

America's National Emblem: The Bald Eagle

[A2]

Questo magnifico animale dallo sguardo sfidante e dal becco affilato è l'emblema nazionale degli Stati Uniti. L'apertura alare arriva a due metri, e può pesare fino a sette chili: è uno dei rapaci più grandi e fotografati al mondo.



The [bald eagle](#) is the national emblem of the United States. It appears in many government institutions and on official documents, as well as on the president's [flag](#), military insignia and billions of one-dollar [bills](#). However, not everyone was happy about its [choice](#) as America's national bird. 18th-century statesman Benjamin Franklin preferred the [turkey](#), believing the [bald eagle](#) to be "a bird of bad moral character".

DISTINCTIVE STYLE

The [bald eagle](#) is the only eagle native to North America. It is [strikingly](#) colourful, with a yellow [beak](#) and eyes and a white head and [tail](#) that contrast with the rest of its dark-brown [feathered](#) body. It is not born this way: [eaglets](#) have a brown [beak](#), eyes and feathers, but their colours change at the age of four or five. The [bald eagle](#) is covered in feathers and not actually bald! The origins of the name are uncertain, but possibly derived from an old English word 'balde' meaning white and referring to its head.

TOP PREDATOR

Eagles are [apex predators](#). This means they are at the very top of the [food chain](#), and have no natural predators [to threaten](#) them. They have very [sharp](#) eyesight and can see [prey](#) from up to two miles away. They scan lakes and rivers for fish swimming near the surface, then [zoom down to grab](#) them with their [talons](#).

HISTORY

The [bald eagle](#) has been a symbol of America since the 18th century. On 4 July 1776, the Thirteen Colonies voted to declare America independent from Great Britain. It was decided that they needed an official [seal](#) as a symbol of the country's "supreme power and authority." For six years, members of Congress [argued](#) over what it should be. Finally, in 1782, the [bald eagle](#) was chosen.

NATIVE AMERICA

Eagles are believed to be sacred by many Native American cultures and are said to carry messages between humans and the Creator. Numerous tribes use [bald eagle](#) feathers in spiritual ceremonies, to decorate traditional [costumes](#) or for [healing](#) or purification [purposes](#). In the US, wildlife laws

prohibit possessing or selling [bald eagle](#) feathers or other parts, but a special law called the eagle feather law makes an exception for their use in Native American spiritual practices.

SURVIVAL

In 1940, US Congress [passed a law](#) that made it illegal to kill [bald eagles](#). However, [overhunting](#) and habitat [loss](#) led to a critical decline in their population. The main [culprit](#) was DDT, a pesticide that was [banned](#) in 1973. Between 1978 and 1995 the [bald eagle](#) was [listed](#) as an endangered species. Today, the population has [recovered](#) and this magnificent [bird of prey](#) is no longer under threat.

THE US SEAL

It displays a [bald eagle](#) with a [shield](#) of thirteen red and white [stripes](#) covering the bird's breast. In its right talon, the eagle holds an [olive branch](#), in its left a [bundle](#) of thirteen [arrows](#), and in its [beak](#) it carries a [scroll](#) bearing the words: "E Pluribus Unum" (meaning "One out of many").

Glossary

- **overhunting** = cacciare in eccesso
- **stripes** = strisce
- **bills** = biglietti
- **beak** = becco
- **eaglets** = aquilotti
- **food chain** = catena alimentare
- **listed** = classificare
- **shield** = scudo
- **scroll** = pergamena
- **apex predators** = predatori alfa
- **healing** = cura
- **zoom down** = sfrecciare giù
- **to grab** = afferrare
- **argued** = discutere
- **purposes** = scopi
- **passed a law** = approvare una legge
- **bundle** = mazzetto
- **prey** = preda
- **loss** = perdita
- **arrows** = frecce
- **bald eagle** = aquila calva
- **to threaten** = minacciare
- **sharp** = acuta
- **talons** = artigli
- **banned** = proibire
- **olive branch** = ramoscello d'ulivo
- **flag** = bandiera
- **choice** = scelta
- **turkey** = tacchino
- **strikingly** = straordinariamente
- **tail** = coda
- **feathered** = ricoperto di piume
- **seal** = sigillo, marchio

- **culprit** = colpevole
- **recovered** = recuperare
- **costumes** = costumi
- **bird of prey** = uccello rapace