

GOLDEN EAGLES NEST SUCCESSFULLY IN TREES

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The Golden Eagle in Saskatchewan is typically a bird of the drier river valleys and "badlands." The overwhelming majority of pairs build their nests on steep clay banks of rivers and their tributary coulees. Between 1960 and 1984 Houston banded 107 young in 72 successful cliff nests. Even in northern Saskatchewan, Golden Eagle sites have been on rocky ledges, avoiding use of the universally prevalent trees.²

Twice, ranchers have taken us to an "eagle nest" in a tree on the plains but each time the birds proved to be Ferruginous Hawks. We have heard, after the event, of one seemingly authentic

report of a pair of Golden Eagles nesting in a large cottonwood in the South Saskatchewan River Valley within 50 km of Leader. Edward Arnold also found a pair nesting in a willow in the McDonald Hills north of present Dysart in late June 1885.¹

In 1977 the cliff-nesting pair near Riverhurst, after failing to produce young in 9 of 12 successive annual attempts, no doubt partly because of disturbance from fishermen's boats immediately below their traditional nesting site after the filling of Lake Diefenbaker, attempted to nest in a tree. A large new nest was built 22 feet from the ground in an introduc-



Figure 1. *Adult Golden Eagle on nest near Matador*

C.S. Houston



Figure 2. *Kelwin Wylie banding eaglet*

Bruce Tomlinson

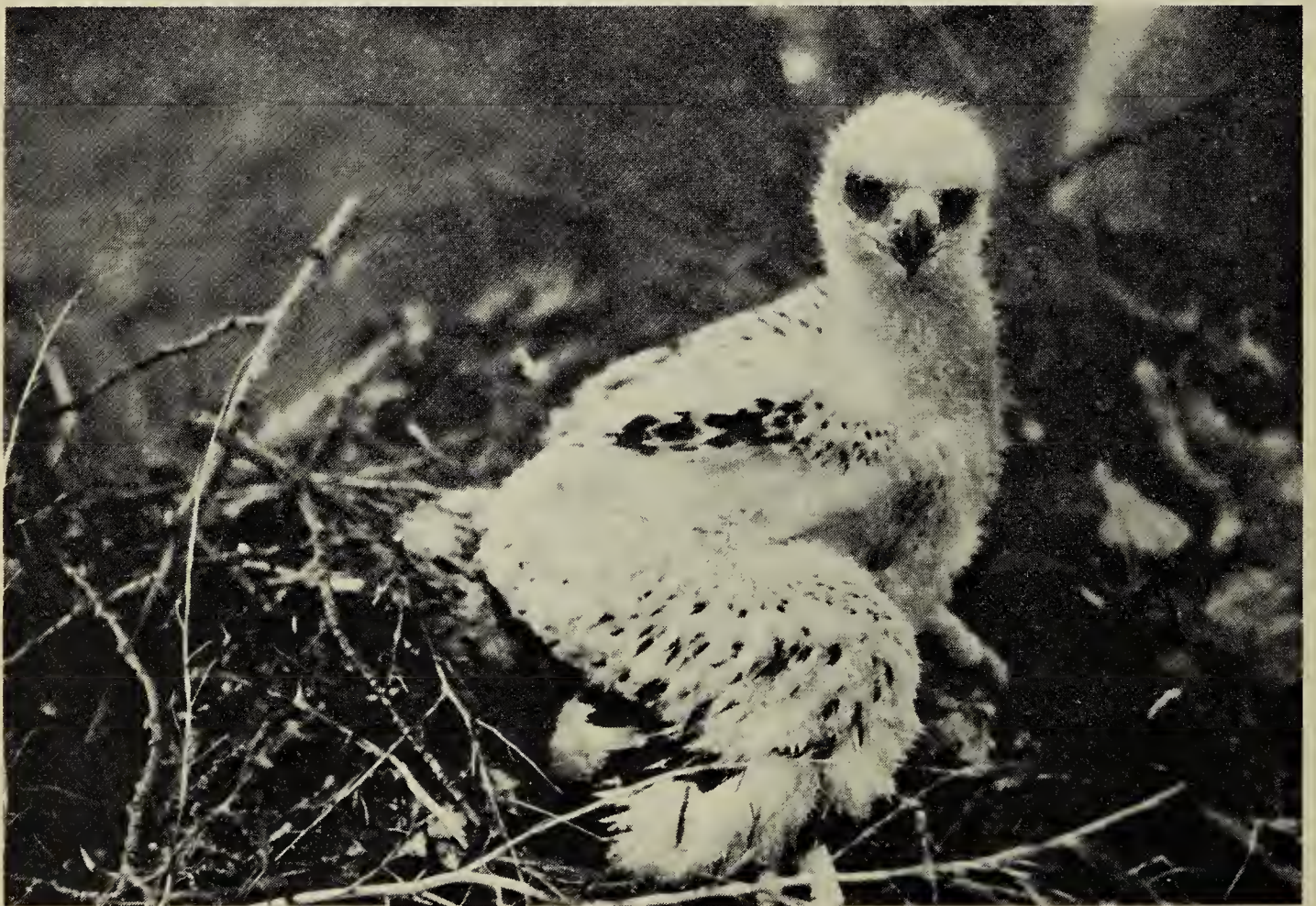


Figure 3. *Young eaglet in nest*

C.S. Houston

ed European White Poplar in a deserted shelter belt about a mile from the river. The adult eagle sat tightly on the nest while Lorne Hamilton seeded the surrounding field on 20-22 April. The eagle showed no fear of the tractor. However, when the tree was climbed on 4 June it contained a Mallard incubating four duck eggs. Clearly the eagle had abandoned her attempt sometime during May.

Not until 1984 did we visit a successful Golden Eagle nest in a tree. Indeed, half of the known successful pairs in 1984, two of four, nested in trees, all well away from the river. On our eagle banding trip of 9 June we went first to the nest found by Dan Zazelenchuk on the Co-op ranch near Matador. The nest was less than a mile from farm buildings and 8 miles north of the river. It was 18 feet from the ground in an introduced European Poplar (Fig. 1). The single, good-sized downy eagle was banded (Fig. 2,3). Dan informed us that his nest had also been used by the eagles in 1983.



Figure 4. *Adjacent successful nests of Black-billed Magpie and Golden Eagle northwest of Swift Current; Bruce Tomlinson in foreground*
Kelly Wylie.

The second nest was in a smaller pasture, northwest of Swift Current and 20 miles south of the river. The eagle nest was 22 feet from the ground in a Green Ash, only 5 feet above an active Black-billed Magpie nest in which we banded three young. It had been found by Derek Kreuger. Two downy eaglets were banded.

Later, on 3 July, Houston was shown a third Golden Eagle nest in a very large willow tree about 20 feet from the ground on the ranch of Joe Letournus southeast of Val Marie. This nest, only half a mile from the United States boundary, had raised two young in 1983. Houston had scouted a shelter belt less than 4 miles north of there 9 July 1983 when searching for Ferruginous Hawk sites and had found a Northern Mockingbird singing. We wish we had known of the site four miles to the south, although the young eagles would probably have fledged by the end of June.

¹ HOUSTON, C.S., and M.J. BECHARD. 1982. Edward Arnold, enthusiastic oologist. *Blue Jay* 40:184-192.

² WHITFIELD, D.W.A., D.W. DAVIS, J.M. GERRARD, and W.J. MAHER. 1969. Golden Eagles in central Saskatchewan. *Blue Jay* 27:74-79.



Figure 5. *Stuart Houston banding eaglets*
Bruce Tomlinson