



Eagles

20 Nov 2016

241-2016-23

The eagle is a bird of prey which figures heavily in the cultures of many societies worldwide including the United States of America. It is often seen as a proud and fearsome bird, and is considered a symbol of strength. There are approximately sixty species of eagle. The two best known species found in the United States are the bald eagle (top picture) and the golden eagle (bottom picture). This article will provide information about these wonderful birds and explain the difference between the two.





BALD EAGLE

GENERAL

The bald eagle is our national bird and is the only eagle unique to North America. All eagles are members of the Accipitridae family which also includes hawks, kites, and vultures. The bald eagle is a sea or fish eagle. The bald eagle's scientific name signifies a sea (halo) eagle (aetos) with a white (leukos) head. At one time, the word "bald" meant "white," not hairless.

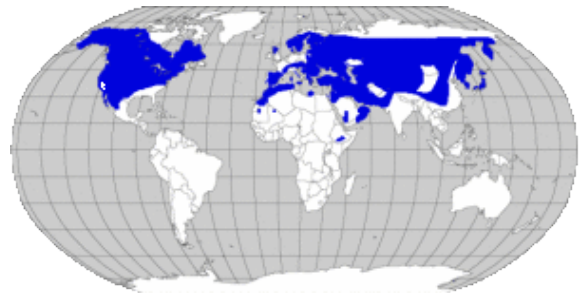
Bald eagles are found throughout most of North America, from Alaska, Canada, and mainland U.S. to northern Mexico. About half of the world's 70,000 bald eagles live in Alaska. Combined with British Columbia's population of about 20,000, the northwest coast of North America is by far the greatest stronghold for bald eagles. They flourish here in part because of the salmon. Bald eagles primarily consume fish, and therefore their habitats are located close to rivers and large bodies of water.



GOLDEN EAGLE

GENERAL

The golden eagle is found in parts of Eurasia (Europe and Asia), North America, and North Africa, and is the most widely distributed species of eagle. It is found in great numbers in many locations – see map below. The total number of individual golden eagles from around the world is estimated to be somewhere around 250,000.



Golden eagles use their agility and speed combined with powerful feet and massive, sharp talons to snatch up a variety of prey (mainly hares, rabbits, jackrabbits, marmots, squirrels, etc.). Their habitats can be found anywhere from large forests to arid deserts, and they often nest in high locations such as mountain cliffs.



The Bald Eagle Hunting for Fish



The Golden Eagle Hunting for Fox



Got One!



Got One!

DESCRIPTION

Color - Both male and female adult bald eagles have a blackish-brown back and breast; a white head, neck, and tail; yellow feet, legs and beak; and pale yellow eyes.

DESCRIPTION

Color - Adult Golden Eagles (both male and female) are dark brown with a golden sheen on the back of the head and neck. For their first several years of life, young birds have neatly defined white patches at the base of the tail and in the wings.

Size – The Bald Eagle and the Golden Eagle are about the same size. The female eagle is a little bigger than the male. A female eagle's body length varies from 35 to 37 inches with a wingspan of 79 to 90 inches. The male eagle has a body length of 32 to 35 inches with a wingspan of 74 to 85 inches. Both eagles have board wings that range from 26 inches to 40 inches wide. The adult eagle's

average weight is 10 to 14 pounds. The eagle stands about 30 inches tall.

Eyesight - An eagle's eye is almost as large as a human's, but its sharpness is at least four times that of a person with perfect vision.

Voice – Shrill and high pitched are common descriptions used for the bald eagle's vocalizations. Eagles do not have vocal cords. Sound is produced in the syrinx, a bony chamber located where the trachea divides to go to the lungs. Golden eagles have a tendency for silence.

Beak - The hook at the tip is used for tearing. Behind the hook, the upper mandible, the edge is sharp enough to slice tough skin, over laps the lower, creating a scissors effect. An eagle's beak is a strong weapon, but is also delicate enough to groom a mate's feathers or feed a small portion of food to a newly hatched chick.



