

**California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System**  
**California Department of Fish and Wildlife**  
**California Interagency Wildlife Task Group**

---

GOLDEN EAGLE

*Aquila chrysaetos*

Family: ACCIPITRIDAE  
B126

Order: FALCONIFORMES

Class: AVES

Written by: C. Polite, J. Pratt

Reviewed by: L. Kiff

Edited by: L. Kiff

#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Uncommon permanent resident and migrant throughout California, except center of Central Valley. Perhaps more common in southern California than in north. Ranges from sea level up to 3833 m (0-11,500 ft) (Grinnell and Miller 1944). Habitat typically rolling foothills, mountain areas, sage-juniper flats, desert.

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Eats mostly lagomorphs and rodents; also takes other mammals, birds, reptiles, and some carrion. Diet most varied in nonbreeding season. Needs open terrain for hunting; grasslands, deserts, savannahs, and early successional stages of forest and shrub habitats. Soars 30-90 m (98-297 ft) above ground in search of prey, or makes low, quartering flights, often 7-8 m (23-26 ft) above ground. Occasionally searches from a perch and flies directly to prey (Carnie 1954). Sometimes pirates food from other predators. Hunting in pairs apparently common.

**Cover:** Secluded cliffs with overhanging ledges and large trees used for cover.

**Reproduction:** Nests on cliffs of all heights and in large trees in open areas. Alternative nest sites are maintained, and old nests are reused. Builds large platform nest, often 3 m (10 ft) across and 1 m (3 ft) high, of sticks, twigs, and greenery. Rugged, open habitats with canyons and escarpments used most frequently for nesting.

**Water:** No data found. Water needs probably met from prey.

**Pattern:** Uses rolling foothills and mountain terrain, wide arid plateaus deeply cut by streams and canyons, open mountain slopes, and cliffs and rock outcrops.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

**Activity Patterns:** Yearlong, diurnal activity.

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** Mostly resident, but may move downslope for winter, or upslope after breeding season. Some migrate into California for winter.

**Home Range:** Home range probably same as territory. Size of home range related to prey density and availability, and openness of terrain.

**Territory:** Territory estimated to average 57 km<sup>2</sup> (22 mi<sup>2</sup>) in Idaho (Beecham and Kocher 1975), 171-192 km<sup>2</sup> (66-74 mi<sup>2</sup>) in Montana (McGahan 1968), 23 km<sup>2</sup> (9 mi<sup>2</sup>) in Utah (Smith and Murphy 1973), 93 km<sup>2</sup> (36 mi<sup>2</sup>) in southern California (Dixon 1937), and 124 km<sup>2</sup> (48 mi<sup>2</sup>) in northern California (Smith and Murphy 1973).

Reproduction: Breeds from late January through August; peak in March through July. Clutch size 1-3, usually 2. Eggs laid early February to mid-May. Incubation 43-45 days (Beebe 1974), and nestling period usually 65-70 days.

Niche: Occasionally preys on domestic calves and lambs. May compete with ferruginous hawks for small mammals, and with California condors for carrion. May desert nest in early incubation if disturbed by humans (Thelander 1974).

## REFERENCES

- Beebe, F. L. 1974. Field studies of the Falconiformes of British Columbia. Brit. Col. Prov. Mus. Occas. Pap. No. 17. 163pp.
- Beecham, J. J., and M. N. Kochert. 1975. Breeding biology of the golden eagle in southwestern Idaho. Wilson Bull. 87:506-513.
- Carnie, S. K. 1954. Food habits of nesting golden eagles in the coast ranges of California. Condor 56:3-12.
- Dixon, J. B. 1937. The golden eagle in San Diego County, California. Condor 39:49-56.
- Grinnell, J., and A. H. Miller. 1944. The distribution of the birds of California. Pac. Coast Avifauna No. 27. 608pp.
- McGahan, J. 1968. Ecology of the golden eagle. Auk 85:1-12.
- McGeen, D. S., and J. J. McGeen. 1968. The cowbirds of Otter Lake. Wilson Bull. 80:84-93.
- Olendorff, R. R. 1976. The Food habits of North American golden eagles. Amer. Midl. Nat. 95:231-3-236.
- Remsen, J. V., Jr. 1978. Bird species of special concern in California. Calif. Dep. Fish and Game, Sacramento. Wildl. Manage. Admin. Rep. No. 78-1. 54pp.
- Smith, D. G., and J. R. Murphy. 1973. Breeding ecology of raptors in the eastern Great Basin of Utah. Brigham Young Univ., Provo. Sci. Bull. Biol. Ser. 18, No. 3. 76pp.
- Thelander, C. G. 1974. Nesting territory utilization by golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) in California during 1974. Calif. Dept. Fish and Game, Sacramento. Wildl. Manage. Branch Admin. Rep. 74-7. 19pp.ican rough-legged hawk. Pages 269-284 in A. C. Bent. Life histories of North American birds of prey. Part 1. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. No. 167. 409pp.
- Udvardy, M. D. F. 1977. The Audubon Society field guide to North American birds: western region. A. Knopf, New York. 855pp.
- Zarn, M. 1975. Rough-legged hawk, *Buteo lagopus sanctijohannis*. U.S. Dep. Inter., Bur. Land Manage., Wash. DC. Tech. Note No. 270. 23pp.