



1828

Plate: 25½ x 38½ inches (64.8 x 97.8 cm)

Original watercolor by
JOHN JAMES AUDUBON
American, 1785–1851

Hand-colored etching
and aquatint by
ROBERT HAVELL, JR.
British (active United States),
1793–1878

Printed and colored by
ROBERT HAVELL, SR.
British, 1769–1832

Published by
JOHN JAMES AUDUBON

LET'S LOOK

The artist who created this image was a scientist and an artist. Which parts of the picture seem to focus on scientific accuracy?

What did the artist show us about what the eagle eats and where it lives?

LET'S LOOK AGAIN

What artistic choices were made to create a captivating image? Where do you see interesting lines, shapes, colors, and textures?

Where do you see areas of contrast—between light and dark, rough and smooth?

What adjectives best describe this eagle? Fierce or peaceful? Powerful or weak? How does the artist communicate those qualities?

WHITE-HEADED EAGLE WITH YELLOW CATFISH

PLATE 31 FROM *BIRDS OF AMERICA*, NO. 7

With his sharp talons, piercing eye, pointed beak, and imposing size, this white-headed eagle appears strong and fierce. Also known as the bald eagle, this bird is easily recognizable because of its white head and tail, which stand out against its dark brown body. As the official emblem of the United States of America, it represents majesty and courage.

As a young man, John James Audubon, a budding scientist and artist, enjoyed studying birds on his father's farm near Philadelphia. In 1820, he took a three-month expedition down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, carefully observing a variety of birds and recording information about them through drawing, painting, and writing. His original **watercolor** paintings were later **etched** and printed in a seven-volume set of books called *Birds of America*, which included 435 large prints. This **print** is one page from volume 7. Audubon presented the birds in their natural habitats, engaging in typical activities such as hunting, feeding, courting, and caring for their young. Each image was accompanied by a written description.

In his text, Audubon described the bald eagle's "strength, daring, and cool courage," and noted its "ferocious, overbearing, and tyrannical temper." He admired its majesty in flight, soaring high with its impressive wingspan of seven to eight feet. Audubon witnessed bald eagles catching their **prey** and stealing recent kill of other birds, a notorious tactic of the eagle. Perhaps such scenes inspired Audubon's image, in which the bald eagle grasps a catfish with his razor-sharp talons.

Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of Caleb W. Hornor and Peter T. Hornor, 1968-120-1