

GOLDEN EAGLE ATTACKS AND KILLS YEARLING MOUNTAIN GOAT

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RR 1, Site 190, Bowser, BC. V0R 1G0

In mid-March, 1989 my wife Marian Smith and I were visiting Kootenay National Park, British Columbia. We stopped on highway 93, below Mount Wardle, about 1000 hrs on a sunny day to scan the rock bluffs for Mountain Goats (*Oreamnos americanus*) and other wildlife. While scanning the mountainside, using a Redfield 15 x 45 telescope, I spotted a female Mountain Goat with two yearlings. One young was about 44 m below her on a rock ledge about 61 m long by 1.5 m wide with a 3-m vertical drop. I was watching this youngster when suddenly an adult Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) swooped in, hovered about 3 m above the goat for a few seconds, then attacked it by grabbing its neck. The yearling ran down the ledge for about 5 m with the eagle still attached to its neck. Then both fell about 3 m to the ground. The goat then ran down the hillside for about 44 m with the eagle still clinging to its neck. The goat was running through small alder trees, and the eagle was getting hit by them, so it released its grip. The

goat went into a cluster of evergreen trees and soon ran out of the trees and proceeded uphill to join its mother and sibling. Meanwhile, the eagle was about 90 m away and when the goat had made it about 30 m from the safety of the evergreens, it was struck again in the neck. The goat ran about 6 m before it fell down with the eagle on it. This observation is one of the most exciting, yet terrifying events, I have ever witnessed in nature.

Later that evening I contacted Kootenay National Park headquarters and provided them with details of my observation. The following morning, Graham Osborne, who was studying Mountain Goats in Kootenay National Park, visited the site and located the carcass (Figure 1). He confirmed that the goat was a yearling, a female weighing about 27 kg, and that the eagle had only eaten the heart. The following day, about 1200 hrs, the Golden Eagle had returned to feed on the goat carcass.



Figure 1. A yearling Mountain Goat killed by an adult Golden Eagle on Mount Wardle, BC. Mid-March 1989 (Graham Osborne). BC Photo 3297.

The Golden Eagle feeds primarily on small to medium-sized mammals, from ground squirrels (*Spermophilus* spp.) to marmots (*Marmota* spp.) (Kochert et al. 2002) but occasionally kills larger prey. The latter includes Coyote (*Canis latrans*) (Mason 2000), Pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana*) (Olendorff 1976), deer (*Odocoileus* spp.) (Olendorff 1976), Thinhorn Sheep (*Ovis dalli*) (Nichols and Bunnell 1999), Bighorn Sheep (*O. canadensis*) (Akenson and Akenson 1992, Sawyer and Lindzey 2002), and Mountain Goat (Brandborg 1955).

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About the Author

Barry Zettergreen loves the outdoors, especially camping and photography, and has been in a wheelchair for 33 of his 58 years. While living in Golden he conducted wetland surveys of birds in Burges and James Gadsen Park for Ducks Unlimited Canada and Wasa Park for the provincial government. He was also a regular contributor to The Birds of British Columbia project.