

# America's Bird Soars



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

*Bald eagle.*

The bald eagle is flying high! This majestic bird clawed its way back from the edge of extinction, or dying out.

In the middle of the 20th century, the number of bald eagles in the United States was declining rapidly. Thus, the species was put on the nation's list of endangered species. In 2007, however, the bald eagle was taken off the endangered species list.

## Trouble Ahead

In the early 1700s, bald eagles were a common sight. There were about half a million of those birds living in what is now the United States.

Over time, their population fell dramatically. In the early 1960s, a very low amount of bald eagles remained.

What caused the number to drop? Hunting and the use of harmful chemicals sprayed on crops were largely to blame. Those chemicals poisoned the birds and their eggs.

Pollution also contributed to the problem. Bald eagles often became sick after eating fish from polluted waters.

In addition, the bald eagles' habitat was being destroyed as people cut down trees to build

roads and homes. A habitat is a place in nature where an animal makes its home.

## Population Boom

Thanks to laws that helped protect bald eagles and banned harmful chemicals, the birds made a comeback. In 2007, the population of bald eagles living in the United States reached about 20,000, and they were taken off the endangered species list.

Conservation, or protection, efforts have helped their survival. "There is no doubt that it is the single best conservation story the United States has had," bald eagle expert Bryan Watts told *Weekly Reader*.

## A National Symbol

In 1782, the bald eagle was made the national bird of the United States. The nation's founders chose the bird because it symbolized freedom, strength, and courage. At the time, some people disagreed about the choice for the national bird. Benjamin Franklin, for example, thought the turkey would make a better choice because it was "a much more respectable bird."