

## The American Bald Eagle

When I was 15 years old, I saw my very first American bald eagle. It looked like a hawk to me, but it was flying higher than they usually flew, and it was a good bit larger. It was my dad who clued me in to the fact that I was seeing something pretty amazing. He was awestruck, and I couldn't figure out what impressed him so much. He explained to me how rare American bald eagles were at the time. The chances of seeing one flying around back then was something like one in ten thousand - it was almost impossible.

When, a few minutes later, that American bald eagle swooped down and dive bombed its target, I joined my dad in being awed. It was so high, and suddenly it was diving downwards at almost impossible speeds. It swooped in a huge arc, then came up clutching something in its claws - no doubt some type of rodent, or perhaps a turtle. I had never seen a bird doing something quite so impressive, so I was naturally a little bit awed and amazed. I had thought that hawks and eagles were more or less the same, but eagles really have a size and power that hawks just can not compare with.

Back then, my mom used to collect American bald eagle figurines. I was surprised, because figurines were not really her style. When I asked her about them, however, I found out there was more to her American eagles figurines than a simple collection of knickknacks. She bought them from a not for profit group dedicated to protecting American bald eagles. Back then, it was looking like the symbol of our nation might not survive our own environmentally short-sighted ways. Between PCB's in the water, eagle hunting, and encroaching civilization which wreaked havoc on their environment, their population was rapidly dwindling. American bald eagles do not reproduce quickly, and require a lot of solitude and just the right environment to raise their young. Simply put, they were not getting the chance.

I got involved in American bald eagle conservation right alongside my parents. We campaigned to reduce pesticides and create sanctuaries for the birds. It took a long time, but they are finally beginning to make a bit of a comeback. I can not say that they are completely out of the woods yet but, slowly, they are getting there.