

Harpy Eagle

(Harpia harpyja)

The harpy eagle is the largest, most powerful eagle in the world. The female is considerably larger than the male although the male is exceedingly savage when the pair is nesting. Frank Todd, famous for his work with waterfowl, penguins, pelicans, roul rouls, etc., was almost destroyed by a male harpy eagle when he was curator of birds at the Los Angeles Zoo. The zoo's pair of harpy eagles went to nest in a high corner of their huge chain link flight. The ever inquisitive Todd wanted to observe the nest more closely and climbed twenty feet or so up the outside of the cage. The male eagle, with a terrible burst of speed from the far side of the flight, attacked Frank by smashing talon first into the chain link. The impact was so great that Todd was catapulted to the ground below where he wound up looking as though a truck had run over him. The eagle's talon missed Todd's eye by fractions of an inch.

These huge eagles inhabit the tropical lowlands from southern Mexico to Brazil and northern Argentina. They stick to the virgin tropical forests and are remarkably inconspicuous among the tremendous trees of the Amazon Forest. This species is endangered primarily because of the rapid destruction of its habitat.

The prey of the harpy eagle consists of arboreal mammals, i.e., monkeys, sloths, opposum, coati, and porcupine. They sometimes take ground dwellers such as agouti and probably grab an occasional large bird such as a macaw or parrot. They have been known to take snakes also.

Despite their great size and amazing strength the female harpy is sometimes rather docile. Two weeks after an adult female was captured she was taken out and flown near her old home area. The problem was not to get her to come back but to keep away from her. Another trained female was seen chasing a wild monkey through the jungle at forty or fifty miles an hour dipping and dodging with extraordinary agility and speed.

The harpy eagle is a grand bird with a dim future. Great stretches of its forest habitat must be preserved if the bird is to survive \bullet

