

The December Meeting

The Christmas Party

Tuesday, December 8, 2009

2:00—5:00 p. m.

At the Home of Ashley and Michael Feeley

444 Belleville Avenue

On the Corner of Belleville and McLellan



The Feeley House



Bring your favorite Holiday Dish, finger food. ECHS will provide coffee and punch.

Parking should be on one of the side streets, not on Belleville Ave.



The Feeley House

Volume 36, Number 11/12

Nov./Dec. 2009

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The Next Meeting
January 26, 2010
Election of Officers

A Reminder

It is now time to pay dues for the coming year.

- ♦ \$25.00/person,
- ♦ \$35.00/two family members
- ♦ \$250.00/person for Lifetime Members
- ♦ \$50.00/year business

Just Briefly

This is the last newsletter for 2009 and for all practical purposes, the next to last time I will write "Just Briefly." It's been a wonderful ride for the last two years and I could not have made it without the terrific supporting cast of officers: Darryl Searcy (acting vice-president for the first few months) and Ranella Holley, elected vice-president; Jacqueline Stone, secretary, and Susan Crawford, treasurer. I must not fail to mention our "IPPY," as she called herself (immediate past president), Ann Biggs-Williams. If it had not been for these good folks pitching in, there would have been much that would've been left undone. Thank you to all of you for your help.

And certainly thanks are due those of you who have been behind the scenes and pitched in when you saw something that was needed. The Society is indebted to you, too. Many of our members have been faithful to take part in providing refreshments for the meetings. Just the fact of faithful attendance has been gratifying. This is simply a bunch of great people with whom I

am proud to be associated. Thank you all.

As we enter the 2009 Christmas season, please let's not forget those who are less fortunate. When you see a homeless person on the roadside, don't let your first thought be one of cynicism. Let us all have more compassion and realize that perhaps some of these people have nowhere to turn or don't really know to whom to turn. If you don't trust their motives, pass them by, but whisper a silent prayer of help for them and realize that "There, but for the grace of God, there go I."

I do hope you have a wonderful, happy holiday season – and most of all, Merry Christmas!



CD by Annie Waters: A Recording which Gives Some of Her Memories of Brewton



Chris Johns shown at The Frame Shop in Brewton.

Chris is holding a copy of Annie Water's History of Escambia County, Alabama, and the CD of Mrs. Waters.

Chris Johns of the Frame Shop in Brewton is pictured with a copy of Mrs. Annie Waters' History of Escambia County and a CD. Chris donated a CD to the Alabama Room at the Thomas E. McMillan Museum of a project he did with the Mrs. Annie Waters when he was a middle school student in the early 1980's as part of a school assignment.

He actually provided Mrs. Waters the equipment and she recorded herself outside in her yard reminiscing about the early days she recalled of Brewton, Alabama. We are quite fortunate to still be able to hear the late Mrs. Waters' lovely voice and are appreciative of all the work she did to preserve the history of Escambia County, Alabama.

Thanks to Chris for this donation.

Pickin' and Singing for the Railroad

Member Dinky Odom Johnson sent us this story about her uncle.

"Brewton resident, William Orell Hart, was born on Valentine's Day, 1929, in Andalusia, AL. Although he was one of twins, his twin sister dying at age 6 months, it seems that he's been able to squeeze enough into his lifetime to compensate for the short life of his twin sister, Doynell.

"His father Robert W. Hart worked for the L&N Railroad, the family moved frequently, but music was always part of their family life. A battered guitar lay around and everyone who happened by would pick it up and strum a few chords or sing a song to go along with their picking. So the music part of his life came naturally with no musical instructions or lessons.

"He and his older brother Ted, who was also a Brewton resident until his death in 1984, played and sang together and it was commonly known in whatever community they landed that the Hart boys could sing and pick the guitars.

"That was the setting for them when a 1936 L & N Railroad Convention needed some entertainment right where they happened to be living. The Buena Vista Hotel, which was the setting for the convention in Biloxi, MS, was just a few blocks from the section house where they were living. So, these



Dinky Johnson who submitted this story and the pictures wrote, "Little guy with the guitar bigger than he is, Orell Hart, age 7. Other little guy playing and singing his heart out, Ted Hart, age 11."

