

NLC Literacy & English Learning at Home

Second Level

Bald Eagles 1 - Reading

Eagles in America

Bald eagles are birds that have been essential to the United States' sense of history and pride. Native Americans believed bald eagles to be messengers between their people and the gods. Many Native Americans still use bald-eagle feathers in their head-dresses and ceremonies.

In 1782, the U.S. Congress adopted the bald eagle as a symbol of the new nation. Since then, the bald eagle has been displayed on the Great Seal of the United States and on U.S. currency. If you have an American quarter-dollar coin, look at the back of it. The eagle represented there is a bald eagle.

Bald eagles live in many different states throughout the United States and Canada. The largest U.S. gathering is in Alaska, but large populations also exist in Florida, along the East Coast and West Coast, and in the Upper Midwest. Today, there are more than 4,000 nesting pairs of bald eagles in the United States, but that has not always been so. Earlier in the century, bald eagles were in danger of *extinction*.

A Keen-Eyed Raptor

Bald eagles are among the largest raptors in North America. They range from 75 centimetres to 1 metre tall. The birds have wing-span of 2 to 2.5 metres, and weigh 3.5 to 6.5 kilos. The females are larger than the males. The eagles' heads are white, giving them the appearance of baldness. "Balde" is also an old English word for white. When Europeans first populated America, they may very well have referred to bald eagles as white eagles.

A bald eagle can see things up to eight times better than we can. A bald eagle can spot a mouse or rabbit or fish from hundreds of metres away. Bald eagles have large talons, which they use to capture their prey. Their curved beaks help them tear into their food. Often they dive out of the sky to capture a fish or mammal, then carry it away to eat. Bald eagles also eat carrion - animals and fish that are already dead.

Bald eagles migrate each year along fly-lines, which are routes that the birds navigate annually to reach their summer or winter homes. In spring, the eagles fly north and, in autumn, they fly south, wintering along the river valleys and coasts of Canada and the United States. The eagles congregate in places where game and fish are plentiful, such as in pine forests that border rivers. The birds particularly like to gather near dams where salmon and other fish spawn. These fish provide eagles with an ample food supply.

Glossary

- *extinction* - the dying out of plant or animal species
- *raptor* - a bird of prey
- *wing-span* - the measure of a bird's width taken from wing-tip to wing-tip
- *talon* - the claw of a bird of prey
- *prey* - animal hunted and killed for food by another animal
- *carrion* - dead animal flesh, often eaten by scavengers
- *fly-lines* - the aerial pathways used by birds along their migratory routes
- *spawn* - the act of producing, fertilizing, and depositing eggs by an aquatic animal

Read, Think and Talk

1 Bald eagles: key facts

- Carefully **read** over the passage. Discuss the key facts about **bald eagles**.
- Try to group your facts in note form. Keep the notes in sections, giving each section a subheading. Each subheading should describe a linked collection of facts.
- **Discuss** with someone the notes you have collected. Make any additions or changes to your notes following your discussion.
- Use your collected notes to **produce** a written report about bald eagles in America. You can produce this as a leaflet or small booklet with illustrations and drawings to help the reader.

2 Find the following words in the text and read the sentences surrounding them.

word (line)	suggestion	dictionary
essential (2)	_____	_____
native (2)	_____	_____
extinction (16)	_____	_____

Talk with someone about what you think the words could mean, and note down your suggestions.

Look in the dictionary for the correct meaning and record your answers.

3 Find the following words in the text and read the sentences surrounding them.

word (line)

suggestion

dictionary

prey (27)

congregate (2)

raptor

Talk to someone about other words that might mean the same, and note down your suggestions.

Check your answers with a thesaurus and record the words that are closest in meaning.