

The bald eagle, our country's national bird.

One day you go bird watching, and as you watch a bald eagle soar lazily through the sky, you see a feather fall off. You rush to find the feather where it lands.

If you find an eagle feather, can you keep it?

Federal Law

Do you want to pay thousands of dollars in fines and possibly face jail time? If not, then don't touch the eagle feather!

Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act

The Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, passed in 1940, prohibits "pursuing, shooting, shooting at, poisoning, wounding, killing capturing, trapping, collecting, molesting, or disturbing" a bald or golden eagle. It's is also illegal to "possess, sell, purchase, barter, offer to sell, offer to purchase or barter, transport ... any bald eagle... alive, dead, or any part, nest or egg thereof."

This means you can't take or even move any part of a bald eagle, not even a feather already on the ground. A single violation could result in up to one year in prison and a \$5,000 fine.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

In addition to bald and golden eagles, you could even get in trouble for picking up a migratory bird's feather. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 also makes is illegal to kill, sell, buy, or possess any part of an alive or dead migratory bird. This law pretty much protects almost all birds except for house sparrows, starlings, and pigeons.

Exception

Because of the religious and cultural significance of eagle feathers, the law makes an exception that allows members of federally recognized tribes to own eagle feathers. Eligible Native Americans must first get a permit to own and receive eagle feathers. The law allows Native Americans to wear, use, inherit, or even give feathers to other Native Americans. However, they cannot give the feathers to non-Native Americans.

So, if you ever see a bird feather, especially an eagle feather, leave it alone, unless you're a Native American.