



# The Bald Eagle

*We are surrounded by images of the Bald Eagle, whether it's on the back of the quarter, on top of the flagpole, or at the post office. We may see these images daily, but how much do we truly know about this bird?*

Mature Bald Eagle



Immature Bald Eagle



## *Frequently Asked Questions*

- **How long does a Bald Eagle live?**  
Bald Eagles typically live to be 15-20 years old in the wild but may live up to 30 years. However, in captivity, where they can be watched and well cared for, they may live up to 50 years.
- **Where can I see Bald Eagles at LBL?**  
Check out the viewing tips inside this brochure.
- **How do you tell a male Bald Eagle from a female Bald Eagle?**  
They do look similar, but the females tend to be larger than the males.
- **How does a Bald Eagle stay warm on these cold winter days?**  
Smaller feathers, called down, line a bird's body and provide a warm insulating layer. A Bald Eagle has approximately 7,000 feathers. An eagle's feet are mostly tendon, which doesn't require a lot of blood flow. Therefore, there isn't much there to get cold. The same is true for the beak. It isn't made of tendon, but within the beak there is minimal living material.

## *Did you know?*

- The scientific name of the Bald Eagle, *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*, actually means "white-headed sea eagle."
- One of the largest Bald Eagle nests ever found was in Vermilion, Ohio. The nest was 12 feet high and 8.5 feet wide. It weighed approximately the same as a small car, two tons, and was located 80 feet high in the tree. Different pairs of eagles continuously used this nest for over 35 years until it was destroyed by a storm.
- Adult eagles will walk around the nest for the first few weeks with their talons balled up into fists to keep from injuring the babies.
- Both male and female eagles assist in the incubation of eggs.
- June 20, 1782, was an important day in the life of all Americans. It was the day that the Bald Eagle was declared our national symbol.

Bald Eagles are found only in North America, usually around large bodies of water.

**Eyesight**

Four times greater than people

**Size**

- Standing height is 2 ft
- Weight is 10-14 lbs

**Wingspan**

6-8 feet

**Adults**

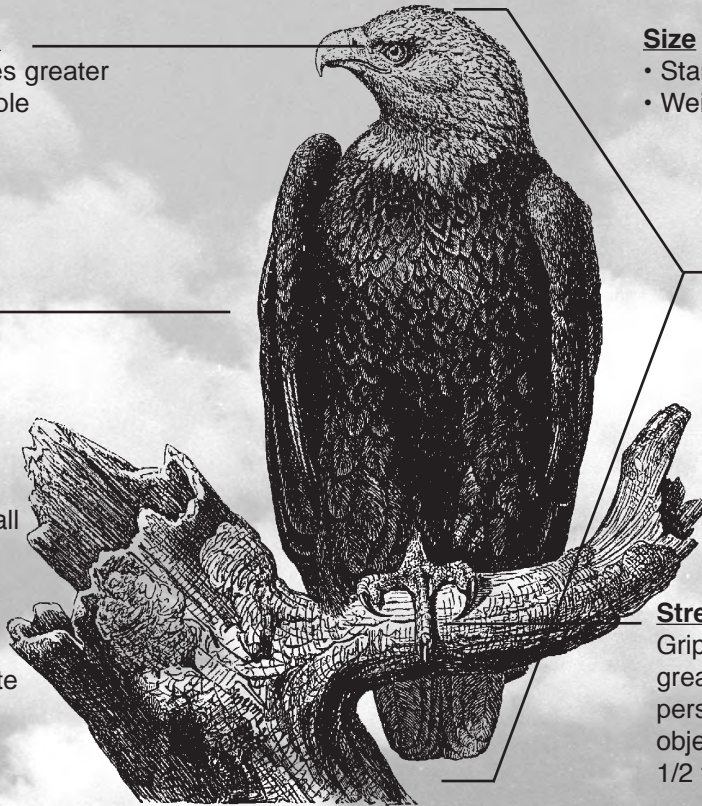
After 3-5 yrs, new head and tail feathers are white

**Nest**

- Avg. 3-5 ft across x 3-6 ft tall
- Typically built at least 50 ft high in a tree near water
- Lay 1-3 eggs/hatch in about 30 days. Larger eaglet will often out compete weaker sibling.

