

Alaska Golden Eagle Guide

Your Complete Guide to Alaska's Majestic Mountain Hunter



While the bald eagle may be Alaska's most recognizable bird, the **Golden Eagle** is often considered its most powerful. With incredible speed, razor-sharp eyesight, and breathtaking aerial skills, golden eagles rule Alaska's mountains, cliffs, and open tundra.

Unlike bald eagles, which are commonly found along coastlines and waterways, golden eagles prefer Alaska's rugged interior landscapes. They are masters of soaring on mountain thermals, often flying high above valleys while searching for prey far below.

For travelers visiting Denali National Park or exploring Alaska's Interior, spotting a golden eagle gliding silently across the mountains is an unforgettable wildlife experience.

Quick Facts



Scientific Name: *Aquila chrysaetos*

Height:

- 27–38 inches

Wingspan:

- 6–7½ feet

Weight:

- 6–15 pounds

Lifespan:

- 20–30 years in the wild

Diet:

- Arctic ground squirrels
- Snowshoe hares
- Ptarmigan
- Marmots
- Young caribou
- Fish (occasionally)
- Carrion

Golden eagles are among the fastest birds of prey in North America.

Where Can You See Golden Eagles?



The best places to spot golden eagles include:

- Denali National Park
- Alaska Range
- Brooks Range
- Interior Alaska
- Hatcher Pass
- Wrangell–St. Elias National Park
- Arctic tundra
- Open mountain valleys

Golden eagles are much less common along the Southeast Alaska coast than bald eagles.

★ Golden Eagle vs. Bald Eagle



Although both are impressive raptors, there are several easy ways to tell them apart.

🦅 Golden Eagle

- Dark brown body
- Golden feathers on the back of the head and neck
- Feathers extend down the legs
- Prefers mountains and open country

🦅 Bald Eagle

- White head and tail (adults)
- Yellow beak
- Often found near water
- Frequently seen around coastal Alaska

Both species are magnificent to observe in the wild.

⚡ Incredible Hunters

Golden eagles rely on:

- Exceptional eyesight
- Powerful talons
- High-speed dives
- Incredible patience

They can spot prey from over a mile away and dive at speeds exceeding **150 mph** when attacking.



Can You See Golden Eagles on an Alaska Cruise?

It's possible, but **uncommon**.

Your best opportunities are during:

- Denali CruiseTours
- Interior Alaska land tours
- Scenic drives through mountain passes
- Alaska Railroad journeys
- National park excursions

Most traditional Southeast Alaska cruises primarily encounter bald eagles instead.



Photography Tips



For the best photographs:

- Bring a telephoto lens.
- Scan mountain ridges and cliffs.
- Watch for birds soaring on rising air currents.
- Use burst mode during flight.
- Include mountain scenery to showcase their natural habitat.

Golden eagles often soar for long periods without flapping their wings.



Best Time to See Golden Eagles

May

Excellent.

Nesting season is underway.

June

Outstanding.

Adults actively hunt to feed their young.

July

Excellent.

Young birds begin learning to fly.

August

Excellent.

Warm mountain thermals create ideal soaring conditions.

September

Very good.

Migration begins for some birds.



Interesting Behaviors

Golden eagles are known for:

- Soaring for hours without flapping.
- Building massive nests on cliffs.
- Returning to the same nesting sites for years.
- Outstanding vision.
- Spectacular aerial hunting skills.

Some nests can reach **over six feet across** after years of use.



What to Bring

Bring:

- ✓ Binoculars
- ✓ Camera

- ✓ Telephoto lens
- ✓ Layered clothing
- ✓ Patience

Golden eagles are often seen high above the landscape, so scanning the skies is essential.

Premium Travel Group Tip

If you're visiting Denali National Park, don't spend all your time searching the ground for wildlife. Every few minutes, look toward the mountain ridges and open sky. Golden eagles often soar silently overhead, and once you learn their graceful flight pattern, they're easier to spot than you might think.

Continue Exploring Alaska

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 - Bald Eagle Guide
 - Great Horned Owl Guide
 - Puffin Guide
 - Dall Sheep Guide
 - Caribou Guide
 - Gray Wolf Guide
 - Denali National Park Guide
 - Alaska Railroad Experience Guide
 - Best Time to Visit Alaska
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Fun Facts

- Golden eagles can dive at speeds of **more than 150 mph**.
 - Their eyesight is estimated to be **4–8 times sharper than a human's**.
 - They can carry prey weighing several pounds while in flight.
 - Golden eagles often mate for life.
 - Their nests, called **eyries**, may be used for decades and become enormous over time.
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Why Are Golden Eagles So Special?

Golden eagles embody the strength and freedom of Alaska's rugged mountains. Their incredible flying skills, keen eyesight, and powerful hunting abilities make them one of the state's most impressive birds of prey. Seeing one soaring effortlessly above the Alaska Range is a reminder of just how wild and expansive the Last Frontier truly is.



Joe's Logbook

If bald eagles are Alaska's celebrities, golden eagles are the quiet professionals. They don't usually gather around harbors or fish processing areas like bald eagles. Instead, they're often found high above the mountains, doing exactly what nature designed them to do.

One thing I enjoy is trying to spot them while traveling through Denali or other Interior Alaska landscapes. At first, they may look like just another bird circling overhead, but once your binoculars lock onto one, you immediately notice the incredible wingspan and effortless way they ride the mountain air.

My advice is simple: don't forget to look up. Alaska's wildlife isn't just on the ground or in the water. Some of its most impressive residents spend their lives soaring high above the mountains, and seeing a golden eagle in its natural habitat is an unforgettable reminder of the freedom and beauty that make Alaska so special.