

Upper Mississippi River

*National Wildlife
& Fish Refuge*

Bald Eagle Facts



Bald Eagle Facts

Identification: Immature eagles, those under 5 years old, have mottled brown and white feathers; mature eagles have a brown body with white head and tail feathers

Life Span: 20 to 30 years

Size: 6 to 8 foot wingspan; 8 to 14 pounds; one of the largest birds in North America

Diet: They hunt for fish and waterfowl, but will take small mammals and scavenge on dead animals

Nest: Paired eagles build large nests of sticks in tall trees and will re-use a nest year after year.

Eggs: 1-3 eggs are laid in February and March, incubation lasts 35 days, chicks fledge when they are around 12 weeks old.

In 1972 there was only one active bald eagle nest on the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge. Strong endangered species laws, conservation efforts, and the banning of the pesticide DDT helped bring the bald eagle back from the edge of extinction. Today, there are over 300 pairs nesting on the refuge.

Bald eagles can be seen year-round on the refuge; from November-March pairs renew their bond with aerial displays and nest maintenance, from March-October eagle pairs care for their fledglings and the young birds learn to fly and hunt, and from November-March migratory eagles congregate on open water below the river's locks and dams to fish.

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