



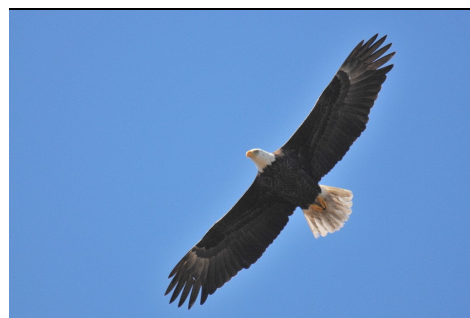
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EAGLES!

I have loved Eagles as long as I can remember: the thrill of my first Bald Eagle at Hawk Mountain with my Scout Master in 1946 as a teenager; the vicarious thrill again in 1976 when I took my 76-year-old father to Hawk Mountain and watched his excitement upon seeing the first Bald Eagle of his long life; and the thrill of seeing my Philadelphia Eagles win their first ever Super Bowl on February 4, 2018. Actually, the gridiron Eagles watch was the longest time coming, and I was never sure even until the very end of the game that I would ever see it.

The Bald Eagle is one of those canary-in-the-coal-mine species that as a top of the food chain predator was greatly impacted by the DDT disaster of the 40's and 50's. Northern Bald Eagles are just now beginning to recover even though a winter trip to the Conowingo Dam on the



Adult plumage

Susquehanna River in Maryland might make one think they are quite common. Southern Bald Eagles, particularly in Florida, have fared much better, and a watchful birder can see one almost anywhere at almost any time. Still, the thrill of seeing one fly low overhead is breathtaking and a sight to be long remembered.

Bald Eagles take from four to five years to reach full adulthood with the iconic white head and tail. Aging immature and juvenile Bald Eagles can be a challenge, but I have found the most reliable field mark to be the head and the bill.

First year Bald Eagles have an all dark head with a bill that is half black and dark gray at the base. They are mostly dark plumaged as well. Second year Bald Eagles have a dark tip only on the bill and have more white in their body plumage. The top of the head becomes slightly paler giving a hint to the white it will later obtain. By the third year the bill is completely yellow; the head is mostly white save for a dark streak through the eye; and the plumage is primarily dark. (photo 4) At four years of age the adult Bald Eagle achieves its magnificent and regal all white head and tail.

"What do they eat?" Primarily fish. They are quite adept at catching their own, but also sometimes work in pairs to steal a fish from an even better fishing bird - the Osprey. Watching a pair of Eagles attack an Osprey flying with a fish in its talons can be awe-inspiring. One Bald Eagle flies above the Osprey harassing it from above, while the second Bald Eagle flies below and snatches the fish out of the air when the over-whelmed Osprey finally gives up and drops it. Teamwork! Just like the gridiron Eagles of the 2018 Super Bowl. (Sorry, I couldn't resist that.)



Common Gallinule. (*above*)

I have a fisherman friend in Maine who delights in demonstrating for me how he can catch a fish and wave it in the air so that a nearby observant Eagle can't miss it. Within seconds the Eagle will fly right to the boat whereupon my friend will toss the fish into the water close by the boat and the Eagle will pick it up. It is really a cool experience. However, Eagles will also take birds, such as this one carrying off a hapless



Certainly the football Eagles mascot "Swoop" in his green jersey and oversized green and white shoes, (*internet photo*) while exciting and crowd pleasing at Eagles games, cannot begin to compete with the real thing. Still, the Philadelphia Eagles winning the Super Bowl did cross one more thing off my "bucket list," and, as my close friends and family know, that

experience is right up there with my first Bald Eagle back in 1946, and certainly a long time coming!

Eagles at Conowingo Dam:

bellaremyphotography.com/2012/12/09/a-visitors-guide-to-the-bald-eagles-at-conowingo-dam/. More on aging juvenile Bald Eagles from the Feathered Photography blog.



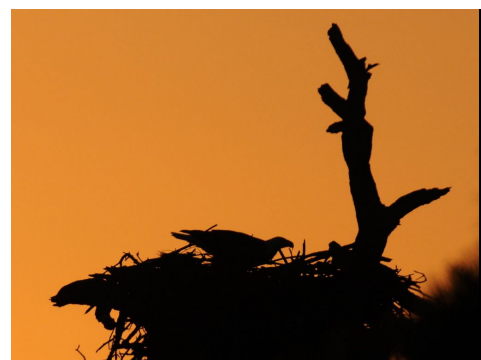
First-year Bald Eagle



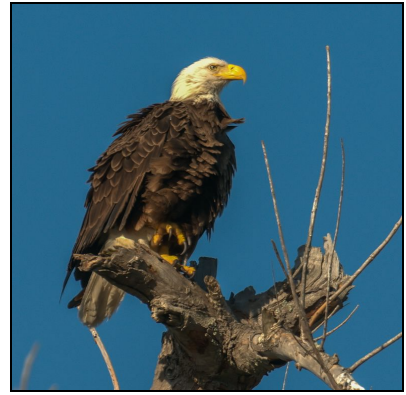
Second-year Bald Eagle



Third-year Bald Eagle



Bald Eagle nest at dusk



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