The two brothers are shown in front of the Buena Vista Hotel in Biloxi, MS where they performed for the L & N Railroad Employees Convention in 1936.

Dinky Johnson notes that a story about the boys playing at the convention accompanied with this picture appeared in the L & N Magazine in July 1936.



**Orell with Guitar
Picture made in
Pensacola in 1942**



**Ted (on the left) and Orell
(on the right) as
Teenagers**

two Hart brothers, Ted age 11 and Orell age 7, were asked to play and sing.

"Someone sent a car or a taxi to pick them up and they performed outside on the lawn underneath the oaks, seated on a bench. Their mother Fannie Lou Harrelson Hart sewed little white shirts and shorts pants for them to wear, added white socks and shoes, combed their hair neatly, and this duo of 7- and 11-year old songsters did the rest.

"After performing for the guests, they were taken inside and fed from a huge banquet buffet, then returned to their home.

"Later when Papa Hart was transferred to Brewton, they were still playing and singing, sometimes solo and sometimes duo. They would play at the old L&N Railroad depot in Brewton as trains arrived and departed. Their tips were their spending money. Although Ted's individual musical accomplishments are unknown to me, Orell continued to perform any chance he got.

"Then at W. S. Neal High School, about 1945-46, Orell had a chance to play with Roy Acuff of The Grand Ole Opry in Nashville. Roy and his band were touring, performing at schools, so Orell went to Roy and told him that he played and sang too.

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Pickin' and Singing for the Railroad

(Continued from page 4)

“Roy got him a guitar and asked him to play a little. After listening, he told Orell he’d let him sing. So during the program, Roy introduced him, handed him a guitar and Orell began. Roy’s band members found the key in which he was playing, jumped in and accompanied him.

“In the meantime, Ted had been drafted into the U. S. Army and went to combat action in Europe. Returning home to Brewton, he worked as a butcher and later for Container Corporation.

“Orell graduated from W. S. Neal, Class of 1947, and



Orell Hart, Age 80, in May 2009, with His Wife of 61 Years, Allie Mae Barrow Hart

married his sweetheart Allie Mae Barrow early in 1948. He worked for J-M Chevrolet in Brewton until entering the U. S. Air Force.

“He served our Homeland almost thirty years, in cities and countries across the globe. With all these travels and moves, he still has the guitar his father gave him when he graduated, plus others he’s acquired over the years.

“He is the youngest 80-year-old person you’re apt to meet, still the slim physique that he had at age 30, mind sharp as a tack.”



Then and Now

A Picture on a Post Card of the David Miller House from an earlier time with the E. L. McMillan House to the right.

Below, at right, the same house today, December 2009, now the Feeley House.

Our Business Members

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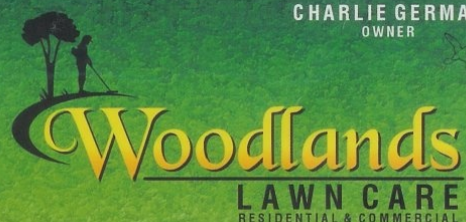
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The ECHS *Journal* Section

Wagon Train from Virginia to Missouri, 1829

Compiled and Introduced by Paul Merritt

Below are unedited excerpts from the diary kept by William Campbell as he traveled by wagon train from Lexington Virginia to Saint Charles, Missouri in 1829. The writer found this diary in the University of Missouri archives.

Two of the people on the journey were the sister and brother of the writer's great, great grandfather, Rev. Samuel D. Campbell, of Geneva Alabama. The brother was William M Campbell who kept the diary and his sister was Sophia Campbell McCluer.

Now from the Diary

"August 20th, 1829 - I started from Lexington, Va. on a journey to the state of Missouri. My own object in going to that remote section of the Union, was to seek a place where I might obtain an honest livelihood by a practice of the Law. I travel in company with four families, containing about 50 individuals, white and black.