Talons - Talons are important tools for hunting and defense. Eagles kill their prey by penetrating its flesh with their talons. Eagles can open and close their talons at will. If a bald eagle is dragged into the water by a fish too large for the eagle to lift or if a golden eagle is dragged down a mountain cliff by a baby mountain goat, it is because the eagle refuses to release it. In most cases, this is due to hunger.



Bald Eagle Soaring



Golden Eagle in Flight



Bald Eagle in Flight



Golden Eagle Landing

When soaring in level flight, bald eagles fly at average speeds around 35 mph, but are capable of up to 55 mph. When diving in flight, bald eagles can reach speeds of up to 100 mph.

How high can eagles fly? Somewhere between 12,000 and 15,000 feet.

Lifting Power - A bald eagle's lifting power is about 4 pounds. Generally, they do not feed on domestic livestock or pets, but they will make use of available food sources – usually it is fish.

A Golden Eagle normally flies at speeds of up to 32 miles per hour when flying through the sky. But they can fly much faster when on the hunt. These magnificent birds can glide at speeds of up to 120 miles per hour and have been recorded diving for prey at up to 200 mph. This places the golden eagle as the one of the two fastest moving living animals on earth. The Peregrine Falcon is the fastest member of the animal kingdom with a diving speed of 242 mph.

A flying golden eagle can pick up a six to eight-pound animal.



Bald Eagle Nest

Nests - Bald eagles build enormous nests, with average sizes going up to 4 feet deep and 5 feet wide. Male and female eagles build the nest together. Bald eagles nest in trees usually choosing the tallest living tree with accessible branches. A bald eagle nest is constructed of interwoven sticks.

Mating - An eagle is sexually mature and ready to breed at about 4 to 5 years of age. Eagles mate for life but if one mate dies or does not return to the nesting site for the breeding season, the surviving eagle will find a new mate very quickly.



Bald Eagle Eaglets or Chicks



Golden Eagle Nest

Nests - Golden eagles usually nest on cliffs or in trees in open or semi-open habitat. They avoid heavily forested and developed areas. When nesting on cliffs, the selection of the site may be based on an exposure that protects the nest and eaglets from inclement weather conditions. Golden eagle nest materials reflect the habitat in which they are built. They are composed primarily of sticks and vegetation, but animal bones, shed antlers and human-made items like wire may be used.

Mating – About the same as Bald Eagles.



Golden Eagle Eaglets or Chicks

Lifespan – The average lifespan of bald eagles in the wild is around 20 years, with the oldest confirmed one having been 38 years of age. In captivity, they often live somewhat longer. In one instance, a captive bald eagle in New York lived for nearly 50 years.

Migration - Adult bald eagles begin fall migration when the northern lakes and rivers freeze over. Depending on location, they usually migrate to the coast or large rivers near dams, where the water remains open. Most bald eagles migrate south in the fall to areas with sufficient food, and return north in the spring to nest.



Behavior – Bald Eagles are powerful fliers—soaring, gliding, and flapping over long distances. In one of several spectacular court ship displays, a male and female fly high into the sky, lock talons, and cartwheel downward together, breaking off at the last instant to avoid crashing to earth. Bald Eagles frequently harass birds including Ospreys and other eagles to steal their food, and occasionally do the same to mammals such as river or sea otters.

Lifespan - The oldest known golden eagle lived to 46 years in captivity. In the wild, golden eagles have been known to live up to 32 years. However, the average lifespan in the wild is about 23 years.

Migration - Some golden eagles migrate, but others do not—depending on the conditions of their geographic location. Alaskan and Canadian eagles typically fly south in the fall, for example, while birds that live in the western continental U.S. tend to remain in their ranges year-round.



Golden Eagles Playing

Behavior - In an undulating territorial and courtship display known as “sky-dancing,” a Golden Eagle performs a rapid series of up to 20 steep dives and upward swoops, beating its wings three or four times at the top of each rise. In “pendulum flight,” the eagle dives and rises, then turns over to retrace its path. Single birds and pairs engage in aerial play with objects such as sticks or dead prey, carrying these items high into the sky, then dropping and retrieving them.

