



# BALD EAGLE

**FALCONIFORMES**  
**Family: Accipitridae**  
**Genus: *Haliaeetus***  
**Species: *leucocephalus***



Female Bald Eagle

- Range:** North America, Alaska, Canada, western coast of United States  
**Habitat:** Able to live anywhere there are nest sites, roosts, feeding grounds, including open water such as rivers, lakes, or ocean which is a necessity.  
**Niche:** Arboreal, diurnal, carnivorous, scavenger and partially migratory  
**Wild diet:** Primarily fish but birds, mammals, reptiles and carrion when available  
**Zoo diet:** Rats, herring, mice and rabbits (skinned and gutted)  
**Life Span:** (Wild) 20-30 years (estimated 50% survive first year)  
 (Captivity) up to 50 years  
**Sexual dimorphism:** Females up to 30% larger than males. Female head is more block-shaped in comparison to the male's smooth, rounded head.  
**Location in SF Zoo:** ACC, ARC and Eagle Island

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## APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

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Adults have dark body plumage with white heads and tails; the young are mostly mottled brown and white. The plumage is the same in both sexes. Their beaks, eyes and feet are yellow. Vision is the most important sense and eyes are exceptionally powerful. Bald eagles can see objects three to four times further away than humans. Eagles can rotate their heads up to 270 degrees, which allows excellent monocular and binocular vision in color. Their hearing capabilities may be similar to humans. The sense of smell is poor; however, taste is developed enough to distinguish foul-smelling food through snow. They have strong, grasping, taloned feet with spicules on the soles of the toes for gripping fish.

<b>Weight:</b>	<b>M</b>	4.4 - 9 lbs
	<b>F</b>	8 - 13.6 lbs
<b>Length:</b>		27 - 35 in.
<b>Wing span:</b>		up to 7.5 ft

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## STATUS & CONSERVATION

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On June 28, 2007, the Interior Department took the American bald eagle off the endangered species list and is still protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. Prior to the advent of DDT in 1947 the population may have been 50,000 in the U.S. with the banning of DDT in 1972 it is estimated that the U.S. breeding population were 800 pairs. Since 1986, the San Francisco Zoo has been releasing chicks on the Channel Islands in S California. In some locations Eagles are still being shot for it is believed that they pose a treat to livestock and fisheries. Today pollution and habitat loss may affect some local populations. Today, there are an estimated 9,789 nesting pairs of bald eagles.

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## COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

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Their call is loud, with a high pitched scream, similar to a gull, but broken into a series of notes in rapid succession. A greeting call is used by both sexes during breeding season. This eagle flies with deep strokes and soars on broad flattened wings reaching speeds up to 44 mph during migration. During dives they may reach 200 mph.

Eagles do not chew their food, but tear it into manageable portions and swallow. Swallowed food is stored in the crop and later goes into the digestive system. This allows the eagle to gorge itself at each kill.

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## COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

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Bald eagles mate for life. Adult coloration signals sexual maturity. Their aerobatic courtship display is considered the most beautiful of any raptor. Eyries, their large nests consist of branches and sticks woven together by the female. These nests are found high in trees or on cliffs and are used year after year. The male assists in bring nest materials and incubating the eggs. Non adult birds transition from plumages of the immature to white-belly 1 age 1 / white-belly 2 age 2 / adult transition at age 3 and adult in their 4 year, though it may take a couple more years to gain the complete adult plumage. Parents bring prey items to the chicks instead of regurgitation.

Incubation:	35 days	Sexual Maturity:	4th year
# of eggs:	1 – 3 (usually 2)	Fledging:	10 - 12 weeks

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## MISCELLANEOUS

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2 sub-species recognized: *H. l. alascensis* in Alaska and Canada and *H. l. leucocephalus* in the lower 48 states.

Haliaeetus comes from the (G) halos - sea and aetos - eagle

Leucocephalus comes from the (G) leucos - white and kephalus - head

The skeleton of an eagle weighs less than half as much as its feathers

Golden eagles are often confused with immature bald eagles. The feathering of the golden eagle's feet however extend all the way down to its toes, while a bald eagle's feathering stops halfway between the ankle and the base of the toes. Golden eagles have longer tails and wider wings with give it more maneuverability for hunting quick game such as rabbits.

The bald eagle was chosen as the national bird of the United States in 1782. They are one of the seven species of sea eagles.

### Sources:

The Bald Eagle © 1987 by Mark V. Stalmaster

Nature Trail Handbook © 1998 by Tracy Hagan

Birds of Prey © 1991 by Noel & Helen Snyder, 156 - 160

Peterson FG - HAWKS © 1987 by Clark / Wheeler, p 81 – 85

A Season with Eagles © 1991 by Dr. Scott Nielsen, Voyageur Press

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