"The first family is that of Doctor McCluer (Robert), his wife, my sister, and five children from six months to 13 years old, and 14 negro servants, two young men, McNutt and Cummings and myself form a part of the travelling family of Dr. McCluer.

"Dr. McCluer leaves a lucrative practice and proposes settling himself in St. Charles County Missouri on a fine farm which he has purchased about 36 miles from St. Louis.

"The second family is that of James H. Alexander, who married a sister of Dr. McCluer, with 5 children and several negro slaves, intend farming in Missouri.

"Third family James Wilson, a young man, who is to



Virginia's Natural Bridge

be married this night, to a pretty young girl and start off--in four days to live 1000 miles from her parents. He has 4 or 5 Negros.

"Fourth family Jacob Icenhoward, an honest, poor and industrious Dutchman with seven children and a very aged father-in-law, whom he is taking at great trouble to Missouri to keep from becoming a county charge. He has labored his lifetime here and made nothing more than a subsistence and has determined to go to a country where the substantial comforts of life are more abundant.

"Our caravan, when assembled will consist of 4 wagons, 2 carryalls, 1 barouche and several horses, cows, etc.-50 people.

"Two of Doctor McCluer's children are in Charleston, Kenahwa, with their Uncle Calhoun. Our caravan will not start until the 25th of August. But I, with my sister and her 3 remaining children and a nurse, will proceed forthwith in the Barouche to Charleston, Kenewa, where we will await the arrival of the caravan.

"This evening, we left Lexington, our native town; possibly never to see it again. I

bade adieu to numerous friends and acquaintances, all of whom profess to wish me well. Many

of them sincerely, some from the bottom of their hearts, some deceitfully, and others with indifference.

"I departed from many whom I respected and esteemed highly. I left a numerous tribe of relations and many old friends. Many requested me earnestly to write to them and give them an account of the country and numbers intimated a hope of coming to Missouri in a few years.

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The Blue Ridge Mountains as Seen from Lexington

The ECHS *Journal* Section

Wagon Train from Virginia to Missouri

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"We came 3 miles to the residence of my aged father and mother, with whom we stay all night perhaps for the last time. To-morrow morning we will start in our Barouch for Warm Springs.

"August 21st, 1829 Took a final leave of all my father's family and turned our faces towards the West.

"We found the roads very bad, an of course traveled slowly. Crossed the North Mountain and at 12 o'clock ate a hearty meal of bread, beef, and cheese at that spring

on the side of Mill Mountain.

"Fed at Williams and started fro the Warm Springs about 3 o'clock. We had not proceeded more than two hundred yards before we broke a single tree and were detained until almost night to have a new one made, then drove 4 miles to Steward's. Fared well on plenty of plain substantial food."

(To be continued)



From A Pictorial History, Volume II

Top left is the Old Vaughn House in Bluff Springs

Top Right is the Ash Department Store and Worley Grocery Store in old South-Flomaton

Bottom Left is the Alger Sullivan Lumber Company Office at Christmas Time

The ECHS *Journal* Section

The Golden Eagle is Alive and Well in Escambia County

Darryl Searcy, Writer and Compiler

The Golden Eagle, *Aquila chrysaetos*, is also known as The King of Birds, and The Royal Eagle. This is one of the best known birds of prey in the Northern Hemisphere. Like all eagles, it belongs to the family *Accipitridae*. Once widespread across the land, it has disappeared from many of the more heavily populated areas.

Despite being locally extinct or uncommon at one time, the species is doing well along the Conecuh river, Murder Creek, Burnt Corn Creek, and the Big Escambia, where open woods and prairies are prevalent. The bird is also thriving in most parts of North America, Eurasia, and parts of Africa. That does not mean that we can relax by lifting restrictions, but it does mean that this once common raptor is well on its way to recovery in Alabama.

Before we read a complete description of the bird, let's understand what we're talking about. What is a raptor? Why is it important? Who determined that Alabama and the Gulf Coast should be a major player in the Golden Eagle's comeback? Why are they protected? Well, as you read this article all your questions will be answered simply by understanding that all creatures, large and small, have a purpose far greater than just soaring above the treetops or burrowing in the ground.

