



the documented Nachusa deer attack combine to suggest the Wisconsin carcass was actually a Golden Eagle kill (Robert Russell of US Fish and Wildlife Service-Division of Migratory Birds, pers. comm.).

A couple documented European and American reports of Golden Eagle attacks on brown bears were recently summarized (Sorensen et al. 2008), including one incident where a Golden captured and carried away the smallest of three cubs before the mother bear could react. The eagle carried this vocalizing cub up the mountainside until they were lost from view in the clouds near the mountaintop.

Despite the documented kills of an amazing variety of larger mammals by the Golden Eagle, none are as big or as heavy as the white-tailed deer. The killing of a four-point antlered white-tailed deer in Arizona in 1916 (Bent 1961) and the remains of the deer species at a Golden Eagle nest (Eakle et al. 1986) likely represent two of the only known confirmed killings of this large deer species by a Golden Eagle.

I initially thought the eagle at Nachusa was a severely hungry immature trying to go beyond its capabilities. But upon examination of the photos, I realized the bird was most likely a 2.5-year-old bird in its third winter. The diminished white in its underwing, little remaining white on upperwing, golden nape feathering and lack of a dark edge along tail tip, among other markings, confirm this age (Jonsson 1993). Typically it takes a Golden Eagle about six to seven years to reach full adult plumage. The eagle I saw was likely an experienced hunter pursuing prey it believed it had a chance to kill.

The late December Christmas Bird Count 2009/2010 season, which covers the Nachusa Grasslands and surrounding areas, recorded a number of raptors hunting here, indicating sufficient prey items available. By the time of this eagle attack episode, many of these same raptor

species found on the CBC had nearly doubled in number (and in the case of Rough-legged Hawk, the 15 found on this day were more than double the CBC count tally). Ample small mammal prey would have been present in December, but for the site to host such a raptor number increase by February, there must have been a spike of small mammal births.

Measuring out the boundaries of the December and February sightings, it became clear this eagle was hunting in at least a 13-square-mile area (near Ogle County Flagg Road on the north, Lee County's Hoosier Road to the east, Franklin Creek Natural Area on the south and nearly two miles west of Nachusa Grasslands). With plenty of other nearby appropriate habitat, it's conceivable this eagle's winter territory was up to 20 square miles!

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