

Banding Golden Eagles Along The South Saskatchewan River - A Picture Story

Photos by Hans Dommasch. (Text by Mary Houston)



Typical coteau country along the South Saskatchewan River, where Golden Eagles nest.

Where the South Saskatchewan River cuts through the Missouri Coteau for some 60 miles between the ferry at Riverhurst and the Saskatchewan Landing bridge, rugged river "breaks" extend for several miles back from the river and offer suitable habitat for nesting Golden Eagles. Since there are only a few areas in Saskatchewan where Golden Eagles nest, this rough terrain attracts the bird bander. With an intrepid climber to scale the cliffs along the river or the coulees running to it, nests can be approached and the young eagles banded before they are old enough to fly.

We first learned of Golden Eagles nesting in the Beechy area when Dave Santy, an old timer of the district, wrote a short item about them in the *Blue Jay* (16:151-152). Actually, ever

since arriving in the Beechy district about 1910, Mr. Santy had found or known of active eyries of the Golden Eagle every year. In the *Blue Jay* item Santy described his most recent visit to an eagle's eyrie on June 29, 1958, with Frank Roy.

My husband and I first visited the area with Dave Santy on June 21, 1959, but our 840-mile weekend trip was a disappointment. The single eaglet was dead in the nest, apparently having died from starvation when the parents deserted the nest after being kept under too constant observation by an eastern photographer in the days preceding our visit.

On June 24, 1960, we again visited the area with Mr. Santy and two young eagles were banded. Later that year, the two young from this



Dave Santy anchors the rope for the climb down the steep cliff.



Stuart Houston, having descended the rope, bands the young eagle. Remains of the eagle's rabbit dinner can be seen at the nest.

nest were seen by Mr. Santy foraging up and down the valley.

In 1961, three nests were visited: on June 27 one bird was banded in a nest located by Ralph Carson; on June 28 Mr. Santy took us to two nests, one of these at the site of the 1960 nest and having two young, the other in a new location with one young. No eagles were banded in 1962 when we were away from Saskatchewan in late June.

This year Mr. Santy located three eagle nests which we visited on July 1. One of these was the old site visited twice previously. Accompanied by Mr. Santy and his grandson, Stanley Peters, who had taken part in each of the previous climbs, Scout Commissioner Doug Redley, and Pete Perrin with his 4-wheel drive truck, the expedition braved impassable country roads to band four eagles in the three nests. One of the nests had been washed down from the cliff, and one young was dead in it, as a result of the heavy June rains.

The topography of this country will be altered by the flooding of the valley to create the South Saskatchewan reservoir, but we hope that sufficient rough terrain will be preserved above to provide nest sites for Golden Eagles.



The young eagle wearing its band.