

The Golden Eagle

For thousands of years, there were two different types of eagles breeding in Ireland. Both species were driven to extinction through changes to the landscape and then they were shot, trapped and poisoned by humans. Golden Eagles were found especially among our mountains and White-tailed Eagles were common along our coasts and big Loughs.

For over 100 years, Ireland has been without Golden Eagles. Efforts are now being made to re-introduce the Golden Eagle, and The Irish Golden Eagle Project in Glenveagh National Park, Co. Donegal, has had some great success with this. Between 2001 and 2007, they have released young eaglets, from Scotland, into Glenveagh National Park and hope to release 60-75 birds altogether. They only expect a third of the released birds to survive until they are old enough to breed and hope that 6-8 pairs of Golden Eagles will become established in Donegal by 2010. The good news is that one chick has already hatched!

Birds of Prey

Golden Eagles are birds of prey. Birds of prey eat or prey upon other birds, animals, fish or even insects and so are known as carnivores. They have powerful talons with sharp claws for grasping their prey, a sharp hooked beak for tearing at flesh and large eyes giving excellent vision. Most birds of prey hunt during the day (owls hunt at night). They range in size from tiny falconets (almost as small as sparrows) to the massive vultures, condors and eagles.

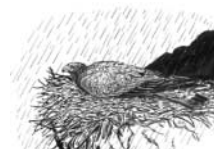


Photo courtesy www.goldeneagle.ie

A Golden Eagle before fledging.

Golden Eagle Life Cycle

Golden Eagles build their nests (called eyries) on cliff ledges.



Breeding Golden Eagles lay two eggs in mid March each year. The adult eagles must keep the eggs warm and dry for about six weeks. The adult birds sit on or incubates the eggs through all types of weather.

In early May the eggs hatch and two white fluffy chicks emerge.



The adult birds tear off small bits of food to feed the delicate chicks.



It takes 5 years before the young

birds mature and are old enough to nest and breed themselves.

A Golden Eagle can live up to 30 years of age. The chicks are fed in the nest or

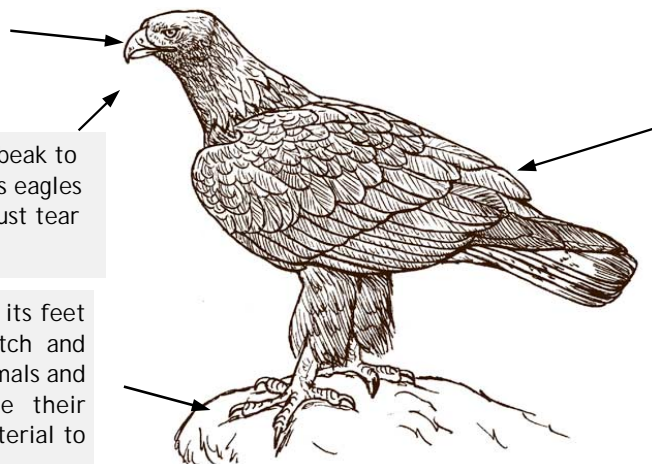


eyrie for 10-11 weeks before they fledge (ie fly away from the eyrie). Very often only one chick survives.

Golden Eagles also have tremendous eyesight. An eagle's eyesight is 8 times better than a human's.

Every bird of prey has a strong hooked beak to tear up its food before swallowing it. As eagles (and other birds) have no teeth they must tear up their food and swallow it in pieces.

A Golden Eagle has very sharp toes on its feet called talons. Talons are used to catch and grasp the Golden Eagles prey, both animals and birds. Sometimes Golden Eagles use their talons to grasp and bring back nest material to their eyrie - such as sticks or heather.



From the tip of one wing to the tip of the opposite wing in a Golden Eagle is over 2 metres. The Golden Eagles wing has large flight feathers at the back of the wing which are used for flying. The rest of the wing, including the bones and muscles, are covered by small feathers called coverts.