**Strength**

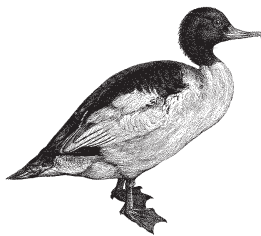
Grip strength is 10 times greater than the average person. They can lift objects weighing up to 1/2 their own weight.



What's for Dinner?



fish (preferred)



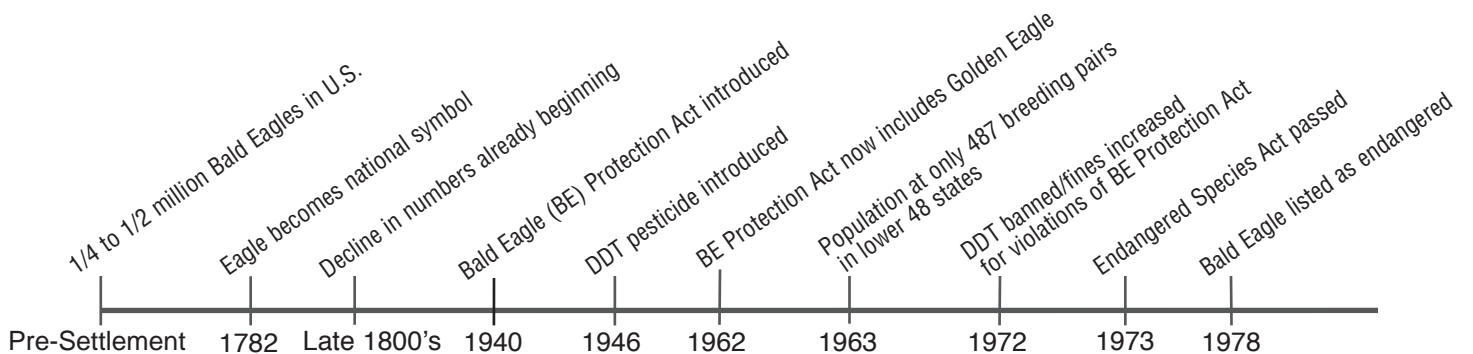
waterfowl (preferred)



