

## THUNDERBIRD

The Thunderbird is a mythical creature and a high-ranking prestige crest. Only the most powerful and prestigious Chiefs have the Thunderbird as a crest especially among the Kwagiulth, Nuu-Chah-Nulth and Coast Salish people.

It possesses supernatural power and is credited with creating the storms. It's believed to live high in the mountains and carry lightening bolts under its enormous wings. When he blinked lightning came out of his eyes, and when he flapped his wings thunder roared.

He hunted and ate Killer Whales by using the two lightning snakes kept under his wings. They have the heads of wolves and are revered for their great hunting capability. These lightning snakes were often painted on the sides of canoes and then covered up by another coat of paint. The power emitted from these snakes would help the native whalers in their hunt.

Frequently depicted in Native art, the Thunderbird is often shown clutching the Killer Whale in its talons and on top of totem poles with its wings outspread. The representation of a Thunderbird bears a striking resemblance to the Eagle except that it has curly horns on top of its head.

Many legends are associated with the Thunderbird. One prominent Coast Salish legend tells of the Salish people's great dependence on the Salmon. One day, the Killer Whale swam into the bay and the Salmon were frightened away.

Soon the people began to starve and called out to the Thunderbird for help. The Thunderbird swooped down, grabbed the Killer Whale and carried him out to the sea. The Salmon returned and the people were no longer hungry.

Thus the Thunderbird was known as a protector of the people and deeply revered.

