



All about the Bald Eagle

The bald eagle is a magnificent bird of prey. It is not really bald, it just has white feathers on its head. The derivation of the name "bald" is from an obsolete English word meaning white.

Since 1782, the bald eagle has been the [national symbol](#) of the [United States of America](#).

Anatomy

Bald eagles have a long, downward-curving yellow bill, and large, keen eyes. These strong fliers have white feathers on their head, tail, and wing tips; the body has brown feathers. The feet have knife-like talons. Eagles have about 7,000 feathers. Adult eagles have a 7 ft (2.3 m) wingspan and can reach 3 ft (1 m) in height. They weigh between 9 and 14 pounds; the females are 30% larger than the males.

Flight and Swimming

Bald eagles are powerful fliers who can reach speeds of up to 100 miles per hour (160 kph) during a dive. Average flight speeds are about 20 to 40 mph (30 to 65 kph). They can soar for hours on end.

Eagles can also swim, using their wings to propel themselves through the water. Since their diet is primarily fish, this skill comes in quite handy.

Prey

Eagles are carnivores and hunt during the day (they are diurnal). They use their sense of sight to find prey. An eagle can spot a rabbit from as far as a mile away. Eagles can see color. Prey is grabbed with the eagle's strong talons. Their diet is mostly fish. They also hunt small mammals, snakes (even [rattlesnakes](#)), and other birds. They also scavenge dead animals (including road kill).

Eagles use their beak to remove indigestible feathers or fur before eating a larger animal. They eat smaller prey whole and regurgitate (vomit) the inedible parts (like hair, feathers, and bone).

Habitat

Bald eagles live in forests near the shores of lakes and rivers.

Range

Bald eagles are found in North America from Florida to Alaska.

Nesting and Reproduction



Eagles reach maturity at 4 to 5 years. When they mate, they mate for life.

Bald eagles build an enormous nest from twigs and leaves. The nest can be up to eight feet across and may weigh a ton! Nests are located high from the ground, either in large trees or on cliffs. Eagles may use the same enormous nest over and over again for years.

A clutch of one to three eggs is laid sometime from December to March. The eggs take about a month to a month and a half to hatch (this is called the incubation period). Both males and females help incubate the eggs in the nest. They will feed the hatchlings until they learn to fly (fledge).

Life Span

Eagles can live up to 20 to 30 years in the wild. Like most animals, they usually live even longer in captivity.

Ecological Status

Eagles are a threatened species. They were reclassified from "endangered" to "threatened" in the lower 48 states in 1994.

Classification

- Kingdom Animalia (the animals)
- Phylum Chordata
- Subphylum Vertebrata (animals with backbones)
- Class Aves (Birds)
- Order Falconiformes (hawks: falcons, accipiters, buteos, kites and eagles)
- Family Accipitridae
- Genus Haliaeetus (sea eagles)

- Species *leucocephalus* (meaning "white head" in Greek)

Name: _____ Date: _____

Eagle Quiz

Use the page on [bald eagles](#) to answer the following questions.

1. Are bald eagles really bald? _____

2. Are eagles herbivores (plant-eaters) or carnivores (meat-eaters)?

3. Name two adaptations that eagles have for obtaining food? _____

and _____

4. Which eagles are bigger, the males or females? _____

5. Can eagles swim? _____

6. Are eagles more active during the day or during the night?

7. In what type of environment do eagles live? _____

8. Do eagles mate for life? _____

9. Do male eagles help incubate the eggs in the nest? _____

10. How big can an eagle's nest be? _____
