

Bald Eagle and Golden Eagle In-Flight ID of Juvenile, Sub-Adult, and Adult Age Classes, Using Shape, Flight Behaviour and Field Marks

Bald Eagle (BE)	Golden Eagle (GE)
Aging an adult or juvenile Bald Eagle is less challenging than aging a Sub-adult by year due to variability in timing of molt and variability in plumage. A BE can reach adulthood in 4 to 6 years.	Aging GE's by year is challenging. 1st year birds can lack white in the flight feathers and conversely 4th year birds can have white visible in the flight feathers. To identify age class, a good view of the tail feathers is key. GE can reach adulthood in 4 to 5 years.
SHAPE	
Head projection is <u>more</u> than half of tail length, greater in adults	Head projection is <u>less</u> than half of tail length
Beak is larger than Golden Eagle	Beak is smaller than Bald Eagle
In a soar, looks plank-like	In a soar, secondary bulge/wing pinches in near the tail
FLIGHT BEHAVIOUR	
Steady in flight with big circles in a soar	
Wingbeats are even, deliberate, and deep	Wingbeats are even, deliberate, but more shallow than BE
Wingbeats have a "higher" upstroke	Wingbeats end abruptly into a dihedral
COMBINATION OF FIELD MARKS FOR EACH AGE CLASS	
Adult (definitive)	
White head	Dark head with golden crown and nape
Cere/Beak is all lemon yellow	Cere is yellow, beak is horn-coloured with black tip
Dark body	Dark body
Upperside is dark	Upperside has a narrow, pale area along the upperwing coverts
Underside is dark	Underwing coverts are dark, flight feathers are grey-toned, dark trailing edge
White tail	Dark tail, may have grey banding/mottling (may also retain trace of white)
Sub-Adult (highly variable)	
Head gradually gets more white	Head, crown and nape is same as adult
Cere/Beak gradually gets more yellow	Cere/Beak is same as adult
Wing coverts, especially in the axillaries, have white (variable)	Wing coverts are dark
Body is variable, can be mostly brown, or mostly white, or mix of both	Dark body
Flight feathers are typically dark	Flight feathers dark with white at base (variable, or none at all)
Back can have a white inverted triangle shaped patch	Leading edge and upperwing coverts are paler than rest of feathers
Tail, gradual decrease of dark terminal band and increase of white	Dark tail with gradually less white and more gray mottling, looks diffuse
Juvenile (limited variability)	
Head is dark	Head, crown and nape is same as adult
Cere/Beak is completely dark	Cere/Beak is same as adult
Wing coverts, especially in the axillaries, have white blotchiness (variable)	Wing coverts are dark
Dark body (can have some white flecking)	Dark body
Flight feathers are typically dark, two inner primaries are light	White at base of flight feathers (variable, sometimes none at all)
Trailing edge of wing is even	Trailing edge of wing is even
Dark tail with variable amount of white mottling	Tail has defined white base (white base size is variable)