

GOLDEN EAGLE ATTEMPTS TO KILL SANDHILL CRANE

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In October eagles congregate along the South Saskatchewan River southwest of Lacadena, Saskatchewan. There were 48 on October 17, 1974 and probably more than 50 on October 28, 1976. In 1974, 1975 and 1976, eagles were observed feeding on ducks and geese. Never had a kill by one of these birds been witnessed although D. N. Nieman watched an adult Golden Eagle stoop unsuccessfully on 12 flying Canada Geese on October 13, 1976, while flying a waterfowl survey in the area. Kuyt has observed Golden Eagles attack White-fronted Geese.²

Walkinshaw indicates "that eagles often attack cranes in Nebraska", however, Bent does not mention the Sandhill Crane as a food item of Golden Eagles.³ On October 4, 1976, I saw a Golden Eagle attempting to kill a crane adjacent to a loafing and roosting slough used by Sandhill Cranes, Mallards, White-fronted, Snow and Canada geese near Lacadena.

By 1430 I was within 0.4 km of about 3,000 cranes and 5,000 geese feeding on an oat stubble field. At 1431 all the birds began rising, milling about and landing 0.2-1.6 km away in stubble and summerfallow. While scanning the field as the birds were flushing, an immature Golden Eagle was observed on the ground 10 m from an apparently injured adult Sandhill Crane. The crane was flopping on the ground unable to stand or fly.

A strong 65 km/h wind was blowing and the eagle spread its wings, caught the wind and soared above the crane as hundreds of cranes and geese soared overhead. The eagle rose to a height of about 15 m, stooped and hit the crane lightly on the back. Then it landed and clawed, pecked and



Golden Eagle

Gary W.

flapped its wings at the crane which also flapped and stabbed back at the eagle. This fight continued for about 30 seconds before the crane tried to stand, only to fall back to the ground.

The eagle again took off but this time landed about 70 m away from the stricken crane. It began walking and hopping towards the crane and stopped at 1437 about 64 m away. Meanwhile the crane was maintaining a low, spreadwing posture with its wings down and neck outstretched. Some minutes later the eagle moved closer and paused for a minute before flying again and landing next to the crane. As the eagle alighted the crane raised its wings and with the aid of the strong wind was able to get airborne. It flew against the wind towards the roosting slough, trailing one leg which appeared to be broken close to the body.

the feeding cranes and geese had
ned at the eagle's last flight and
ed above it. The eagle then flush-
nd flew to the southwest through
milling and flushing birds and out
ght at 1448.

1520 the wounded crane was
ted with the spotting scope. It was
g on the slough about 45 m from
e, on ice near open water with its
gs spread. As the ice was thin, it
impossible for me to reach the

cause the initial contact between
e and crane was not observed, I

do not know whether the eagle was
preying on a wounded crane or if the
bird's injuries resulted from the
eagle's attack.

¹BENT, A. C. 1961. Life histories of North
American birds of prey. Part 1. Dover,
Inc., New York. 409 pp.

²KUYT, E. 1974. Golden Eagles attack
White-fronted Geese. Blue Jay 32:
227-228.

³WALKINSHAW, L. H. 1949. The Sandhill
Cranes. Bull. 29 Cranbrook Inst. Sci.,
Bloomfield Hills, Mich. 202 pp.

