DO NOT DISTURB THE EAGLES

The Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (16 U.S.C. 668-668c) prohibits anyone from harming or disturbing eagles or their nest areas.

Visitors/observers near an active eagle nest site (during breeding season) must:

- Minimize noise
- Do not stand or sit in front of the nest
- To stop and watch, be at a designated viewing area
- Follow the requests of nest monitor volunteers

To report criminal behavior toward wildlife to appropriate authorities, call:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 844-397-8477
- California Dept of Fish and Wildlife 888-334-2258

Bald Eagles: Common Questions

What species are they?
There are 60 species of Eagles worldwide. Except for Alaska, the two that we see in North America are Bald Eagles and Golden Eagles. They are part of a group of predatory birds called Raptors, or Birds of Prey. This group also includes Kites, Hawks, Falcons, Buzzards, Vultures and Owls.

How do Bald Eagles compare to Golden Eagles?
As adults, both are large birds with dark brown bodies. Most people believe they are closely related, but they are not. Bald Eagles belong to a group called “Sea Eagles,” and are more closely related to Kites. Golden Eagles are more closely related to Hawks. Bald Eagles tend to be slightly larger than Golden Eagles.

Why do they call them “Bald” Eagles?
It’s not because they were once thought to have bald heads! The name comes from the Old English word “balde,” which means white and refers to their white feathers.

Where do they live?
Bald Eagles live in virtually any kind of North American wetland habitat including seacoasts, rivers, large lakes or marshes, and other large bodies of open water with an abundance of fish. A pair of wild Bald Eagles living in our region have successfully raised several juveniles in recent years.

What do they eat?
Fish is their preferred diet. But they also eat waterfowl and small mammals like squirrels, raccoons and rabbits. They are also opportunistic predators, meaning that they may steal food from other animals or scavenge on carrion.

How well do they see?
The “eagle eye” is among the strongest in the animal kingdom, with a visual resolution five times stronger than the human eye.

How long do they live?
The average is 25-28 years for those who live in the wild. Those who live in captivity may live twice that long.

Do they keep the same mate?
Bald Eagles mate for life. But if they lose a mate, they will usually find a new one.

How can you tell the difference between a female and a male?
As with all birds of prey, the females are larger. The size difference reflects their respective duties; the males’ smaller, sleeker body enables them to be slightly better hunters, while the females’ larger size allows her to sit for longer periods on the nest and to be a deterrent for any predators approaching the nest.

When do juveniles begin to look like adults?
A Bald Eagle attains their adult plumage with the complete white head and tail at 4-5 years of age.
About this Handout
This educational handout was developed by Friends of Lakes Folsom and Natoma (FOLFAN) with the assistance of Joleen Maiden and Kathy Kayner.
FOLFAN is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and a State Park Cooperating Association for the Folsom Lake State Recreation Area.
FOLFAN’s mission is to enhance education and recreation opportunities for the public and to protect the wonders and resources of Lakes Folsom and Natoma.
Visit us at: www.folfan.org

Do they reuse the same nest?
Yes, unless something drives them away from that nest. For example, if the tree or nest has fallen, or if people don’t give them enough space. They usually nest near the water, often perched in a tall tree.

What is their conservation status?
Forty years ago, Bald Eagles were in danger of extinction. Habitat destruction, illegal shooting, and the contamination of its food source, largely as a consequence of DDT, decimated the eagle population. Habitat protection through the Endangered Species Act, the banning of DDT, and conservation actions have helped Bald Eagles make a remarkable recovery.

How many eggs do they lay and when?
Two eggs is the norm (per season), but three eggs is not uncommon. Nesting season varies by region.

How do young eagles fly?
By their second month, they will be wingersizing (flapping wings) and branching in preparation for that all important first flight (or fledge) which will take place by the time they are three months old. After fledging, they return to the nest for a few weeks to follow their parents and learn to hunt for themselves.

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How do you view them responsibly?
When watching wildlife, including Eagles, one of the greatest challenges is how to get close enough to an animal to have a good view of it without disturbing it. It should be the goal of every wildlife watcher to never approach any wildlife so closely that it reacts to your presence. While it may not seem like a big deal that an animal has noticed your presence and makes an effort to flee, there are potential negative consequences including nest failure.

Do the young ever return to the nest?
Many juveniles who have left the nest do return to their natal area, but aren’t allowed in the nest.