

Species Sheets: Bald Eagle



photo by Milo Burcham ©

Common name: Bald Eagle

Latin Name: *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*

Field Marks: Length 31-37 inches
Wing span 70-90 inches



A huge raptor and the National emblem of the United States. Adult birds unmistakable with white heads, so not really bald, and white tails with very dark bodies, large yellow beak and yellow eye. Immatures vary according to age and only have white head and tail after 4 or 5 years. In mean time plumage shows white patches throughout with a dark beak and eye. In flight tends to hold wings flat straight across. Southern Bald Eagles considered endangered until 1999.

Habitat:

Usually around bodies of water like rivers, lakes and reservoirs. Open country. In migration and over winter often feeds on carrion away from water.

Behavior:

Feeds mostly on fish, but aggressive predator that is able to kill waterfowl and medium-sized mammals. May steal prey from other raptors like Ospreys and other Bald Eagles, which is called "pirating", or "kleptoparasitism". Over winter eats a lot of carrion, especially dead salmon and roadkills.

Nest and eggs:

Huge stick nests built in large snags or broken off tree tops, often used and added to year after year by parent birds that may mate for life. Some nests may be 8 to 10 feet across and weigh many hundreds of pounds. Usually lay 2 eggs with both parents incubating for 35 days. Young fledge at about 2 1/2 months.

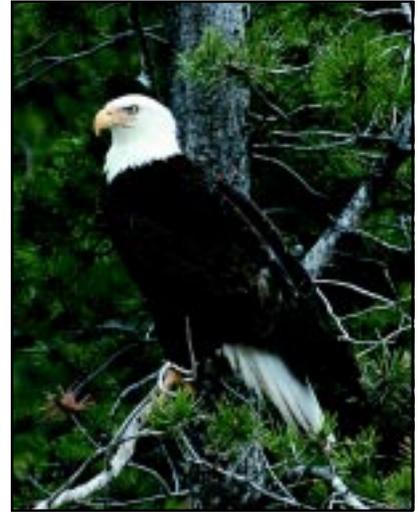
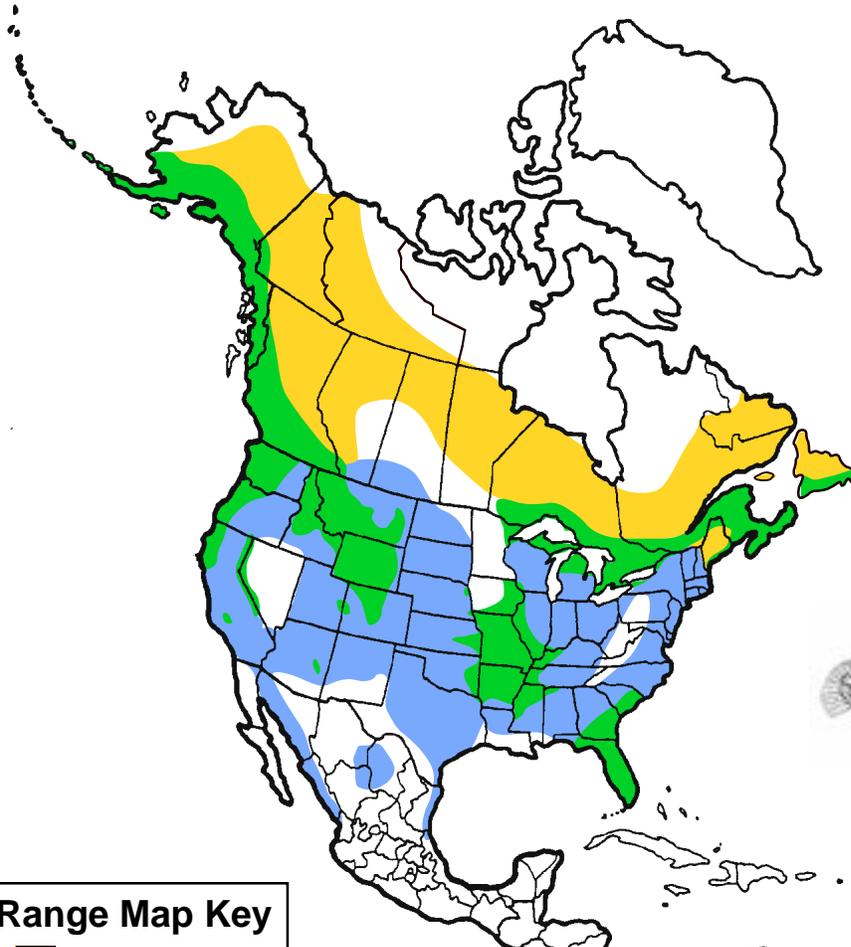
Movement:

Northern birds from Alaska and Canada migrate south in winter but all remain in U.S. Resident birds may be present year around, as well as northern migrants.

Interesting Fact:

In Alaska huge numbers of Bald Eagles take advantage of salmon spawning runs, in which the adult fish die after breeding. This provides a very rich food source and easy pickings for hundreds of eagles during fall migration. These birds congregate in large numbers and all get along for a while.

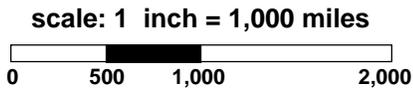
Range Map: Bald Eagle



Bald Eagle, Copyright © Mfio Burcham

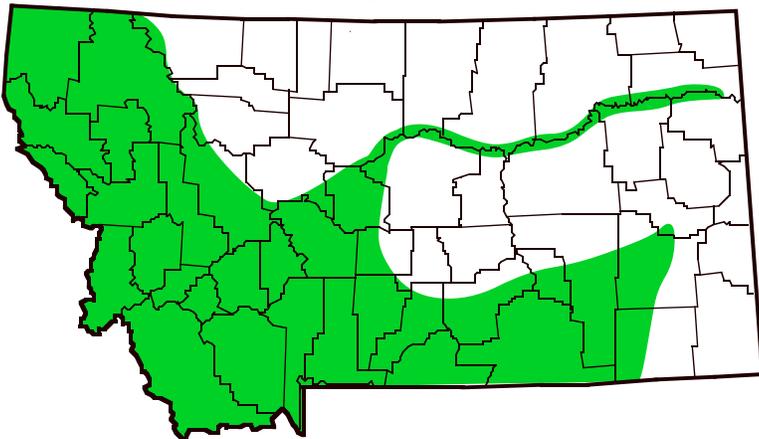
Range Map Key

- Summer
- Year-round
- Winter



These maps are designed to show the general limits of occurrence. Within those limits, each species will likely be found only in appropriate habitat.

Raptor Range in Montana



Montana range maps are based on the Montana Bird Distribution data.