

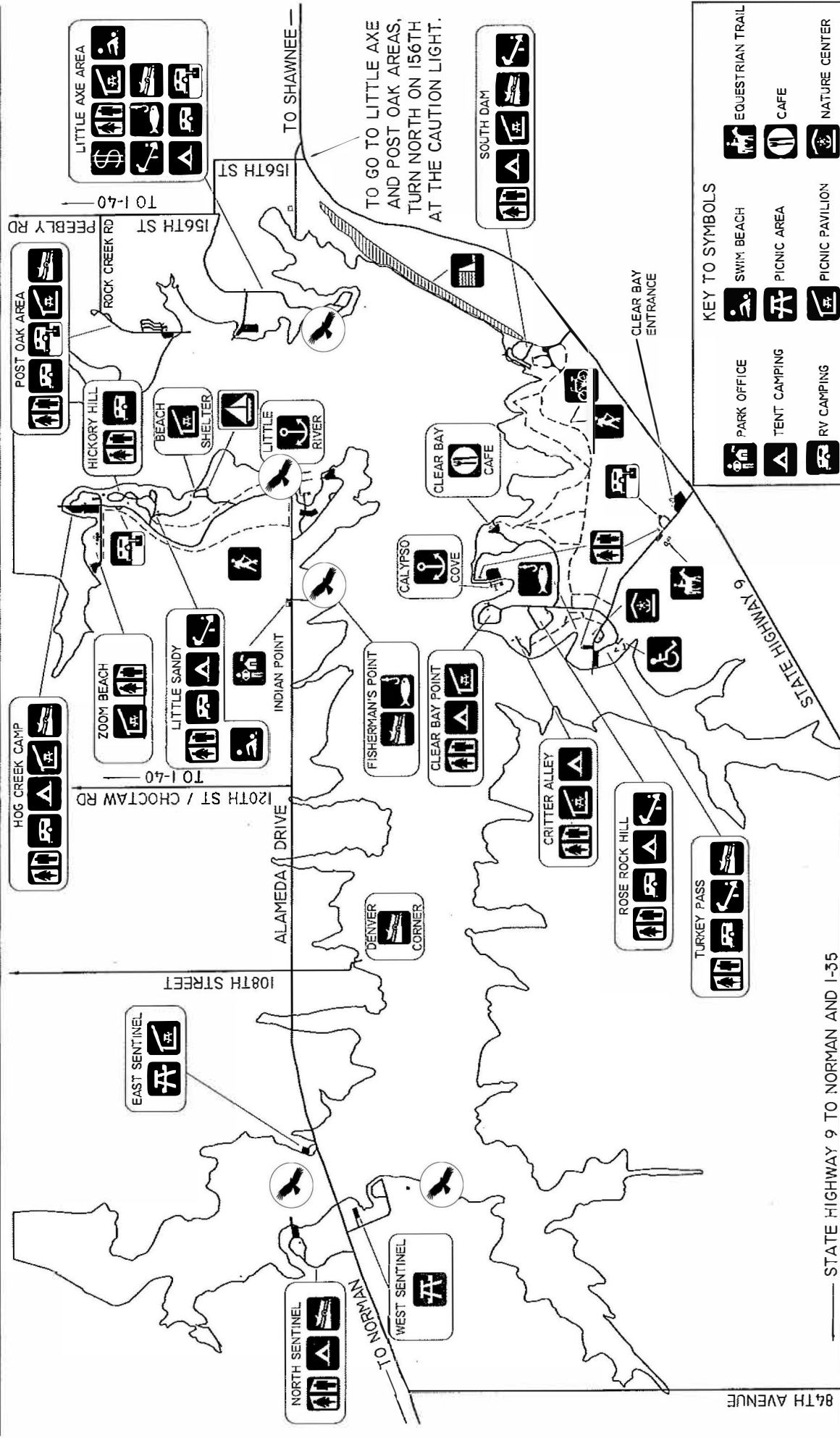
# Lake Thunderbird State Park

## Self Guided Bald Eagle Tour



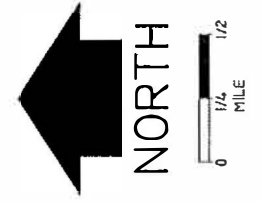
149TH ST (S. 19TH ST IN MOORE)

STELLA ROAD



KEY TO SYMBOLS

PARK OFFICE	SWIM BEACH	EQUESTRIAN TRAIL
TENT CAMPING	PICNIC AREA	CAFE
RV CAMPING	PICNIC PAVILION	NATURE CENTER
RV DUMP STATION	COMFORT STATION	HIKING TRAIL
LAKE THUNDERBIRD AQUATIC TRAINING CENTER	PLAYGROUP	BICYCLE TRAIL
ASSIGNED AREA FEE	BOAT RAMP	ACCESSIBLE TRAIL
MARINA	FISHING PIER	DAM



