

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

Description

A mature bald eagle has a dark brown body with a large white head and tail. The bald eagle is about 32 inches tall with close to an 80-inch wingspan. The immature bird has a mottled appearance (mostly brown with some white) and does not exhibit the white head and tail until four or five years of age. Immature bald eagles can be distinguished from the golden eagle by its larger head and beak, its less feathered, yellow legs, and white mottled coverts on the underside of the wing. (See photo of juvenile bald eagle below.)

Diet

Fish are the bald eagle's primary source of food. Winter die off of shad or alewife at some of Nebraska's lakes and reservoirs also provide readily available forage. Waterfowl are another important source of winter food. Bald eagles may occasionally hunt uplands for birds or mammals. They are also more likely to scavenge on dead animals than the golden eagle.



Juvenile Bald Eagle

Distribution

Bald eagles occur throughout Nebraska as spring and fall migrants. A large number occur as winter residents, and dramatically increasing numbers are nesting in the state. Bald eagles are primarily found along the major river systems and the larger reservoirs throughout the state. In 1980, the first year for a statewide winter survey, 428 bald eagles were observed. By 1998, the survey totaled 1,430 bald eagles. The first confirmed nest with young occurred in 1991, one young hatched but did not fledge the nest. By 2001, bald eagle nest surveys showed 23 nests with 35 young fledged. These numbers of wintering and nesting bald eagles continue to grow.

Habitat

Bald eagles are usually found in areas near water, trees, and a good supply of fish and waterfowl. They build large nests in the crowns of tall trees. Nests can be 4 to 7 feet in diameter and up to 10 feet thick. They need large trees on the edge of water from which to feed and loaf. In the winter, bald eagles roost in large stands of trees in areas well protected from the wind and elements. They often roost in large groups in a few select trees.

Status

The biggest single detriment to bald eagle populations is reported to be the widespread historical use of DDT. Other detrimental factors include habitat loss and/or conversion, shooting, poisoning, disease, and electrocution. The species was de-listed in 2007 and continues to be offered protection by the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

Management

Identification and preservation of nesting and winter roosting habitat is important to benefit the species. Trees used for nesting and roosting should be protected and disturbance minimized during those critical periods. The restoration and management of rivers, streams, and wetlands – which are important feeding areas, is also essential to further increase bald eagle populations.

More Information

<http://www.natureserve.org/explorer/servlet/NatureServe?searchName=haliaeetus+leucocephalus>

<http://ecos.fws.gov/speciesProfile/profile/speciesProfile.action?spcode=B008>

<http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/wildlife/eagles.asp>

BALD AND GOLDEN EAGLE PROTECTION ACT

Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*)

Description

A mature golden eagle has a color range from black-brown to dark brown on the body with a golden-buff crown and nape, which gives the bird its name. This eagle is one of three hawks to have legs feathered all the way to the toes. The upper portions of the wings have an irregular lighter area. Immature birds resemble the adult bird except they have a white banded tail and large white patch at the carpal joint. However, these white wing patches are not always present since they disappear with every molt until full adult plumage in the 5th year. (See photo of juvenile golden eagle below.)

Diet

Approximately 50-95% of the adult's diet is comprised of two main groups of prey: leporids (hares and rabbits) and sciurids (ground squirrels, prairie dogs and marmots). Prey also may include mammals ranging from mice to young goats. In the winter months, when food is scarce, they will feed on carrion. A healthy adult is not preyed upon.



Distribution

The golden eagle is the North America's largest bird of prey and the national bird of Mexico. Golden eagle pairs maintain territories that may be as large as 60 square miles. Most golden eagles do not migrate. They range from Mexico into Alaska.

Habitat

The Nebraska Panhandle supports golden eagles year-round. The remainder of Nebraska is a winter stop-over and non-breeding area. The open prairies of Nebraska are the typical habitat. Pairs mate for several years or possibly for life. Nests will be found in high places such as cliffs, trees or within the tops of telephone poles. The large nest will last for several breeding years. The female will lay one to four eggs and both parents share the incubation process lasting from 40-45 days. One to two young will survive to the fledgling stage by the end of three months.

