

**XXVIII. A NOTE ON THE ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE  
BALD EAGLE IN ALASKA****Ed. D. Crabb**

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Contribution No. 23, Second Series.

During the last two to three years the voices of eminent wild life conservators in the eastern states have been lifted in vain against a bounty which was placed on the heads of eagles of Alaska, in 1918. Among these Dr. W. T. Hornaday has probably been the most active in pleading for "Old Baldy." He points out that the bald eagle is being unjustly exterminated, notwithstanding the fact that this bird is primarily a fisherman, subsisting chiefly upon salmon which have spawned and died, as well as upon other fishes which it captures alive, and that it in no wise interferes with the activities of man.

On the other hand many residents of Alaska and sportsmen in the States are clamoring for the destruction of Alaska's eagles. These men charge bald eagles with having devastated fox farms, destroyed salmon to the extent of injuring the business of canneries, killed lambs of mountain sheep and destroyed ptarmigan to an alarming extent in Alaska.

The writer, during the late spring, summer and early fall of 1921, observed bald eagles at different points along the Alaska coast from its southern extremity around the bay to near the western end of the Alaska Peninsula. Although he saw scores of eagles in no instance did they appear other than as peaceful fisher-folk.

The stomach contents of eagles, *Haliaeetus leucocephalus alascanus* (C. H. Townsend), which I examined contained chiefly fish bones, as follows:

A female taken at Uyak Bay, on Kodiak Island, May 5, was empty.

Another female taken near King Cove, May 25, contained the feet of a ptarmigan and a quantity of fish bones.

The stomach of a specimen collected at Pavlof Bay, May 11, contained only fish bones.

Remains of fish were conspicuous at every nest that I visited, which contained or recently had contained young birds. One nest in particular, which contained two eaglets and was built on the rocky headland west of Ruby's Lagoon, at Pavlof Bay, showed no evidence of food other than fish having ever been eaten by this family. A major portion of seven dollie varden trout, ranging in length while alive from twelve to eighteen or twenty inches and still fresh, were lying on the edge of the nest. Other fish bones were

plentiful; they were, I supposed, for the most part of this species, for they were comparable in size as well as in general form, and too, salmon the usual source of food had not yet begun running. No remains of either bird or mammal were found, although varying hare, ptarmigan, many kinds of waterfowl, including flocks of Aleutian sandpipers, which are rivaled in size only by our flocks of blackbirds and crows, were abundant and could easily have been caught by the parents.

After leaving the coast the writer went north from Cordova to the mouth of the Tanana river and up the Yukon to Dawson and from there back to and up the Fortymile river; spending three weeks in the Jack Wade and Fortymile country, during July, without seeing a single eagle! He then went on up the Yukon to old Fort Selkirk, from whence he pushed some 465 miles up the Pelley and Macmillan rivers into the South Fork of the Macmillan river, in the Yukon Territory, spending 29 days in this vicinity. After returning to Fort Selkirk he took passage up the Yukon to Whitehorse, and embarked at Skaguay, October 12, without having seen a dozen eagles since leaving Cordova, June 20. This leads him to believe that eagles are not sufficiently numerous in the interior of Alaska to do any appreciable damage to the few settlers and the game of that part of the Territory. It is, however, probable that eagles are more numerous in the interior during the winter and early spring, but why they would leave the open water of the coast for the frozen interior requires an explanation.

A correspondent who has had unusual opportunities to make extensive observations on the eagles in Alaska, writes that he has observed these birds eating rabbits, ptarmigan, grouse, martin, fish, shell fish, and on one occasion, May, 1913, he saw an eagle kill a pet fawn, of the Alaska deer, by striking it in the small of the back.

He states that Mr. Henry Carsteins of Healy, Alaska, Supervisor of the Mount McKinley Park, is convinced that eagles there kill the young of mountain sheep. This correspondent watched eagles to find their nests, in the spring and summer of 1919, locating over thirty and killing the young. "There were in most every one (of these 30 nests) duck and bird feathers. In one I found a partly eaten young fox, and tail of martin in another \* \* \* I never have examined their stomach as they are so unsanitary I hate to touch one."

The territorial government of Alaska enacted an unrestricted law, in 1918, offering a bounty of fifty cents a head for eagles, either the golden or the bald-headed species. In this way Alaska

lost 5060 eagles up to January 1, 1920. (W. T. Hornaday, *Natural History*, Vol. XX, No. 2, pp. 117-120), for which she paid \$2530.00 in bounties. I dare say that more than 1200 eagles were killed during the last calendar year. Bounties, however, are not collected on all of the eagles that are killed, for most all the sea-faring folk seem to take keen delight in shooting the birds from boats and usually leave the dead or wounded where they fall. The correspondent, above mentioned, wrote that he killed 182 eagles in 1919 and 327 in 1921 for the bounty, fifty cents each. He is convinced that he is really doing humanity a favor by killing as many eagles as possible. I believe, however, that the sum total of the annual damage done to Alaskans and to their interests by eagles would not cover the annual total of bounties collected for killing these birds.

Furthermore, since I found eagles common only along the coasts I can see no reason for placing a bounty on them throughout the entire territory. Granting that damage by eagles is actually as great as isolated observers have noted and as general as the bounty law would suggest, it occurs to me that a strip of country 50 miles wide along the coasts would be sufficient territory in which to apply a bounty law.