

we got there?" pointing to the bird soaring to our south, sun at our back, a little over the horizon several hundred meters away. We all stopped walking and scanned with binoculars. My first thought was, that doesn't quite look like a buteo. Something different about its graceful, sweeping flight. Someone said, "Is that a Red-tailed Hawk?" to which I replied. "It doesn't quite look like one. I then suggested, "Is that an eagle?" by which I meant to suggest Bald Eagle (quite common in my area of Minnesota, and of those various immature plumages I am familiar.) Very shortly thereafter Mr. Seeler said, "That's a Golden Eagle! I think that's a Golden Eagle!" I immediately opened my tripod legs and studied the bird for perhaps one minute through my Pentax PF 80 spotting scope, first at the lowest 20-power, then zoomed to 40, through which I was able to follow it by panning my scope over the horizon. We continued to study the bird for about 3 minutes as it soared out of view below the tree horizon.

Only after watching the bird a couple of minutes did we check the two field guides we brought from, the car: The *Sibley's* (Eastern) and the *National Geographic* (third edition). We found a few paintings therein that confirmed our identification. It most closely resembles how the books say an immature Golden Eagle appears.

### *Appearance*

The first thing I noticed about the bird was its shape: definitely more buteo-like than accipiter-or falcon-like. It had long wings for its size - longer than any buteo I could think of - without the crook in the wings characteristic of an Osprey, and without the obvious dihedral-angle of the Turkey Vulture (though other raptors can fly this way). Its wings were spread broad, and the tail was fanned wide for soaring. Something else about its shape: the head did not protrude very far in front of the wings.

The next thing I noticed was its unusually large size. Though size is notoriously difficult to judge, especially from afar, without other raptors in close proximity for comparison, and for a less familiar species, yet by judging how large it appeared compared to the trees over which it hovered (it was perhaps 50 meters above them; not soaring high in the sky at all) and judging by how much detail is discernible with binoculars, I judged it to be larger than a Red-Tailed Hawk. That's why my first suggestion was eagle.

Regarding its coloration: overall medium to dark brown with white patches. When I tentatively suggested eagle, I had immature Bald Eagle plumage in mind. The first white I noticed was a large patch in the wing, just beyond the noticeably blackish "wrist" spot, toward the wingtips. At the time, I called I called them "white windows" and asked those checking the field guides while I scoped the bird to see which raptors had those distinctive white windows. The second white region was at the base of the tail. The tail ended in a dark brown terminal band, but between the band and the rump/body of the bird was a bright whitish band. I'd estimate half the tail area was white. The rest of the bird showed less obvious dark and light regions; the overall appearance was more of random dark and white streaking or patching, but no colors concentrated in any areas.

*Except the head.* At first I did not notice anything distinctive about the head- other than its relatively short extension beyond the wings' leading edge but, when the bird wheeled and rocked, I began to notice that certain angles of the sun showed a distinctively blonde appearance to the head. It was a kind of iridescence, giving a golden cast to an otherwise uniformly brownish head the same way that on some blackbirds the feathers can take on a purplish iridescence over their black feathers when viewed from certain angles. I could clearly see this color through the scope, though I don't remember mentioning it to our party at the time. I don't think anyone else mentioned aloud noticing its golden head.

After the bird flew out of sight, Mr. Seeler remarked how rare a sighting that was for the island, and we began to talk about having to write it up. Then we continued birding East Point and other regions on the north tip of PEI.

We also saw an identically-plumed bird perhaps an hour later, from a different location several kilometres south (near Elmira I believe; it was at the same place we found three Black-backed Woodpeckers). At that time, the eagle worked its way southwest, again soaring relatively low over the horizon. We watched this individual for perhaps a minute until it disappeared beyond the horizon. It behaved the same as the bird we'd seen earlier at East Point and we suspect it was the same individual.