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**For additional information and questions, please email
golden@nationaleaglecenter.org**

Golden Eagle Survey 2026

Final Report

On January 17th, 2026, over 227 citizen scientist volunteers from the National Eagle Center spread out across the blufflands and forested areas of Minnesota, Wisconsin, eastern Iowa, northwestern Illinois, and one route in Northern Kentucky for the 22nd Annual Wintering Golden Eagle Survey. They were seeking Golden Eagles that winter in the region.

Over the last couple of years with continued interest in the survey, we have been able to continue to add new routes to the survey area. New counties in Minnesota that were surveyed were Redwood, Renville, Brown, and Nicollet. In Wisconsin Outagamie, Sawyer, and Washburn. New counties in Iowa were Boone, Polk and Dallas. Many of these new survey areas are where potential habitat exists for wintering Golden Eagles and we have wanted to survey for some time. It will take some time for the new surveyors to learn these new routes, but all information gleaned will be very valuable for the survey. Because of the increased interest, we were also able to add 3 new specially focused routes in Minnesota as well.

This Survey began twenty-two years ago focusing on trying to better understand the wintering Golden Eagle population in this area, and it has done that, and will continue to do so. Since day one of the survey, we have also been documenting other raptors that are observed in the survey areas. Because of this effort, this survey is the largest one-day raptor survey in the country! The Center greatly appreciates all the time and energy and data that our citizen scientists dedicate to this survey.

We are always proud of all of our surveyors, but this year's survey we were super excited to add several college students to our survey. They were from Winona State University in Winona Minnesota and Fox Valley Technical College in Wisconsin. We look forward to these students helping with future surveys and we give them encouragement as they consider careers in biology and natural sciences.

Many observers thought that the numbers of Golden Eagles and other raptors may have been lower this year due to this year's survey cold day, with many areas with temperatures around 10 to 18 degrees Fahrenheit for most of the day. Adding to the cold was a steady

barrage of light flurries throughout the day for most of the survey area. Although the snow did not accumulate much, it did make it challenging to see very far into the trees or up on the bluffs. Even with those difficult viewing conditions observers were able to tally 111 Golden Eagles. The survey continues to show that the highest density of wintering Golden Eagles is located in the Driftless area, but there are many forested areas with interspersed openings across our region where Golden Eagles are wintering as well.

Although the number of Bald Eagles was down slightly from last year, still over 1,756 of them were observed. Compared to the Golden Eagles that stay pretty tight within their winter territories, Bald Eagles are known to roam far and wide depending on food availability, so numbers from one individual survey area can vary greatly from year to year.

Even with such high numbers of Bald Eagles recorded in our area, It is still very important to conduct surveys such as this one to monitor the population and observe trends over time. It is also very important for us to continue to educate about the hazards that eagles and other raptors are facing such as lead poisoning, avian flu, vehicle collisions, and rodenticides among others.

Please read the survey overview below, and if you have any questions, please email golden@nationaleaglecenter.org.

Also, over the next few months be sure to check out the Golden Eagle section on the National Eagle Center's website as more data and information will be added to the trends over the years for each survey area. Do us a favor and let your birding friends know that we are still expanding our survey areas and that if they are interested in helping, have them send an email expressing interest to the same email address above.

Thank you so much for your help and interest in learning more about and helping our fascinating raptor by being a citizen scientist.

-Scott Mehus

Golden Eagle Survey Coordinator

Overview

Citizen Scientist Observers: 227

Survey Routes: 97

States Covered: 5 (MN, WI, IA, IL, KY)

Counties: 69 **Total Survey Area:** ~25,000 sq. miles

Total Surveying Hours: 1,126 **Total Miles Driven:** 9,932

Total Golden Eagles Observed	
2026	111
2025	139
2024	115
2023	83
2022	99

Golden Eagles (Adult : Non-Adult)	
2026	61% / 39%
2025	60% / 40%
2024	67% / 33%
2023	66% / 34%
2022	67% / 33%

Total Bald Eagles Observed	
2026	1,756
2025	1,800
2024	2,607
2023	1,737
2022	1,643

2026 Most Active Routes (Bald Eagles)		
MN 22	Anoka County	201
IL 03	Jo Daviess/Carroll/Whiteside	133
WI 20	Pierce County	104
WI 05	Buffalo County	99
WI 11	Buffalo County	62

Unidentified Eagles	
2026	72
2025	67
2024	150
2023	49

2026 Most Active Routes (Golden Eagles)		
WI 05	Buffalo County	8
WI 20	Pierce County	5
MN 01	Goodhue County	5
WI 24	LaCrosse/Vernon County	4
WI 27	Crawford County	4
WI 58	Juneau/Sauk County	4
WI 01	Buffalo/Pepin County	4
WI 03	Buffalo County	4

