

Cherokee Ethnobiology

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BALD EAGLE

Cherokee Importance

The Bald Eagle has always been held in the highest of regard by the Cherokees. Perching and flying higher than other birds, no other bird is considered as sacred as the Bald Eagle. Flying off its high perch before the dawn, the eagle would fly high into the sky, allowing the sunlight to filter through its wings to bring the day. The Creator so revered the eagle as master of the sky, the Creator did not wish for the Eagle to ever walk upon the earth...thus, the Eagle mother lines her nest with a fine carpet of soft fur. Once the Eagle chick is fully feathered, the mother removes the fur, forcing the young Eagle to walk on rough twigs and thorns – encouraging the young Eagle to leave the nest and fly, taking his rightful place as master of the sky. Eagle feathers were given to boys as they transitioned into manhood. However, the feathers were collected only by the most respected of men...who would never allow harm to come to the Eagle.

Description

The bald eagle is a large bird of prey, that, when reaching maturity at 5 years of age, obtain the prominent white head and tail feathers. Body and wing feathers are dark brown to almost black. Juvenile bald eagles have dark head and tail feathers. It is sometimes hard to distinguish young bald eagles from golden eagles, but golden eagles are slightly larger. Bald eagles have large talons they use to grasp fish when they swoop down from high over the water surface when spotted with their keen eyesight.

Where found:

In the Cherokee Nation, bald eagles are generally found from October to March near permanent sources of water. However, there are more resident eagles that are staying in this area year-round.

Other names:

Taxonomy:

Kingdom - Animalia
Phylum - Chordata
Class - Aves
Order – Falconiformes
Family – Accipitridae
Genus – *Haliaeetus*
Species – *leucocephalus*

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