

Hardy Lake winding up year's activities with Family Fun Weekend October 30-31

Written by Marty Randall

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A new house for rats and mice and a Family Fun Weekend are divergent but great news about what's happening at Hardy Lake State Recreational Area.

Tucked into the northeast corner of Scott County, Hardy Lake attracts fishermen, campers and boating enthusiasts nearly every month of the year. Special events are also offered, including monthly Saturday morning breakfasts served outdoors by members of Friends of Hardy Lake, the recent Raptor Days and the upcoming Family Fun Weekend.

Assistant lake property manager Terry Davis noted it's been a pretty busy season with more people than ever taking advantage of the lake's attractions.

The lake also has one of the few licensed raptor rehabilitation centers in Indiana. The Dwight Chamberlain Raptor Rehab Center is home to several permanently-injured animals, including the lake's bald eagle, who is now fully mature at 5½ years.

The eagle was quite an attraction at Raptor Days, held September 25 to 27, though the weather wasn't that great, noted Davis. "The rain we had that Friday caused all the schools that had scheduled tours for students to cancel. We were able to provide Johnson Elementary School with a nice program, though. We were allowed to use their gym, and it worked out great, so we're going to try to arrange an agreement that the school will be an alternate, indoor site in case of inclement weather. Then, all our students will still be able to come and see the birds we have and learn how they were hurt and what we do to heal them if that's possible," explained Davis.

Davis' wife, Tammy, took a day off teaching Spanish at Scottsburg High School to be available for the wildlife programs. "She really loves to present information about what we can do to ensure animals don't get hurt and what we do to help them when they are injured, and the kids respond very well to her," he said.

Raptor Days also included the releases of a healthy kestrel, a barred owl and a red-tailed hawk. Each was nursed back to health by center staff. Additionally, nearly everyone who took the boat tours during the weekend saw either immature or mature bald eagles which now call the lake area home. They also saw several ospreys. Officer Gary Pennington of Floyd County brought his K-9 buddy Apollo and provided a couple of programs for visitors.

Rain canceled both a Friday night movie and a Saturday night campfire and owl hoot that had been planned. A silent auction organized by the Friends group was quite a success. A few of the items had been donated in Dwight Chamberlain's memory. The event raised about \$1,600, which will be used to support the work done at the raptor center.

That center is becoming a complex, with a large flight cage, started by members of a New Albany Eagle Scout/Boy Scout troop, now the home of the bald eagle. A smaller flight cage was also added and that is now occupied by a screech owl.

The lake staff lost its naturalist, Zack Walker, who went on to work as a conservation officer. They gained Derek Coomer, a Scottsburg student taken on during the summer who is still working part-time, helping out at the rehab center and learning a lot in the meantime.

One of Derek's duties is keeping the new shed clean that houses rats and mice. Those animals are used to feed the raptors. Where rats and mice used to live in the main building has been cleaned out and is now devoted to injured or ill raptor residents and patients, all in separate cages.

The building's larger room has been reorganized into a treatment center, storage space and office area.

One of the newest residents, a broad-winged hawk, seems to be doing quite well. "He suffered a head injury, but he's coming along and we hope to release him in the next month or so,"

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related Davis.

Fall Family Fun Weekend on Friday and Saturday, October 30 and 31, will mark the end of special events this year at Hardy Lake. Davis said it's too late to get a camping reservation; all campgrounds are sold out for the popular event. Campers dress up their sites with Halloween themes, and children go from site to site on Halloween night to get treats. "We have a lot of fun," noted Davis. "Some of these campsites have terrific decorations."

Family Fun Weekend will also offer wagon tours of the campsites.