

1. Species: golden eagle (sub-adult).

2. Number: 1.

3. Location: $\frac{1}{2}$ mile south of Johnson Co. Rd. F-20, 4.9 mi. w. of the crossroad leading to the ~~Butler~~ Bridge.

Dupont

Con. NH

4. Date: 19 Feb. 1978.

5. Time bird seen: approximately 9 AM to 9:30 AM.

6. Description:

Plumage: underparts from throat to belly, sides of face and neck, back, upper and lower wing-coverts were a uniform dark blackish-brown. The forehead and the anterior half of the ~~the~~ crown were also of this color. The posterior half of the crown and the rear of the neck were covered with small, ~~many~~ slender feathers that were golden-brown. This 'gold' was set off by a sharp boundary from the dark plumage of the rest of the face and neck. The lower belly, lower rump, and upper rump were dull white, with indistinct darker smudges. The tail was white for the basal $\frac{2}{3}$, with the terminal $\frac{1}{3}$ being dark blackish brown. (The dark terminal band on the outer few feathers on each side was somewhat-- one or two inches-- wider than it was on the central feathers.) The primaries and secondaries were basically dark blackish-brown. There was a large white patch on the lower surface of the wing, visible in flight, that was formed by the ^{white} basal portions of the primaries and a few of the outer secondaries. ~~white~~ The width of this patch was greatest in the inner primaries, where nearly half the feather was white; the width decreased sharply both medially and laterally. In flight, the dorsal surface of the inner primaries was white for the basal half of their length. No white was visible on the folded wing. The legs were feathered as far as the base of the toes, with fine, short, light tan plumage.

Soft parts: iris: dark ~~brown with a reddish~~ reddish-brown; gape and base of bill: deep yellow; cere and adjacent bill yellowish-white; outer portion of bill pale blue-grey, darkening to blackish at the tip. (The changes in bill color were continuous, with no distinct bands.) Toes yellow; talons: pale blue-grey at base, darkening to blackish at the tips.

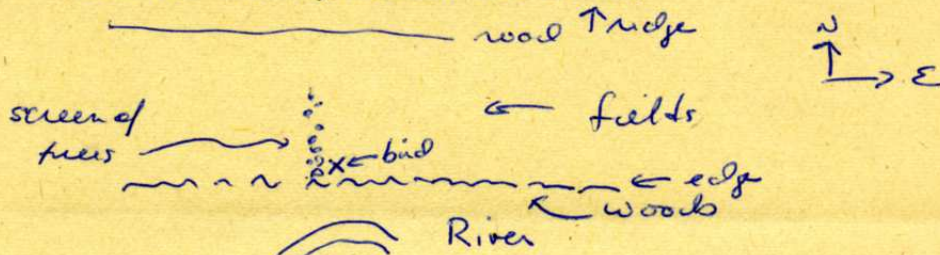
7. Voice: not observed.

8. Behavior: originally seen perched at the top of a dead snag; after a few minutes flew about 100 yds and perched about halfway up in a large cottonwood, at the edge of a field. Bird faced away from the field, and spent most of its time looking down back over its shoulders at a weed ~~path~~ patch below the tree. (Later inspection showed that the path was full of rabbit tracks, and was on a major animal trail.) Twice, bird shook out its ~~body~~ plumage; on one of these occasions flapped its wings a few times. Once, it hunched forward, raised its wings slightly, cocked up its tail, and defecated. (Seemed unconcerned with observers, even when approached as close as approx. 50 yds.) Several times was observed to gaze intently into the woods for a few seconds, then return to observation of the field. Alternated looking over right and left shoulders ~~every few seconds~~ a couple of times per minute. After several minutes of observation from ca. 50 yds., bird flew out into field, turned sharply, and disappeared over the screen of timber.

9. Habitat:

General: border between an extensive tract of riverbottom ~~forest~~ forest and a half-mile stretch of corn and soybean fields (with large patches of unharvested beans). At the north edge of the fields was a road, followed by a wooded ridge.

Specific: Perched at the edge of a narrow screen of trees that extended out from the forest, between two fields.



10. Similar species: The three species with which confusion is most likely are the bald eagle (imm) and red-tailed and rough-legged hawks (~~the~~ dark-phase). Several points rule out these species. (1) Size: the body length of the bird was $2\frac{1}{2}$ -3 times that of a crow that perched in the same tree; the two hawks are not nearly this large. (2) tail pattern: imm. bald eagles sometimes show tails that are darker at the tip than at the base, but all such individuals that I have seen have had a gradual transition from dark to light, rather than the sharp boundary that this bird showed. Adult melanistic redbills usually have red ~~tails~~ tails; imm birds should show dark tails crossed by darker bands. (3) Wing pattern: imm bald eagles have white in the wing, but this is usually in the wing-lining rather than the primaries and secondaries; dark-phase rough-legs usually have the primaries and secondaries entirely white. (4) build: bald eagle has longer neck, and more massive head and bill, than golden; this bird had the general proportions of a buteo.
11. Distance: $\frac{1}{2}$ mile to 50 yards (estimated).
12. Optics: 8x32 binoculars, 20-45x60 zoom scope.
13. Light: bright sunlight, sun nearly directly behind observers.
14. Previous experience: Have seen golden eagles in Pa, Washington State, Wyoming, Colorado, and numerous bald eagles in the Chesapeake Bay region, Mass, Wash. State, Iowa. Am also familiar with the northeastern species of ~~buteo~~ Buteo.
15. Other observers: Richard DeCoster.
16. R. DeC concurs with ~~identical~~ identification.
17. No other independent observers.
18. Unfortunately did not have writing materials in the field. Made notes immediately after return home, a lapse of about 4 hrs. No. books consulted before writing notes on appearance or behavior. Description above taken from these notes (with grammar cleaned up).

Michael Newlon

Michael Newlon
408 Wales Street
Iowa City, Iowa 52240