Rare Animals of Louisiana

Bald Eagle
_Haliaeetus leucocephalus_

**Rarity Rank:** S2N,S3B/G5

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<th>State</th>
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<tr>
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<td>imperiled</td>
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<td>2</td>
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**Identification:**
- A very large raptor
- Adult with dark brown body, white head and tail, and large, yellow bill
- Immatures are dark brown with pale underwing coverts, irregular light base of tail and black bill
- Subadults intermediate between immatures and adults and exhibit various amounts of white mottling on body
- 4 to 5 years required to attain adult plumage
- Wings very long, broad and rounded at the tip with primary feathers often widely separated; wings held flat when soaring
- Adults to 1.1 m in length with wingspread to 2.3 m

**Habitat:**
- Nests primarily in the tops of cypress trees near open water
- Feeds in open lakes

**Food habits:**
Feeds on fish, either self-caught or robbed from other birds (especially ospreys), as well as carrion, waterfowl, coots, muskrats and nutria

**Range:**
- Breeds throughout the United States, southern Canada and Baja California, although it is rare away from the coast
- Winters throughout the United States along river system, large lakes, or coastal areas
- In Louisiana, nests primarily in southeastern coastal parishes and, occasionally on large lakes in northern and central parishes, but these nests are less successful

**Reproduction:**
- Louisiana birds nest in winter and early spring
- Nests very large (up to 2.5 m across and 3.5 m deep) and used year after year

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

Range based on occurrences in Natural Heritage database
Alternate nests may be constructed by breeding pair, and the birds may alternate between the two nests annually. Usually up to 3 eggs per clutch. Incubation period about 35 days; young fledge 72 to 78 days after hatching.

**Threats:**
- Accumulation of pesticide residues (especially DDT) caused thinning of egg shells, which reduced reproductive success rate.
- Loss of habitat.
- Human disturbances to nesting pairs during nesting season.

**Beneficial Management Practices:**
- Annual nesting surveys conducted to determine productivity.
- Midwinter surveys of non-nesting birds.
- Hacking program, where newly hatched young are moved to areas with no eagles, hand reared, and released, in hope that they will return to the release site to nest.
- Protection of nest sites through Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries’ Natural Areas Registry Program.

**LA River Basins:**
Atchafalaya, Barataria, Mississippi, Ouachita, Pearl, Pontchartrain, Red, Sabine, Terrebonne, Vermilion-Teche.