

General Categories of Behavior and Activities to Look For:

Daily Behaviors

- Hunting & Eating
 - o Eagles hunt primarily fish during the breeding season, but will also eat carrion, mammals, and waterfowl. You may see an eagle catch prey while you are watching the nest site. Once young have hatched, you will see the adults bring prey to the nest to feed the young.
- Preening & Perching
 - o You may see the second, non-incubating eagle perched near the nest site. This bird is likely keeping an eye out for predators and resting. Birds preen/clean their feathers quite often, so you may see a perched eagle preening.
- Vocalizations
 - o Peal Call: high-pitched, prolonged, gull-like cries. Juvenile Eagles have their own Peal Call as well as a chirping sound they use as nestlings to beg for food.
 - o Chatter Call: 3 – 4 introductory notes separated by short silences and then followed by a rapid sequence of descending notes.
 - o Kuk-kuk-kuk Call: Females tend to have lower pitched calls than males.
- Courtship Behavior & Nest Building
 - o Depending on when you start observing a nest site, you may see copulations. These happen when the female is perched. The male flutters above her briefly. There are often vocalizations.
 - o Pairs work on and maintain their nest throughout the breeding season. A nest continues to grow in size each year.

Territorial and Defense Behavior

- Chasing other birds near the nest tree
- Chasing off intruding eagles
- Reacting to the presence of humans who are too close – flying and vocalizing

Incubation Activity (mid-March – mid/late April)

- Incubation: the female does most of the incubation, but the male also participates. Both adults protect the eggs from the weather, and they turn the eggs to maintain consistent temperature throughout the egg. Both parents defend the nest so as to protect the eggs from predators or intruders.
- Incubation lasts approximately 35 days

Hatching of Young (mid- April – early May)

- Once the eggs hatch, you will see some subtle changes in behavior. Adults will bring prey to the nest, and pick off small pieces in their beaks to feed the young. Once the young are over a week old, you may be able to see their fuzzy white heads when being fed.

- Chicks are covered with light whitish down when they first hatch. By the time they are 9 – 11 days old, the first down is replaced by a second down which is much darker in color.
- Feathers begin to appear when the chicks are about 24 days old. These are always very dark when they start to appear.
- Chicks are fully feathered when they are approximately 6 weeks old. At this time they are almost full-grown.

Fledging (July – Aug)

- Eaglets begin “branching” at approx. 9-10 weeks; this is a precursor to fledging.
- Eaglets will fledge, or fly away from, the nest at 10-14 weeks old.
- Once the eaglets have fledged they may remain around the nest for 4-5 weeks, taking short flights while their primary feathers grow and strengthen. The parents will still provide all of their food. They will eventually learn how to hunt on their own.

Nesting Failure

- If a nest fails, you will likely see a few clues that indicate the pair’s young did not hatch or survive to fledging, but sometimes this is hard to confirm until you have seen a pattern over the course of more than one visit. You may see both adults in the area, but no activity on or near the nest for a period of time. You may stop seeing both adults or only observe one adult. You may not see the adults hunt and bring prey back to the territory.

Additional Sources of info:

- All About Birds: https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Bald_Eagle
- Audubon Bird Guide: <https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/bald-eagle>
- Sibley Guides, including *The Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior*
- *Hawks in Flight*, by Pete Dunne, David Sibley, and Clay Sutton