

ALMA—Free boat tours for visiting birders, a nature-based art show and silent auction, original chamber music and dance from the Nebraska Chamber Players and the UNL Dance Department, and more events are set for Nebraska's 2014 celebration of the spring White Pelican migration at Harlan County Reservoir in the south-central part of the state.

Annually thousands of American White Pelicans begin arriving at the Reservoir typically in late February staying through early April before resuming their migration to breeding grounds in the northern states and Canada.

Harlan County, where the largest concentration of the giant birds can be observed in Nebraska, began four years ago inviting birders and the general public to join their communities in witnessing this previously unheralded marvel of nature, long known locally as an inspiring symbol that winter is finally over and spring is soon to arrive.

The Harlan White Pelican Watch begins March 1 and runs through April 15 each year, with events celebrating the birds' local "homecoming" taking place throughout that time.

The Pelicans can generally be easily observed during daylight hours from locations all around the lake, including campgrounds, marinas, parking lots and other day-use areas.

In late March and early April they can often be observed dramatically kettling in giant circles and spirals above the lake and towns.

The American White Pelican is one of North America's largest birds, weighing 10-20 pounds.

Harlan County Reservoir is one of the largest bodies of water within the North American Central Flyway and is a primary spring stopover for millions of migrating birds, including not only Pelicans but also Bald and Golden Eagles, Osprey, vast flocks of ducks and geese, up to seven species of gulls, and many more.

Around 300 bird species have been observed in the area.

For more information, a map of best viewing areas and a schedule of local events, or to register for boat tours sponsored by the Harlan County Lake Association, which will run this year from March 28-April 5 (weather permitting), contact the Harlan County Tourism office at harlancountytourism@yahoo.com, 800-762-5498, or visit www.harlantourism.org.