

## WHITE-HEADED EAGLE.

*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*, Savigny.

L'Aigle à tête blanche.

It is not until very recently that the confusion which had existed in the instance of the Golden Eagle (gen. *Aquila*), as well as in that of the Sea Eagle, and of the present species (gen. *Haliaeetus*), has by patient observation been satisfactorily cleared away. This confusion arose from the striking difference in the plumage of the immature bird from that which characterizes it in an adult condition. Hence it was that the White-headed or Bald Eagle (as it is called by Wilson), has been universally confounded with the Sea Eagle (*H. albicilla*), a species which appears to be exclusively European. It must, indeed, be confessed that the immature birds of both species very closely resemble each other; but we believe that distinguishing characters are not wanting even at this period, though perhaps not very apparent upon a superficial examination; the tail, for example, is longer in the White-headed Eagle, and the plumage is less regularly varied with brown.

Sir W. Jardine, in his notes on Wilson's description of this species, observes, that having had both the White-headed and the Sea Eagle in his possession for several years, he has observed their respective manners to be also different, the White-headed being "more active and restless in disposition," "constantly in motion," and incessantly uttering "its shrill barking cry." It is also more fierce and untameable.

The adult of the present species cannot be mistaken, but the white of the head and tail is not acquired in its full purity till the third year. The first moult gives a mingling of ash colour, white, and obscure brown; the second increases the ratio of white; the third completes the transition from the dull greyish brown of the first year.

Sir W. Jardine observes, that in captivity from three to five years are required to effect a thorough change.

This beautiful Eagle is a native of the temperate and northern regions of both continents, but is much more common in America, where it is adopted as the national standard of the United States. "Formed," says Wilson, "by nature for braving the severest cold; feeding equally on the produce of the sea and of the land; possessing powers of flight capable of outstripping even the tempests themselves; unawed by anything but man; and from the ethereal heights to which he soars looking abroad at one glance on an immeasurable expanse of forests, fields, lakes, and ocean deep below him; he appears indifferent to the little localities of change of seasons, as in a few minutes he can pass from summer to winter, from the lower to the higher regions of the atmosphere, the abode of eternal cold, and thence descend at will to the torrid or the arctic regions of the earth."

Though preying indiscriminately on every kind of animal, especially small mammalia, and not even refusing carrion when pressed by hunger, the White-headed Eagle gives the decided preference to fish. Not that he obtains his prey by his own exertions as a fisher, or at least very seldom, and then only in the shallows; he watches the labours of the Osprey, and forces that industrious fisher to give up his booty. Wilson's spirited description of the contest has been often quoted; nor is the sketch by Audubon of this bird's ferocious attack upon the Wild Swan less replete with descriptive energy. The favourite localities of the White-headed Eagle are the borders of lakes, the rocky margins of the larger rivers, and especially the precipitous shores of the ocean.

The nest is generally placed in the topmost branches of lofty trees, often in the centre of a morass or swamp, and is formed of a mass of sticks, sods, grass, &c. It is increased by fresh layers annually, being repaired and used year after year until it becomes of such magnitude as to be observable at a great distance. The young are fed with fish, which often lie scattered in a putrid state round the tree, infecting the air for a considerable distance. The young are at first covered with a cream-coloured cottony down, which gradually gives place to the greyish brown feathers of the first year.

The adult plumage is as follows: head, upper part of the neck, and the tail, pure white; body of a deep chocolate brown; beak, cere, and tarsi, whitish yellow; irides almost white.

We have figured an adult male and an immature bird one third the size of nature.