

**LOUISIANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE
RARE BIRD DOCUMENTATION**

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Species: Golden Eagle, *Aquila chrysaetos*

Location: Willow Island, Cameron Parish, Louisiana

Date: 2 November 2019

Age and sex: Juvenile or nearly so, sex unknown

Molt status: Perhaps some inner primary molt

Number of individuals: Two (!)

Other observers: Anna Hiller, Arthur Liles, Bonnie Duman, Casey Wright, Eamon Corbett, Gregory Hejnar, Jane Crone, John Nelson, Judy Matsuoka, Paul Conover, Virginia Mayo, Bernadette Kolb

Original observers: Oscar Johnson, Eamon Corbett, Paul Conover

Circumstances: A Yellow Rails and Rice Festival field trip. We had checked the parking lot area at the end of the road south of Willow Island, and then walked down the beach for a short ways in both directions, having split into two groups. I think both groups found the eagles about the same time. Eamon and I both found them from our group and I think Paul found them from the second group. The eagles came in from the east and were first spotted quite a long ways away. They slowly circled and drifted over, eventually coming nearly directly over the parking lot before heading off slowly to the west and out of sight in the distance. We had been seeing many raptors migrating overhead in this fashion all morning, so I suspect that these eagles were also migrants. Weather: cool, clear, light breeze. eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61179992>

Description: Two massive dark raptors, easily dwarfing a nearby *Accipiter*. Both birds were similar in appearance, being entirely dark brown except for three large obvious and distinct white patches. Two white patches were at the base of the inner primary feathers, extending slightly onto the outer secondaries, but covering less than half of any given feather. The tail was mostly white with a broad black terminal band. Both birds showed the characteristic pale brown ('golden') nape. Otherwise the bills were pale, possibly with a yellow cere, and the legs were also pale, possibly yellow. The flight style was distinctive, they spent most of their time soaring (I'm not sure that I ever saw either bird flap) and had long straight wings held at a slight dihedral, which at a distance almost made them look like a Turkey Vulture. In a few of the photos it looks like there might be some replaced inner primaries, but I'm not positive.

Discussion: A pretty straightforward identification, especially given the diagnostic photos. Given the mostly even-length flight feathers, I think that both of these birds are either juveniles or hatch years that have just started a wing molt.







