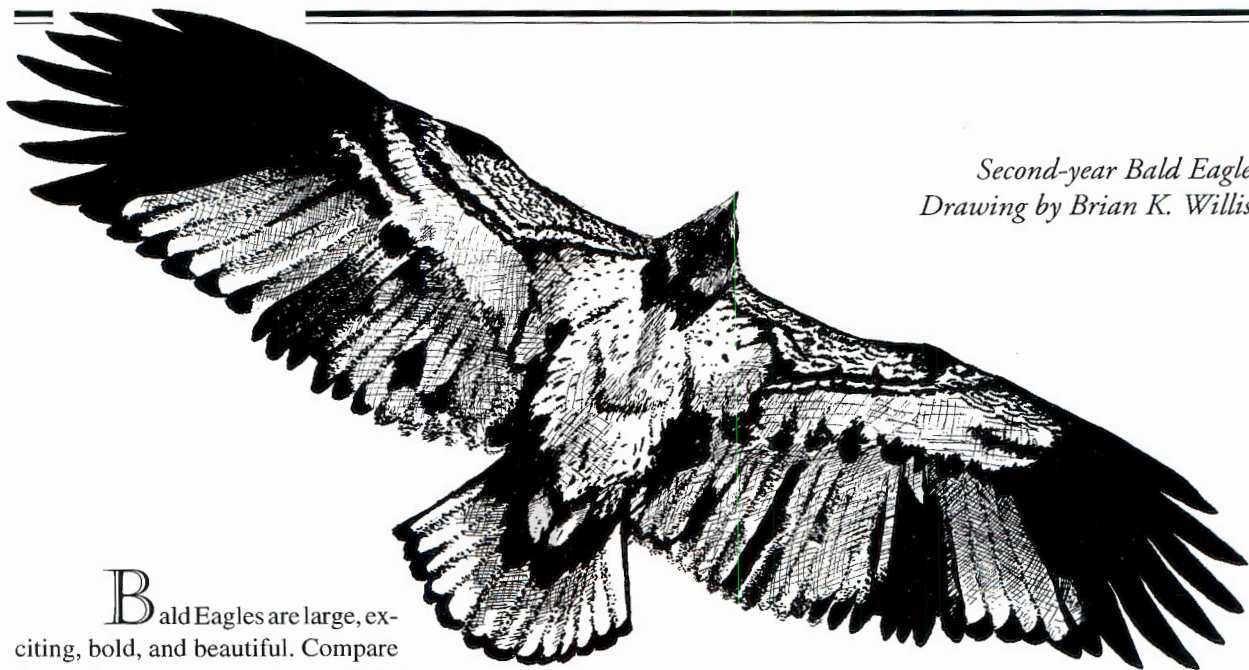


# Bald Eagles

## Distinguishing from Other Raptors and Determining Age

by Hal Cohen

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*Second-year Bald Eagle.  
Drawing by Brian K. Willis.*

**B**ald Eagles are large, exciting, bold, and beautiful. Compare the eagle's 6- to 8-foot wingspan with the 3-foot wingspan of a Red-tailed Hawk and you are looking at a giant and a dwarf.

In North America, only the Golden Eagle and Turkey Vulture match the Bald Eagle in size; the California Condor tops it. Discerning between these species from afar can be difficult. And even though it is smaller, a white-headed bird like the Osprey also presents some identification problems, especially at a distance.

The small head size of the Osprey helps label it. The bold black and white markings on the belly and inner lining of Osprey's wings are diagnostic. Although a Bald Eagle will crook its wings, never will the wings be as accentuated as are the Osprey's.

Flight behavior also offers clues when separating the Bald Eagle from the Turkey Vulture and Golden Eagle. Turkey Vultures fly in a dihedral, rocking motion when gliding or soaring; Bald Eagles spread their wings flat. The wings emerge from the body rather straight without indentations.

To separate Golden from Bald Eagles at a distance, note that the Golden holds its wings in a slight dihedral and that the wings are pinched where the trailing edge emerges from the body.

**'The young eagles with their mottled, darker colorations more easily**

**blend into the background and thus are camouflaged and protected from potential predators or food thieves.'**

Identification confusion can occur between immature Bald and adult Golden Eagles. Young Bald Eagles and adult Golden Eagles appear large and dark when viewed from a distance or when lighting is poor. Up close, observers may note that adult Golden Eagles lack white throughout the entire body, although occasion-