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Isla a la Cache Highlights the Wilderness in Romeoville

The bald eagle is America's national bird. This majestic raptor can have a wing span of 6-8 feet and dive at speeds nearing 100 miles per hour. You don't have to go far to see one either. There are actually bald eagles right here in Romeoville. You can find them on Isle a la Cache, the 101-acre island based park on Romeo Road that sits between Route 53 and the bridge over the Sanitary and Ship Canal. The museum and preserve are managed by the Forest Preserve District of Will County. "We've been in the middle of a staff meeting and an eagle will dive right out of the sky," says Chris Gutmann, the Facility Supervisor for the North Zone of the Forest Preserve. "The meeting stops pretty quickly because everyone is watching." The eagles are present year around, but there tends to be more during the winter. They like to patrol up and down the river and the more time you spend in the preserve, the more likely you are to encounter one.



Photo courtesy of Laurel Ahlenius

Eagles aren't the only animal visitors may be surprised to find in town. Peregrine falcons can be spotted in the area. These birds are smaller than eagles, but can dive twice as fast, reaching speeds of 200 miles per hour. There are also rare swans and stunning waterfowl that can't be seen during the summer. "Most people miss these exotic looking species because they aren't outside in the colder months," explains Chris. There are mink at the Isle and river otters have recently been observed in the Romeoville/Des Plaines River via radio tracking. There are also a number of endangered species in Romeoville. In total, over 170 bird species have been documented at Isle a la Cache alone.

Isle a la Cache isn't the only place to go if you want to spot some animals in the wild. O'Hara Woods, located directly behind Village Hall and Deer Crossing Park, is designated as an Illinois Nature Preserve. This status is reserved for the highest quality/most important habitats in the state. "O'Hara Woods has roughly 130 species of birds," says Chris, who went on to explain that because the woods lie along a migratory route, birds of all kinds stop by on their travels. In early May, he says a visitor in the wee hours of the morning will be greeted by the singing of 60 different species of birds, all at one time. "It can be pretty overwhelming," laughs Chris.

Nature is all around us. You can go exploring yourself or link up with a guide at Isle a la Cache. They offer free programs throughout the year, like a Hoot Hike and Winter Bird Walk. Both experiences are led by a guide as you explore the island in search of owls or winter birds. When the weather gets nicer, you can launch a canoe or kayak from the Isle and explore the Des Plaines River. As you're sure to find, Romeoville is wilder than you may think.