Question: What is a raptor? Raptor means "to plunder." Generally we think of it as a predator belonging to a group of birds of prey, with a strong notched beak and sharp talons -- eagles, hawks, and vultures. Anything that possesses the means of seizing another, tearing it apart, and devouring it -- a grizzly bloodthirsty description, but accurate.

Question: Why is the Golden Eagle protected? Simply put, like all raptors, it is essential to help maintain the balance of nature. Without raptors the entire world would be a poorer place filled with rotting flesh and rampant diseases carried by large and small mammals and birds.

These marvelous and powerful birds have been cultivated since Biblical times -- not only for sport, but as a symbol of strength and beauty. Then the world human population



grew, it became careless, greedy, and hungry for sport killings, or for the need to overly protect domestic animals.

Question: Who determined that Alabama would be a major player in the eagle's comeback? Primarily the Federal and local wildlife officials who saw the need to protect and encourage the population of these national symbols. Alabama was chosen among the players because of its vast prairies and swamp lands that provide the right environment for birds of this species. Our state and the Escambia region are proud to be a part of this very successful program.

The U.S Fish & Wildlife Service in Birmingham reports that after 15 years of checking eagle nests (Golden and Bald) from small planes, there is now documentation that the state's recovery goal has been met under the Endangered Species Act. With the nest-to-nest status check, the state now watches over a few dozen nests rather than the whole to monitor the eagles' health.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will soon remove the bird from the Endangered Species List, saying the eagle only needs monitoring now that it has successfully repopulated. The population increased from 417 nesting pairs in 1963 to more than 8,500 today.

So, armed with that good information, let's describe the Golden Eagle in more romantic terms. They are dark brown, with lighter golden-brown plumage on their heads and necks. It has an average wingspan of about 7 feet and a body length of about 3 feet. They are extremely swift, and can dive upon their quarry at speeds of more than 150 miles per hour.

Golden eagles use their speed and sharp talons to snatch up rabbits, ground squirrels, and other small animals that roam the tall grasses. They also eat carrion, reptiles, birds, fish, and smaller fare such as large insects. They have even been known to attack much larger animals that are weak and sick -- deer, goats, pigs, newborn livestock. and even brown bear.

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The pairs maintain territories that may be as large as 60 square miles. They are monogamous and often remain with their mate for several years or possibly for life. They nest in high places including cliffs, trees, or human built structures. They build huge nests to which they may return for several breeding years. Females lay from one to four eggs, and both parents incubate them for 40 to 45 days. Typically, one or two young survive to fledge in about three months.

Adult Golden Eagles range considerably in size, though some are among the largest eagles, most vary in the range from 26 to 40 inches in length with a wingspan of from 60 to 96 inches. The weight may vary from 5.5 to 15.5 pounds. The smallest-bodied sub-species is *Japonica* (Japanese) while *daphnia* is the largest.

However, wild specimens from the Northwestern part of this country (*canadensis*) can exceed normal dimensions and weigh up to 20 pounds with a body length of 40 inches. As with many birds, females are considerably larger than males. In the case of the Golden Eagle species found along the Conecuh River, the female usually weigh one-quarter to one-third more than male birds.

The plumage colors range from black-brown to dark brown, with a striking golden-buff crown and nape, which give the bird its name. The upper wings also have an irregular lighter area. Immature birds resemble the adults, but have a duller more mottled appearance.

Also they have a white-banded tail and a white patch at the shoulder joint, that gradually disappears with molting until full adult plumage is reached, usually in about the fifth year. Contour feathers may molt in a shorter time span.

The species was first described by Linnaeus in his 1758 treatise *Systema Naturae* as *Falco chrysaetos*. The locality given by Linnaeus was given simply as "Europa" but that



location was later fixed to Sweden, his home country. The Golden Eagle is one of the largest eagles in its genus class, and is distributed almost worldwide.