# LAKE THUNDERBIRD STATE PARK

STATE HIGHWAY 9 TO NORMAN AND I-35

BAIRD EAGLE WATCHING  
December - February

# Lake Thunderbird State Park

## Self Guided Bald Eagle Tour

### Common Bald Eagle Sighting Areas at Lake Thunderbird State Park

- West Sentinel
- North Sentinel
- East Sentinel
- Fisherman's Point
- Sailboat Ramp
- Little Axe Area

### Eagle Viewing Tips

- The best time to observe eagles is around sunrise or sunset.
- Choose a location, and be patient! Get comfortable; bring snacks, water, or a warm beverage, and plan on spending some time in each spot. The more time you spend in a location, the more you increase your chances of seeing eagles.
- Keep your movements and sounds as minimal as possible.
- Spend some time looking up towards the sky and in the trees, but also look out across the water. Eagles hunt fish, and you may see them flying over the lake or swooping in to catch a meal!
- Check the weather forecast and be prepared for the conditions.
- Wear warm, neutral-colored clothing and appropriate outerwear. Winters in Oklahoma can be cold and windy, so bring along a warm coat, gloves, hat and scarf. Layers are advised in cold weather.
- Bring binoculars, a camera (preferably with a zoom lens), and a field guide book to help you identify eagles and other bird species you may find along the way.
- A portable camp chair or lawn chair can be helpful.
- Always call ahead to state parks or wildlife management areas for up-to-date eagle viewing information before your trip.
- Please do not litter.
- Please do not feed or touch wildlife.

Lake Thunderbird State Park  
Self Guided Bald Eagle Tour

**Flight Silhouettes for  
Common Oklahoma Birds of Prey**



**Bald Eagle**



**Golden Eagle**



**Turkey Vulture**



**Red-Tailed Hawk**



**Osprey**



**Great Horned Owl**



**Merlin**



**Peregrine Falcon**



**American Kestrel**



**Mississippi Kite**



**Cooper's Hawk**

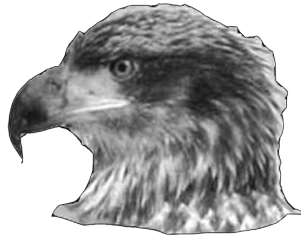
These silhouettes are sized to scale. The bald eagle's wingspan can reach 90 inches while the American Kestrel's wingspan is around 22 inches.

Lake Thunderbird State Park  
Self Guided Bald Eagle Tour

**Common plumage / coloration  
for bald eagles by age**



6 months  
Head is mostly dark brown



1.5 years  
Some visible variation in plumage



2.5 years  
More visible variation in plumage



3.5 years  
Very visible variation in plumage



4.5 years  
Head color is mostly white



Adult  
Head color is white

**Young eagles are often misidentified as hawks because they have not yet developed their signature white head. While the timeline varies slightly for individuals, this image shows the gradual color change in their plumage during development.**

## Lake Thunderbird State Park Self Guided Bald Eagle Tour

### **Background Information**

As the chilly veil of winter spreads across the plains, hundreds of bald eagles make their way to Oklahoma. The winter months are the perfect time to head out on a crisp, clear day in search of the approximately 800-2,000 magnificent eagles that call the Sooner State home during the season's peak. Migrating south to Oklahoma from Canada and the northern states in search of warmth, these noble birds join nearly 80 pairs of bald eagles that are year-round residents of Oklahoma, creating a birder's paradise filled with boundless eagle-viewing opportunities.

The bald eagle's trek into Oklahoma begins in November and early December, then peaks in January and February, when numerous bald eagle watching events pop up around the state to take advantage of the increased numbers. Primarily a fish-eater, the bald eagle prefers to settle near Oklahoma's lakes and rivers for easy access to food. Groups of eagles will rest together, or "roost," in trees along the shores, with the same roost trees being used each year. With seven foot wingspans and the characteristic bright white heads that adult bald eagles have, the grand size and distinguished appearance of these birds make them easy to spot and watch. As birders have long known, watching a bald eagle in its daily routine is awe-inspiring.

Lake Thunderbird State Park, situated within the bald eagle migration corridor in Norman, hosts roosting eagles between the months of December and February. Attracted by the rolling, oak-covered hills that surround Lake Thunderbird, eagles flock to the park for shelter and a stable food source.

