

Habitat

- Near water, meadows, cliffs.
- Nests on large cliffs overlooking rivers or valleys where prey is abundant.

Behavior

- Resident in the park March through October, when its prey—songbirds and waterfowl—are abundant.
- Lays 3–4 eggs in late April to mid-May.
- Young fledge in July or early August.
- Migrates to South America.
- Dives at high speeds (can exceed 200 mph) and strikes prey in mid-air.

2011 Status

- From April to July, biologists monitored 25 eyries in Yellowstone.
- 19 were occupied by at least one adult.
- Nesting occurred in 12 eyries; 11 pairs raised 21 young.

Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

Monitored since the 1980s, when the bald eagle was placed on the federal list of threatened species, Yellowstone's population of bald eagles is relatively stable. In 2007, it was removed from the federal threatened species list, and monitoring continues. Each year, 40 to 60 percent of nests succeed (produce eggs), with each successful nest producing an average of 1.42 eaglets. These statistics are slightly lower than expected for a stable and healthy population, and may be explained by the park's harsh environment, especially during the early breeding season (February–April), and the declining cutthroat trout population in Yellowstone Lake.



A bald eagle in Yellowstone National Park.

Identification

- Large, dark bird; adult (four or five years old) has completely white head and tail.
- Females larger than males, as is true with most predatory birds.
- Immature bald eagles show varying amounts of white; they can be mistaken for golden eagles.

Habitat

Habitat can be a clue to which eagle you are seeing:

- Bald eagles are usually near water where they feed on fish and waterfowl.
- Golden eagles hunt in open country for rabbits and other small mammals.
- Exception: Both feed on carcasses in the winter, sometimes together.

Behavior

- Bald eagles nest in large trees close to water.
- In severe winters, eagles may move to lower elevations such as Paradise Valley, north of the park, where food is more available. On these wintering areas, resident eagles may be joined by migrant bald eagles and golden eagles.
- Feed primarily on fish and waterfowl, except in winter.
- In winter, when fish stay deeper in water, they eat more waterfowl.
- Eat carrion in winter if it is readily available.
- Form long-term pair bonds.
- Some remain on their territories year-round, while others return to their nesting sites by late winter.
- Two to three eggs (usually two) laid from February to mid-April.
- Both adults incubate the eggs, which hatch in 34 to 36 days.
- At birth, eaglets are immobile, downy, have their eyes open, and are completely dependent upon their parents for food.
- When 10–14 weeks old, they can fly from the nest.
- Some young migrate in fall to western Oregon and Washington.
- Many adults stay in the park year-round.

2011 Status

- Some eagle territories are experiencing nest instability due to large numbers of trees that are falling as a result of the 1988 fires.
- In 2011, 17 pairs of eagles nested in the park; 10

of these pairs raised 13 young.

- Although the population is relatively stable parkwide, few of the nests in the Yellowstone Lake area succeeded.
- Bald eagles, like osprey, are among the fish-eating wildlife being monitored to determine any effect from the declining cutthroat trout population.

Osprey (*Pandion haliaeetus*)

Like many other birds of prey, osprey populations declined due to pesticides in the mid-20th century. Its populations rebounded during the latter part of the 20th century. Monitored since the late 1980s, Yellowstone's population of osprey is considered relatively stable. On average, 50 percent of nests succeed (produce eggs) each year, with each successful nest producing an average of one young. These statistics are slightly lower than expected for a stable and healthy population, and may be explained by the park's harsh environment. As with bald eagles, scientists suspect that declining nest success for osprey around Yellowstone Lake is due, in part, to the decline of cutthroat trout.

Identification

- Slightly smaller than bald eagle.
- Mostly white belly, white head with dark streak through eye.
- Narrow wings with dark patch at bend.

Habitat

- Usually near lakes (such as Yellowstone Lake), river valleys (such as Hayden and Lamar valleys), and in river canyons (such as the Gardner Canyon and the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone River).

Behavior

- Generally returns to Yellowstone in April & leaves in September.
- Builds nest of sticks in large trees or on pinnacles close to water.
- Lays 2–3 eggs in May to June.
- Eggs hatch in 4–5 weeks.
- Young can fly when 7–8 weeks old.
- Feed almost entirely on fish.
- Often hovers 30–100 feet above water before diving for a fish.
- In the air, arranges the fish with its head pointed forward to reduce its resistance to air.



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An osprey in Yellowstone National Park.

2011 Status

- In Yellowstone, the osprey population fluctuates, with 31 nests producing 25 young in 2007 and a high of 100 nests and 101 fledglings in 1994.
- Overall, osprey reproduction has increased each year since 2003.
- In 2011, osprey occupied 26 nests; 13 of these breeding pairs successfully fledged 24 young. However, none of the nests in the Yellowstone Lake area succeeded.
- Osprey in Yellowstone are being monitored, along with other fish-eating wildlife, to find out if they are affected by the declining population of cutthroat trout.

Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*)

Trumpeter swans in North America neared extirpation in the early 1900s due to human encroachment, habitat destruction, and the commercial swan-skin trade. Small populations survived in isolated areas such as Yellowstone. Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, west of the park, was set aside in the 1930s specifically for this species. In the 1950s, a sizeable population of swans was discovered in Alaska. Today, more than 46,200 trumpeters exist in North America. Their population in the Greater Yellowstone area (GYA) is considered stable, but the park's population is declining. In recent years, fewer than 10 swans have lived here year-round. Winter numbers vary from 60 to several hundred. Reproduction rates are low. Scientists suspect that several factors are contributing to this decline:

- loss of wetlands during an extended drought in the late 20th and early 21st centuries
- fewer trumpeter swans taking up residence in the park