



# Bald Eagle

(*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

Chosen as our national symbol in 1782, the Bald Eagle is one of two species of eagles in North America and is considered the most recognizable bird of prey. The adult is easily recognizable with its bright yellow eyes and pure white head and tail. This fish eagle has strong talons that are designed for snatching prey out of the water.

## Habitat & Diet

The base of the Bald Eagle's diet is fish, which it can easily catch. For this reason, it is seldom seen far from water. Often, this bird will steal its food from osprey or other raptors. Carrion and garbage also make up a portion of the bald eagle's diet, along with the occasional muskrat, mammal, and water bird.

**Height:** 35-40 inches  
**Weight:** 7-13 pounds  
**Wingspan:** 8 feet  
**Habitat:** Old wooded areas near open water  
**Range:** Only in the US and Canada—most abundant in Alaska  
**Life Expectancy:** Up to 55 years  
**Group:** Convocation



## Fascinating Facts

These birds are very social animals and form massive flocks in their winter range. One of the largest wintering congregations is found in Alaska (up to 4,000). Bald eagles mate for life, and both parents share the responsibilities of rearing their young. They build the largest nest of any bird in the world, measuring up to 9.5 feet in diameter and weighing 2 tons! Occasionally, a bald eagle will catch a fish that is too large to carry to land. When this occurs, the bird is capable of swimming to shore using the butterfly stroke.



## Status

In Alaska, bounties were offered from 1917 to 1952 and more than 100,000 eagles were shot! In the early 60's, excessive use of harmful pesticides caused a tremendous decline in bald eagle populations. This, in addition to widespread human persecution, decimated this great raptor's population. Without the conservation and recovery programs enacted by man, the bald eagle would not be here today. Though the eagle is now making a comeback, we must still remain vigilant in protecting this magnificent bird.



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