

[Back Cover - A Life History of the Northern Bald Eagle](#)

ISSUE : [Issue 6](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1973/12/1

A Life History of the Northern Bald Eagle The Bald Eagle was once abundant throughout North America, from the middle of Hudson Bay into Mexico • and early writers reported great clusters of them along riverbanks, feeding on migrating anadromous fish. Today, the majority of Bald Eagles live along the northwest coast and (despite years of bounty) in Alaska. There are two major breeding populations east of the Rocky Mountains: one is in Florida, the other is on Cape Breton Island. What follows is a composite picture of the life of the Northern Bald Eagle made primarily from the extraordinary observations of Francis Hobart Her? rick, with additions from the researches of Edward Gittens and Charles Broley, The Eagle is a bird of prey, apparently prefers to take his food live but certainly eats considerable carrion • and eats a tremendous variety of animal life. The major portion of the diet is fish, and nesting territories are never very far from water. Herrick believed a good deal of the fish was talcen dead from the surface or along beaches • but the Eagle can fish. G. Lunn reported in the Nova Scotia Bird Society Newsletter (1964), "On two occasions I have watched one of the adults catching fish, ...On both occasions the eagle had been circling at very considerable height....On neither occasion had it spotted its prey from almost directly above, as an osprey seems to do, but had begun its direct planing glide several hundred feet up and a- bout a mile from the point where it took its fish....lVhen just a few inches above the water it stretched its legs straight down, until its talons went just below the water's surface to make its catch. Gradually rising with slowly beating wings, the eagle drew its legs close to its body until the fish was virtually invisible.'* The Eagle is known for attacking an Osprey that has successfully taken a fish, making it drop the fish and then taking the fish in its oxvn talons out of the air. Herrick re? ports that "there is strong evidence that the Eagle is not always content with sto? len prey, but sometimes bags the Osprey itself...." He will attack a ivide range of waterfowl. "An Eagle...would sit well concealed in the bushy top of a fir; a flock of Bluebills or American Scaup may be swimming along shore, and at the moment they enter water not over a foot deep they are doomed; the Eagle shoots from his hiding place; the Ducks dive and circle back and forth under the water in vain; the Eagle follows every turn of his chosen bird, which after swimming underwater for a minute rises only to fall into the Eagle's talons." Chasing Brant and Geese, "when close upon quarry the Eagle suddenly sweeps beneath it, and turning back downwards,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18