

THE GOLDEN EAGLE IN ALABAMA

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The following notes are in addition to the records and data concerning the status of the Golden Eagle (Aquila chrysaetos) in the State of Alabama. The records are few, and it is felt that this note would further knowledge of the life history in Alabama of this dwindling species.

The data are from the same locality, an area 7,000 acres in extent, located on the Tombigbee River, Marengo County, about 18 miles W.S.W. of Demopolis, Alabama. This section supports one of the heaviest populations of deer (Odocoileus virginianus) and turkey (Meleagris gallopavo) in the state.

In 1965, the eagles were first seen on January 7 when two immatures were in an aerial battle. Within a few minutes they lit in a large, dead oak about 100 yards distant. Judging by size differences, they were male and female.

An immature eagle was seen on January 27 and again one was seen on February 15, 1965. February 16, 1965, an immature eagle was found perched upright on a large, corner fence-post watching a drove of turkeys in an open oat patch about 150 yards distant. This eagle was approached by truck to within 40 yards before reluctantly taking flight.

An immature eagle was noted on the 23rd and again on the 25th of February, 1965, when it was flushed from the body of a fresh fawn deer which had been killed a few hours prior to this incident, when the door of a deer trap fell upon it. This eagle was approached to within a distance of 20 yards before taking flight, then moved only about 50 more yards.

On March 3, 1965, an immature eagle was flushed from the edge of a sand road at 200 yards distance. Investigation of the wet sand area showed clearly how the eagle had run, hopped and pursued a turkey into a net wire fence. The only remains found of the turkey were a few wing feathers, patches of body feathers and a couple of bones. Apparently the kill had taken place sometime earlier and the eagle had revisited the kill which is a common practice.

On March 4, 1965, three immature eagles were perched in a large oak on the border of a field. They were watched with the aid of field glasses for about ten minutes, at which time a drove of turkeys appeared in the lower end of the field. The turkeys stayed in the field no more than a minute before nervously and hurriedly walking into the woods. The eagles did not move; evidently the presence of the truck caused the hasty retreat.

In the morning of March 5, 1965, in the same area, three eagles were found and observed for some time on the body of a large fawn deer. They were continuously fighting and running each other from the deer. The deer was examined later and the positive cause of death could not be

determined. Several deer have been caught in the net wire fence in this same area in the past. Some were found still alive; others were dead.

March 9, 1965, an immature eagle was seen, and the last record was on March 11, 1965, when two immature birds were observed.

In summary, no eagles were seen killing deer or turkey; however, there was strong evidence that they did kill a turkey and probably take small deer from time to time as well as turkeys. No full adult plumaged eagles were seen. There is no way of determining how many eagles were present during the winter; however a minimum of three is definite. The Golden Eagle is very rare and local in the southeastern states. This particular area is very much the exception. The Golden Eagle is now fully protected by the Federal Government, as it rightly should be.

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