

Golden Eagle

Aquila chrysaetos

The Golden Eagle is one of the largest, fastest, nimblest raptors in North America. Lustrous gold feathers gleam on the back of its head and neck; a powerful beak and talons advertise its hunting prowess. You're most likely to see this eagle in western North America, soaring on steady wings or diving in pursuit of the jackrabbits and other small mammals that are its main prey. Sometimes seen attacking large mammals, or fighting off coyotes or bears in defense of its prey and young, the Golden Eagle has long inspired both reverence and fear.

Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

Golden Eagles are one of the largest birds in North America. The wings are broad like a Red-tailed Hawk's, but longer. At distance, the head is relatively small and the tail is long, projecting farther behind than the head sticks out in front.

Color Pattern

Adult Golden Eagles are dark brown with a golden sheen on the back of the head and neck. For their first several years of life, young birds have neatly defined white patches at the base of the tail and in the wings.

Behavior

Usually found alone or in pairs, Golden Eagles typically soar or glide with wings lifted into a slight "V" and the wingtip feathers spread like fingers. They capture prey on or near the ground, locating it by soaring, flying low over the ground, or hunting from a perch.

Habitat

Golden Eagles favor partially or completely open country, especially around mountains, hills, and cliffs. They use a variety of habitats ranging from arctic to desert, including tundra, shrublands, grasslands, coniferous forests, farmland, and areas along rivers and streams. Found mostly in the western half of the U.S., they are rare in eastern states.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 27.6 - 33.1 inches
- Wingspan - 72.8 - 86.6 inches (6.1 - 7.2 feet)
- Weight - 105.8 - 216.1 ounces (6.6 - 13.5 pounds)

