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LETTERS.

STATUS OF THE GOLDEN EAGLE IN IRELAND.

To the Editors of BRITISH BIRDS.

SIRS,—The Rev. F. C. R. Jourdain's note in *British Birds* (*antea*, p. 211) will be read with great interest by those ornithologists who would wish to see the Golden Eagle (*Aquila ch. chrysaetus*) re-establish itself in Ireland, where it was once a familiar object. There is some hope that it may yet do so. Although I cannot speak of the counties of Mayo and Galway from personal observation, yet I have little doubt, from information in my possession, that at least one pair of Eagles has reoccupied during the last two years a former haunt in the west, and it is possible that these are not the sole representatives of the species in Connaught.

With regard to Co. Donegal, I can confidently assert that no Eagles have bred since 1910. Their last eyries were in the Slieve League and Glenveigh Mountains. In the former a pair appeared in 1912, but one disappeared the following spring, and the survivor was shot in 1915. At Glenveigh, the last pair was seen in 1910. One of these was shot the following year, and since that date a solitary straggler has appeared intermittently, and I have records of its appearance in 1924, and 1925. Probably this is the bird seen by Mr. French, but if so, it has not yet succeeded in finding a mate. Owing to the restrictions in the use of firearms, and the almost complete cessation of game preserving in those counties which they frequented of old, Golden Eagles would certainly be more free from molestation now than at any time during the past fifty years. C. V. STONEY.

LIFTING POWER OF THE GOLDEN EAGLE.

To the Editors of BRITISH BIRDS.

SIRS,—I hope Mr. MacDonald will give us further particulars about the small lamb which he found in an Eagle's nest (*antea*, p. 219) and tell us whether it was stillborn and what was its weight. During the evening of June 14th, 1925, I observed that a hen Golden Eagle had considerable difficulty in lifting a blue hare, weighing, say, six or seven pounds, from the ground, although, once the bird was in flight, she carried her prey quite easily to the nest, where my friend, Arthur Brook, photographed her arrival. In the course of two tours in the Highlands we have never been able to find any direct evidence that the Golden Eagle steals living lambs, although it is generally accepted that it does so. The fact that the Eagle seemed with great difficulty to lift so small an animal as a blue hare seemed to us very significant.

Mr. Witherby has been good enough to give me two references which do not altogether agree with our conclusions.

In the first (*B.B.*, Vol. XV., p. 24) it is stated that a lamb weighing 19 lbs. was carried by an Eagle for two miles and a half. This story was told by an anonymous Scotch soldier to a resident in Farnham during the war. I, personally, cannot accept such evidence.

In the second, a letter from Lt.-Col. H. Delmé-Radcliffe (*B.B.*, Vol. XV., p. 217), the writer describes how in the Himalayas he saw a Golden Eagle carry a large marmot for half a mile, flying low but "fairly easily." The Eagle was shot and it was found that the marmot weighed slightly more than the Eagle, the latter being about "10 lbs. and the marmot about 1 lb. more."

Lastly, a very interesting letter appeared in the *Field* (August 6th, 1925, p. 260) from Mr. C. H. Donald, who states that he had seen a

good deal of the Himalayan form of the Golden Eagle (*A. chrysaëtus daphanea*) and had kept four as pets at various times, so that he had been able to see and test their strength. With regard to their carrying powers he goes on to say :—

“ Of course, a great deal depends on the nature of the ground and the position of the wind. Given a steep hillside and a fairly strong wind blowing up, to give him a good start, I don't think an Eagle will have much difficulty in carrying double its own weight and something to spare, but on the flat it would be about as much as he can do to raise his own weight off the ground.

The Golden Eagle, in the Himalayas, varies tremendously in size and weight. I found a record of an old female I shot in Kashmir in 1906 as weighing 16 lb., and one of my own pets, a huge bird, was very nearly 14 lb.

You will see that Hume, in *Rough Notes*, records having taken a fish from a Pallas's Fish-Eagle, which the latter had carried right across the river, weighing 13 lb. 2 oz., and I do not think a Pallas's Fish-Eagle would ever exceed 10 lb. in weight, if that.”

Since the above has been put into type I have received the following interesting evidence of the Golden Eagle taking living lambs.

George McKenzie of Grantown-on-Spey, writes, on February 8th, 1926, as follows :—“ While attending my father's sheep on the farm of Dirdhu, on May 1st, 1910, I came across a ridge of the hill and saw a Golden Eagle attacking a young lamb about fifty yards below me. The Eagle rose with the lamb grasped in its talons, but when I shouted and threw my stick, it dropped the lamb which I found with a deep gash in its throat and some scars on its back. I took it home and it recovered but was weak from loss of blood for some time.

Early in the morning on the Thursday following I disturbed the Eagle, which rose about eighty yards on the far side of the burn from me. On the near side of the burn and at least 150 yards from where the Eagle rose, I found a ewe which I knew had given birth to a lamb that morning. The ewe was bleating and running about looking for her lamb but it was not to be seen, although I found the very spot where it was dropped. I then remembered about the Eagle, and after what I had seen the Sunday before I suspected it might have taken it. I went across the burn to where I saw it rise and there found the lamb. It was dead but fully matured, and as far as I could judge had been born alive as it seemed to have been well licked by its mother all over, which would have been impossible if it had been born dead.”

This evidence is confirmed by John G. McKenzie, brother of the above, from whom I hope to receive details of other cases later.

Alex Kinnaird of Boat of Garten writes, on February 15th, 1926, as follows :—“ In the year 1898 I was a gamekeeper in Aberdeenshire, and about the last days of April I met the shepherd of a farm on my beat. While I was talking to him an Eagle came in sight on the slope of the hill. We watched it coming soaring over the sheep and lambs, and about five hundred yards where we were standing it darted down on a lamb which had been born about three-quarters of an hour before that. It carried it straight away. We followed on but saw no sign of the Eagle or lamb. The shepherd said he has lost them in the same way every year.”

H. A. GILBERT.

BISHOPSTONE, HEREFORD. *February 4th, 1926.*

[In *Field Observations on British Birds* the late F. Menteith Ogilvie, who had very considerable experience, has a good deal to say about

the destruction of lambs by Golden Eagles, though he gives few details. He states (p. 210) that "an Eagle that nests on a sheep-farm and starts on lambs, will go on taking them until they are grown too big for him to carry," and even says that the Eagle will pick them up at the rate of two and three a day. In support of the latter statement he describes how he found in the immediate vicinity of an eyrie (in which the hen was incubating) three freshly killed lambs besides a blue hare. He does not, however, state the age or weight of the lambs.—EDS.]