Status

North America has seen a general decline in the population numbers of the golden eagle compared to historic levels. The main threat is habitat destruction. Other detrimental factors include shooting, poisoning, disease, and electrocution. The golden eagle is protected by the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

Management

A crucial part of managing Nebraska's golden eagle population is the identification and preservation of nesting and winter roosting habitat. In areas where wintering eagles have been observed, roosting trees should be protected as well as any physical features such as hills, ridges or cliffs that provide shelter from weather. Protection should also be given to known or potential nesting sites. The protection, restoration, and management of wetlands, important feeding areas, is also very important in maintaining and increasing bald eagle numbers.

More Information

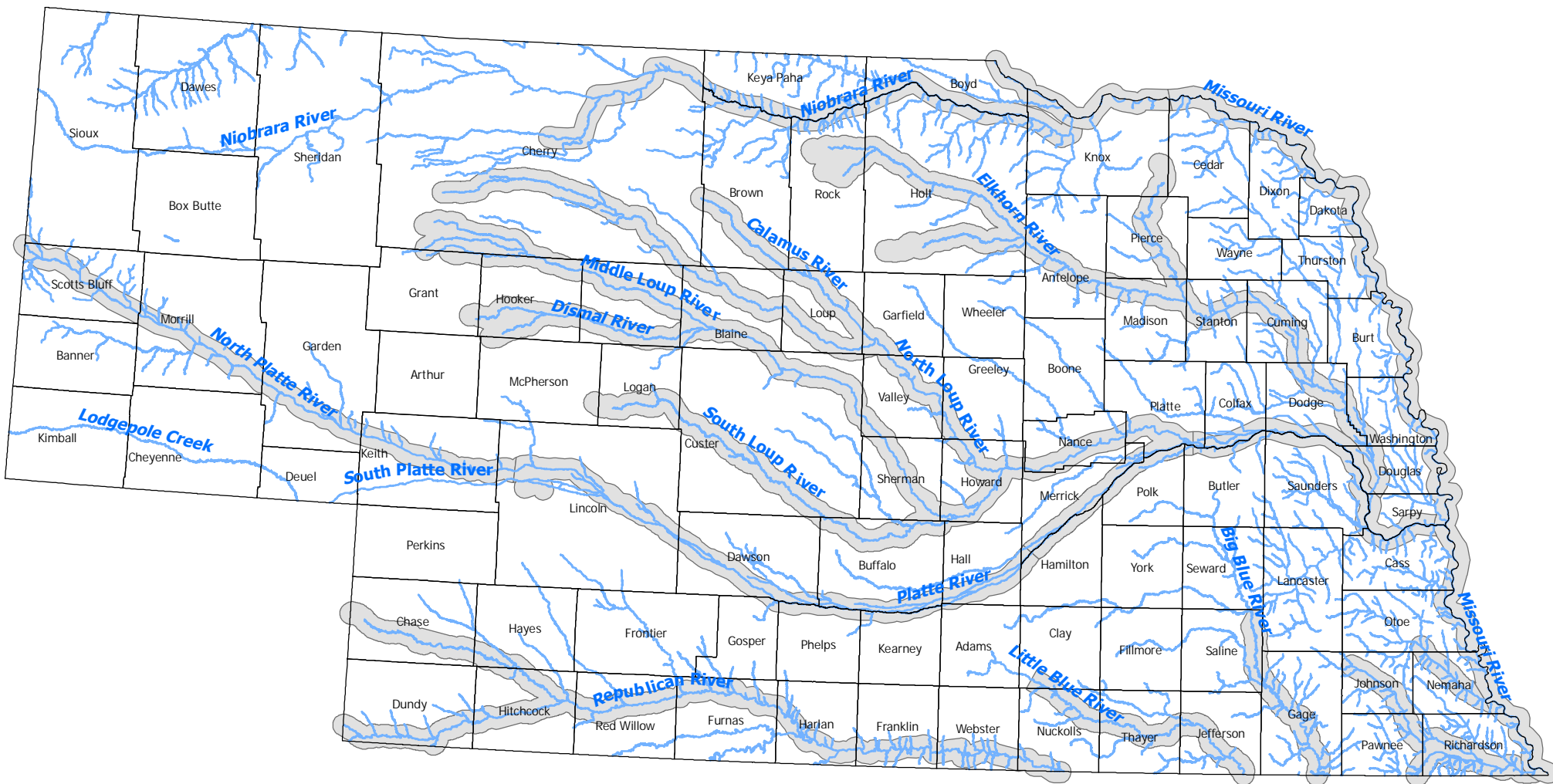
<http://www.natureserve.org/explorer/servlet/NatureServe?searchName=aquila+chrysaetos>

