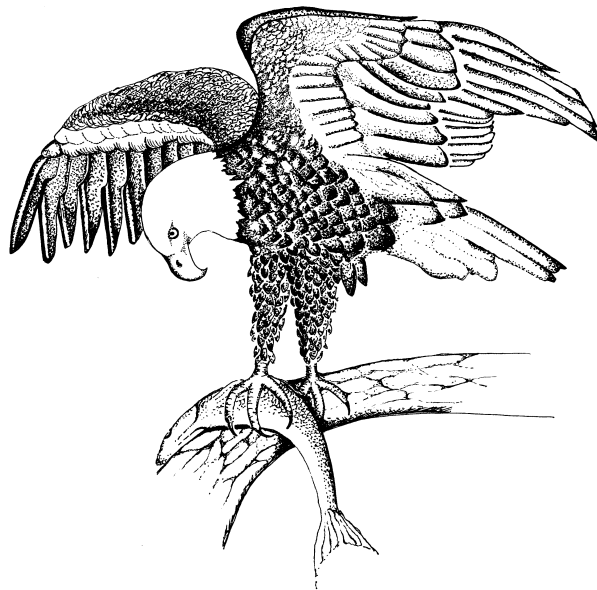


Living With
BALD EAGLES
in King County



A King County Wildlife
Program
Publication

Department of Natural Resources
Water & Land Resources Division

*If you want to see birds, you must
have birds in your heart.*
- John Burroughs

An American Symbol

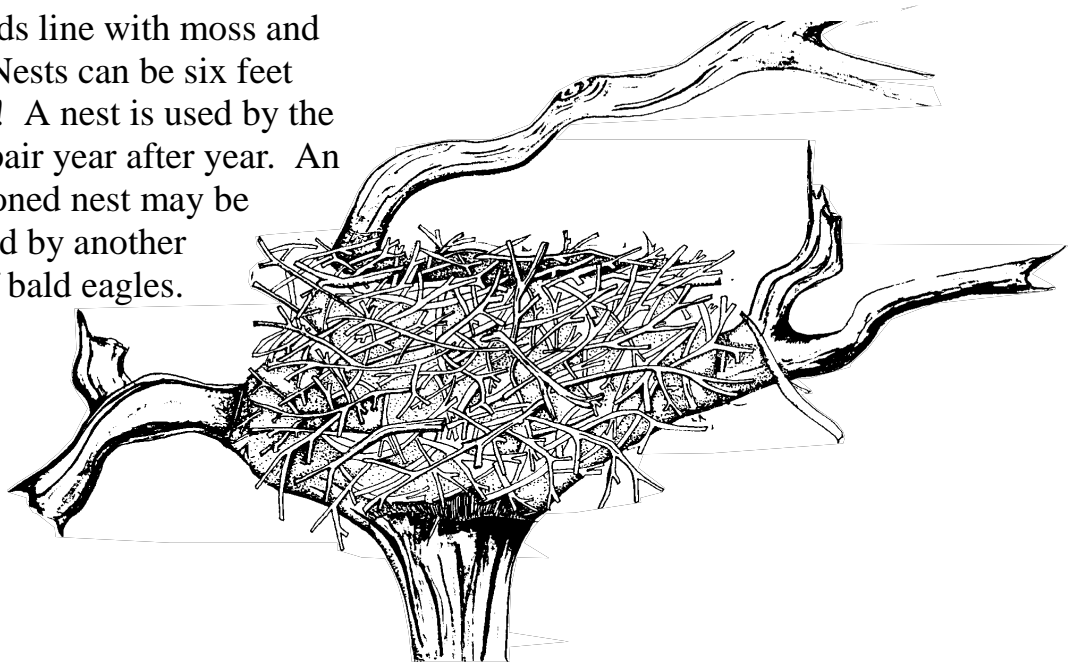
With its distinctive look and dramatic flight, the American bald eagle, *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*, is a symbol of strength and freedom. (Its latin name means “white-headed sea eagle”.) Bald eagles are raptors, or birds of prey. They prefer fish, but will also eat waterfowl and mammals. Eagles use their excellent vision and sharp talons to hunt and capture live prey.

