

Golden Eagles over Franklin Mountain

On Oct. 25, 2018, we counted 128 Golden Eagles, a single-day record for eastern North America. The previous single-day high was 71 (Nov. 11, 2015) so the magnitude of this big day cannot be overstated. The reason for this Golden Eagle push two weeks before the traditional migration peak, is unknown.

—Andy Mason, Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch 2018 Report

The scaffold bristled with digital Yashicas clamped on scopes
and monopods strutting in khaki and camouflage, as a flock
of hawk-watchers scanned quadrants of sky from Otego
to the peaks where the Susquehanna swerves into the valley, and east.

I stood by, naked eye aswarm with floaters the one,
the other useless that magnifies and smears every human face.
Peter, half-felled by flu, and Becky tallied the count
and helped the dozen-some visitors identify specks

that could be buzzard, or goshawk, or harrier, or sharp-shinned
or rough-legged or Cooper's or red-tailed hawks, or merlin, falcon,
kite or kestrel, among twenty-nine listed, including Unknown Raptors,
hoping for Goldens riding the polar stream from Canada, or, better, one

gliding low and hungry on a hunt. I couldn't see diddle.
And it seemed weird to me to have the drum, but to my hand ungloved
the skin felt warm and taut. So I slipped away and up the path,
deer-silent for the spring of thatch underfoot.

I dug my heels in and labored up the grade, paused
to catch a breath at the hill's brow, midway through the field
walled in by limb-laced fir and hardwood, when a shape or shadow rose—no,
an enormous bird rose above the brim and—*Wait!* I yelled and I swear

[stanza break]

it gave pause mid-air while bone-chilled I fumbled the drum,
 and out of a cloud of sage-smoke started a roll of thunder
 that closed in, closed fast and passed, then the song brought
 a line of thunders helping the verse find drafts and currents

to ride and sign God-knows-what to the bird, white flame-tongued
 wings that skimmed the tree-rim, gliding so slowly with the song
 that so tethered the two of us it seemed the wall of trees revolved
 the way between the potter's thumb and fingers the new bowl turns.

We shared the easy slip of air around the bowl of circled trees.
 Once around, his flight feathers splayed, trimmed then splayed,
 eyes holding steady gaze, with each lift of song a fresh wind. A quick
 turn of his head and he vanished. Who'd not be at first forlorn?

But filled with that glory who'd mourn or sorrow for long
 or deny he'd gone to let the others of his kind know,
 ready for passage through this valley to the Catskills, that here,
 here someone had kept the song the eagles gave so long ago:

Wanbli gleska, naha anunca, heya a uh chun kay.

Mea trocha heya anpetu wawakeay:

“Golden eagles, Spotted eagles, the first to fly with the dawn,
 come see the people trying to become human beings! Come!”

So they did and were counted: one-hundred twenty-eight strong.