

American Bald Eagle

December 27, 2024 • vajiramandravi.com



What's in today's article?

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- **What is American bald eagle?**
- **News Summary: American bald eagle**
- **Population decline since the 1800s**
- **Steps taken to protect the bird**

Why in news?

Recently, the Bald eagle was officially declared as the United States national bird after 250 years.

What is American bald eagle?

• About

- Bald eagle, (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), the only eagle solely native to North America.
- It has been the national emblem of the United States since 1782 and a spiritual symbol for native people for far longer than that.
 - In 1782, it was first placed with outspread wings on the country's Great Seal as a sign of strength.

• Features

- Bald eagles are large, predatory raptors that are recognizable for their brown body and wings, white head and tail, and hooked yellow beak.
- Their feet, which are also yellow, are equipped with sharp black talons.
- Juvenile bald eagles look very different from adults—they are almost entirely brown, with occasional white markings on the undersides of their wings and chest.
- Bald eagles grow to about 2.5 to 3 feet (0.7 to 0.9 meters) in height, and they have an impressive wingspan of 6.5 feet (two meters).
- Female bald eagles are larger than the males, but share the same coloration.

• Habitat range

- Bald eagles are **North American birds**. Their range extends from the Mexico border through the United States and Canada.
- The birds are extremely populous in Alaska.
 - They can be seen year-round in Alaska, along the East and West coasts, the Rocky Mountains, and the Mississippi River.
 - The rest of the United States only sees bald eagles during the winter and their migration.

• Food

- Bald eagles love fish. These birds are opportunistic predators.
 - When fish are not available, they will eat whatever they can catch, including small birds and rodents.
- Bald eagles are also scavengers that will feed on carrion. If they see an opportunity, bald eagles may even steal food from other birds such as osprey.

• Life history

- Bald eagles are solitary, but monogamous animals. Although they spend winters and migrations alone, bald eagles maintain the same breeding pair year after year.

• Conservation status

- The bald eagle was previously listed under the Endangered Species Act, but was delisted in 2007 due to recovery efforts.
- **IUCN Status** – Least Concern

News Summary: American bald eagle

Population decline since the 1800s

- **Statistics**

- Once upon a time, bald eagles were abundant across the United States.
- When they were adopted as the country's national symbol in 1782, there were as many as 100,000 nesting birds in the continental United States (including Alaska).
- However, their populations began to decline in the early 1800s.

- **Reasons for the decline**

- **Hunting**

- Bald eagles began to be seen as a threat to livestock, especially domestic chicken, and started to be hunted.
 - Hunting intensified in the latter half of the century, when feather hats became a fashion staple.

- **Appearance of DDT**

- DDT or dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane was first synthesised in 1874.
 - However, in 1939, it was first promoted as an insecticide and began to be used to kill malaria carrying mosquitos and agricultural pests.
 - While extremely effective as an insecticide, DDT had a catastrophic impact on the bald eagle population.

Steps taken to protect the bird

- **Role of Rachel Carson's book Silent Spring**

- This book, for the first time, documented the detrimental effects of chemical pesticides on the environment.
 - It meticulously described how DDT was the prime cause behind the decline in bald eagle populations.

- **Ban on the use of DDT for agricultural use**

- A nationwide ban on the use of DDT for agricultural use was introduced in 1972.

- **Introduction of Endangered Species Act in 1973**

- This act broadened protections already in place for endangered species, particularly focussing on protection of animal habitats.
 - The bald eagle was one of the original species listed for protection under this act.

- **Captive breeding programmes and strict habitat protections**

- Captive breeding programmes were launched in the 1970s and proved to be crucial in helping the resurgence of bald eagles.
 - A practice known as hacking was commonly used by conservationists.
 - Hacking is a controlled way to raise and release bald eagles into a wild viable environment from artificial nesting towers.
 - This method simulates a wild eagle nesting site and aids in recovery in an area where re-population is desirable.
 - Strict restrictions were brought in with regards to human activity around eagle nests or known nesting areas.

Q1) What is Captive breeding?

Captive breeding refers to the practice of breeding and raising endangered or rare species in controlled environments, such as zoos, aquariums, or specialized breeding facilities. The primary goal of captive breeding programs is to increase the population size of threatened species and to ensure their long-term survival.

Q2) What is IUCN Status?

The IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) Status, also known as the IUCN Red List Status, refers to the classification assigned to a species based on its conservation status. The IUCN Red List is a globally recognized system that assesses the extinction risk of various species worldwide. It provides a comprehensive evaluation of the conservation status of plants, animals, fungi, and other organisms.

Source: [How the American bald eagle 'returned' from the brink of extinction](#) | [Britannica](#) | [National Geographic](#) | [The National Wildlife Federation](#)

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