The Eagle — Apex Hunter of the Open Sky

Reading Worksheet — Level F | tahricteaches.com

The **eagle** is one of the world's most powerful birds of prey. With more than 60 species found across every continent except Antarctica, eagles have conquered nearly every kind of environment — from dense tropical rainforests to open Arctic tundra. Among the most iconic is the bald **eagle** of North America, the national symbol of the United States. Others, such as the Philippine **eagle**, are critically endangered and rank among the largest and rarest birds alive on Earth today.

What makes the **eagle** such a formidable **hunt**er is its extraordinary physical design. Its enormous **wing**s — spanning up to 2.4 meters in some species — allow it to soar effortlessly on warm air currents called thermals, reaching heights where prey cannot detect its approach. Each **claw**, or talon, is longer than a human finger and capable of exerting hundreds of kilograms of crushing force in a single lethal strike. Even the **feather**s are engineered for near-silent, high-speed flight.

Eagles are intensely territorial. Each breeding pair stakes out a **territory** that they will defend aggressively against rival eagles and competing predators. Within this zone, they construct a massive **nest** — known as an eyrie — that the same pair returns to year after year, adding new sticks and branches each season until the structure can weigh over a tonne. Eagles mate for life, and both parents share the work of incubating eggs and raising their young.

In the **wild**, eagles play a vital ecological role as apex predators. By hunting rabbits, fish, snakes, and even young deer, they regulate prey populations and prevent overgrazing that would otherwise damage grasslands and riverbanks. The bald **eagle**'s near-extinction in the 1970s — caused by the pesticide DDT — demonstrated exactly how much ecosystems depend on these birds. Their disappearance triggered a cascade of environmental damage across North American river systems.

Today, conservation programs work hard to **protect eagle** populations worldwide. Banning harmful chemicals, establishing no-fly zones near eyries, and restoring degraded habitats have helped several species **survive** and begin to recover. Yet deforestation, illegal hunting, and climate change continue to push many populations toward the edge. The fate of the **eagle** is directly linked to the health of our entire planet — to **protect** it is to **protect** the ecosystems on which all living things depend.

A. Vocabulary

1. eagle ____	a. one of the light, thin coverings that grow on a bird's body and enable flight
2. hunt ____	b. to keep something or someone safe from danger, harm, or damage
3. nest ____	c. the natural environment where animals live, away from human control
4. wild ____	d. to continue to live or exist despite difficulty, danger, or threat
5. wing ____	e. to search for and catch animals for food
6. feather ____	f. a structure built by a bird to hold its eggs and raise its young
7. claw ____	g. a flat body part used by birds to fly through the air
8. territory ____	h. a sharp, curved nail on the foot of a bird or animal; a talon
9. protect ____	i. an area of land that an animal defends against others of the same kind
10. survive ____	j. a large, powerful bird of prey with keen eyesight and strong talons

B. True or False

1. Eagles are found on every continent, including Antarctica. ____
2. The bald eagle is the national symbol of the United States. ____
3. Eagle wingspans can reach up to 2.4 meters in some species. ____
4. An eagle's claws can exert very little pressure when they strike. ____
5. Eagles return to the same nest every year, making it bigger each time. ____
6. Eagles mate for life and both parents help raise their young. ____
7. Eagles play no important role in the health of natural ecosystems. ____
8. The bald eagle nearly went extinct due to the pesticide DDT. ____
9. Conservation efforts such as pesticide bans have helped eagle populations ____ recover.

C. Fill in the Blanks

Word Bank: territory, wild, protect, survive, nest

1. Eagles build a large _____ called an eyrie, returning to it and adding more branches each year.

2. In the _____, eagles act as apex predators that keep prey populations from growing too large.

3. Each breeding pair defends its _____ aggressively against rival eagles and other predators.

4. Conservation programs work hard to _____ eagles from threats like pesticides and illegal hunting.

5. Banning harmful chemicals has helped many eagle species _____ and slowly recover their numbers.

D. Comprehension Questions

1. Why is the eagle described as having 'conquered nearly every kind of environment'? Give examples.
2. How do an eagle's physical features — wings, claws, and feathers — help it hunt successfully?
3. Describe the nesting behavior of eagles. How does an eyrie change over time, and what does it reveal about eagle partnerships?
4. What ecological role do eagles play in the wild, and what happened when bald eagles nearly disappeared in the 1970s?
5. What are the main threats to eagle populations today, and what conservation strategies have helped some species recover?

E. Discussion Questions

1. The bald eagle's near-extinction was caused by a pesticide designed to protect crops. What does this teach us about how human decisions can produce unexpected consequences in nature?
2. Eagles are national symbols of power and freedom for many countries. Is it appropriate to use wild animals as national symbols? What responsibilities might that create?
3. If a construction company wanted to build a factory inside a breeding eagle pair's territory, should the eagle's needs take priority over economic development? Defend your position.

Answer Key

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A. Vocabulary: 1-j, 2-e, 3-f, 4-c, 5-g, 6-a, 7-h, 8-i, 9-b, 10-d

B. True/False: 1-F, 2-T, 3-T, 4-F, 5-T, 6-T, 7-F, 8-T, 9-T

C. Fill Blanks: 1-nest, 2-wild, 3-territory, 4-protect, 5-survive

D. Comprehension:

1. Eagles live in nearly every type of habitat — tropical rainforests, Arctic tundra, mountains, and rivers — across every continent except Antarctica, showing their remarkable ability to adapt to different environments.
2. Wide wings allow eagles to soar on thermal air currents without tiring. Their claws exert hundreds of kilograms of force for a lethal grip on prey. Their feathers are engineered for silent, high-speed flight, preventing prey from detecting their approach.
3. Eagles build eyries — massive stick nests — in the same location each year, adding materials until the nest can weigh over a tonne. This reveals that eagles mate for life and are committed long-term partners who share parenting duties across many breeding seasons.
4. Eagles regulate prey populations — hunting rabbits, fish, snakes, and deer — preventing overgrazing that damages ecosystems. When bald eagles nearly disappeared due to DDT in the 1970s, river ecosystems collapsed across North America, showing how dependent entire habitats are on apex predators.
5. Main threats include pesticides, illegal hunting, deforestation, and climate change. Conservation strategies such as banning DDT, creating protected no-fly zones near eyries, and restoring habitats have allowed several species, including the bald eagle, to recover significantly.