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Talons: Claws of Birds of Prey

Birds of prey use their talons to hunt, climb trees, or grip things.

All birds have claws, or talons, which are used to hold onto things and as protection for their toes. Claws can also be used to grip a perch, climb trees, dig or forage. Birds of prey, such as hawks, eagles or owls, primarily use their talons to hunt for food.

Talons are made of keratin and continue to grow throughout a bird's life, because they get worn from use. Talon size ranges depending on the bird, but birds of prey typically have prominent claws to help them seize their prey and defend themselves.

The different shapes and sizes of talons help researchers determine how birds of prey capture their kills. Hawks and eagles have developed large claws on the front and second toes of each foot, which help them seize large prey. Owls have large talons that are not highly curved, which helps them have a strong grip on their prey. This allows them to squeeze their targets to death. The medium-sized claws of falcons show that they rely more on the speed of their attacks rather than their claws to kill prey.



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