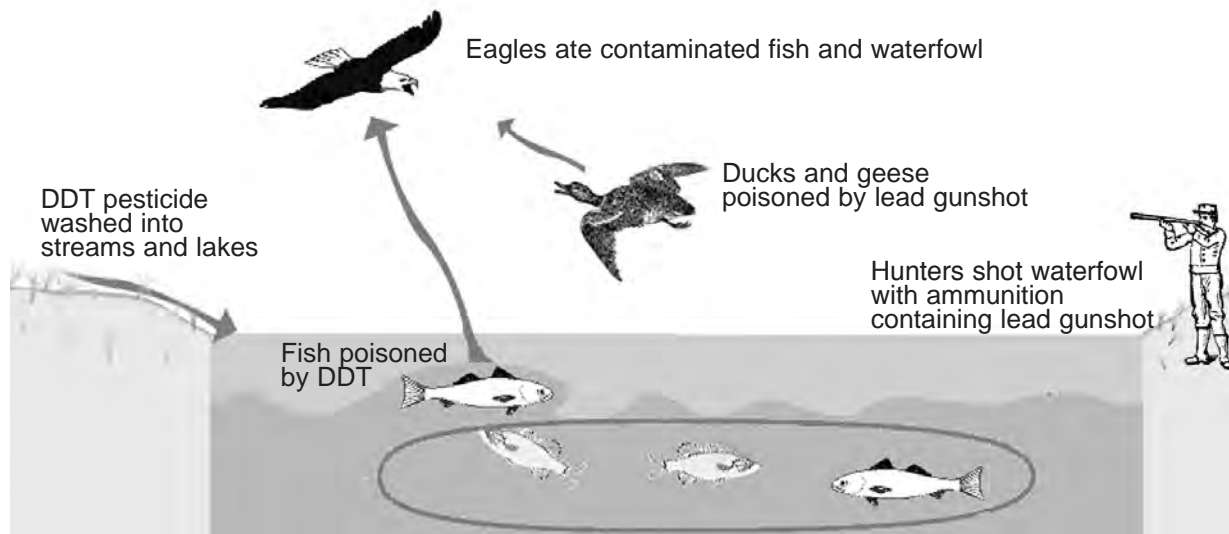
turtles



small mammals



## How Eagles Came in Contact with DDT or Lead



Two of the Bald Eagle's biggest enemies were a pesticide called DDT and lead poisoning. DDT was commonly used after World War II. This long-lasting pesticide washed into streams, lakes, and rivers. As depicted in the above graphic, when an eagle ate the contaminated fish this chemical remained in the eagle's body. While some eagles died from eating the contaminated fish, the more devastating result was that females laid thin-shelled eggs which would break during incubation. Because eagles are scavengers, they suffered from lead poisoning after eating wounded or dead waterfowl that had been shot with ammunition containing lead.

### Conservation Efforts

Over the past 60 years many laws have been created to protect Bald Eagle populations and their habitat. Harassing birds and possessing or selling any part of an eagle, including a feather, is illegal. These laws have also been expanded to include all raptors (hawks, owls, etc.) and migratory birds, such as songbirds.

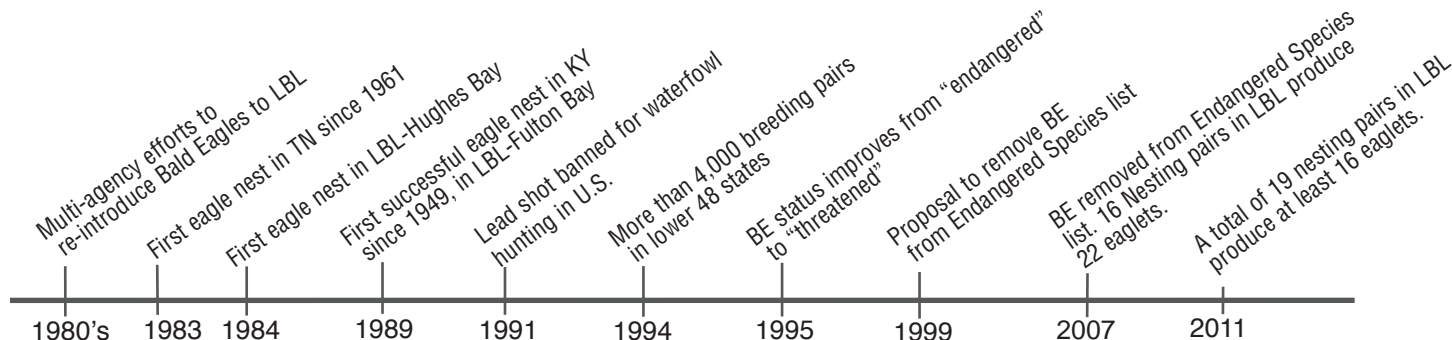
Bald Eagles have been re-introduced into areas where they once thrived. An extensive effort by multiple agencies to re-introduce Bald Eagles at Land Between The Lakes (LBL) has re-established eagle populations in both Kentucky and Tennessee. Over an 8 year period, a total of 44 young eagles were released at LBL with hopes they would return here to nest. Since that time, LBL has supported as many as 18 active eagle nests in one season.

### What Can I Do?

Every living thing depends on clean water to survive. Avoid using unnecessary chemicals at home. What you pour down your drain or on the ground may end up in your water supply. Respect nesting areas and other gathering places for all birds by viewing from a distance. Birds use up valuable energy when forced to fly away.

### Current Status

Bald Eagle populations continue to increase. As of 2006, there were a total of 9,789 documented nesting pairs of Bald Eagles in the lower 48 states as compared to only 487 pairs in 1963. Due to successful recovery efforts, the Bald Eagle is no longer listed as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act, but it is still protected by the Bald Eagle Protection Act and the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Although efforts to protect individual species have been successful, greater benefits can be achieved by protecting habitats as a whole. The USDA Forest Service manages LBL to provide a wide variety of important habitats for wildlife, including Bald Eagles.