Bald Eagles (Adult : Non-Adult)	
2026	72% / 28%
2025	74% / 26%
2024	74% / 26%
2023	78% / 22%
2022	74% / 26%

2025 Most Active Routes (Bald Eagles)		
MN 22	Anoka County	185
WI 31	Grant County	98
WI 10	Buffalo/Trempealeau County	80
WI 16	Buffalo County	65
WI 06	Buffalo County	48

% Routes Reporting 1 or More:	
Golden Eagles	53%
Bald Eagles	99%
Red-Tailed Hawks	87%
Rough-Legged Hawks	55%

Hawks

Total Red-Tailed Hawks Observed	
2026	537
2025	714
2024	582
2023	609
2022	866

2026 Most Active Routes (Red-Tailed Hawks)		
WI 60	Monroe/Vernon County	27
WI 24	LaCrosse/Vernon County	19
IA 02	Allamakee County	19
IA 07N	Winneshiek County	15
WI 16	Trempealeau/Buffalo County	14

2025 Most Active Routes (Red-Tailed Hawks)		
WI 24	LaCrosse/Vernon County	36
WI 25	Vernon County	28
WI 50	Sauk County	23
WI 60	Monroe/Vernon County	21
WI 28	Crawford/Richland County	20

Total Red-Shouldered Hawks Observed	
2026	11 (6 in Kentucky)
2025	6 (5 in Kentucky)
2024	0
2023	2
2022	1

Total Rough-Legged Hawks Observed	
2026	137
2025	117
2024	100
2023	213
2022	199

2025 Most Active Routes (Rough-Legged)		
MN 11	Houston County	8
WI 48	Burnett County	7
IA 01	Allamakee County	6
IA 07 (N)	Winneshiek County	5
IA 50	Sauk County	5

2026 Most Active Routes (Rough-Legged)		
MN 11	Houston County	8
IA 02	Allamakee County	7
IA 07S	Winneshiek County	7
WI 06	Buffalo County	6
MN 12	Houston County	6

Total Sharp-Shinned Hawks Observed	
2026	6
2025	11
2024	4
2023	7
2022	8

Total Cooper's Hawks Observed	
2026	19
2025	10
2024	11
2023	21
2022	16

Falcons

Total American Kestrels Observed	
2026	120
2025	192
2024	65
2023	140
2022	111

Total Merlins Observed	
2026	6
2025	0
2024	4
2023	3
2022	5

2026 Most Active Routes (American Kestrels)		
MN 33	Redwood/Renville/Brown/Nicollet	10
WI 25	Vernon County	9
KY 01	Bullit/Nelson County	9
MN 09	Houston/Winona County	7
WI 22	LaCrosse County	7

Total Northern Harriers Observed	
2026	26
2025	35
2024	10
2023	15
2022	6

2025 Most Active Routes (American Kestrels)		
WI 25	Vernon County	15
IL 03	Jo Daviess/Carroll/Whiteside Co.	13
WI 30	Grant County	11
WI 28	Crawford/Richland County	8
WI 29	Vernon/Crawford/Richland Co.	8

Shrikes

Total Northern Shrikes Observed	
2026	6
2025	4
2024	17
2023	10
2022	6

Other Raptors

Other Raptor Species Observed
Great-Horned Owl (2)
Barred Owl (3)
Short-eared Owl (3)
Snowy Owl (1)

Other Noted Species

American Crow	House Finch
American Goldfinch	House Sparrow
American Robin	Killdeer
American Tree Sparrow	Lapland Longspur
American Wigeon	Mallard
Belted Kingfisher	Mourning Dove
Black-Capped Chickadee	Northern Cardinal
Blue Jay	Northern Flicker
Brown Creeper	Pileated Woodpecker
Bufflehead	Purple Finch
Canada Goose	Red-Bellied Woodpecker
Cedar Waxwing	Red-Breasted Nuthatch
Common Goldeneye	Red-Headed Woodpecker
Common Grackle	Red-Winged Blackbird
Common Merganser	Ring-Necked Pheasant
Common Raven	Rock Pigeon
Common Redpoll	Ruffed Grouse
Dark-Eyed Junco	Sharp-Tailed Grouse
Downy Woodpecker	Snow Bunting (1 route with flock of >100)
Eastern Bluebird	Song Sparrow
Eurasian Collared Dove	Trumpeter Swan
European Starling	Tufted Titmouse
Gadwall	Tundra Swan
Hairy Woodpecker	White-Breasted Nuthatch
Horned Lark	Wild Turkey

Non-Bird Species

Beaver	Red Fox
Coyote	River Otter
Eastern Cottontail	Squirrel (Fox, Gray, Red)
Eastern Timber Wolf	Virginia Opossum
Gray Fox	White-tailed Deer
Raccoon	