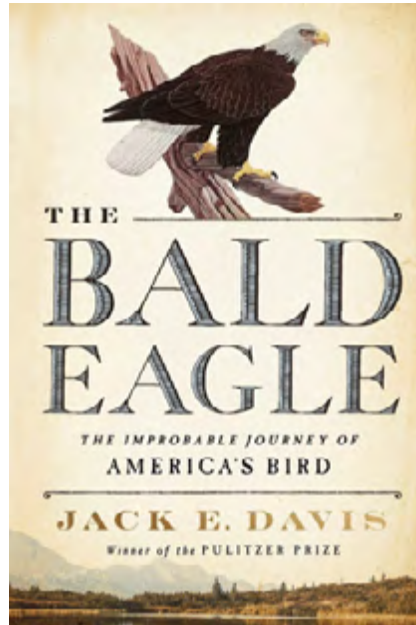


A NATIONAL BIRD AND AN INTERNATIONAL MESSAGE

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The Bald Eagle: The Improbable Journey of America's Bird by Jack E. Davis, who was a Fulbright Scholar to Jordan in 2002.

Jack E. Davis has enjoyed a celebrated career as an environmental historian since his time as a Fulbright Scholar to Jordan over twenty years ago. The author of 10 books, including the Pulitzer-Prize-winning *The Gulf: The Making of an American Sea* (2019), Davis has followed up with *The Bald Eagle: The Improbable Journey of America's Bird*. Here, Davis crafts a comprehensive narrative for a species that became so important to the country and whose story is so important for the world.

The Bald Eagle forces the reader to reflect on several ironies about America's bird and America's relationship with the bird. First, while the bald eagle poses as noble and free, many of the earlier characterizations of the bird (even by John James Audubon) included words like "tyrant" and "thief." Many bald eagles do steal the dinners of ospreys, leading to Benjamin Franklin's famous jest that a more moral bird, like the turkey, should be on the national seal instead. Yet, Davis acknowledges putting human characteristics on the bird's behavior was unfair.

While Americans closely associate their national values with the prestige of the bald eagle, the bird's plight more closely mirrors that of the original peoples of North America, a second irony. In the

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next section of the book, Davis makes clear that just as Native Americans were ignominiously uprooted from their homes and ancestral lands, “America’s Bird” was too. He goes on to demonstrate the relationship between the bald eagle and the myriad of Native American tribes living across North America. By doing so, Davis paints a picture of two species, alike in their natural heritage and suffering a similar fate, and reminds us, “Anthropology preserved artifacts but not Indians; the Great Seal of the United States preserved a symbol but not a bird” (200-201). Further, he does an effective job identifying a new cultural paradigm toward the natural world: “Inevitably, nature as a resource eclipsed nature as cultural identity” (8). Indigenous peoples saw themselves as a part of nature, with eagles, at times, even representing deities; the Americans, however, believed that nature was something to be tamed, and eagles were nothing more than “predatory pest[s]” (163).

This appraisal of bald eagles as a predatory nuisance certainly contributed to their precipitous decline. As recently as 1978, the bald eagle was listed as “endangered” in forty-three out of the forty-eight lower states. Davis identifies multiple causes, such as protective ranchers and habitat loss, but he focuses much of his attention on the devastating impacts of DDT, providing an effective summary of its history and how it came to impact bald eagles specifically.

Davis continually reminds us of the dual roles the bald eagle played throughout American history: “In one universe people hunted it down; in the other, the Americanization of popular culture raised it up. The bald eagle was object and ornament” (136).

The Bald Eagle, however, is ultimately a patriotic and inspirational survival story. From Charles Broley, a retiree in Florida who pioneered tagging bald eagles, to Doris Mager -- the “Eagle Lady” -- who staged a “nest-in” (literally living in a bird’s nest in a tree for six days) to raise awareness and funds for the bald eagle, Jack Davis provides a complete account of the successes of grassroots lobbying, scientific preservation, and government regulation. Scientist and volunteer- led “hacking” programs helped introduce bald eagles back into their native habitats, and the 1940 Bald Eagle Protection Act was the first law that actively worked to protect America’s bird. The greatest protections came, as Davis noted, from the Endangered Species Act which required a 330-foot distance between development and bald eagles nests. Between this and other protections for birds and the environment, bald eagle numbers have rebounded from the brink of extinction to over 10,000 nesting pairs in the lower forty-eight in 2007, the same year they were taken off the endangered species list.

Therefore, Fulbrighters past, present, and future can use this book as a lesson in coming together to protect the environment and to protect our natural heritage worldwide. As Davis so deftly put it, “No species is independent of other members or parts of an ecosystem” (300). This applies to the natural world and our international community alike. The lessons learned from the devastation of the bald eagle and its subsequent restoration and protection can and should be spread around the world. Jack Davis knows the value of international exchange and learning from each other: That is what he has done as a Fulbright scholar and as the author of this book.

Jack E. Davis, *The Bald Eagle: The Improbable Journey of America's Bird*. New York: Liveright: 2022. 432 pages. \$29.95.

BIOGRAPHY

Daniel Hopkins graduated summa cum laude from Boise State University in history, political science, and secondary education. In 2021, he received a Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship to Malta where he taught secondary and university classes. He has a strong interest in international education and immigrant and refugee education, having taught, tutored, and mentored diverse student populations around the world. Currently, he lives in Casablanca, Morocco, where he teaches AP American History and English at the American Academy. He can be reached at danielhopkins@u.boisestate.edu

