



Golden Eagles

Status Fact Sheet



Golden Eagle
Photo: George Gentry/USFWS

Golden Eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos canadensis*) can be found from the tundra, through grasslands, forested habitat and woodland brushlands, south to arid deserts, including Death Valley, California. They are aerial predators and eat small to mid sized reptiles, birds, and mammals up to the size of mule deer fawns and coyote pups. They also are known to scavenge and utilize carrion.

Golden Eagles build nests on cliffs or in the largest trees of forested stands that often afford an unobstructed view of the surrounding habitat. Their nests are usually, sticks and soft material added to existing nests, or new nests that are constructed to create strong, flat or bowl shaped platforms.

Golden Eagles avoid nesting near urban habitat and do not generally nest in densely forested habitat. Individuals will occasionally nest near semi urban areas where housing density is low and in farmland habitat; however Golden Eagles

have been noted to be sensitive to some forms of human presence. Golden Eagles lay one to four eggs, with two eggs being most common and four eggs most rare. The laying interval between eggs ranges between three to five days.

Golden Eagle Migration

Golden Eagles will migrate from the Canadian provinces and northern tier and northeastern states to areas that are milder in the winter and/or may have less snow cover. During winter, Golden Eagles are found throughout the continental United States. Golden Eagles tend to migrate during midday along north-south oriented cliff lines, ridges, and escarpments, where they are buoyed by uplift from deflected winds. Golden Eagles will forage during migration flights and use lift from heated air from open landscapes to move efficiently during migration and seasonal movements, gliding from one thermal to the next and sometimes moving in groups with other raptor species.

Status of Golden Eagles

The most recent survey of Golden Eagles across four large Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs) in the West (80 percent of the species' range in the lower 48 states is in these BCRs) provided an estimate of 20,722 Golden Eagles of all ages across the survey area. The best available survey data the U.S. Fish and Wildlife has for Golden Eagles indicate, at best, a stable population in the four Bird Conservation Regions, with a possible decline in the population of juvenile Golden Eagles in the southern Rockies. The Service extrapolates those survey data to estimate that there may be 30,000 Golden Eagles across the United States. However, Golden Eagle populations are believed to undergo a (roughly) ten year cycle, so having only four years data (surveys 2006 – 2009) limits the Service's ability to assess the long-term population trend. Size and

shape, and distribution of golden eagle nesting territories vary with topography and prey availability. Disturbances near areas that are important for roosting or foraging can stress eagles to a degree that leads to reproductive failure or mortality elsewhere

Protection of Golden Eagles

Bald and Golden eagles are protected by three federal laws: The Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Lacey Act. These laws prohibit the possession, use and sale of eagle feathers and parts as well as a number of other activities, including the transportation of eagles and feathers and parts that have been illegally obtained. The Eagle Act has prohibited take of Bald Eagles since 1940 and Golden Eagles since 1962. Take means pursue, shoot, shoot at, poison, wound, kill, capture, trap, collect, destroy, molest, or disturb. Such restrictions help ensure the future viability of eagles in the wild. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has long recognized the religious and cultural significance of eagles to Native Americans and works to accommodate these special needs. The Service operates the National Eagle Repository as a clearinghouse for eagles and eagle parts to provide Native Americans with eagle feathers for religious and cultural use.