

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

HISTORIC GOLDEN EAGLE DAY AT FRANKLIN MOUNTAIN HAWKWATCH

The largest single-day flight of Golden Eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) in eastern North America, according to records of the Hawk Migration Association of North America (www.hawkcoun.org), took place on 25 October 2018 at the Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch near Oneonta, NY. A total of 128 Golden Eagles was tallied by counters Peter Fauth and Becky Gretton and witnessed by numerous visitors. Many of the birds were documented in photographs by Curt Morgan.

The big day was preceded four days earlier by a flight of 41 goldens which briefly stood as the highest October count at the site. The day was also bracketed by counts of 24 on 24 Oct. and 19 on 26 Oct. Total Golden Eagles for October was 254, well above the 175 season total average in the 17 years since full-time counting began at the lookout, and even above the previous seasonal high of 252 in 2005.

This unprecedented movement of Golden Eagles in October came two weeks prior to the traditional fall migration peak in mid-November. Other eastern hawk watches known for significant Golden Eagle counts, including Hawk Mountain, Allegheny Front and Waggoner's Gap in Pennsylvania, also reported October totals considerably higher than normal.

No cause for this large, early and widespread movement is immediately apparent. A review of summer and fall 2018 weather records for October in the province of Quebec, where most eastern Golden Eagles nest, showed precipitation well below normal, with more snow cover than usual in October (www.nohrsc.noaa.gov/nsa/). However, October temperatures were normal (www.climat.meteo.gc.ca). Food supply could potentially be a factor, but no measure of this is readily available.

Golden Eagles do often move in a concentrated fashion in migration. Franklin Mountain has recorded 31 dates with counts of 20 birds or higher over the past two decades, including the previous single-day high of 71 on 11 Nov. 2005, a count of 57 on 11 Nov. 2016, and several counts in the 30s and 40s. The previous eastern North American record was 74, counted at Allegheny Front on 24 October 2015. Interestingly, the count at Allegheny was 66 Golden Eagles on the day following the record count of 128 at Franklin Mountain, following a consistent trend at the two sites.

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Golden Eagles, Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch, *Delaware*, 25 Oct 2018, © Curt Morgan.
See note p. 27.