**Bald Eagles Soar in Ohio Skies**

The bald eagle, our nation’s symbol, was once an endangered species. But now it is doing very well. For example, in 1979, only four nesting pairs of bald eagles lived in Ohio. As of 2008, our state’s bald eagle population includes more than 150 nesting pairs! For the latest Ohio bald eagle numbers, go to the bald eagle nesting report. To see bald eagles near you, check out our [eagle viewing map](http://www.dnr.state.oh.us/LinkClick.aspx?link=6975&tabid=6017).

The cause of the bald eagle decline was due to a loss of habitat and the use of pesticides. A pesticide is a chemical that farmers put on their fields to protect crops from harmful insects.

The problem with some pesticides is that when it rains the chemicals wash into streams, rivers, and lakes. The chemicals then get into fish. When bald eagles eat fish (their favorite food), the eagles get pesticides into their bodies. The pesticides then make it difficult for the big birds to reproduce. As a result, the eagle population crashed.

The good news is that once the harmful pesticides were made unlawful, the eagle population soared again. And the birds also got some help from the ODNR Division of Wildlife. Biologists took eaglets (young eagles) from Ohio zoos and placed them in wild eagle nests to be adopted by wild foster parents.

Today, bald eagles are no longer endangered nationally. In 2008, they were also downlisted to threatened in Ohio!

**Eagle ID**
Bald eagles are not really bald. They just have white feathers on their head that makes them look bald at times. Adult bald eagles also have white tail feathers. The rest of their body is dark brown. Male and female bald eagles look alike, but the female is a little bigger. Their wingspan is six to seven and a half feet - probably taller than you!

**Bald Eagle Nests**
Bald eagle nests are huge, usually measuring three to five feet across and three to six feet deep (about the size of a bathtub). The largest eagle nest ever was located near Vermilion, Ohio. It was known as the "Great Nest" and measured eight and one half feet across and was 12 feet deep. Different pairs of eagles used the nest for more than 35 years. When it blew down in a storm in 1925 it weighed two tons!

**Where Can I See a Wild Bald Eagle?**The best place to see bald eagles in the wild in Ohio is along the western Lake Erie shoreline. Most of the nests in our state are in the marshes along the lake, high in tall trees. The ODNR Division of Wildlife suggests looking for eagles at the Magee Marsh Wildlife Area or Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, both along State Route 2 west of Port Clinton. But the bald eagle population is growing quickly, (so find an eagle location near you). You may soon see a bald eagle soaring overhead at a large lake or river near you!

History

At one of the first battles of the Revolution, early in the morning, the noise of the battle awoke the eagles.  The eagles flew from their nests and circling and crying out over the heads of the men that were fighting.  "They are shrieking for Freedom," said the patriots. 1

  The bald eagle is a symbol of  freedom.  In 1782 it was chosen as the American National Bird. Also in 1782 the eagle became the central figure in the official national seal.  The designer originally drew in the golden eagle, but since the golden eagle lives in both Europe and America the American bald eagle was used instead. The Great Seal shows a wide-spread eagle, faced front, having on his breast a shield with thirteen perpendicular red and white stripes, surmounted by a blue field with the same number of stars.
  The bald eagle is the emblem of twelve states and is the symbol of many companies and organizations across the country.  On the backs of our gold coins, the silver dollar, the half dollar and the quarter, we see an eagle with it's wings spread out.
  Not all people wanted the bald eagle to be chosen as the national bird.  Some felt it was a bad choice.  **Benjamin Franklin wrote:**

*I wish that the bald eagle had not been chosen as the representative of our country, he is a bird of bad moral character, he does not get his living honestly, you may have seen him perched on some dead tree, where, too lazy to fish for himself, he watches the labor of the fishing-hawk, and when that diligent bird has at length taken a fish, and is bearing it to its nest for the support of his mate and young ones, the bald eagle pursues him and takes it from him... Besides he is a rank coward; the little kingbird, not bigger than a sparrow attacks him boldly and drives him out of the district.  He is therefore by no means a proper emblem for the brave and honest...of America.... For a truth, the turkey is in comparison a much more respectable bird, and withal a true original native of America...*
*a bird of courage, and would not hesitate to attack a grenadier of the British guards, who should presume to invade his farmyard with a red coat on.*  2

  If the turkey had been chosen as the national bird do you think that we would be eating turkey for Thanksgiving?

**Bald Eagle**

*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*

**At-a-Glance**

**•** Mating: Monogamous

**•** Incubation Period: 35 days on average, February through April

**•** Clutch Size: Usually 2 eggs; with a range of 1 to 3

**•** Young: Altricial (helpless and dependent on the parents). They leave the nest after 10-13 weeks

**•** Number of Broods per Year: 1; however, if a nest is destroyed, some pairs will “recycle” and initiate a second nest within the same year

**•** Migration Patterns: Adults are generally year-round residents; immature birds sometimes migrate during spring and fall.

