

J. Raptor Res. 32(3):268

© 1998 The Raptor Research Foundation, Inc.

CARIBOU ANTLERS AS NEST MATERIALS FOR GOLDEN EAGLES IN NORTHWESTERN ALASKA

There are few published records of antlers in Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) nests (three for Scotland [L. MacNally, 1977, *The ways of an eagle*, Collins and Harvill Press, London, U.K. and S. Gordon, 1955, *The golden eagle: king of birds*, Citadel Press, New York, NY U.S.A.] and an unspecified number for Colorado [R. Olendorff, 1975, *Golden eagle country*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York NY U.S.A.]). We found many caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*) antlers in three Golden Eagle nests in the Cape Kruzenstern region (67–68°N, 163–164°W) of northwestern Alaska. At one nest that was situated at 270 m elevation on a cliff face, three young and two adults were present in 1986. This nest contained numerous male and female antlers composing 10–15% of the matrix of the nest. The second nest in which antlers were found was situated 240 m elevation atop a 2-m cliff in 1988. We counted 21 antlers, some of which were very large male antlers, all in the perimeter of the nest (ca 10–15% of the bulk). The third nest was situated at 300 m elevation on a cliff face in 1988 and it contained numerous antlers, mostly of female caribou (ca 10% of nest bulk). We did not find antlers in one other Golden Eagle nest on the Cape and in five other nests along the Noatak River immediately to the east.

Because all three nests were within 13 km of each other and no two were simultaneously occupied, there was a possibility that all were alternate nests of the same pair of eagles with a preference for antlers. Another explanation for the local importance of antlers is that the lack of sizable sticks, the similarity of antlers to sticks, and the abundance of antlers, especially the much smaller female caribou antlers, lead the eagles to substitute antlers for sticks. C.M. White and J.R. Haugh (pers. comm.) saw parts of antlers in a nest in northwestern Alaska and Y. Potopov (pers. comm.) found a small caribou antler in a tree nest along the Kolyma River in northeastern Siberia. We also found a single deer (probably *Odocoileus hemionus*) antler in a nest in Montana.—**David H. Ellis, USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, HCR 1 Box 4420, Oracle, AZ 85623 U.S.A. and Richard L. Bunn, AFZC-ECM-NR (Wildlife), Building 302, Fort Carson, CO 80913-5000 U.S.A.**