## Lake Thunderbird State Park Self Guided Bald Eagle Tour

**Bald Eagle**(*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) : bird of prey found in North America.

**Kingdom:** Animalia  
**Phylum:** Chordata  
**Class:** Aves  
**Order:** Accipitriformes  
**Family:** Accipitridae  
**Genus:** *Haliaeetus*  
**Species:** *H. leucocephalus*



### Size and Weight:

American bald eagles are one of nature's largest raptors, with wings that can span eight feet. Even their nests can weigh up to a ton.

Female bald eagles are about 25% larger than males. While female bald eagles weigh 10 to 15 pounds, males weigh 6 to 9 pounds. Their height is 28 to 38 inches and their wingspan is 5.5 to 8 feet.

### Appearance:

Despite what their name may suggest, bald eagles aren't actually bald. The name is an old translation of "piebald" thought to describe the birds' coloring, meaning "white-headed."

Their beak is large and hooked. On their wing feathers, they have black pigment, which has been found to strengthen the feathers against breakage when diving into the water. Each foot has four powerful toes with sharp talons. Tiny projections on the bottom of their feet called spicules help bald eagles grasp their prey. The bald eagle has serrations on the roof of its mouth that help it hold prey.

## Lake Thunderbird State Park Self Guided Bald Eagle Tour

### **Diet:**

Bald eagles are often found near bodies of water to be close to their favorite food — fish. They can capture fish with their spiny scales and sharp talons on their toes. They also have rough pads on the bottom of each foot to help grip slippery food.

Large groups of Bald eagles will gather along rivers in Alaska when salmon is abundant. When fish are scarce, they also hunt small mammals like rabbits, squirrels and even young deer. At times, they may scavenge food from other birds or visit human garbage dumps.

American bald eagles are specialized predators: They can catch falling prey mid-flight and even dive-bomb into rivers to snag wriggling salmon.

### **Habitat:**

Bald eagles are adaptable birds. While they are mostly found in the forest and tundras of Alaska and Canada, they can also be found in Florida's mangrove swamps. They are almost always found near water, such as lakes, sounds, or seas.

Geography:

Bald eagles are found throughout North America from Canada and Alaska to Mexico.

### **Breeding:**

It is believed that bald eagles mate for life, and the pair builds a nest together. Once the nest is to the eagles' liking, the female lays one to three eggs. The mother lays her eggs several days apart, once a year. Both parents take turns keeping the eggs warm day and night until they hatch. The first chick to hatch has an advantage over its younger siblings, as it had more time to grow. The oldest, biggest eaglet may even kill its smaller, younger siblings over food. This is a survival strategy for the eagles, ensuring that at least one chick gets a good chance at living to adulthood. Most eagles do not survive the first year. While they are young, both parents help care for the eaglets. The mother does most of the chick-sitting, while the father provides the food for the family. At birth, eaglets are a fluffy, light gray color. At 12 weeks old, about the time that they leave the nest, they turn a dark brown. Their head and neck feathers don't turn white until they are mature.



## Lake Thunderbird State Park Self Guided Bald Eagle Tour

### **Social Structure:**

Bald eagles are believed to mate for life. Their courtship involves elaborate calls and flight displays. One way that bald eagles impress each other is through a special aerial courtship dance in the sky. The male and female lock on to each other's talons and tumble and twist in the air. They let go at the last second, just before reaching the ground. Once bald eagles find a mate, they look for a spot to build their nest. They look for a spot where the fishing is good, where the trees are tall and where there are few disturbances. The pair then builds their nest high in a sturdy tree. They continue to add to their nest year after year, with twigs, grass, branches and feathers. Eagle nests can grow to be massive. The largest nest, found in Florida, weighed 2 tons and measured 9 feet across and 20 feet deep.

### **Lifespan:**

In the wild bald eagles typically live between 15-30 years.

### **Threats:**

Bald eagles are at the top of the avian food chain, and their only natural enemies are bears and wolves. Therefore, the largest threat to bald eagle populations is humans. Their populations started declining in the late 1800s when they started to be killed for sport. Later, in the mid-1900s, farmers started using pesticides to protect their crops from insects. Unknown to the farmers, this pesticide use had adverse impacts on bald eagles, who ate fish from bodies of water that had been contaminated by overuse of the poison. The widespread use of pesticides disrupted eagle reproduction, and forests, where eagles nested, were cleared. While biologists once estimated that up to 500,000 eagles soared the sky, their numbers dropped drastically during this time.

### **Conservation Status:**

The bald eagle is listed as Least Concern on the IUCN's list of endangered species. It was removed as an endangered species in 1995 and later removed as a threatened species in 2007, as populations recovered from years of decline.

# Bird Watching Notes

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Time \_\_\_\_\_

Species \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
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Date \_\_\_\_\_

Time \_\_\_\_\_

Species \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
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Date \_\_\_\_\_

Time \_\_\_\_\_

Species \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
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