The latest research indicates it forms a super species with The Verreaux Eagle, Gurney Eagle, and the Wedge-tailed Eagle. There are five living sub-species of Golden Eagle that differ slightly in size and plumage. These can be found in different parts of the world, including the state of Alabama, but all are not known in the Escambia region.

While the Golden Eagle's beak is well suited to tear apart large prey, its predominant food stuff is rabbits, ground squirrels,

prairie dogs and marmots (large mouse). These groups normally comprise 50 to 94% of the nesting eagle's diet. The secondary important prey group for the Golden Eagle is other birds. While the favorite food bird is the larger ones, virtually any bird from blue jay to swan is potential prey.

During winter months when prey is scarce, Golden Eagles scavenge on carrion to supplement their diet. Sometimes when no carrion is available the eagles will hunt down large prey such as domestic goats, sheep, and even newborn calves.

Reports have been made of mature adults killing wolves and other medium sized canine species. There is a confirmed report of a Golden Eagle snatching the cub of a Brown Bear.

Golden Eagles are not necessarily preyed upon by other avian predators. However, there are records of Golden Eagles killing and eating larger raptors such as other eagle species, owls, and hawks, whether adults, nestlings, or their eggs.

It was reported from the Zion National Park in Utah that an adult eagle passing by a Peregrine Falcon nest was struck and killed by a swooping parent Peregrine. It is also

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known that Falcons and Red-tail or Red-shoulder Hawks, which are normally competitors, have worked together to group-mob Golden Eagles that have passed their adjacent nesting areas.

More commonly, Golden Eagles steal prey from other raptors, thus their efforts to drive the Golden Eagle out of its territory. Despite often being smaller in size, they are capable of overpowering large vultures from a meal of carrion. However, the Bald Eagle and White-tailed Eagle can and do overpower Golden Eagles in competition over food.

Golden Eagles have very good eyesight and can spot prey from an exceptional long distance. This bird has a resolving power eight times more powerful than a human. The talons are used for killing and carrying the prey and the beak is used only for eating.

They often have a division of labor while hunting in that one bird drives the prey towards its waiting partner. On the other hand, the size difference between males and females allows more unpaired birds to live off the land, which is helpful to maintain a sufficiently large population for this slowly-maturing bird.

Golden Eagles usually mate for life. They build several nesting sites (eyries) within their territory and use them alternately for several years. These nests consist of heavy tree branches, lined with grass and feathers when in use. Old nests may be six to eight feet in diameter and three feet in height, as the eagles repair their nests whenever necessary and enlarge them during each use.

If the nest is situated on a tree the supporting branches often break due to over-weight. Certain other animals – birds and mammals too small to be of interest to the huge



Golden Eagle in Flight

raptor – often use the nest as shelter. Their predators are just the right size for Golden Eagle prey, and therefore avoid active nests.

The female lays one to four (usually two) eggs between January and September (depending on the locality). The eggs vary from all white to white with cinnamon or brown spots and blotches. They start incubation immediately after the first egg is laid, and after 40 to 45 days the young hatch. They are covered in fluffy white down and are fed for 50 days before they are able to make their first flight attempts and eat on their own.

In most cases only the older chick survives, while the younger one dies without leaving the nest. This is due to the older chick having a few days' advantage in growth and consequently winning most squabbles for food. This strategy is useful for the species because it makes the parents' workload manageable even when food is scarce, while providing a reserve chick in case the first-born dies soon after hatching.

Golden eagles invest much time and effort in bringing up their young. Once the young are able to hunt on their own, most will survive many years, but mortality even among first-born nestlings is much higher, particularly in the first weeks after hatching



Eagles Returning to Nest

As with many raptors, the Golden Eagles congregate once a year. In Eurasia and North America, this congregation usually occurs in the Autumn (while congregations of Bald Eagles is a late-winter / early-spring phenomenon). The largest known congregation is in the state of Montana in October.

The congregation site is the east slope of the Bridger Mountains and adjacent Bridger Canyon. The mountain

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range is on the edge of the Rocky Mountain chain, where it borders parts of the Great Plains and several inland ranges.

