



## Squamish Eagle Watch

### Eagle Fact Sheet

Bald Eagle's Scientific Name: *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* ("sea eagle" "white head") Belongs to raptor family (rapere is Latin and means to "take by force")

#### Physical Characteristics:

- Adult male and female both have blackish brown feathers except for white head, neck and tail.
- Adult eagle's beak and feet are yellow.
- Immature eagles lack white head and resemble golden eagles until 4 to 5 years of age.
- Eagles molt in patches and can take 6 months to complete a molt; begins with the head feathers.
- Some adults can be mistaken for juveniles when molting due to scruffy appearance
- Juveniles have longer tail feathers than adults, making them better at soaring flight, while adults are better at quick maneuvering flight. Juveniles can also appear larger than adults due to having more feathers 8,500.
- Eagles have 4 talons, one of which is called a hallux and points forward.
- The hallux of the female eagle is longer than the male's and is one way to tell the sex of them.
- Females also tend to be heavier and larger. (reverse sexual dimorphism)
- Size: length 71-96 cm, wingspan 204 cm, weight 3 - 6.3 kg
- Bones are hollow to reduce weight
- Adults have 7,000+ feathers
- Beak, talons and feathers are made of keratin



Bald eagle hallux talon

#### Other facts:

- Soars on thermals, can reach speeds up to 70 km/hr, can dive up to 160 km/hr
- Will lock talons when mating and freefall
- Can live up to 38 years in the wild
- Known to "mate for life"
- 35 days of incubation shared between male and female; followed by 56-98 days of nesting
- Can take 3 months to build a nest; both bring materials but female usually places
- Nests can weigh up to 2,000 kg and be 2 m in diameter- some of the largest of all birds
- Produce 1 brood per year with 1 to 3 eggs
- Only eagle exclusive to North America
- Can lift up to 1.8 kg

#### Habitat and food:

- will catch live food but will also eat carrion and steal from others (such as osprey)



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- fish is important but will also eat fish, bird, reptiles, amphibians, crabs and small mammals
- Often locates food resource patches (like rivers) by soaring and searching for conspecifics (other eagles)- which can be seen from a distance of 23km away.
- Can gorge and then fast for days or even weeks.
- Needs open water; will breed inland and then migrate to coastal or southern areas before water bodies freeze; the colder the winter - the more eagles migrate to the coast.
- Alaska has the largest population (high densities on Chilkat River) followed by B.C.
- Winter chum run from late October to early December is key to attracting bald eagles to Southwestern B.C.

### Historical Threats:

- Up to 1940s bald eagles were shot in US (for sport and as a threat to livestock)
- In 1940s received protection
- After WWII DDT was introduced to control mosquitoes and the gypsy moth
- 1962 Silent Spring was written by Rachel Carson regarding the use of pesticides
- By then only 487 nesting pairs in US
- 1972 DDT banned
- 1978 Bald Eagles listed by US Endangered Species Act
- Now: 10,000+ nesting pairs in lower 48 and removed from the ESA
- In BC 1984 estimate is 21,000+ breeding pairs
- However, historically there would have been 300,000 to 500,000 in US in the 18<sup>th</sup> century

### Current Threats:

- Require nesting trees near bodies of water which can be threatened by shorelines' development and logging
- Collisions with vehicles or man-made structures
- Lead shot used in hunting waterfowl
- Lead used in fishing gear
- Oil spills and other environmental contaminants
- Depletion of food source - especially salmon
- Sensitive to human disturbance - especially during nesting season

### Interesting facts:

- Great blue herons will sometimes establish a rookery of several nests around a nesting pair of bald eagles. While they lose some offspring to the eagles, the eagles will also defend the rookery from other invaders and predators.

**For more information go to this website: [hancockwildlife.org](http://hancockwildlife.org)**



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