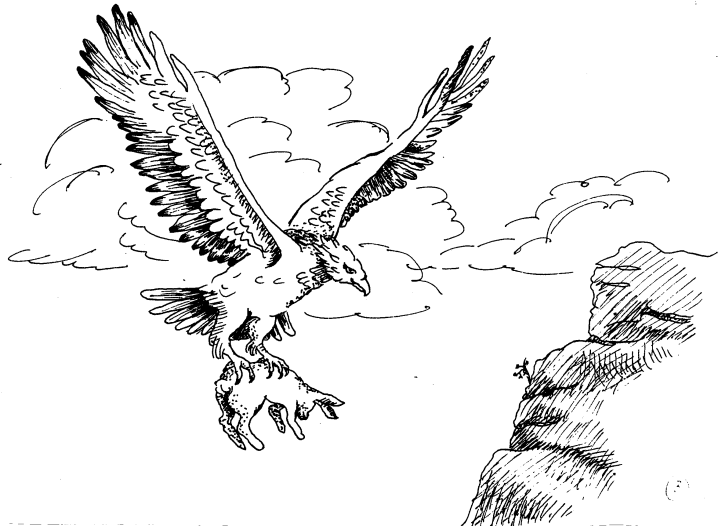


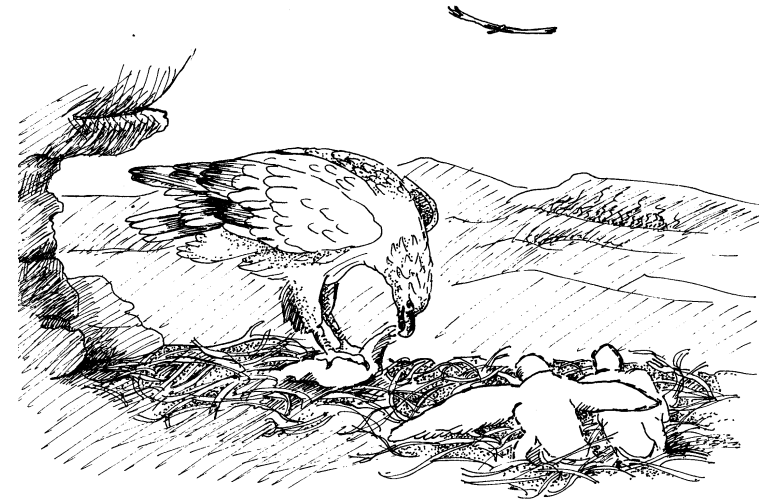
Eagles' first flight

On a rocky ledge the bird watchers could see an eagle's nest through their binoculars. The nest was a scatter of large sticks and grass that spread about two metres across the ledge. There, beside the nest, on the rock, was a small animal that the mother bird had captured earlier. Two young eagles were standing beside the carcass, picking away at the flesh while the mother bird stood on the opposite side also feeding from it.



It seemed that the mother eagle was teaching the young how to tear off bite-sized pieces of flesh from the carcass with their sharp, curved beaks. The young birds still had most of their fluffy baby feathers that were beginning to moult, to be replaced by speckled adult brown and white plumage. They

flapped their wings constantly as they stood feeding on the ledge.



As the birdwatchers quietly observed the mother and two babies, they noticed another bird hovering high overhead. This was the father eagle. The parent birds usually stay together and mate year after year. Not all birds remain partners for life, but eagles mostly do. The father watched his mate and the babies, and also watched that the birdwatchers did no harm.

After a few days the bird watchers returned to the rocky outcrop and watched the young birds take their first flying lesson. The mother began to scatter the sticks of the nest with her beak. The young ones began to flap about, their wings showing greater strength than before. Then the mother pushed edge of the ledge. She perched on the ledge beside them, then

flew off into the air and returned after circling around. She repeated this several times as the young looked on. Then she landed behind one of them and gave it a push with her beak. It over-balanced and suddenly found itself launched in mid-air. Flapping its wings furiously it soon discovered that this action kept it from dropping to the ground below.



Then the mother dropped down to the lower edge, calling to the baby, which flapped its way through the air to land beside its mother. It perched on this new ledge, trembling and calling out in alarm at this new experience. It called even louder when its mother left it alone in this new place. But mother was now busy with the other young bird.

She returned to the first ledge and put her second baby through the same routine, until all three birds were perched on the rocky ledge, calling loudly.

If bird language could be translated into our language it would go something like this:

Mother bird: "Good children. That was your first try at flying. Now you know how it feels to let the air carry you along as you move your wings up and down. The more you do this the stronger your wings will be; then you will be able to soar high up in the sky like your father and I do. Now, we have to get you back to the nest."

Babies: "Oh Mother! Please can't we stay here, now you got us here? It's scary hanging in the air with no rocks underneath!"

Mother: "No, you were made to fly. You have wings that will take you high up in the sky, and you are big enough now to use them. After you can fly well, I will teach you to find your own food. The time is coming when your father and I must build a new nest ready for the next eggs I will lay. Then there will be more baby eagles for us to feed and teach. So I must have you flying and caring for yourselves very soon."

With that, the mother eagle moved over behind the first baby and again gave it a gentle nudge that sent it flapping through the air again. Instantly the mother left the ledge and dived below the baby to encourage it to keep flapping and to guide it back to the nest. It squawked and flapped its way up to the

security of the familiar nest and then waited trembling, as mother escorted the other fledgling back again.

God made each creature different and gave each one special abilities. He made each person different too, and each of us has special things we can do as well.

God tells us about the eagle in Job 39: 27 – 29:

Does the eagle soar at your command, and build its nest on high?

It dwells on a cliff and stays there at night; a rocky crag is its stronghold.

From there it looks for food; its eyes detect it from afar.

Activities

1. Describe an eagle's nest. Explain how and where it is constructed.
2. What foods do eagles eat? Describe how they get their food.
3. Explain the terms 'herbivorous' and 'carnivorous'. To which group does the eagle belong?
4. How do you think the baby eagles would feel as they are learning to fly?
5. Make a list of the things the mother does to show that she cares for the young birds.
6. How does the father bird care for the young?
7. Write the meaning of these words: carcass escorted fledgling