Golden eagles from all over North America congregate here before migrating for the winter. It's also an opportunity for younger eagles to find mates and learn the art of soaring on higher air currents.

At one time, the Golden Eagle lived in temperate Europe, Asia, North America, North Africa, and Japan. In most areas this bird is now a mountain-dweller, but in former centuries it also bred in the plains and the forests. In recent years it has started to breed in lowland areas again, as is the case along the Conecuh River and the Tensaw Delta..

There has been a great decline in Central Europe where they are now essentially restricted to the Alps, and the Carpathian Mountains. In Britain, there are about 420 pairs, the majority of these in the Scottish highlands. Golden Eagles can still be seen soaring above the mountains in Scotland, and are slowly returning to Northern England.

In Ireland, where it had been extinct due to hunting since 1912, efforts are being made to re-introduce the species. Forty-six birds were released into the wild in Glenveagh National Park, County Donegal, between 2001 and 2006. At least three known female fatalities have occurred since then, but slow recovery is being made.

The plan now is to release another 60 birds to ensure a viable population. It was in 2007 that a pair of Golden Eagles produced the first chick to be hatched in the Republic of Ireland in nearly a century. The previous attempt to help the birds breed at the Glenveagh National Park had failed.

In North America the situation is not as dramatic, but there has still been a noticeable decline. The main threat is habitat destruction, a development which meant that by the late 19th century the Golden Eagle had already been driven from some regions they used to inhabit. In the 20th century,



Mexico Coat of Arms

chlorides and heavy metal poisonings were also commonplace, but these have declined thanks to tighter regulations on pollution. Within the United States, the Golden Eagle is legally protected by the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

Available habitat and food are the main limiting factor nowadays. Collisions with power lines have become an increasingly significant cause of mortality since the early 20th century. On a global scale, the Golden Eagle is no longer considered threatened, mainly thanks to the large Asian and American populations. The greatest enemy to the Golden Eagle in south Alabama has been the loss of habitat through clear-cutting and trophy poaching.

In human culture, Golden Eagles can be trained for falconry. In Mongolia and China these eagles are still used to hunt foxes and wolves, particularly by Kazakh and Kyrgyz nomads. In their language the bird is called Burkut. Foxes are killed outright by the eagles, but due to their size and strength wolves are usually held down while the falconer himself finishes the kill.

In Mexico the Golden Eagle is the national bird, and is well connected to the Saladin Golden Eagle currently used in the Mexican coat of arms..

In Europe and North Africa it is seen in the coat of arms of Germany, Austria, Egypt, and Romania in continuation of the Holy Roman Empire. The Golden Eagle was the model for the *aquila*, the standard of the Roman legions

In some cultures the eagle is a sacred bird and the feathers of the eagle are key to many religious and spiritual customs, especially among a number of Native Americans in the United States and Canada (Canada refers to them as First Nations). Some Native American peoples revere eagles as sacred and the feathers of Bald and Golden Eagles are kept with pride.

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Feathers are often worn on Native American headdresses and have been compared to the Bible and the crucifix of Christianity. Eagle feathers are often used in various ceremonies where noteworthy achievements and qualities are being honored and recognized. Exceptional leadership and bravery are just two examples.

Current United States eagle feather law stipulates that only individuals of certifiable Native American ancestry who are enrolled in a federally recognized tribe are legally authorized to obtain eagle feathers for religious or spiritual use. Thus, the supply of eagle material for traditional ceremonial use can be guaranteed and ceremonial eagle items can be passed on as heirlooms by their traditional owners. This inheritance process is done without restrictions, so long as the heirloom is not passed outside tribal families. Commercial trade in Golden Eagles or their feathers is a strict violation of today's laws.

To prevent the hunting and unnecessary killing of eagles, a feather bank was established in Denver, Colorado, overseen by the National Eagle Repository, where feathers of all denominations are kept. The feathers and other usable parts are plucked by park rangers from birds that have been found to have died naturally within their habitat, or are the remains of another predator.

