



Common Name Bald eagle

Scientific Name *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*

Status Endangered

Species Description The bald eagle is a large raptor with long, broad wings which are held flat when soaring. The adults are unmistakable, being nearly black with a white head and tail. Immatures are mostly dark with white mottling at the base of the tail and on the underwing coverts.

Distribution

Historic Bald eagles formerly nested throughout Canada and the U.S., south into Baja California. The species nested in a few scattered locations in western New Mexico.

Existing The populations levels in the continental U.S. have been greatly reduced, most notably in the east. There has only been one nesting record in New Mexico in recent years. The number of wintering birds in New Mexico has increased, due to reservoir construction and the resultant expansion of rough fish populations.

Reason for Decline Most of the decrease in the continental population can be attributed to pesticide accumulation, but the demise of the nesting population in New Mexico is probably due more to habitat (terrestrial and aquatic) degradation, and shooting.

Habitat For nesting, this species requires cliffs, pinnacles or tall trees near a clear stream or lake. In winter, bald eagles mostly congregate near large reservoirs or major rivers. In both cases hunting perches and roosts, in the form of large snags near water, are used.

Food The principal food of breeding birds in the southwest is fish, primarily carp, catfish, and suckers. In winter waterfowl, mainly coots, make up a large portion of the diet. Eagles will also eat small mammals such as rabbits, particularly road-killed animals.

Did You Know? The white on the head and tail becomes more extensive with each molt, until they are pure white at 4-5 years of age.