

# Bald Eagle

*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*

## Natural History



**Description:** Bald Eagles are one of the largest birds of prey in the Midwest with a 5-7 foot wingspan. Adults have a solid dark brown body and wings, with a white head and tail. The beak, cere, eyes and feet are bright yellow. Juveniles are mottled brown and white, with brown eyes. Female Bald Eagles are similar to males in coloration, yet are larger. Young Bald Eagles are often mistaken for Golden Eagles.

**Vocalizations:** The call is high-pitched, cackling pip or whistle.

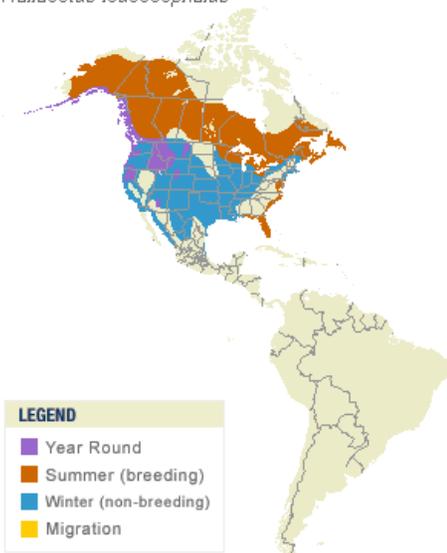
**Habitat:** Bald Eagles typically select territories within 1/2 a mile of a body of water, with large trees for nesting. They need open space for hunting.

**Migration:** In the southern portions of their range eagles may remain on their territory year-round. In the northern portion of their range eagles may or may not migrate depending on the availability of food and open water. In the winter large numbers of eagles will congregate near open water, often near locks and dams along the Mississippi River.

**Diet:** Bald Eagles are adept at catching fish, but will also eat carrion, small mammals and birds such as waterfowl. Eagles may also steal food from other animals.

**Lifespan:** Bald Eagles typically live 15-30 years in the wild, but may reach 50 in captivity.

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LEGEND	
Year Round	Migration
Summer (breeding)	Winter (non-breeding)

Map by Cornell Lab of Ornithology  
Range data by NatureServe

**Breeding:** Bald Eagles reach breeding age at 4-5 years. In the spring the pair performs aerial acrobatic flights. Bald Eagles re-use their large stick nest year after year. The largest nests on record were 10 feet wide, 20 feet from top to base and weighed over 2 tons. In March the female lays 1-3 eggs which she incubates and both parents feed. The chicks fledge after 14 weeks and may be dependent on the adults for another 6 weeks.

**Conservation Status:** The Bald Eagle population declined across much of North America until 1972 when DDT was banned. Bald Eagles have made a terrific come back and were removed from the Endangered Species list in 2007. Eagles still have great protection through the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Bald Eagle and Golden Eagle Protection Act. It is even illegal to possess a molted eagle feather without proper permits.