

THE GOLDEN EAGLE.

Aquila Chrysaetos.

BY GEO. F. BRENINGER, FORT COLLINS, COLORADO.

Confining myself in the writing of this article exclusively to the distribution and nesting of the Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and such notes that may seem proper in the article in connection with the bird, I shall endeavor to place before the reader as complete a history of this noble bird as is in my power.

Larimer County contains 4000 square miles. The north-eastern portion is made up entirely of barren plains, with irregular outcroppings of sand stone that form what is known as "Chalk Bluffs," "Twin Buttes," while smaller ones have no particular name at all. Here and there dry creeks are encountered that carry water only in times of heavy rainfall. At other seasons they are perfectly dry. The south-eastern portion is the fertile "Cache la poudre" valley, covered with farms, pastures, etc. The greatest part is mountainous, and by going up some little hill on the plains, one can see the Snowy Range and Long's Peak, white with snow in mid-summer. Across this lofty range of mountains we find we still have a whole country by itself, nestled down between the Medicine Bow and Rabbit Ear range of mountains. This also is a portion of Larimer County. This is North Park, 9000 feet above sea level.

Over this whole tract of country we meet with the eagle. Chalk Bluffs is a noted place for them and for many years eagles have lived there and reared their young in peace. I was pointed to a high rock that still bears the name of "Eagle Rock." The eagle that inhabits the plains when the month of March approaches, is forced to look up as good a nesting site as the country will afford. Often an eagle will locate its nest upon a low strata of rocks, within reach of the ground. Those that inhabit the mountains find a place more difficult.

From my present observations I can safely say that there is not less than 25 inhabited nests in this one county. I might cite a hundred cases of my encounters with them, one time in particular

when I fully expected to secure my birds. It was one evening, late in September, after the last shadows of the sun were fast disappearing. I was driving slowly up and around a bend in a deep canon, carelessly looking about at the different Magpie's nests, from which I had taken eggs the spring before. In the top of a tall cotton-wood tree, I saw the dark forms of two large eagles, quietly perched among its lofty branches. I was very anxious to obtain a pair for my collection and I was soon upon the ground; a quick aim with a 12 guage collecting gun rewarded me only with a handful of feathers.

On the 3d day of May, 1887, I met my first eagle's nest. Since that time I have seen a great many. My trip was more for a series of Magpie's eggs than anything else, and the country was new and strange to me. I had traveled all the forenoon and most of the afternoon without finding a house where I might get my dinner. About 4 o'clock I saw my desire in view; about a mile down the canon I saw a house, and for it I started, fatigued and almost exhausted with hunger. I asked of the lady if I might take supper there. Stating my object of collecting, I soon learned that there was an eagle's nest near by, and also a nest of our large Western Horned Owl. This last I knew I was too late for.

My repast was finished, charges paid, and I was again on the road, feeling a great deal better than I had felt an hour previous: My mind was all turned with the desire of finding that eagle's nest the lady spoke of at the house by the wayside. My eyes were carefully scanning the top of a long and high ledge of brown sand-stone, least I should see the male bird pluming himself or sitting in repose on some isolated point. I soon found him. My object was to start the bird, and he would invariably fly by the eyrie where the female was covering her eggs or young, as the case might be. For the first time in my career as a naturalist, I beheld before me an eagle's nest. My anxiety was raised to the highest pitch and I lost no time in casting off all my unnecessary equipments, including my coat. Taking my gun, I began my ascent by a winding detour to an opening by which I expected to reach the top. I was pushing my way still harder and faster after I saw the female leave the nest. The cliff was 100 ft. from top to bottom; 75 ft. up was the nest, on a shelving rock, and 25 to the nest from the top.

From the top I looked over. There were no eggs, but two downy young, scarcely two days old. I got the young by means of a rope, and shot the old bird. By this time it had grown quite dark, and I was several miles from a house. There was nothing left but to spend the night on top of that lonely mountain. I gathered together a large pile of dry cedar wood and built a fire, with the intention of keeping it burning all night, as the night air was quite chilly and nothing to protect me from the cold but my overcoat. I put my birds close to my head to keep the wildcats and wolves from carrying them away and laid myself down to sleep. The silence of the night was broken at intervals by the dismal howling of wolves and hooting of owls. Now and then I would have to replenish my fire.

Through the last half of the night I was brought to my feet rather hurriedly. Some wolves had gathered in a little hollow which was not more than 80 yards away. They made themselves known by a succession of yells that echoed from hill to hill. I could have discharged my gun, but thought I would not waste the charge, and in case they ventured too near I would try and mark one down.

