

Species Sheets: Golden Eagle



photo by Kate Davis ©

Common name: Golden Eagle

Latin Name: *Aquila chrysaetos*

Field Marks: Length 30-40 inches
Wing span 80-88 inches



Large raptor with seven-foot wingspan. Dark brown overall with golden feathers on back of head. Young show white patches in middle of wings and white at base of tail up until breeding age of 4-6 years. Adult males have several light bars on tail, females one band. “Booted eagle” with feathers down to the toes. In flight holds wings in slight dihedral, versus flatter profile of Bald Eagles. Six subspecies across Northern Hemisphere.

Habitat:

Open, often remote country. Mountains, plains, plateaus, deserts with winds and thermals to help hunting abilities. Less successful where thick vegetation and shrubs provide hiding cover for prey and obstruct low flight.

Behavior:

Prey is mostly medium and large mammals. Rabbits, hares, ground squirrels, marmots, and young deer and antelope. Birds taken especially in winter, such as ptarmigan and pheasant. Also carrion. Hunt from high perch or cruise low over terrain. Capable of high speed chase and falcon-like stoop. Pairs may hunt together.

Nest and eggs:

Large stick nests on cliffs, lined with greenery. In some regions nests in trees. Nests may be used year after year by mated pair. 1-3 eggs, incubation 41-45 days. Often only one chick survives. Fledging 65-80 days. Young dependant upon adults for several months afterward. May live up to 38 years in wild.

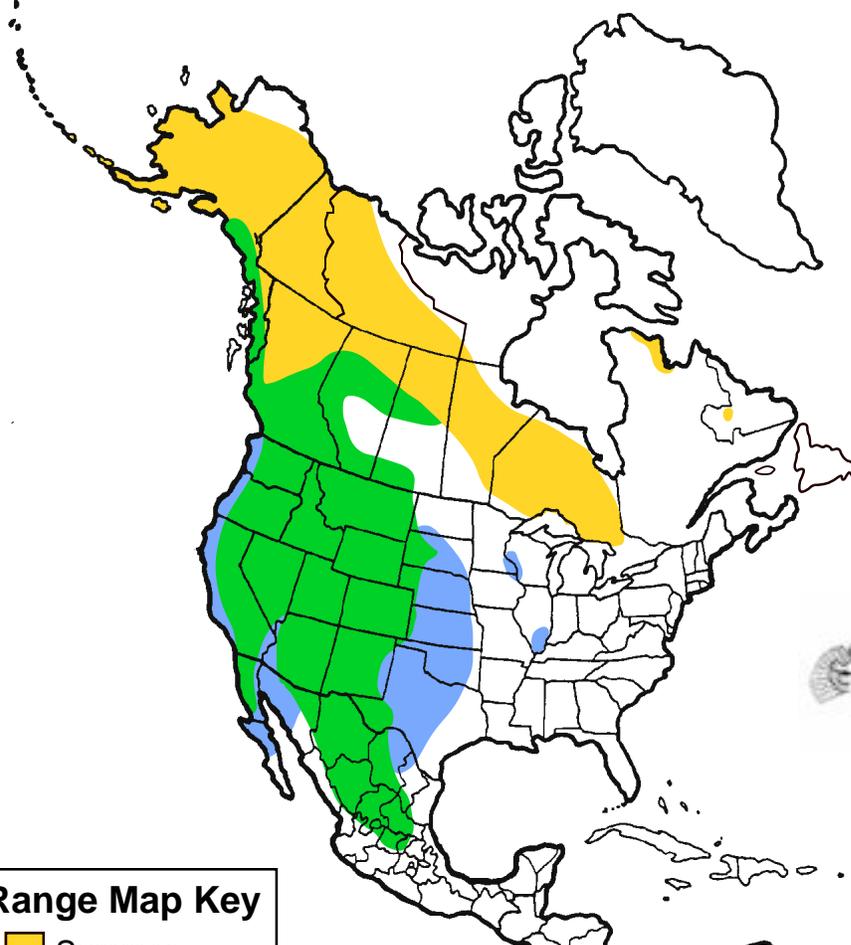
Movement:

Northern birds may migrate into Mexico and Central America. Many remain year-round. Most breeders in Montana are probably year-round residents.

Interesting Fact:

More than 20,000 Golden Eagles were shot and trapped in the southwest U.S. in the 1950's and 60's because they were known to kill newborn sheep. With this and the killing of coyotes, the rabbit population increased to numbers that reduced the forage of grass required by the sheep. Golden Eagles have been legally protected in North America since 1970.

Range Map: Golden Eagle



Golden Eagle, Copyright © Kate Davis



These maps are designed to show the general limits of occurrence. Within those limits, each species will likely be found only in appropriate habitat.

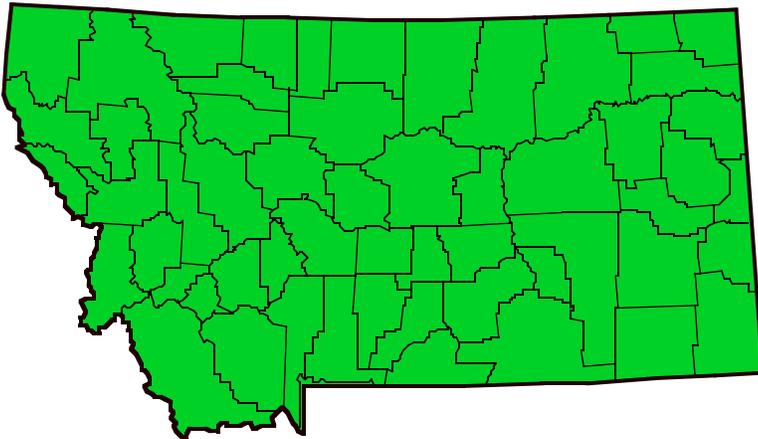
Range Map Key

-  Summer
-  Year-round
-  Winter

scale: 1 inch = 1,000 miles



Raptor Range in Montana



Montana range maps are based on the Montana Bird Distribution data.