The bald eagle is a hunter and a scavenger. Each winter, along the Skagit River, bald eagles gather by the hundreds to eat carcasses of spawning salmon. These fish are important to eagles during the winter months when other food may not be available. Bald eagles are found in mountains, near rivers where fish are abundant and near rocky or wooded seacoasts. They usually nest within 300 feet of water.

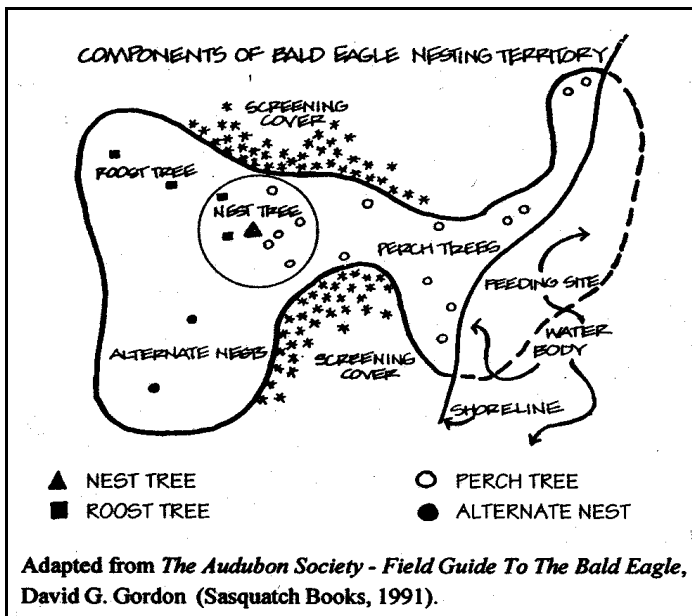
Paired for Life

Scientists believe that bald eagles form life-long pair-bonds. Working together, the pair constructs an enormous circular nest of sticks which the birds line with moss and grass. Nests can be six feet across! A nest is used by the same pair year after year. An abandoned nest may be claimed by another pair of bald eagles.

If a nest is destroyed, an eagle pair may remain in their established territory, even if no other suitable nest trees or alternate nests exist.



Amazing Bald Eagles



A Fading Symbol

At one time bald eagles were a common sight across the United States, Canada, and parts of Mexico. Disruption of eagle habitat began when early settlers cut trees for lumber and fuel. Believing folklore that eagles preyed on chickens and livestock, farmers and ranchers killed eagles. With the passage of the Eagle Protection Law in 1940, bald eagles finally began to receive legal protection.

The use of DDT created a new threat, as the pesticide entered the waterways and contaminated fish eaten by eagles. The ingested toxins caused eagles to lay thin-shelled eggs that crushed during incubation. Reproduction rates plummeted. By 1974, only 791 pairs of adult eagles occupied nesting areas in the 48 contiguous states.

- ◆ From tip to tip, an eagle's wings may measure eight feet.
- ◆ Airborne eagles can ride for miles on rising warm air currents called "thermals".
- ◆ Mated pairs perform a mid-air courtship dance - they spiral downward through the sky, lock talons together, then separate and swoop upward again.
- ◆ Female eagles are one-third larger than males.
- ◆ Nests can weigh 1000 pounds.
- ◆ Immature eagles are often confused with golden eagles; immatures have dusky brown feathers with blotches of white and a brownish bill.
- ◆ When an eagle reaches maturity, at age five or six, it develops a yellow bill and snowy-white head and tail feathers.

Reclaiming The Skies

Bald eagles were once headed toward extinction because of hunting, DDT, and loss of forested habitat. Today, bald eagles are listed as threatened in Washington state. What is their future? How can we conserve natural resources so that eagles and people can live together in harmony?