The rest of the night was spent in about the same manner, with an eager desire for morning. I had looked along the brow of the hill to the east for hours, that I might see that faint, yellow line along the horizon and welcome the approaching day. Long before sunrise, with my eagle under my arm, an eagle in each of my overcoat pockets and my gun over my shoulder, I started for my breakfast. The memory of the nest and the taking of the eagles is still fresh on my mind, while the bird is mounted with full spread of wings and holds its place in my museum room as the largest of its kind there.

I might add that I took a beautiful set of two eggs from the same nest last spring, on the same day I visited a place known as "Eagle Rock." I saw the nest so far up its rugged sides that it appeared only a speck against the rock. My companion and myself were riding true mountain horses and by circuitous riding we at length halted and tied our horses to the last pine tree that grew on that side of the mountain. We had avoided the cliff itself and ridden around and made half of the ascent, but still the nest was 200 yards from where we stood and fully 150 feet higher. I looked at the nest, its elevation, and turning to my companion,

I said, "we will never reach that nest." But some one had once achieved the feat by securing the eggs from the nest. We must go on by all means, clambering over rocks, up and down. We seated ourselves to rest. In the meantime the eagle had flown from the nest and was circling far up in the blue sky. Having reached the narrow shelf or ledge on which the nest was located, my companion left me to finish the task, if it should ever be finished. I crept on all fours along that ledge, 300 feet from the bottom, till I came to a place too narrow for me. The nest was directly above. The sticks which had dropped from age and decay lay scattered before me, yet I could go no further and gave it up as *lost*. This eyrie was beyond the reach of shot from either above or below, the top being so sharp and cragged that no man could stand there to lower a rope.

It has often been said that whenever obtainable or in fact in any mountainous country that the Golden Eagle always selects for a nesting site some shelving rock on the face of a high rock or cliff. True; but this rule must not stand as one to be relied upon. All of the eagle nests which I have seen were built in just such out-of-way places, out of the reach of man, on cliffs of rock, with the exception of one. This one particular nest is built in the forks of an aspen tree, in a gulch down the side of Independence Mt., North Park. I happened there on the 21 day of December, 1888. An elevation of nearly 10,000 feet at that time of the year made everything have the appearance of winter. A storm had just been prevailing, the ground was covered with snow, and the huge nest, 40 feet up in the forks of the aspen tree was quite a conspicuous object, so much so, that when I made inquiries at the ranch below, into the history of the nest, I was told that a pair of Black (Golden) Eagles had brought forth their young in that nest, unmolested, for many years past.

This mountain carries quite a record. Many years before stock raising and cattle kings commanded the mountain and surrounding country, a party of miners, seeking for wealth from the bosom of the earth, found the mountain rich in gold, and some excellent placer diggings might be founded. With hope and skill a few log cabins were put together and sluices made, preparatory to treating the ground that bore such rich indications. They had scarcely commenced their work when they were swept down

upon by a hostile band of Ute Indians. Some of the party escaped, while not a few were forced to suffer death by the hands of their foes. Independence Mt. still stands in bold relief against a cold sky and cattle graze in the valley below.

The Indian has fled before the onward stride of civilization, but the work of that courageous little band of miners still stands to show what once happened. The dark traces of the life blood of some victim still clings to the walls. The sluices have grown wide and deep from the swelling torrents of spring rain. A few old Silver-tipped Range Bears and Mountain Lions make the laws to suit themselves, while the Golden Eagle soars high above the mountain crest, and rests and plumes himself on some points that hold snow and ice ten months in the year and secures his living by capturing rabbits, grouse and prairie dogs.

Seated at my desk, I can look up and see a rock that holds the eyrie of an eagle. A little farther on around the bend is another. Near the old 7L. horse ranch is a nest that has been used for many years, and is seldom seen, except by cowboys in the spring round-up. On Maynard Flats there are nests which have been abandoned years since on account of being nearly on the ground. The sticks of one of these nests would be sufficient to load an ordinary farm wagon, or enough fuel to last some needy family a week.

THE NIDIFICATION OF THE GOLDEN EAGLE.

BY W. RAINE, TORONTO, CANADA.

There are upwards of fifty species of Eagles at present known; but only two species are residents of North America, the Golden Eagle and the Bald Eagle. The latter only inhabits North America; but the Golden Eagle is cosmopolitan, being found in the mountainous regions of Europe, Africa, Asia and America. In America the Golden Eagle is most numerous among the mountains of California and British Columbia, and is also known to breed in Pennsylvania, New York, New England and Quebec.

Although I was never fortunate enough to take a clutch of the eggs of this noble bird from the nest, still I have a large series of