



Facts about Bald Eagles:

- A bald eagle's white head may make it look bald. But actually the name comes from an old English word, "balde," meaning white. These graceful birds have been the national symbol of the United States since 1782. Bald eagles were on the brink of extinction because of hunting and pollution. But laws created almost 40 years ago have helped protect them, and they've made a comeback.
- Female bald eagles are a bit bigger than males. Their bodies can be 3 feet (1 meter) long, and their wingspan can be 8 feet (2.4 meters) across. That's about the distance from the floor to the ceiling! Babies, called eaglets, are born light gray then turn brown. When they are 4 to 5 years old, they develop their normal white heads and tails. In the wild, they can live to be 35 years old or more.
- One of the most awesome sights in nature is a bald eagle swooping down from the sky to grab a fish. They can soar over 10,000 feet (3,048 meters) high, and their great eyesight lets them see fish up to a mile (1.6 kilometers) away. When they attack, they drop down at up to 100 miles (161 kilometers) an hour! Then they glide just above the water, snag a fish with their feet, and fly off to eat it.
- Eagle nests are called aeries (AIR-ees). Bald eagles build their nests at the very top of tall trees so the eggs will be safe. Some parents come back year after year to the same nest, adding more sticks, twigs, and grass each time.
- One old nest in Florida grew to 9 feet (2.7 meters) wide and 20 feet (6.1 meters) tall and weighed more than 4,000 pounds (1,814 kilograms).

Text by Scot Hoffman

- **FAST FACTS**

These carnivorous birds can only lift about half their body weight. If they catch a fish that weighs more than that, they might hang onto it with their talons and "swim" to shore using their huge wings.

- The average female bald eagle has a wingspan of 6 to 8 feet (1.8 to 2.4 meters) and weighs 9 pounds (4 kilograms).

Bald eagles live up to 35 years of age.

Photograph by Steve Raymer

Map by Sean Finnegan

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<http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/animals/creaturefeature/baldeagle/>

Bald Eagle

Haliaeetus leucocephalus



An American Bird: Unique to North America, the bald eagle can be found along lakes, rivers, marshes and seacoasts across all 50 states except Hawaii. The bald eagle, so named because of its bald appearance due to a patch of white feathers on top of its head, is the only eagle native to North America.

Built to Kill: [Bald eagles](#), as part of the group known as birds of prey, have acute [eyesight](#), muscular legs and sharp [bills](#). Most birds of prey hunt during the daytime unlike owls. They make their homes along lakes and rivers where fish is plentiful, a dietary staple.

Mates for Life: Bald eagles will pair for life. Bonding between pairs occurs through intricate aerial acrobatics. Together the couple builds massive nests by creating a web of sticks in a tall tree or sometimes a cliff.

From Eaglet to Eagle: A clutch includes two or three white eggs each season. The plumage of newly born eaglets is light gray, but turns dark brown by the time they leave the nest at 12 weeks. Adults are mottled brown with a white crown and white feathers under their wings. By 4 or 5 years of age, a bald eagle's beak and eyes turn yellow. Their wingspan is between 6 and 8 feet.

Animal Planet Website

<http://animal.discovery.com/birds/bald-eagle/>

Animals: Nat Geo Wild

The Bald Eagle



Successful conservation efforts have helped bald eagle populations rebound from near extinction in the 1970s.

Photograph by Michael Melford

Map



Bald Eagle Range

Type:

Bird

Diet:

Carnivore

Average life span in the wild:

Up to 28 years

Size:

Body, 34 to 43 in (86 to 109 cm); Wingspan, 6 to 8 ft (1.8 to 2.4 m)

Weight:

6.5 to 14 lbs (3 to 6.5 kg)

Did you know?

The largest bald eagle nest on record was 9.5 ft (3 m) wide and 20 ft (6 m) high. It weighed more than two tons.

Size relative to a 6-ft (2-m) man:

The bald eagle, with its snowy-feathered (not bald) head and white tail, is the proud national bird symbol of the United States—yet the bird was nearly wiped out there. For many decades, bald eagles were hunted for sport and for the "protection" of fishing grounds. Pesticides like DDT also wreaked havoc on eagles and other birds. These chemicals collect in fish, which make up most of the eagle's diet. They weaken the bird's eggshells and severely limited their ability to reproduce. Since DDT use was heavily restricted in 1972, eagle numbers have rebounded significantly and have been aided by reintroduction programs. The result is a wildlife success story—the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has upgraded the birds from endangered to threatened.

Though their numbers have grown in much of their range, bald eagles remain most abundant in Alaska and Canada. These powerful birds of prey use their talons to fish, but they get many of their meals by scavenging carrion or stealing the kills of other animals. (Such thievery famously prompted Ben Franklin to argue against the bird's nomination as the United State's national symbol.) They live near water and favor coasts and lakes where fish are plentiful, though they will also snare and eat small mammals.

Bald eagles are believed to mate for life. A pair constructs an enormous stick nest—one of the bird-world's biggest—high above the ground and tends to a pair of eggs each year. Immature eagles are dark, and until they are about five years old, they lack the distinctive white markings that make their parents so easy to identify. Young eagles roam great distances. Florida birds have been spotted in Michigan, and California eagles have traveled all the way to Alaska.

National Geographic

<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/birds/bald-eagle/>

Smithsonian: National Zoological Park

Bald Eagle Refuge

Bald Eagle Pop Quiz

Which of the following bald eagle statements is true?

1. It was chosen as a national symbol of the United States in 1782 because of the bird's long life, great strength, and majestic looks.
2. It's a distinctive raptor found throughout North America. from Baja California and Florida all the way to Alaska and Newfoundland.
3. It was once listed as an endangered species but its population has rebounded and is now considered threatened in the lower 48 states. It's still threatened by illegal shooting, harmful pesticides, and habitat loss.
4. The National Zoo opened an exhibit to celebrate this bird in 2003.

Answer at bottom of page.

Bald Eagle Fun Facts:

- The bald eagle's scientific name, *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*, means "white-headed sea eagle."
- The bald eagle is the only sea eagle—there are eight different species—that inhabits North America.
- As with all sea eagles, the primary food source for bald eagles is fish. They also feed on carrion, birds, small mammals, and reptiles.
- The bald eagle is a short-distance migrant, meaning that the majority of individuals in the population remain in North America during the winter—as opposed to long-distance or Neotropical migratory birds that winter in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Adult eagles are about three feet from head to tail and weigh ten to 12 pounds.
- As in most birds of prey, female eagles are larger than males.
- Eagles can live up to 28 years in the wild.
- Bald eagles generally nest in large trees near water and often use the same nest year after year. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in the Chesapeake Bay watershed bald eagles show a preference for nesting in mature loblolly pines, tulip poplars, and oaks near the water.
- The largest bald eagle nest ever recorded was found in Florida. It was more than nine feet wide and 20 feet high and weighed more than two tons.
- Each fall, the Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve in Alaska hosts one of the world's largest concentration of eagles as 3,000 birds congregate there to prey on salmon spawning in the shallow waters.

Quiz Answer: All of the above!

Smithsonian

<http://nationalzoo.si.edu/animals/northamerica/baldeaglerefuge/eaglefacts.cfm>