<http://ecos.fws.gov/speciesProfile/profile/speciesProfile.action?spscode=B0DV>

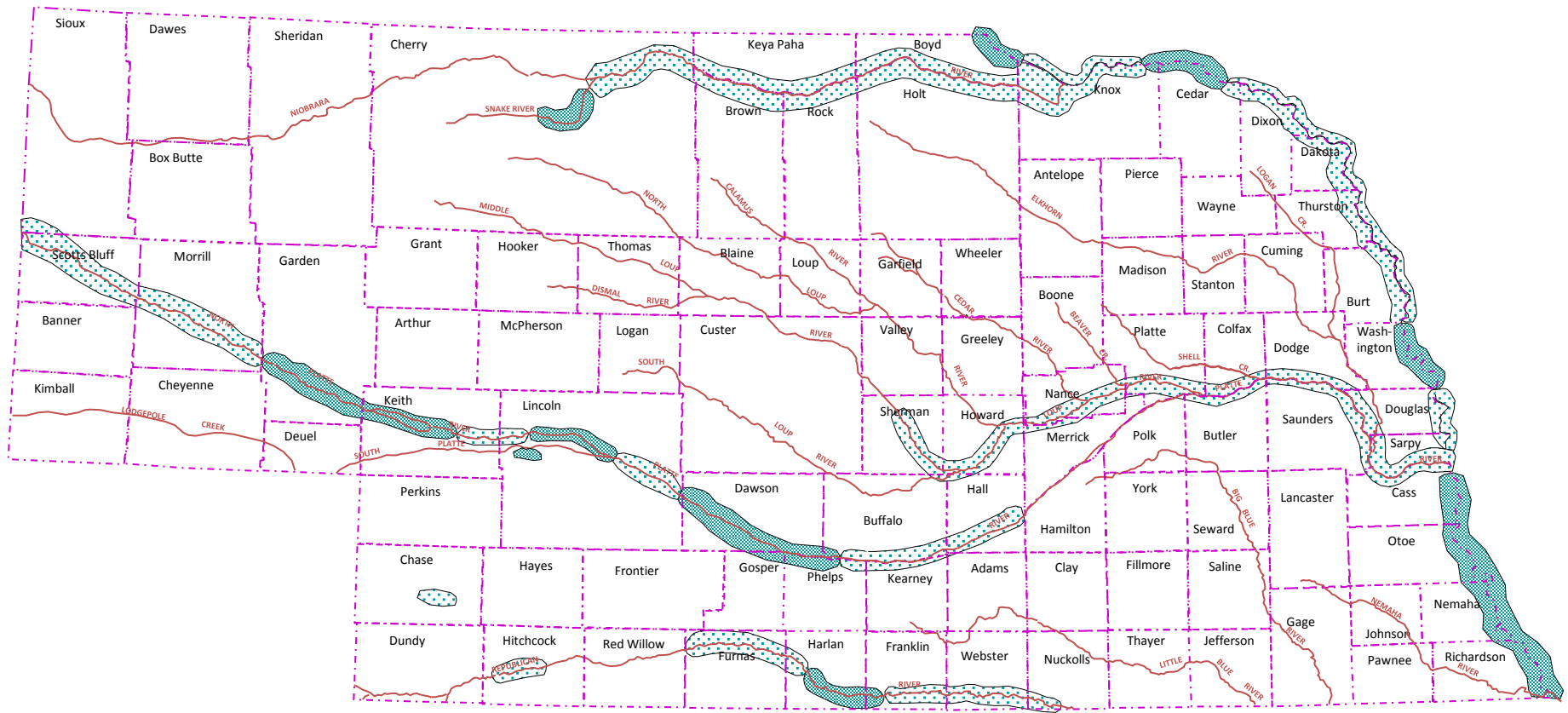
http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Golden_Eagle/lifehistory

Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

Nesting Distribution in Nebraska



Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) Wintering Distribution in Nebraska



MODERATE DENSITY



HIGH DENSITY