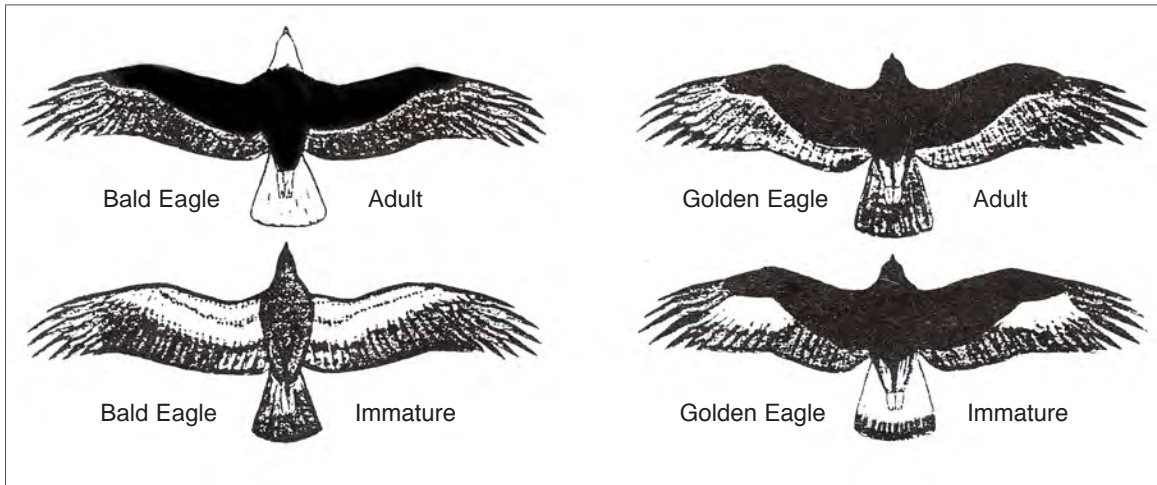
## Bald Eagle Viewing at Land Between The Lakes

Viewing eagles can be challenging. We have put together helpful hints that will make it a little safer and easier for you and a little less stressful for the birds too. Remember that viewing in this area is best during the months of December, January, and February when northern birds are here looking for food. They prefer quiet, secluded areas along the shoreline. Tall trees provide nesting and roosting sites—LBL offers prime habitat for Bald Eagles.

- Bald Eagles will often fly if approached too closely. It's a good idea to use binoculars or spotting scopes to view them rather than trying to get up close.
- It is always a good idea to join a guided tour—especially if it's your first time out. The Nature Station offers Eagle Van Tours during January and February. Visit [www.lbl.org](http://www.lbl.org) for more details, or call 270-924-2000. Boat tours on the lakes are also occasionally offered.
- Be prepared for inclement weather conditions such as snow, ice, rain, mud, and strong winds.
- To protect eagles and nesting sites, viewing areas may occasionally be closed to public use.

Ask any Nature Station or Visitor Center staff member for some good viewing sites within LBL.

### Looking up...



### Resources

- The Bald Eagle: Haunts and Habits of a Wilderness Monarch by Jon M. Gerrard and Gary R. Bortolotti, A Smithsonian Nature Book
- US Fish and Wildlife Service ([www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov))
- Ohio Division of Wildlife ([www.dnr.state.oh.us/wildlife](http://www.dnr.state.oh.us/wildlife))
- Missouri Department of Conservation ([www.conservation.state.mo.us](http://www.conservation.state.mo.us))
- [www.baldeagleinfo.com](http://www.baldeagleinfo.com)
- Land Between The Lakes [www.lbl.org](http://www.lbl.org)



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For more information on LBL write: Land Between The Lakes, 100 Van Morgan Drive, Golden Pond, KY 42211-9001, call 270-924-2000 or visit [www.lbl.org](http://www.lbl.org).

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*Land Between The Lakes*®

