

UC SANTA CRUZ CAMPUS NATURAL RESERVE

GOLDEN EAGLE



Zane Hiatt

Scientific Name: *Aquila chrysaetos*

Common Name: Golden Eagle

Global Rarity: Secure

State Rarity: Vulnerable; CA Fully Protected Species

UCSC Rarity: Uncommon



General Description

The Golden Eagle is one of the largest raptors in North America and is the national bird of Mexico. They are dark brown with a very large wingspan. In the western United States, Golden Eagles occupy open grassland and other open habitats and nest on cliffsides or in tall trees. Unlike Bald Eagles, which tend to scavenge a large portion of their diet, Golden Eagles primarily hunt a variety small mammals, as well as fish and larger mammals such as foxes and small deer.



Identification

General Color: Dark brown overall, pale flight feathers, golden nape

Wingspan: Very large (185-220 cm)

Length: Both sexes range from 70-84 cm

Weight: Both sexes weigh between 3-6.200 kg

Geographic Range and Migration

Golden Eagles are widespread in the Northern Hemisphere. In western North America, breeding occurs from northern Alaska and Canada south through several western states into northern Mexico. Migration patterns can be obscured by the fact that eagles in some areas are resident while others may migrate, either locally or long-distance. The California distribution of Golden Eagles is pictured to the right.





UCSC Distribution

Golden Eagles, often a pair, soar over lower campus meadows, hunting small mammals, most months of the year.

Life history

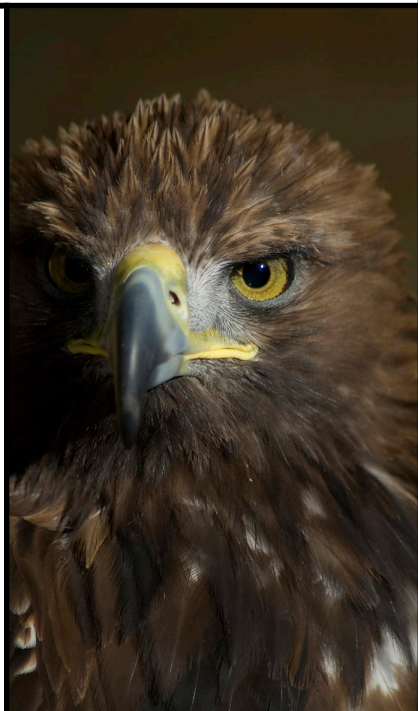
Habitat: Golden eagles live in grasslands and other open habitats in the Northern Hemisphere and avoid developed areas. They can be found in mountain ranges and along cliffsides, or over rivers and wetlands in more forested regions.

Reproduction: They usually nest on cliffsides or in trees. They build their astonishing six feet wide nests with twigs and vegetation about 2 months before egg laying. They lay 1-3 eggs in each brood, which the female incubates for 43-45 days. Chicks fledge in 60-77 days (sooner in southern part of the range) and stick with their parents for a few months. Adults typically breed in their 4th or 5th year.

Diet: They typically prey on small targets such as hares, rabbits, squirrels, prairie dogs, and fish. The black-tailed jackrabbit is a key prey species that lives throughout most of their range. They have also been known to eat larger mammals such as young deer.

Research Highlights and Fun Facts

- Golden Eagles typically form monogamous pairs that mate for life.
- Their wing-tip primary feathers spread out and look like fingers while they are flying.
- Golden Eagles are sometimes struck and killed by wind turbine blades on wind farms such as at Altamont Pass in California. The seemingly stable population there appears to be sustained by immigration from other regions, but is classified overall as a population sink.



Conservation Status

Vulnerable

The Golden Eagle is classified as Vulnerable in California, which has also placed the species on the its Fully Protected Species list. There are an estimated 25,000 left in the United States but their population appears to be stable around the world.



Threats

Statewide:

1. Lead poisoning and ingestion of poison meant for coyotes
2. Habitat loss from development and agriculture
3. Powerline electrocution
4. Climate change is affecting their breeding and migration patterns; a 3 degree Celsius increase will cause a 44% range loss.

UCSC campus:

1. Development of new buildings in the lower campus meadows.



Ways you can help

1. Get involved with efforts to conserve land within Golden Eagle habitats.
2. Support organizations working to combat the effects of climate change and find ways to make changes in your life that decrease your own ecological footprint.



References and Photo Credits

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