



FAST FACTS

NAME: Bald eagle

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*

AVERAGE WEIGHT: 2.7 to 4 kg (males), 4.5 to 6.8 kg (females)

AVERAGE WINGSPAN: more than 2 m

LIFESPAN: 25 to 40 years

DID YOU KNOW? When a bald eagle loses a feather on one wing, it will lose a feather on the other in order to keep its balance!

PHYSIOLOGY

The bald eagle isn't bald. The word "bald" actually comes from the word "piebald" which is used to describe something that is spotty or patchy. Adult eagles are dark brown and have white feathers covering their heads and tails. They also have hooked yellow beaks, large talons, and oversized feet equipped with small spikes, called spicules. Together, eagles use these body parts as their own type of fishing pole. Eagles also have a super sense of vision, allowing them to see four to seven times farther than humans.

Young eagles are called eaglets and are light grey and fluffy when they first hatch. Their feathers turn dark brown when they're about 12 weeks old and ready to leave the nest. The feathers on their heads and tails won't turn white until they're about four years old. Life can be challenging for young eaglets, and nearly 50 per cent don't survive their first year.

HABITAT/BEHAVIOUR

Bald eagles make their homes in forested areas near large bodies of water. This environment ensures good fishing and large trees for nesting. Eagles also tend to seek areas that are isolated from humans.

The bald eagle is the only eagle exclusive to North America. Eagles are at the top of the food chain and have no natural enemies. When bald eagle populations dwindle, it's likely because humans have interfered with their natural habitat.

The bald eagle is Canada's largest bird of prey. It gets its food by direct capture, scavenging and stealing prey from other animals. Its diet consists primarily of fish. However, if fish are scarce, eagles refuse to go hungry and instead feast on rabbits, squirrels, birds and even young deer!

It's believed that bald eagles choose one mate for life. To impress each other, males and females perform special courtship dances in the sky. The dance involves locking talons and cart-wheeling through the air.

RANGE

Bald eagles that breed in areas that don't freeze in the winter are likely to stay in the same habitat year-round. Eagles that nest inland generally migrate to coastal wintering areas. Others migrate from northern breeding areas to southern wintering areas.

Most of Canada's bald eagle population is found along the Pacific coast of British Columbia. Healthy eagle populations are also found in the boreal forests of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and northwestern Ontario. Small groups of eagles also make their homes in Cape Breton and along the coast of Newfoundland. In the United States, bald eagles nest in more than half the country. Bald eagles that nest in northern areas are considered to have stable populations, while those nesting in areas of southern Ontario, New Brunswick and most of the United States are considered threatened animals.