

## Golden eagle

The golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), Britain's most majestic bird of prey, is confined mainly to Scotland



The symbol of power, the golden eagle derives its name from the rich yellow feathers on its head and neck.

The rest of its plumage is dark brown. Its long broad rounded wings are fingered at the tips, while its tail has a dark terminal band and greyish banding towards the base. Young birds have a white tail with dark tips, and white patches on the wings, these darken as the birds mature and disappear altogether when they are about six years old.

Length: 75-88cm; wingspan: 204-220cm

### Status in UK

442 pairs, slowly increasing; AMBER listed; resident

### Population trends

The golden eagle needs a very large range, some 25 to 75 sq km, so it has never been common.

The species was, however, severely persecuted by shepherds and gamekeepers in the 18th and 19th centuries. The bird had disappeared from England by the 1780s and reached a low point in Scotland of 80 to 100 pairs in 1870. It was at about this time that sheep farming declined in the Highlands to be replaced by deer forest, and the eagles began to recover.

Although hit by persistent pesticides from sheep dip picked up from carcasses in the 1950s, the population was 424 pairs by 1982/3. They began breeding once more in England, in the Lake District, for the first time for over 180 years in 1969.

### Habitat and distribution

Golden eagles are found in the mountains and areas of high moorland in north-west Scotland, the Western Isles, the southern uplands and the Lake District

### Breeding

It builds a very large stick nest on a cliff ledge or in a tree. Traditional sites are used for many years, and a pair may have several eyries in their territory.

### Feeding

Mammals, mainly hares and rabbits, birds, especially grouse usually taken on the ground, and carrion particularly sheep and deer carcasses. Coastal pairs will take seabirds.