

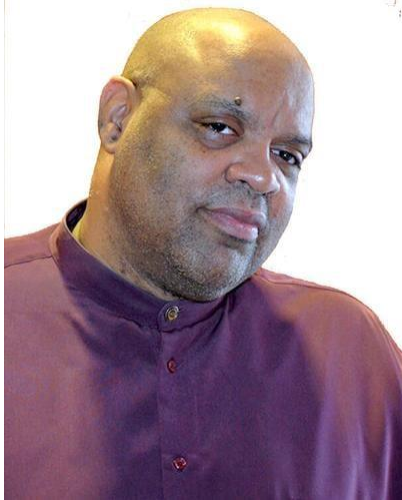
## NATURALLY: Raptors live, soar and thrive

- By ANTHONY FRAZIER Special to the Gazette
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An American adult osprey and her juvenile were perched in a nest.

- Photo by Anthony\_Frazier



The term “raptor” refers to birds of prey, including eagles, hawks, falcons, ospreys, kites, owls and vultures. Raptors are carnivores with good eyesight, sharp talons and curved beaks.

Eagles and ospreys are the raptors that I spend time watching and photographing. Bald eagles were on the Endangered Species List in most of the United States for over 30 years. When the pesticide DDT was banned in 1978, the bald eagle population began to recover, and, in the last two decades, has become widespread again.

In fact, we don’t have to drive far at all to see a nest and watch these magnificent birds in flight. Bald eagles can be found at Yellow Creek State Park and Two Lick Creek Reservoir, both a short drive from Indiana. These birds of prey can also be found in Ebensburg (Rowena Lake and Colver Reservoir), New Alexandria (Keystone State Park), Glendale (Prince Gallitzin State Park), Loyalhanna Lake (Saltsburg), Crooked Creek Dam (Ford City), near swamps, in a tree in your backyard, on a farm, or hanging out near a highway.

There are over 60 species of eagles, but only two — the bald eagle and the golden eagle — are native to North America. Most eagle species are in Africa and Eurasia.

These raptors may not always be easy to spot, but if you can devote enough time and patience, you will be rewarded.

Chances are you will find an eagle perching in a tree. Why do they just sit there? Every animal needs to rest. Perching provides the animal a time and place to do that.

But not all perching is about rest. Perching can provide time to digest food, look for new food, and keep close watch over their nest. Notice how the eagle is perched. Is it sitting low and compressed or sitting up looking around? Are there other eagles perching nearby? Does this eagle or other raptors perch in the same place?

Eagles prefer to have a high and open viewing advantage. They are always on the lookout for predators, invaders or other dangers. The eagles, like most raptors, have exceptional eyesight and do most of what it does for survival by instinct. They generally shy away from people and will respond or flee if their territory is breached. Eagles will also use their time to clean their feathers, talons or beak.

Some eagles, including some nearby, are year-round residents. Some migrate long-distances and their complex migration patterns depend on age, breeding location and food availability. Northern adults begin fall migration when lakes and rivers freeze, usually migrating coastward or to open water. They return to breeding grounds when weather and food permit, usually January to March.

To keep warm and dry, an eagle has 7,000 feathers, including stiff exterior feathers that fit together over fluffy down feathers underneath. The outer feathers shed water and keep heat from escaping. The down feathers provide the warmth.

Raptors' behavior is both instructive and inspirational. These birds model determination and persistence. Of course, they rely on instinct and are committed to survival. But they are also devoted to their partners and offspring. They thrive on ritual and excel at communication. They are experts at maintaining extraordinary balance and they stay aware. Eagles are masters of patience, practice and precision.

One of the most important lessons we can learn from wildlife as symbolized by the flying American bald eagle is: Live your life, soar and thrive. Wildlife doesn't sit around and complain about the weather or life. They just live.

But my study of raptors has taught me a larger lesson, too: the importance of conservation. The ways that humans behave, the machines we have, even the trash we leave, impacts the environment. Our land and the creatures that occupy it survive in a delicately balanced ecosystem that we need to protect and preserve mindfully.

Anthony Frazier, a raptor enthusiast, is a local broadcaster, photographer and community volunteer. The Naturally columns are brought to you each month by the Indiana Gazette and Friends of White's Woods to showcase the wonders of nature in our area.

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