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Raptor Facts

PRINT MAIL



BALD EAGLE

COMMON NAME: Bald Eagle

 SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*
IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS:

Wingspan 6.5-8 feet; length 31-37 inches. Adults have a dark brown body with a white head and tail, yellow eyes and beak. Immature eagles are all dark with some white mottled in the wings and tail. The eyes and beak are dark. As the birds mature around 4-5 yrs of age they start getting the white tail and head and the eyes and beak start turning yellow.

RANGE:

Formerly distributed across North America, they are now limited to breeding in Alaska, Canada, the northern Great Lakes states, Florida, and the Pacific Northwest. In Minnesota they commonly breed on northern lakes and along the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers. Bald eagles move south for the winter to open water areas that attract large numbers of waterfowl or fish. In Minnesota this includes the Minnesota, and Mississippi Rivers and sometimes lakes in the southern part of the state

HABITAT:

Bald eagles nest on the edge of rivers, lakes, or seashores. In winter and on migration they can be found where there is open water attracting sufficient food, and evening roost sites.

NESTING:

Bald eagles build large stick nests (sometimes weighing over 1 ton) that are usually about 6 feet in diameter and more than six feet tall. Nests are built near the top of the largest trees near a river or lake. The birds start nesting in Minnesota in March when the female lays from one to three eggs. The male and female share incubation duties. The young hatch after 35 days and grow very quickly being ready to leave the nest at between 10 and 12 weeks of age.

FEEDING HABITS:

Bald eagles commonly feed on fish that they catch themselves, find dead, or pirate from other birds such as ospreys. They also feed on a variety of carrion or live prey including waterfowl and other birds, turtles, and rabbits. Road killed deer are a favorite and thus lead to many eagles being hit by cars.

RAPTOR CENTER DATA:

One of our most common patients, we often receive bald eagles that have been shot, caught in leg hold traps, poisoned, or hit by moving vehicles. Eagles are very difficult birds to maintain in captivity due to their size, strength, and wild nature. We have been involved for many years in reintroduction programs being conducted throughout the Midwest. Other TRC programs include investigations into the effects of lead poisoning, the incidence of chemical contamination in nestling eagles, and the location and use of winter roost areas.

CONSERVATION STATUS:

The bald eagle was listed as an endangered species throughout most of the United States, with the exception of Alaska, where it is not listed, and Minnesota, Wisconsin, Washington, Oregon and Florida, where it is considered threatened. In 1995, the bald eagle's status was changed to "threatened" for the entire United States. In 1999, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed that the bald eagle be removed from the endangered species list, but this has yet to happen.

Other Web Resources**Raptor Center Education Birds**

[Meet Leuc and Othello, education birds at The Raptor Center](#)

[See a picture of Leuc, one of our resident education bald eagles](#)

[Hear what Leuc sounds like](#)

[See a picture of Othello, one of our resident education bald eagles](#)

Images

[Radiograph \(x-ray\) of shot bald eagle](#)

Animated GIFs

[Bald eagle head](#)

[Feeding a bald eagle patient bird in the clinic at The Raptor Center](#)

[Dr. Pat Redig, director of The Raptor Center, releasing a bald eagle](#)

[U.S. Senator Paul Wellstone releasing a bald eagle on Veterans Day](#)

Quicktime Movies

[Governer Ventura's bald eagle release](#)

Track Bald Eagle Migration Via the Web

[Clinic eagles released \(with case histories\)](#)

[Eagles banded from the wild](#)

Famous Release Stories

[Minnesota Twins first baseman Doug Mientkiewicz releases bald eagle \(5/23/01\)](#)

[Governer Ventura release \(1/7/99\)](#)

Teacher Lesson Plans

["Radical Raptors"](#)

[See an eagle in-flight silhouette](#)

["Raptors & Culture"](#)

Bald Eagle Range

[Minnesota Ornithologists' Union bird range map](#)

Additional Information (not specifically about eagles)**Publications**

This page is located at:

www.cvm.umn.edu/depts/raptorcenter/info/bald_eagle/Banded_Eagles_From_The_Wild.htm/

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