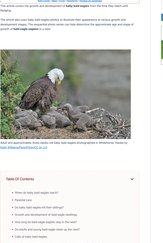
Baby Bald Eagles in the Nest: Hatching to Fledging.

Nesting Bald Eagles | Learn Nesting Bald Eagles

This article covers the growth and development of **baby bald eagles** from the time they hatch until they fledge.

The article also uses baby bald eagles photos to illustrate their appearance at various growth and development stages. The important photo series can help determine the approximate age and stage of growth of **bald eagle nestlings** in a nest.



Adult and approximately three weeks old baby bald eagles photographed in Whitehouse, Ontario by Keith Williams(Flickr/Flickr CC by 2.0)

Table Of Contents

- When do baby bald eagles hatch?
- Parental care
- Do baby bald eagles kill their siblings?
- Growth and development of bald eagle nestlings
- How long do bald eagle eaglets stay in the nest?
- Do adults and young bald eagle clean up the nest?
- Calls of baby bald eagles.
- How long do young bald eagles stay with their parents after fledging?
- View More Articles About Bald Eagles

When do baby bald eagles hatch?

After 35 days, a relatively long incubation period, the eagle chicks begin hatching. The rest of the eggs hatch within approximately the same time the hatched eagle egg and the second and third eggs.

The difference in the time of [egg laying](#) is that the female eagle begins incubating the first egg as soon as she lays it, hence initiating embryo formation earlier than in the second and third eagle eggs.

Females bald eagle sometimes lay an egg on successive days, but this is not always the case. Overall, most eagles lay one egg every 2 or 3 days, consequently, all eggs hatch within the same period of 3 to 4 days.

The hatching baby eagles crawl and zip the eggshell open independently, without any help from the parents.

The timing of egg hatching varies with latitude (from the south to the north). Bald Eagle's eggs in the south hatch earlier than eagles in the northern States and Canada.

Region	Approximate date of egg hatching
Florida	Egg hatching may start as early as November and as late as May. Most egg hatching starts in January through February.
Chesapeake Bay, Maryland	Egg hatching starts in January. Most eggs have already hatched by the last week of February through the end of March.
Province of Saskatchewan, Canada	It appears most of the egg hatching occurs in the second half of May.
Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming	Eagles eggs hatch from early April through mid-May. Egg is more at higher elevations (Bald Eagle's Eggs Hatch Later)..
Arizona	Eggs start to hatch in February through late mid-March.
Central Oregon	Eagles eggs appear to hatch between March and June (through early February).
Alaska and Yukon Territory	The egg hatching period extends from late May through the end of June, peaking in the second week of June.

Parental care

After hatching, both the female and bald eagle brood the baby eagles most of the time during the first eight weeks. The female does most of the brooding.

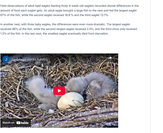
After the first week, the parents will the nestling eagles exposed for some time but mostly brooding most of the time during inclement weather.

It is estimated that during the first three weeks of the hatchlings' life, the female spends about 90% of the time on the nest [laying](#) care of the eagles while the male brings food for the mother and babies.

During the first three weeks, the female may briefly leave the nest, but the male replaces her, avoid leaving the eaglets unattended.

After the third week, the parents begin to relax the broad's care, leaving the eaglets in the nest unattended for short periods of time. By the 5th and 6th weeks, the parents begin take longer periods of time away from the nest to hunt and rest in nearby trees.

On hot and sunny days, the female may cover the baby eaglets from the sun. On cool days she may keep the eaglets warm by alternately brooding the nest eagle hatchlings.



These bald eagle chicks enjoyed lighting after a week and grow uniform lighting with they fledged

Do baby bald eagles kill their siblings?

Yes, baby bald eagles will kill each other. Nests fledgeon nestlings can be very aggressive to each other. They appear to be aggressive to stress. They may engage in fierce fights and hurt each other or dismember the fight and grow together (Stan Lebed).

Sibling aggressive behavior is one the driving force in determining how aggressive eaglets are to each other.

When the parents bring plenty of food, broods of 2 or three eaglets do not show much aggression toward each other. When food is decreased, all three eaglets fledge the nest at similar sizes even after showing differences in size at earlier stages in the nest.

However, when food is scarce, the difference in size between the first, second, and third baby eagle becomes more pronounced. The little food brought to the nest is capitalized by the larger eaglet that hatches first (the dominant bird). The eaglet eaglet is either driven by the larger siblings or dies of starvation.

If there is enough food for two, then both eaglets will grow and develop at similar positions. If food continues to be scarce, the larger eaglet gets most of the food brought to the nest and continues to develop to be smaller sibling to the point that it may end up killing it or also drives it to die from starvation.

Besides bringing food to the nest, the adult eagle do not intervene in the eaglet's disputes.

If one of the three eaglets in the nest ends up dying, why do bald eagles lay three eggs?

The bald eagles will always try to maximize the number of eaglets in each breeding season. With this purpose in mind, they lay up to three eggs to explore the possibility of being a season of plenty of food. And if food is not enough food available, they end up only raising one or two eaglets.

