






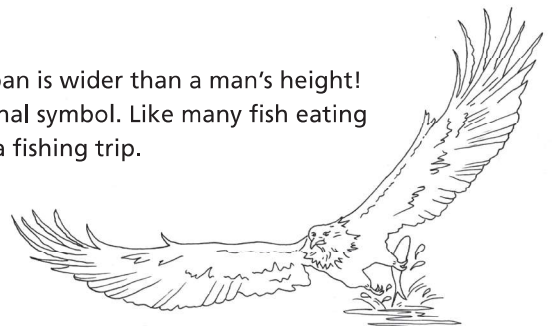
Birds of Prey

The kings of the sky, these majestic creatures have made the heavens their own. Although there are around 300 different species, nearly all share the same features needed to kill and butcher their prey. With dagger-like talons, razor sharp eyesight and powerful hooked beaks, they are living, breathing hunting machines. No wonder our fabulous feathered friends continue to fascinate us.

Talons	Eyes	Beaks
<p>Normally the rear talon is the strongest and deadliest. Once this plunges into its victim's body, there is no escape. After snatching dinner from a lake or meadow, the talons grip hold of the feast while the bird flies to a nearby feeding post or back to its nest.</p> 	<p>Piercing eyesight can scan for prey over a wide area. In fact, a special pit in the back of the eye gives them telescopic vision. This is so sensitive that they can spot the twitch of a rabbit's ears up to two miles away.</p> 	<p>Hooked beaks act like sharp knives, tearing up the dead meat so that it is easier to eat. Interestingly, owls are not usually classified as birds of prey as they like to swallow their meal whole.</p> 

An American Beauty

The **bald eagle** truly is a colossal bird. Powerful and strong, its wingspan is wider than a man's height! Perhaps this is why the USA chose this magnificent bird as their national symbol. Like many fish eating birds, the bald eagle has bare legs so its 'socks' don't get wet during a fishing trip.



Snake Snack

With the longest legs of any bird of prey, the **secretary bird** attacks from the ground rather than the air. It uses its stilt-like legs to stun a snake by stamping on it. Tough scales on its legs protect it from any poisonous snakebite. It then deals the snake a deadly blow with its powerful back talon before grabbing it in its beak.

Scavengers

Members of the **vulture** family rarely hunt. They prefer to 'watch and wait' instead. The black vulture, for example, will simply circle a dying animal (or one that has already been killed) until it is safe enough to swoop down and pick the bones clean. This is probably the reason why some vultures look so ugly. The lack of feathers on their heads not only allows them to stay cool, but also keeps them clean... after all, it is easier to wipe blood off a bald head than off a set of beautiful feathers.

