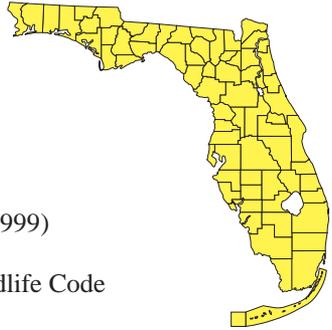


# BALD EAGLE

## *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*

**Order:** Falconiformes  
**Family:** Accipitridae  
**FNAI Ranks:** G4/S3  
**U.S. Status:** Threatened  
(proposed for delisting in 1999)  
**FL Status:** Threatened

U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act and state Wildlife Code prohibit take of birds, nests, or eggs.



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immature

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**Description:** Adult has white head, white tail, and large, bright yellow bill; other plumage is dark. Immatures dark with variable amounts of light splotching on body, wings, and tail; head and bill are dark. In flight wings are broad and wide and held horizontally, presenting a flat profile when soaring and gliding. Flies with slow, powerful wing-beats.

**Similar Species:** At a distance, in flight, eagle's size and lack of white in wings should help differentiate it from the crested caracara (*Caracara cheriway*; see species account), which also has a white head. Flattened aspect of the eagle's wings is unlike the teetering, V-shaped flight of the turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*).

**Habitat:** Most commonly includes areas close to coastal areas, bays, rivers, lakes, or other bodies of water that provide concentrations of food sources, including fish, waterfowl, and wading birds. Usually nests in tall trees (mostly live pines) that provide clear views of surrounding area. In Florida Bay, where there are few predators and few tall emergent trees, eagles nest in crowns of mangroves and even on the ground.

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**Seasonal Occurrence:** In extreme southern Florida, most adults are resident, but most birds in northern and central Florida migrate north out of state after breeding season (late May - July). Juveniles and younger birds mostly migrate north in summer and may range as far as Canada. Also, in winter, some birds from northern populations migrate to northern Florida.

**Florida Distribution:** Florida has largest breeding population of any state outside Alaska. Breeds throughout most of peninsular Florida and Keys, mainly along coast in eastern panhandle, and is rare in western panhandle. Greatest concentrations of nesting eagles occur around Lake Kissimmee in Polk and Osceola counties, around Lake George in Putnam, Volusia, and Lake counties, lakes Jessup, Monroe, and Harney in Seminole and Volusia counties, along Gulf coast north of Tampa, and Florida Bay and southwest peninsula area.

**Range-wide Distribution:** North America. Breeding range extends from Alaska, across Canada, south to Baja California, the Gulf coast and Florida Keys, although very local in the Great Basin and prairie and plains regions in interior U.S., where range has expanded to include Nebraska and Kansas. Non-breeding range is generally throughout breeding range except in far north, most commonly from southern Alaska and southern Canada southward.

**Conservation Status:** Original population in Florida could be found throughout state and likely numbered well over 1,000 pairs. Population declined sharply after late 1940s, reaching a low of 120 active nests in 1973, and by 1978 was considered rare as a breeder. Use of pesticide DDT and related compounds and development of coastal habitat are probably chief causes of decline. Numbers have steadily increased, especially since 1989. In 1993, 667 active territories were reported, and in 1999, 996 active nests were recorded. Major threats include habitat loss because of development and commercial timber harvest; pollutants and decreasing food supply are also of concern.

**Protection and Management:** Monitored annually by Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC). Continue acquisition of breeding territories and protection of foraging and roosting sites. Incorporate information known about buffer zones around nesting areas into state and local development regulations to help mitigate losses as Florida's human population continues to expand. Monitor pesticides and other environmental contaminants that affect reproduction and food supply.

**Selected References:** FFWCC 2001, Kale (ed.) 1978, Poole and Gill (eds.) 2000, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Rodgers et. al. (eds.) 1996, Stevenson and Anderson 1994.