons

The Peregrine Falcon is revered worldwide for its speed and incredible hunting skill. Some of these impressive birds migrate through and winter near the coast. Alabama's most common falcon is the diminutive American Kestrel, which is easily spotted hunting from roadside telephone wires.



Sharp-shinned Hawk/Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Rick Kline

Hawks

Hawks are the most diverse group of raptors in Alabama. They range in size from the tiny Sharp-shinned Hawk, which zips through the forest catching small birds, to the familiar Red-tailed Hawk which preys on squirrels and other mammals.

Bald Eagles Nest Nearby

- Both male and female participate in nest building, incubation, and brooding the young.
- Look for adult eagles in December and January as they prepare their nests for eggs.
- Activity will pick up considerably in February, once the eggs hatch and the eagles are busy hunting to feed the chicks.
- By April, the chicks are as large as their parents and start learning to fly.
- The young eagles may stay around the nest for another year until the nesting season starts again, and the young birds finally move out on their own.
- Bald Eagles first begin to nest when they become sexually mature at four to five years old.