

DOCUMENTATION: Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*)

About 10:00 a.m. on Friday, November 6, I observed an immature Golden Eagle in the Oak Grove Park area in western Sioux County. I had parked my car in a small parking area just to the west of the ranger's home in Oak Grove Park. As I walked down the trail I heard crows scolding. The trail runs over a knoll from where one can see across the Big Sioux River. As I scanned the trees on the west side of the river, I noticed a half dozen crows pestering a large bird perched in a tall, bare tree. The bird was more than twice as large as a crow.

Through my 9x25 binoculars I could see right away that the bird was an eagle. Also I noticed the coppery sheen on the top and back of its head. The distance was approximately one-fifth of a mile, however, so the view was not clear. I ran back to my car to get my balscope and tripod. The bird was still there when I got my scope out and set up.

The sun was behind me, so when I got the bird in my scope it was easy to see that I was looking at a golden-maned Golden Eagle. The crows kept mobbing, so the bird would occasionally move from branch to branch, revealing its white tail with dark terminal band, and flashes of white on the underside of the wings. I observed the bird in this situation for about a half hour.

The eagle finally decided it had seen enough of the pesky crows, and took to wing. It circled low over the tree tops, then began its thermal ride upwards. The bird continued to circle over my head, allowing fine views of its markings: a completely dark-brown bird, with white tail with dark terminal band, and white patches at the base of the primaries. As it banked, the gold on the back of its head and neck was impressively visible.

I watched the bird soar for another 15 minutes or so, until it was so high that one could easily lose sight of it. It then veered off and disappeared towards the southeast.

I have the placement of the white in the wings of immature Golden Eagles indelibly imprinted on my mind: Many years ago, when the California Condor was still a free-flying bird, I spent many days at the Edmunston power plant south of Bakersfield, California, to look for the Condor. The Condor, too, has white under the wing, but it is placed differently. We looked at what must have been a hundred Golden Eagles, before we finally experienced the thrill of actually seeing a Condor come over.

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