On the ground, Bald Eagles walk in an awkward, rocking gait. Capable of floating, a Bald Eagle may use its wings to “row” over water too deep for wading. Though often solitary, Bald Eagles congregate by the scores or even the hundreds at communal roosts and feeding sites, particularly in winter.

Conservation - Bald eagle numbers in the U.S. were estimated to be between 300,000-500,000 in the 1700s. But hunting and pesticides reduced the number of bald eagles to only about 500 nesting pairs in the lower 48 states in the 1950s. Bald eagle numbers have rebounded since and now the lower 48 states boast over 5,000 nesting pairs.

The U.S. Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act has helped the eagles make a comeback from near extinction.



U.S. National Bird Info – The Bald Eagle is our national bird and is found on the US National Emblem. The bald eagle was chosen on June 20, 1782 as the emblem of the United States of America,

In addition to attacking prey from the air, Golden Eagles sometimes hunt on the ground, wildly flapping as they run. Mated pairs hunt rabbits cooperatively during breeding season—one eagle diverting the animal’s attention while the second makes the kill.

Conservation – The Golden Eagle population appears to have been stable since 1966. The golden eagle global breeding population is about 300,000 with 35% spending some part of the year in the U.S., 15% in Canada, and 3% in Mexico. The other 47% are mostly located in Europe, Asia and North Africa.

In 1962, the U.S. Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act outlawed harming these birds, their eggs, and their nests. Although this legislation remains in effect, humans are still Golden Eagle’s greatest threat: it's estimated that more than 70 percent of recorded Golden Eagle deaths are attributable to human impact, either intentional or inadvertent.



Hunting with Eagles – This is a traditional form of falconry found

because of its long life, great strength and majestic looks, and because it was then believed to exist only on this continent.



Interesting Facts –

Bald eagles are not born with their distinctive dark brown and white look. When baby eaglets hatch, their entire bodies are covered with light gray feathers. Around 3 weeks, their plumage takes on a brown coloration. Finally, at 4-5 years old, they acquire the distinctive dark brown and white color pattern.

To defend their territories and attract a mate, bald eagles put on spectacular aerial displays including death-defying swoops and seemingly suicidal dogfights that involve locking talons with another bird and free-falling in a spiral.

Native Americans historically gave eagle feathers to non-indigenous people and to members of other tribes who were deemed worthy.

Eagle nests are called aeries (AIR-ees). Bald eagles build their nests at the very top of tall trees so the eggs will be safe.

throughout Eurasian. It is especially practiced in Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and Xinjiang, China. Though these Turkic people are most famous for hunting with golden eagles, they have also been known to train northern goshawks, and peregrine falcons.



Interesting Facts –

The Golden Eagle is the most common official national animal in the world—it's the emblem of Albania, Germany, Austria, Mexico, and Kazakhstan.

Golden Eagles maintain territories that may be as large as 60 square miles.

When hunting birds, Golden Eagles may engage in an agile tail-chase where they can snatch birds in mid-flight.

The talons of the Golden Eagle exert an estimated 450 pounds per square inch of pressure which is more than 15 times more pressure than can be exerted by the human hand.

Some parents come back year after year to the same nest, adding more sticks, twigs, and grass each time.

Baby eagles weigh about 2 ounces when they're born and can gain 6 ounces of weight every day.

Bald eagles can soar over 10,000 feet high, and their great eyesight lets them see fish up to a mile away.

The adult eagle's only predator is the human.

Golden eagles have been known to hunt foxes, wild cats and even young deer and mountain goats.

Because their common prey animals don't tend to ingest pesticides, Golden Eagles have escaped the harm sustained by fish-eating raptors such as the Bald Eagle.

The Rough-legged Hawk, the Ferruginous Hawk, and the Golden Eagle are the only American raptors to have legs feathered all the way to the toes.

In some religions, high-soaring eagles are believed to touch the face of God. There are 33 Bible verses about Eagles - which symbolizes them for their strength and speed.



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