

**ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT  
HERITAGE DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

**Animal Abstract**

**Element Code:** ABNKC22010

**Data Sensitivity:** No

**CLASSIFICATION, NOMENCLATURE, DESCRIPTION, RANGE**

**NAME:** *Aquila chrysaetos*

**COMMON NAME:** Golden Eagle, American War Bird, Bird of Jupiter, Black Eagle, Brown Eagle, Calumet bird, Calumet Eagle, Canadian Eagle, Gray Eagle, Jackrabbit Eagle, King of Birds, Mountain Eagle, Ring-tailed Eagle, Royal Eagle, War Bird, White-tailed Eagle

**SYNONYMS:**

**FAMILY:** Accipitridae

**AUTHOR, PLACE OF PUBLICATION:** C. Linnaeus, Syst. Nat. 8vo, pp.4+824 (Syst. Nat. ed. 10, p.88). 1758.

**TYPE LOCALITY:**

**TYPE SPECIMEN:**

**TAXONOMIC UNIQUENESS:** Six to 20 species in genus. Only one subspecies in North America, *A.c.canadensis*.

**DESCRIPTION:** A very large raptor with mostly brown plumage and golden wash on the back of the head and neck. The bill is mostly horn colored, their tail is faintly banded and their eyes are dark brown. Their wings are long and rounded and they have slow powerful wing beats that are often alternated with gliding or soaring. The legs are feathered down to their toes. Immatures have white at the base of the primaries and a white tail with a dark terminal band. The eagle's total length is 30- 40 in (76-102 cm) and their wingspan is 80-88 in (203-224 cm). Their weight averages between 9-12.5 lbs (4-5.6 kg).

**AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION:** The Golden Eagle differs from the bald eagle in lacking a white head in adults and in lacking a white spotting on the underwing coverts in immatures.

**ILLUSTRATIONS:** Color Drawing (National Geographic, 1987: p 184)  
Color Drawing (Robbins, 1983: p 78)

**TOTAL RANGE:** Contiguous North America, Canada south to central Mexico, Northern Russia, Siberia, British Isles, Northern Africa, Asia minor, Persia, southern Tibet, Korea and Japan. This outline represents the combined ranges of several subspecies, only one of which (*A. c. canadensis*) is found in North America.

**RANGE WITHIN ARIZONA:** Arizona.

### **SPECIES BIOLOGY AND POPULATION TRENDS**

**BIOLOGY:** The Golden Eagle's territory size in several areas of the western U.S. averaged 22-55 sq miles (57-142 sq km). Northernmost populations withdraw southward for the winter (some individuals may remain in the north) and they return to their northern breeding areas in March-April. They tend to vacate hot deserts during the summer. They can dive at tremendous speeds at a prey animal or in play, traveling in its stoop at an estimated speed of 150-200 m.p.h. Their flight speed during gliding and flapping is 28-32 m.p.h.

**REPRODUCTION:** The dates for laying the eggs vary depending on the location but for California to Texas the peak is late February to March. The clutch size is 1-3, rarely 4 (usually 2). The incubation period is about 43-45 days and is done mostly by the female. The eggs are dull, white spotted and blotched or freckled with brown or red brown. The young can fly at 60-77 days and the parents care for them for another 30+ days. The older stronger eaglet will often kill smaller nest mates and adults do nothing to prevent it. The family units sometimes stay together for several months. They typically first breed in their fourth or fifth year. Lifelong monogamy may be the rule, though some apparent exceptions have been recorded.

The distance between active nests almost never less than .5 mile (0.8km). The nest can be 8-10 ft (2.4-3 m) across and 3-4 ft (.9-1.2 m) deep, as the site allows. The nest is made from a foundation of sticks, weeds, brush, roots, twigs, lined with soft mosses, lichens, down, and fur. The pair often adds leafy green branches to the nest. Other nests may be a mere scrape on a shelf or a cliff with a circle of branches surrounding it. Their courtship display is similar to that of the Buteos. It consists mainly of spectacular flight maneuvers, spiral sailings in ever-rising circles in which the birds frequently come together and then drift apart.

**FOOD HABITS:** The Golden Eagle is a carnivore that feeds mainly on small mammals like rabbits, marmots and ground squirrels. They may also eat insects, snakes, birds, juvenile ungulates and carrion. They can fast for days between feedings. They hunt while soaring or from their perch and they may hunt cooperatively. They commonly hunt in the early morning and early evening.

**HABITAT:** They are usually found in open country, in prairies, arctic and alpine tundra, open wooded country and barren areas, especially in hilly or mountainous regions. They nest on rock ledges, cliffs or in large trees. The pair may have several alternate nests and they may use the same nests in consecutive years or shift to alternate nest used in different years. In Arizona they are found in mountainous areas and are virtually vacant after breeding in some desert areas.

**ELEVATION:** In western mountains, nests were built at elevations between 4,000-10,000 ft (1219-3048 m).

**PLANT COMMUNITY:**

**POPULATION TRENDS:** In eastern North America they are reappearing in some sites in historic nesting range but they may be decreasing in northeastern U.S. A decline has also been noted in parts of its' range in Canada.

### **SPECIES PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION**

**ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT STATUS:**

**STATE STATUS:**

**OTHER STATUS:**

P, Determined Endangered in Mexico  
(Secretaira de Medio Ambiente, Proyecto de  
Norma Oficial Mexicana 2000)  
Group 3 (NESL, NNFW 2000)

**MANAGEMENT FACTORS:** They are moderately threatened range-wide as their habitat lends itself to alternate uses. They are susceptible to power line electrocution, poison intended for other species, occasional shootings and habitat loss to agriculture and suburban land uses. And they are extremely sensitive to human disturbance during the nesting period.

**PROTECTIVE MEASURES TAKEN:** They are protected in National Parks and by similarity under the Bald Eagle Protection Act.

**SUGGESTED PROJECTS:**

**LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP:** BIA – Navajo Nation, San Carlos Reservation and Hopi Reservation; Bureau of Land Management; NPS - Glen Canyon National Recreation Area and Wupatki National Monument; USFS – Coconino, Coronado, Kaibab, Prescott and Tonto National Forests; State Land Department; Private.

### **SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION**

**REFERENCES:**

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**MAJOR KNOWLEDGEABLE INDIVIDUALS:****ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

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