Any member of a Native American tribe may request a feather for ceremonial use. If the request is deemed reasonable and proper, the feather is released to the individual, thus eliminating the need for one to go in search of a live bird.

On February 1, 2006 the Director of the USFWS (United States Fish & Wildlife Service) issued a permit to the Hopi Tribe of Arizona that authorize them to take up to 40 golden eaglets for ceremonial use only..



**Typical Feather
Ornament**

In keeping with a policy begun in 2003, the USFWS Headquarters in Washington, D.C. issued additional eagle permits. The Regional Office in Albuquerque issued a separate permit in 2007 for the Hopi to take an unlimited number of red-tail hawk nestlings in northeastern Arizona for the sole purpose of breeding and raising their own birds for falconry and ceremonial needs..

A new aspect of Native American religious eagle gathering is that additional tribes are now taking live eagles under USFWS permits, for the first time. In 2003 the Jemez Pueblo were issued a permit to capture up to two golden eagles annually in the Valles Caldera National Preserve.

The USFWS had previously denied a Jemez request to take them, but since the general nationwide population has stabilized, the Jemez people have found accommodation and have since collected the two immature golden eagles they requested..

At the same time the Taos Pueblo were issued a permit to shoot one mature golden eagle on Tribal lands in Taos County, New Mexico. An additional permit issued in 2007 allowed the permit holder to transport the taken eagle and its parts anywhere within the United States when traveling on official tribal functions.

In 2007, the Pueblo of Isleta were issued a permit to take two mature golden eagles on Pueblo lands in Valencia and Bernalillo County, New Mexico. In March of 2008, the Isleta properly reported its progress as demanded by law. The Golden Eagle

continues to thrive in the Pueblo Isleta Valencia and Bernalillo region.

These are exceptional rules that do not apply to Native



**Photograph of Golden Eagle by Jerry Green,
with the Alabama Dept. of Conservation**

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The Golden Eagle is Alive and Well in Escambia County

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Americans in the State of Alabama, or the Escambia region in particular. It is mandatory, however, that any Golden Eagle killed by accident must be reported to the Alabama Department of Conservation and the Federal Fish & Wildlife Service. To do otherwise is accompanied by a very heavy penalty and possible prison time.

Locally, such a bird that had been purposely killed on the Conecuh River in Escambia County was not reported, but when the killing was discovered, it was accompanied by a heavy fine and the perpetrator was ordered to mount the bird in such a fashion that it could go on permanent display in a museum-like environment.

Today, this beautiful bird is on display at the Turtle Point Environmental Science Center in Flomaton, Alabama.

The Golden Eagle escaped the plague of DDT contamination, because their diet consists of small grass-eating mammals. However, deliberate poisoning, shooting, and trapping continues today despite laws protecting them. The motivations behind this may be a misguided attempt to protect livestock or an international effort to obtain feathers for sale on the black market..

Overall folks, the Golden Eagle is alive and well in Escambia County. Nevertheless, by comparison, it would be remiss if this writer failed to acknowledge the Bald Eagle, of course, the national bird of the United States. The Bald Eagle is also nesting along rivers in Escambia, but its primary home in Alabama is in the lower Tennessee Valley and at seashore in Mobile and Baldwin counties.

From the Alabama Department of Conservation in a document entitled, Bald Eagle, we are reprinting by permission the following:

“The Bald Eagle, *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*, is one of North America’s largest raptors with adult females reaching weights of 14 pounds and standing 42 inches tall. Adult

males are slightly smaller. The bright white head and tail contrasted against dark body feathers are key characteristics used to identify the bald eagle. However, these white feathers as well as the yellow color of the bill do not develop until the eagles reach sexual maturity at about five years of age. The eyes, legs, and talons are yellow.

“Immature bald eagles are often mistaken as golden eagles because they lack the white head and tail feathers. Unlike the golden eagle, the legs of bald eagles are free of feathers and their wing feathers are held flat when soaring.

The primary feathers of a golden eagle curve upward on the ends while soaring.

