



Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Natural Heritage Program

Aquila chrysaetos Golden Eagle



Identification: Large, dark brown-raptor with long, broad wings; slight golden wash at the back of neck; squared off tail that is banded in mature birds and has a large white band in immature birds. Sex similar in appearance, although females average larger from males. Length ranges from 70 to 84 cm, wingspan 185-220 cm. Juvenal plumages (0-1 yr) distinguished from adults by much darker color, and by white at base of secondaries and inner primaries. Similar with immature Bald eagle, differs mainly in that immature bald eagles has irregular white/tawny areas on much of body as well as on underwing while golden eagles lacks extensive white on body and has white on undersurface of wing restricted to base of flight feathers.

Voice: Yelping “kee, kee, kee” or whistling notes.

Taxonomic comments: Worldwide there are 6 subspecies of the golden eagle but only *Aquila chrysaetos canadensis* resides in North America.

Status: Global rank is **G4** and state rank is **S1N**.

Habitat: Breeding range, open and semi open habitats from near sea level to 3,630 m. Winter range, prefers open habitats with native vegetation and avoids urban, agricultural, and forested areas.

Range: Breeding, mainly west North America from Alaska to central Mexico. Winter, from Alaska and southernmost British Columbia, south throughout breeding range in west US and Mexico; occasionally winters in central and gulf United States.

Food habits: small to medium sized mammals, mainly rabbits and large rodents but also skunks and foxes; occasionally deer, snakes, birds such as turkeys, geese, hawks and owls; and sometimes carrion. Rarely attacks young livestock.

Life expectancy: Golden eagles live 10 to 30 years in the wild and 46 years in captivity.

Reproduction: Individuals are sexually mature between the age of 4 and 5 years. Pairs typically mate for life. Each pair builds at least one nest on rocky cliffs or in large trees and may continue

to use the same nest for consecutive years. One to four eggs are laid in late February/early March (later in colder regions). Females tend to the eggs until they hatch (approximately 45 days). Young fledge two months after hatching. Both parents continue to tend to the young until one to three months after the young fledge. Sometimes family groups remain together for several more months.

Reason for decline: In early 1900's the golden eagle was believed to be a threat to livestock and as a result was the target of hunting and eradication campaigns. Today the bird is protected from hunting by the Bald Eagle Protection Act but still threatened by habitat destruction. Conversion of land to agriculture and urban areas is detrimental to this species because it has difficulty adjusting to changing environmental conditions. Accidental killing from mammal traps and poison and electrocution from power lines are also threats.

Interesting facts: Individuals and pairs engage in behavior that involves repeatedly carrying an object (e.g., moss or dead prey) to great height, dropping it, and then diving after it.

Known distribution in Louisiana:



Dates of documented observations are: 1986

References

Hall, S. P., and H. E. Legrand Jr. Element stewardship abstract for *Aquila chrysaetos*, Golden Eagle. The Nature Conservancy, Arlington Virginia.

Kochert, M. N; K. Steenhof, C. L. McIntyre and E. H. Craig. 2002. Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 684 (A. Poole and F. Gills, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.

Lowery, G. H. Jr. 1974. *Louisiana Birds*. 3rd Ed. Kingsport Press, Tennessee.

NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. 2002. Version 1.6 . Arlington, Virginia, USA: NatureServe. Available: <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>. (Accessed: December 6, 2003).

Peterson, R.T., and V.M. Peterson. 1980. A field guide to the birds: A completely new guide to all the birds of Eastern and Central North America. 4th Ed. Houghton Mifflin Company, New York.

Snow, C. 1973. Habitat management series for unique or endangered species. Technical Note. Bureau of Land Management U.S. Department of the Interior.