

Habitat:



Some typical habitats of the Golden Eagle. High mountains, loch amidst mountains, undulating country with sparse vegetation.



Flying over boulders on mountain tops.

Inaccessible, rugged, stony, desolate high mountains with cliffs, crags and crevices and sparse vegetation. Also inhabit bogs, taiga, rough grasslands, heath, subalpine and alpine pastures, river watersheds and sparse boreal forests.

Habit: Diurnal and crepuscular

hunter. Hunt in pairs. Perch on high vantage points. Soar and fly leisurely.

Distribution: Six races are described, *Aquila chrysaetos chrysaetos*, *A.c.homeyeri*, *A.c.daphnea*, *A.Cccanadensis*, *A.c.japonica*,

and *A.c.kamtschatica*, with distribution in Eurasia, North America and North Africa. It has a holarctic, palearctic and nearctic breeding range.

Status: In India, resident in Himalayas, from Kashmir to East Assam. 1850 m to 5500 m asl.

Food:

Carnivore. 20 % hunting attempts are usually successful. The powerful talons can exert a pressure of up to 750 psi per sq inch on prey, which is more than 15 times that exerted by human hands! Can lift prey just in excess of 4 kg in favourable winds.

Glide and stoop on ground prey, grab it by the neck or pierce vital organs or take prey in air by knocking it. Eagles prey on hare, rabbit, ungulates, fox, cat, ground squirrel, grouse and pheasants. Also scavenge on garbage dumps.



Partially eaten shag.



Prey as large as a badger is taken.



Red Squirrel.



Mountain goat and hare.



Leg of a deer.

Key Features



Pattern on the underside of wings (moon-patch) and tail.



Front view.



Golden hind crown.



Adult.



Juvenile.

- Deep, chocolate brown to blackish plumage of adults.
- Golden or rufous-tawny hind crown, nape and hind-nape.
- Primaries longer than secondaries by more than tarsus length.
- Iris dark brown; Eyelids yellow. Bill bluish horny, black tipped.
- Legs feathered till toes. Legs and feet yellow.
- Hind claw enormous > 63 cm; Claws black.



Skull of White-tailed Eagle and talons of Golden Eagle.



A nestling exercising the wings in the nest prior to fledging.



A chick nearing fledging time with aremains of a goat in the nest.



Chick and a dead hare in the nest.



Young stoat. Prey as small as a shrews, voles and mustelids is also taken.

- Female larger than male.
- Young show semi-lunar shaped patch on wings, white tail with dark terminal band.

Flight:



Golden Eagles flying amidst silver clouds - a priceless moment of infinite beauty!



The King of Raptors is flying close to the mountain top. Note the white wing patches.

Flight:

Wings are held in a 'V' above the body in a dihedral manner. Soaring and gliding is preferred. Flapping flight is powerful but laborious. In stoop, the flight speed can be more than 250 km per hour, one of the fastest flight speeds recorded for any bird.

Etymology:

Aquila (L), an eagle; *chrysaetos* (Gr), golden. Refers to the golden plumage of head and nape. (Pande, Satish. 2009).



Golden Eagle is extensively used in falconry in Mongolia.



A falconry festival.



National symbol of Mexico.

Amazing Facts:

One of the fastest birds with flight speed in stoop or dive more than 250 km per hour. This 'King of Raptors' is recorded to kill prey like wolf (in falconry), deer, mountain goat, sheep, badger, etc. This regal eagle is the national symbol of Mexico. This great hunter also resorts to kleptoparasitism.

Cultural aspects:

A highly priced eagle in falconry. Their feathers were prized by native American Indians. Popularly features on postal stamps of several countries, including India. The Kazakhs and Berkut Association celebrate a Golden eagle festival in Mongolia in October.

Nests:



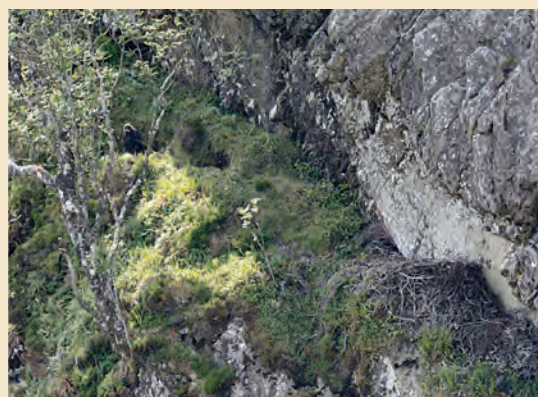
Nest in a cliff near a tree.



A nest on a cliff overlooking a loch.



An exposed nest.



Nest on a ledge in a cliff face.

Prefer to breed in mountains but can adapt to boreal forests, peats, bogs, river valleys and marshes with pine, larch, juniper, etc. trees. Avoid areas with human disturbance and dense forests.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* Linnaeus, 1758.

Type locality: Europa = Sweden. For Himalayan Golden Eagle: Russian Turkestan, Mongolia, Himalayas, Transbaikalia and Ala-shan Mountains.

Local names: **Suvarna Garud** (Marathi); **Muridri** (Chamba); **Dhungshoorish** (Bashahr, Himachap Pradesh).

- **Size:** 90-100 cm.
 - **Average weight:** 4005 g (3500 to 5000 g).
 - **Wing:** Male 630 - 655 mm; Female 660 -700 mm.
 - **Wing span:** 6.5 to 7 feet.
 - **Breeding season:** January - March.
 - **Clutch:** 2 to 4 eggs. Hatch in 40 – 45 d.
 - **Fledging period:** 3 months.
 - **Eggs:** White. Blotched, spotted
- with red brown. Broad oval. 77.1 mm x 61.7 mm. (Baker).
- **Average life span:** 30 years in wild.
 - **Territory:** Up to 155 sq km.
 - **Call:** Yelp-like shrill calls and barks. Usually silent.



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Ela File 12

GOLDEN EAGLE

- **Order:** Falconiformes
- **Family:** Accipitridae
- **Status:** Resident

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Phenology:



Nuptial display.



A single white egg.



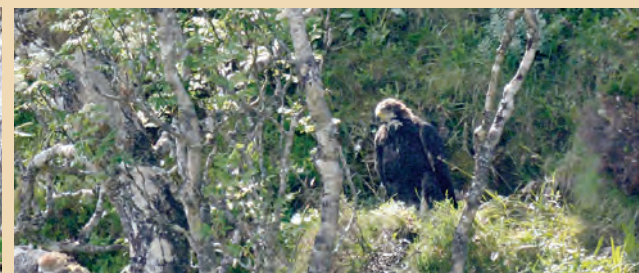
10 days old chicks in the cliff nest.



45 to 50 days chick.



50 days old chick with a hare and goat's leg in the nest.



A near-brancher.



Study:



A huge nest and a researcher.



A transmitter fitted on the chicks back.



Bony and other remains collected from the nest give an idea about the diverse diet.



Golden Eagle with a crow scavenging on a carcass.

Threats:

Habitat loss and electrocution are major threats. Pressure on wild populations due to demand for falconry is taking a toll.

Economic importance and conservation:

Major financial transactions are carried out due to the clandestine trade for falconry. The Golden Eagle is a top predator and is an indicator of the safety of its habitats. It is intolerant to human presence and is protected by law. Special power line designs are needed to avoid electrocution risks, considering its long wing span. Golden Eagle re-introduction projects are conducted to augment wild populations.

Based on photographs and field research by Derek Spencer (Scotland) and Prof. Gombobaatar Sundev (Mongolia). We thank Paul Haworth and colleagues for supplying some images and Prof. Des Thompson (Scottish Natural Heritage) for valuable edits.