“There are two subspecies of bald eagles: *H. l. leucocephalus*, found mostly in the southern U.S. and Baja California, and *H. l. alascanus*, found mostly in the northern U.S. and Canada. The two subspecies intergrade broadly in the central and northern United States. Federal status is categorized by state/region, rather than by subspecies.

“Bald eagles occur throughout the continental United States and Canada. They are also found northwestward into southern Alaska. In Alabama, these eagles are found statewide; however, they are concentrated primarily along rivers and large bodies of water. A January survey of bald eagles in

Alabama has averaged about 100-150 birds in recent years. Concentrations occur on Pickwick Lake near Waterloo and Guntersville Lake near Guntersville State Park.

“Bald eagles inhabit areas near coasts, bays, rivers, lakes or other bodies of water where food is plentiful. The Bald Eagle is an opportunist, feeding on fishes, injured waterfowl and seabirds, various mammals, reptiles, and carrion. The majority of their diet is comprised of fish. They hunt live prey, scavenge, and pirate food from other birds.

“These large birds mate for life and share all nesting and brood-rearing responsibilities. Large nests are most often built in the crowns of tall trees, usually near water. Occa-

(Continued on page 15)



Bald Eagle

The ECHS *Journal* Section

The Golden Eagle is Alive and Well in Escambia County

(Continued from page 14)

sionally, nests will be constructed on the sides of cliffs, however it is uncommon in southern areas. Typically, breeding pairs will return to the same nests year after year, and repair or restore the nest by adding new material. Nests are very large reaching 10 feet across and weighing about 2,000 pounds.

“One to three eggs are laid in December or January and are incubated for 30 to 32 days. Relatively small at hatching, eaglets need nearly three months of development before leaving the nest. Juveniles are about the same size as adults when they are ready to permanently leave the nest, but they don’t reach sexual maturity until they are approximately five years of age. The normal life span of the bald eagle is estimated to be about 30 years.”

The bald eagle population dwindled to such a low point in the 1950’s and 1960’s that it was put on the endangered species list. The cause of this plunge in the population was the effects of DDT pesticide poisoning. This chemical caused not only eagles but other bird populations to lay eggs with very thin shells that broke during incubation so that quite often the young failed to hatch.

In Alabama, it was rare to find bald eagles wintering in the state and the breeding population died out. After DDT was banned in 1972, the population of birds began to increase and some would winter in Alabama. However, the birds went north to breed.

It would take forcing juvenile eagles to take their first flight in Alabama so that the geographical area would become “imprinted” to restore a nesting population of bald eagles to Alabama. This process of releasing juvenile birds in an area is called jacking. From 1985-1991, ninety-one juvenile eagles were released.

“The numbers tell the story. In the twenty years since



(c) George Jameson

bald eagles began re-nesting in Alabama, as of 2006, there have been 493 known nesting attempts, with 557 young eagles successfully fledging these nests. This recovery of the bald eagle in Alabama, and indeed nationwide, has been one of the most remarkable success stories in wildlife management.”

A close neighbor who resides on a large lake in western Conecuh County, has reported the presence of a Bald Eagle circling and hunting in a grove of pine and hardwood trees that stand at lakeside. He reports that the bird appears to be mature as it has a full head-dress of white feathers, but does not seem to have yet taken a mate. Let’s hope it finds good food and habitat and stays with us for a while. On the same lake is the Great White and the Blue Heron.

Sources:

- ◆ James R. Davis, *Non-game Birds in Alabama: The Golden Eagle*.
- ◆ Kevin Holsonback, Wildlife Biologist, Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries
- ◆ Alabama Department of Conservation, Montgomery, AL
- ◆ Jim Weaver, Cornell University, Photographs and Commentary
- ◆ Federal Fish & Wildlife Service, Department of Conservation, Birmingham, AL.
- ◆ Federal Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C.
- ◆ Escambia Division of Alabama Forestry, Brewton, Alabama
- ◆ Outdoor Alabama, a web site, Eagle Restoration in Alabama

ECHOES
THE NEWSLETTER FOR
THE ESCAMBIA COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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