**•** Feeding Periods: Anytime during daylight hours

Typical Foods: Mostly fish, will also feed upon waterfowl, small mammals, and carrion

Our national symbol, the bald eagle, displays many outstanding characteristics - exceptional vision, a striking appearance, and a commanding presence. Sadly, by the later half of the 20th century, the bald eagle was classified as an endangered species. This, however, is a case with positive results. Through the diligent efforts of wildlife biologists and a concerned public, the bald eagle population is coming back and is no longer on the federal endangered species list. Its federal status is now delisted but it is still in a monitoring stage for 5 years. The bald eagle is a threatened species in Ohio.

**Description**
The adult bald eagle is one of the most easily recognized species of wildlife. It has snow white feathers covering its head down to the neck area. The tail feathers of the mature bald eagle are also white. The body color is very dark brown, almost black. Yellow eyes, beak, and feet accent the bird’s appearance. The white of the head and tail distinguish the fully mature eagle from immature birds of the species. Young eagles do not have this appearance until they reach the age of five or six years. Until that time, they are decidedly duller in appearance and, to the inexperienced observer, probably would not be recognized as a bald eagle. Immature eagles are almost uniformly dark brown from head to tail feather. Their undersides are mottled white with buff and cream blotches.

**Habitat and Habits**The bald eagle can be found in small concentrations throughout the U.S., particularly near sizeable bodies of water, natural and man-made. In Ohio, the bald eagle’s stronghold is the marsh region of western Lake Erie. For the bald eagle, the ideal site is one where water with ample food (fish) is located within two miles of the nest. The eagle shows a preference for a somewhat secluded homesite. This is particularly critical when the nest is being established and young raised. Eagles are highly territorial and too much interference from other eagles can result in problems at the nest site.

**Reproduction and Care of the Young**Pair bonding activity for both new and established pairs begins in the fall. Courtship behavior and nest building can occur anytime between October and early December. The female lays one to three eggs in mid-February to late March. Both she and her mate spend time on the nest incubating and share the feeding responsibilities

**Bald Eagle Folklores**

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| There is an old legend that the eagle alone among animals can look into the sun. According to the translation of St. Augustine, "The sun invigorates the eyes of eagles, but injures our own."    Athapaskan myths portrayed eagles as the deliverers of people from famine. A prince who gave an eagle a salmon during time of plenty was repaid in the lean year that followed by grateful eagles who first dragged salmon, then sea lions, and eventually whales to shore in gratitude for the prince's kindness. Such legends were probably inspired by the sight of eagle parents carrying food to their nests.    A Kwakiutl legend has it that the eagle once had very poor eyesight. Because it could fly to the highest treetops, however; a chief asked the eagle to watch for invading canoes. Anxious to assist, the eagle convinced the slug, which in those days had excellent vision, to trade eyes temporarily.   The slug agreed, but when the eagle's sentinel duties were finished, the eagle refused to trade back eyes. Thus, goes the legend, not only is the eagle's sharp vision accounted for, but also the slowness of the slug.    The Navahos have a myth telling how eagles originated when a warrior, Nayenezgani, slayed a monster who lived at Wing Rock. Afterwards, he turned to the beast's offspring, who were now alone in their nest. Rather than have them grow up evil, he turned the youngest into an owl and the oldest into an eagle, who would be a source for feathers for rites and bones for whistles. |  |

   For those of you who have e-mailed me **wondering if it's true that an eagle goes into seclusion, plucks out all of its feathers, sheds its beak and talons, and then renews itself, is a myth/legend.** It's possible the eagle renewal myth/legend was derived from a biblical metaphor. I didn't deduce it is a myth/legend from the contents of a book. Both science and logic indicate an eagle can not survive for any length of time without his/her feathers, beak and talons. Exposure and starvation would overcome the eagle long before a physical renewal could occur. An eagle's beak and talons grow continuously, because they are made of keratin, the same substance as our hair and fingernails. Eagles molt in patches, taking almost half a year to replace feathers, starting with the head and working downward. Not all feathers are replaced in a given molt.

**Biblical metaphors:** A figure of speech in which a term or phrase is applied to something to which it is not literally applicable in order to suggest a resemblance, as in "A mighty fortress is our God" or "Carried on eagle's wings."

**Eagles do not carry their young.** A bald eagle's **lifting power** is about 4 pounds. At 10 to 13 weeks, eaglets are as large as the parents as well as fully fledged for a first flight, enabling them leave the nest.

"**Eagles flying above a storm**" - Perhaps, it's depicted in various inspirational stories to relate to a Bible metaphor.

Ask eagle expert Peter Nye - Question and answer at the bottom of the page, "[From Lazar](http://www.learner.org/jnorth/tm/eagle/ExpertAnswer07.html)"

   The Comanche's myth of eagle creation began when the young son of a chief died and was turned into the first eagle as an answer to his father's prayers. The Comanche eagle dance celebrates this legend.

   Native North Americans believed the thunderbird, a mythical super eagle, was responsible for creating thunder and lightning by beating its wings.

   The Pawnee believed the eagle to be a symbol of fertility because they build large nests high off the ground and valiantly protect their young. They honored the eagle with songs, chants, and dance.

   Aztecs and related tribes established in the valleys of Mexico, revered the eagle as a strong symbol, with feathers used by that society's elite.

