
A Notable Golden Eagle Encounter

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On 4 December 2014, residents reported an eagle that could not quite get airborne near Flathead Pass, Gallatin County, Montana (45.973° -111.057°) to the Montana Raptor Conservation Center (MRCC), a local raptor rehabilitation group (<http://montanaraptor.org>). Later that day, MRCC personnel retrieved the adult Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), which had no visible impediments to flight other than icing on plumage and the burden of a full crop. Notable morphologic characteristics included ashen gray-to very pale yellow feet (normally bright to pale yellow) and pale wheat/brown iris with brown iris “spokes” (see photo), normally deep sepia to brown speckled wheat. The eagle wore a rivet aluminum band # 0629-32544. We banded the eagle as an SY male near Ringling, Meagher County, Montana (46.242° -110.774°) on 30 March 1992, making the eagle at least 23 years 7 months old (est. hatch date in April 1991). At banding, the eagle’s mass was 3,400 g (empty crop). The encounter location was 37 km and 216° from the banding site. Blood tests completed by MRCC indicated a blood lead level of 10 µg/dL, well within “background” limits (0-20 µg/dL). The bird’s mass was 3,760 g after passing the crop. After a week of observation in MRCC’s large flight barn, we tagged the eagle with a tail-mounted, satellite tracked transmitter and released him at the encounter location on 14 December 2014. He is currently (~11 Feb 2015) being tracked and appears to be moving normally, remaining in the general area of the encounter. It is likely, having not been encountered and sustained by a full crop, the eagle would have survived after preening ice from its flight feathers; it was perched on a fence post when retrieved. There are two recoveries of Golden Eagles over 30 years old and four encounters of Golden Eagles in their 20s (U.S.G.S. BBL data). Only one 20 year old was released alive, presumably post-rehabilitation. Since 1960, 8.6% of nearly 12,000 Golden Eagles banded in North America have been encountered (U.S.G.S. BBL data), but only about 1 in 2,000 banded (1 in 170 encountered) were over 20 years old.



**Adult Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*)
encountered almost 24 years after it was banded.**