Eagles And People Living Together

Our quality of life is enhanced by the presence of nature. As wildlife habitat diminishes, we struggle to balance our needs with the needs of other animals. Landowners who work in cooperation with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) can create a plan to protect bald eagles and eagle habitat at risk from development. If we follow a few guidelines, bald eagles and humans **can** live together in harmony.

Today bald eagles are frequently seen throughout King County. It is a credit to the eagle's adaptability and our continued conservation efforts that urban forests like Seward, Marymoor and Discovery Parks are able to support nesting eagles.

Changes For The Better

A campaign begun by biologist-naturalist Rachel Carson led to a ban on DDT in 1972. In 1973, the Endangered Species Act was created to provide for the conservation of threatened and endangered animals. When the bald eagle was listed as endangered in 1978, plans for its recovery began.

Success And Cause For Celebration

Today five times as many nesting pairs of bald eagles exist in the United States as in 1974. Recovery and rehabilitation programs, education, use of environmentally safer pesticides, and cooperative management of land between wildlife agencies and landowners means that bald eagles are reclaiming the skies.

Where To See Bald Eagles

Discovery Park, Seattle, WA
Visitor Center (206) 386-4236

Northwest Trek Wildlife Park, Eatonville, WA
1-800-433-8735 or (360) 832-6117

Padilla Bay National Estuarine Reserve
Mt. Vernon, WA (360) 428-1558

Skagit River Bald Eagle National Area
Contact US Forest Service, Mt. Baker Ranger Station
(360) 856-5700

Woodland Park Zoological Gardens, Northern
Trail Exhibit, Seattle, WA (206) 684-4800

Humans and Eagles, Side By Side

Here are some typical recommendations:

- ◆ Maintain communal roost sites and all nearby essential features like trees used for night roosting and flight corridors.
- ◆ Protect nest trees.
- ◆ Maintain breeding habitat, including tall trees and snags that occur along shorelines.
- ◆ Retain perch trees and forest cover along shorelines, and provide a buffer around important foraging areas.
- ◆ Limit use of toxic chemicals; emergency use situations, like insect infestation, will be addressed on a case by case basis.
- ◆ Restrict activities disruptive to eagles during these sensitive periods:
 - January 1 - August 15:** near nests
 - November 1 - April 1:** near winter roosts



What Are The Rules?

Site-specific management plans must be developed when new building construction, conversion of land from agriculture to other uses, or application of pesticides may have a serious impact on eagle nests or roost sites. There are several steps to this process:

- ◆ The County notifies WDFW of proposed development activities within bald eagle habitat.
- ◆ Landowners and WDFW biologists meet and discuss options to protect the eagle habitat.
- ◆ WDFW develops a management plan for the site.
- ◆ The management plan is included in the conditions of the permits issued by King County.

...all human activity should be with a sense of respect and reverence for all life, with a feeling of conservation and not exploitation.

-Tree of Life

Who To Call?

Humans and eagles can live together. For more information, contact one of these agencies.

King County Wildlife Program
Water & Land Resources Division
Dept. of Natural Resources
506 Second Ave., Suite 708
Seattle, WA 98104-2311
(206) 296-7266

WDFW
16018 Mill Creek Blvd.
Mill Creek, WA 98012
(425) 775-1311

Seattle Audubon Society
8050 - 35th Ave. NE
Seattle, WA 98115
(206)523-4483

Eagle Rehabilitation Program
Woodland Park Zoological Gardens
5500 Phinney Avenue North
Seattle, WA 98103

Endangered Species
666 Pennsylvania Ave.,SE
Washington, D.C. 20001

Learn More About Bald Eagles

Read about bald eagles to understand their needs and habits in the wild.

The Audubon Society Field Guide to the Bald Eagle, David G. Gordon; Sasquatch Books, Seattle, WA, 1991.

The Bald Eagle, Mark Stalmaster; Universe Books, New York, 1989.

The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds, John K. Terres; Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York, 1980.

**For more information about the Wildlife Program,
call the Water & Land Resources Division at
(206) 296-7266 or for TTY 1-800-833-6388**



KING COUNTY
Department of Natural Resources