

# Bald Eagle

*(Haliaeetus leucocephalus)*



## DID YOU KNOW:

The Bald Eagle, our national symbol, is a dark, streaked bird when it is young. It is not until it is 5 years old that it acquires its white head and tail and is old enough to reproduce

## EATING HABITS:

During most of the year fish are the most important part of the diet. Many of the fish are stolen from other hunting eagles and the smaller osprey (another fish-eating bird of prey)! In the winter, however, many eagles feed almost entirely on migrating waterfowl (ducks and geese). Small mammals like squirrels and rabbits are hunted, and carrion (dead animals) is always an important source of food.

## THE YOUNG:

Usually 2 eggs are laid (sometimes 1 or 3), and there is much competition and aggression between the babies. The baby eagle which hatches first will be larger and stronger than its sibling (brother or sister) and will push itself forward to be fed first when mom or dad arrives to the nest with



food. The second smaller baby will often starve unless there is lots of food available to mother and father eagle. By the time they are 2½ months old, baby eagles are nearly as large as their parents and are flying on their own - but mom and dad continue to feed and protect them.

### **HABITAT (HOME):**

Bald eagles are members of the group called "sea eagles". They are usually found resting, hunting, and raising their young near large open bodies of water such as the coastline, large lakes, and major rivers. As part of mother and father's annual courtship and pair-bonding, they add new limbs to their nest each year; so they depend on very large old trees, with strong limbs to nest in.

### **DEFENSIVE HABITS:**



Eagles are shy and avoid people and other threats, but if an eagle has to protect itself or its family they are very powerful fighters! An eagle will use its incredibly strong feet and sharp claws (talons) for defense. An eagle can also inflict painful bites with its large, strong beak. The hooked end of the beak is designed for tearing flesh.

### **UNUSUAL FACTS:**

- A pair of Bald eagles will construct the largest nest of any bird. One nest was 7 - 8 feet wide and 12 feet deep!
- Like most hunting birds, the females are larger and more powerful than the males. Their wingspan can be between 6 and 7.5 feet!
- Every part of an eagle's body is built to be incredibly strong and lightweight. An eagle standing 3 feet tall may only weigh 10 - 12 pounds!
- Eagles have the finest eyesight of any animal on earth. A soaring eagle can spot a rabbit over a mile away!
- Bald eagles have lived for over 30 years in zoos.
- These eagles occasionally hunt cooperatively, with one individual flushing prey towards another.