Some ornithologists think that eagles lay three eggs just in one or two of the eggs are not fertile.

Growth and development of bald eagle nestlings.

The following pic series baby bald eagle photos is illustrated the eaglet growth and development from hatching to fledging. The photo series can be used as a reference to make an approximate age determination of the young bald eagles in the nest.

1-2 Days

Newly hatched baby eagles have a white to light gray coat of white down. The white down helps the eaglets to camouflage with the female inside the eaglet's nest. They warm the face & 10 days after hatching.

9 Days

The white down is replaced by thermal down, which is gray in color. Juvenile feathers begin to emerge on our nestlings. The white down helps the eaglets to camouflage and provide thermoregulation on their nest.

3 Weeks

Eaglet in thermal down. The entire body is gray in color. Juvenile feathers begin to emerge on our nestlings.

4 Weeks

Juvenile feathers begin to emerge through the thermal down. The top of the head, back, and wings of the nestling are the first to show juvenile feathers.

5 Weeks

Juvenile feathers begin to appear on the head, back, and wings. The thermal down is still present but continue to grow longer and denser.

5.5 Weeks

Feathers continue to grow. The eaglet has much of its body covered in juvenile feathers. The tail and wing feathers are rather short.

6–7 Weeks

The eaglet's body is covered in juvenile feathers. However, the tail and wing feathers continue to grow for weeks after the eaglets leave the nest.

8-10 Weeks

The entire body is covered in juvenile feathers. However, the tail and wing feathers continue to grow for weeks after the eaglets leave the nest.

How long do bald eagle eaglets stay in the nest?

Across the Bald Eagle's range in North America, baby eagle fledge between 8 to 10 weeks after hatching.

Studies of nesting bald eagles in different regions indicate that young eagles leave the nest as follows.

- In California, bald eagle nestlings left the nest on average at 10 weeks.
- In Florida, at about 11 weeks (10).
- In Maine, at about 11-12 weeks.

The difference in the number of weeks has to do with the timing of hatching, availability of food, and sex of the eaglets.

In general, the [big eagle](#) hatch grow bigger and develop faster than the rest. Hence this eaglet leaves the nest sooner.

When the food is abundant during the nesting seasons, baby eagles develop faster and leave the nest earlier than when food is scarce, and they take longer to develop.

Field observations also indicate that males tend to fledge earlier than females. In nests where the first eagle hatches, the female, bald eagle, fledge earlier than the second eagle.

Do adults and young bald eagle clean up the nest?

The very young bald eagle eaglets tend to defecate outside of the "[eagle](#)" but still on the nest. As the eaglets grow, the droppings are pushed outside the nest by pinning their rear ends outside the nest before defecating.

Bald eagle nests with eaglets often show a distinctive lack of whitewash on the ground vegetation below the nest.

The bald eagles do not clean out the bones and the rest of the carcasses they bring to the eagle nests. The bones and rest of the carcass carcasses are scattered by pests, crows, and other scaring creatures in the nest. At the end of the breeding season, the nest has a pungent odor.

Calls of baby bald eagles.

Nesting bald eagle begin making hard calls after the first week. However, when they begin to stand up by the end of the second week, they start making more frequent and louder calls. Eaglets vocalize softly while in the nest but become much louder when the parents bring food to the nest.

The following are calls a single bald eagle nestling.

Young eagles sometimes fall to the ground, do they do it on purpose?

Many young bald eagles indeed fall to the ground, but they do not die in most cases.

Young eagles begin to stand up in nests. No nestlings need flapping their wings to develop enough strength. First, they flap their wings in place and perform jumps on the nest. Then they start exercising their take off and landing skills on the nest branches. This is the period when bald eagles show a landing spot bias in nest.

The eagle parents do not teach the young bald eagles how to fly. When the time to fledge approaches, the young eagles are forced to fledge the nest by flying around the nest while squalling.

Field observations indicate that up to half of bald eagle fledglings end up on the ground.

Eaglets remain on the ground for several seconds, where the parents continue feeding them until they gain more strength and coordination skills and can fly.

When eagles stay on the ground, they are vulnerable to foxes, coyotes, and mountain lions.

How long do young bald eagles stay with their parents after fledging?

Fledging eaglets stay/return/visit their parents for 10-15 weeks after leaving the nest. The young eagles depend entirely on their parents for food. In fact, field observations indicate that during the first 5 weeks after fledging, young eagles cannot catch their own food.

[Juvenile eagles](#) follow the parents everywhere, including the trips to the feeding grounds where they learn how to catch their own food. The young eagles learn how to catch prey and how to perch and sit safely in first hunt. Eaglets learn by watching fledging their fall in scavenging on carcasses.

The majority of their diet during the first month after their parents is composed of fish.

Young bald eagles appear to learn to hunt mostly on their own by trial and error. This is because they begin to hunt well in waterfowl and other animals only after becoming independent and moved to longer with their parents.

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