



Viewing Bald Eagles

IN SCHOHARIE COUNTY

WING TIPS

Viewing Bald Eagles as they migrate or congregate has become a popular wildlife watching activity.

The Schoharie County Eagle Trail was designed so you may see Bald Eagles in their natural habitat. Please exercise proper etiquette for safe and protective viewing of these wonderful birds.

Sometimes it's easy to spot a Bald Eagle. Its striking white head and tail and the sheer size of its wingspan (6 to 7 feet) make it hard to miss. However, it is not until an eagle reaches maturity at about five years that the white plumage develops. Younger (immature) Bald Eagles are chocolate brown with white-mottled feathered heads.

For this reason, it is important to learn the size, shape and flying posture to correctly identify Bald Eagles.

As an eagle flies toward you, its wings are held straight out, unlike the more common turkey vulture, which soars with its wings in a V-shape. As the eagle passes overhead, you'll notice that the feathers at the tips of its wings are widely separated. Its relatively short tail is usually fanned open.

MAJESTY

The Bald Eagle was adopted as the symbol of the United States because of its independence and strength. Known in Native American cultures as *Protector of Peace*.

One of the largest birds of prey found in North America, Bald Eagles stand about 30 inches high, have a wingspan of 72-84 inches, and weigh between 8 and 14 pounds.

This majestic bird is easily identified in adult plumage by its unmistakable brown body set off by a white head and tail and bright yellow bill.

Male and female eagles look identical, except that the female is usually about one third larger and heavier than the male. Sexual maturity and the characteristic white head and tail are achieved at five years of age.

Juvenile Bald Eagles are often mistaken for immature golden eagles, which are much rarer in New York.

Despite their fierce image, Bald Eagles are actually quite timid and opportunistic. Since their primary prey is fish, Bald Eagles are sometimes called sea eagles, though they will take some mammals, waterfowl, seabirds, and carrion, especially during winter.

COUPLING

They are a long lived bird, with a life span of 30 years. Bald Eagles mate for life, which can be over 30 years. Returning to nest in the general area (within 250 miles) from which they fledged. Once a pair selects a nesting territory, they use it for the rest of their lives. Nests are reused and added to each year, growing to over six feet across, eight feet deep, and weighing hundreds of pounds.

Bald Eagles' aerial courtship is an amazing display of avian abilities. The pair soars high in the sky, begins a dive, and interlocks talons while descending in a series of somersaults. Bald Eagles produce only one or two offspring per year, rarely three. In New York, the young fledge by mid to late summer at about 12 weeks of age. By 20 weeks they are largely independent.

The Schoharie County Eagle Trail is a cooperative effort featuring Bill Combs Jr. nature photographer and local eagle expert sponsored by SEEC, a county-wide economic development organization. www.seecny.org