

American Bald Eagle

(Haliaeetus leucocephalus)

The bald eagle is the most recognizable and unique bird in the United States. The bald eagle has both distinctive animal features and its deeply rooted history in United States culture. **Can you think of a place where you may see a symbol of a bald eagle? How about on a dollar bill or a quarter? Have you ever seen one in real life?** Look around near public buildings. There are symbols of bald eagles everywhere. The bald eagle became the national emblem in the year 1782

At one point the bald eagle was placed on the endangered species list, but it was delisted in 2007. They are still legally protected by the **Bald & Golden Eagle Protection Act**, the Lacey Act, and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Body

The bald eagle's wingspan can reach to nearly seven and a half feet wide! The length of their body however, is only about three feet. Mature bald eagles have an entirely white head, a blackish-brown body and yellow feet, legs and beak. A younger eagle's feathers and body are a mixture of brown and white feathers. It takes nearly five years for a bald eagle to reach sexual maturity and to have solid colored features.

Did you know a bald eagle has nearly seven thousand feathers?!! Their feathers are their protection against the elements. The feathers are waterproof, flexible, and lightweight but strong. They have several layers of feathers, all of which have a special function. **Have you seen a bird "puff" its feathers?** They do this for many reasons, especially when it is cold to keep themselves warm.

An eagle can fly to altitudes of up to ten thousand feet and fly up to thirty five miles per hour! Eagles also soar, which is achieved by catching currents of warm air and drafts on the wind. Sometimes you may see them soaring together. The group is called a **"kettle of eagles."**

The birds' talons and beaks are unique features that help them tear apart their prey and defend themselves. They can also open and close their talons voluntarily, just in case they have to let go of prey that is too heavy!



Photo Courtesy of US Fish & Wildlife Southeast Region

Diet

The bald eagle is a predator (*Can you define that word?*) and opportunistic in catching their prey. While they prefer fish, they will also scavenge other small birds and mammals. They can lift up to four pounds. When diving for fish the eagle's speeds can reach upwards of seventy miles per hour.

Reproduction & Lifespan

Eagles are partners for life. This means they will mate once per year, always with the same partner for the rest of their lives. If one partner happens to die, the surviving partner will seek another mate. They will build a nest together consisting of sticks and other materials. Sometimes they will use the same nest for several years. The incubation period for eggs is about thirty six days. Once the babies are born, both parents bring food to the nest. One parent will stay consistently with the babies for up to two weeks. The young will take their first flight at about twelve weeks. The lifespan of a bald eagle can be up to twenty eight years!



Photo Courtesy of Jona Thunder