

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Golden eagles in Appalachian

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

We came to a stop on the shoulder of the dirt road, got out of the car, crossed the road, and the driver pointed to a spot near the top of a rocky cliff. It was a golden eagle nest, and on it was the first golden eagle I had ever seen. But that was Montana.

Golden eagles are well-known in the West, where populations number up to 35,000 birds, however, there's a much smaller, and lesser known Eastern population estimated at between 1,000 and 2,500 individuals, which was essentially unknown to ornithologists until the 1930s.

While the Mississippi River and the Atlantic seaboard are famous bird migration routes, the Appalachians are an important route for these eastern golden eagles, carrying them from their Canadian breeding grounds to their Appalachian wintering grounds, where they routinely winter as far south as central Alabama.

Like many raptors, golden eagles experienced declines over much of the last century and experienced a bit of a recovery in the wake of the banning of DDT and tighter controls on pesticides. In a move to boost eastern numbers, there were several efforts in the late 20th century to introduce additional birds into the Southern Appalachians. Today a major source of mortality for western golden eagles is electrocution from power lines, and there's growing concern in the east about the impact of wind-power development and the accompanying infrastructure.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.