

## Bald Eagles

The bald eagle is a bird of prey belonging to the fish and sea eagle group. Bald eagles are the only eagles that can only be found in North America. They are not actually bald. They were named bald eagles because of their white head. The word "bald" actually meant "white headed" many years ago. Bald eagles are large birds. They can weigh up to fourteen pounds and have a wingspan of 72 to 90 inches. They can live as long as 30 years.

*Get out a ruler and measure out the wingspan!*

Although bald eagles will accept an easy meal of **carrion**, they prefer to dine on fish. They can often be seen swooping down from the sky and grabbing fish out of the water with their talons. They prefer to live near large bodies of open water where they can easily locate fish. Bald eagles will also hunt mammals including rabbits, raccoons, beavers, and even deer fawns.



Bald eagles are found throughout most of North America. They can be seen in the southern states and Mexico all the way to Canada and Alaska. However, the largest number of bald eagles live in Alaska, Canada, and the Pacific Northwest.

*Find these areas on a map!*

Bald eagles like to build their nests in large, old-growth trees. These massive nests are usually built near a body of water. The nests have new leaves, twigs, and grasses added to them each year. Over time the nests become very large. They may be as large as 12 feet deep, 10 feet across, and weigh up to 2000 pounds.

After a courtship of high flying cartwheels, swoops, and free falls, the female bald eagle lays one to three eggs in the nest each spring. Both parents take care of the eggs. After 35 days, the chicks, or *eaglets*, break out of the eggs. The parents take turns hunting for food and feeding the babies. The young eagle is ready to leave the nest for good when it is about 13 weeks old.

Despite being the emblem and national bird of the United States of America, the bald eagle has not always been well protected. Hunting, pollution, and loss of habitat brought the numbers of bald eagles in the United States to a dangerous low. New laws to stop the hunting of eagles and to cut pollution has allowed the bald eagle to bounce back. The next time you are out in nature, look up in the sky. You just might see one of these **majestic** birds in flight.

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