

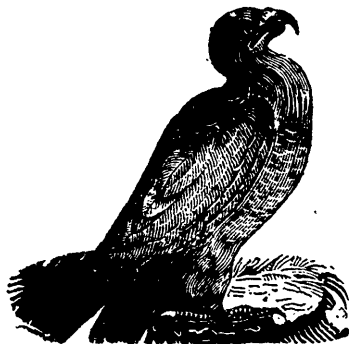
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NATURAL HISTORY



THE GOLDEN EAGLE.

The Golden Eagle is the largest and noblest of all those birds that have received the name of eagle. The length of the female is three feet and a half; the extent of its wings, eight and a half; it weighs from sixteen to eighteen pounds, but the male seldom weighs more than twelve pounds. In general, these birds are found in the mountainous and ill-peopled countries, and breed among the loftiest cliffs. They choose those places which are remotest from man, upon whose possessions they but seldom commit depredations, being contented rather to follow the wild game in the forest, than to risk their safety to satisfy their hunger. It requires great patience and much art to tame an eagle, and even though taken young, and brought under by long assiduity, yet still it is a dangerous domestic, and often turns its force against its master. Of all animals the eagle flies highest, and on this account he was called by the ancients the bird of Jove. Of all birds also, he has the quickest eye; but his sense of smelling is far inferior to that of the vulture.

He never pursues, therefore, but in sight: and when he has seized his prey, he stoops from his height, as if to examine its weight, always laying it on the ground before he carries it off.

Infants themselves, when left unattended, have been destroyed by these rapacious creatures; which probably gave rise to the fable of Ganymede's being snatched up by an eagle to heaven. An instance is recorded in Scotland of two children being carried off by eagles, but fortunately they received no hurt by the way; and, the eagles being pursued, the children were restored unhurt out of the nests to the affrighted parents.

The eagle is thus at all times a formidable neighbour: but peculiarly so when bringing up its young. It is then that the female as well as the male, exert all their force and industry to supply their young.

It happened some time ago, that a peasant resolved to rob the nest of an eagle that had built in a small island, in the beautiful lake of Killarney. He accordingly stripped and swam in upon the island, while the old ones were away: and, robbing their nest of its young, he was preparing to swim back, with the eaglets tied in a string; but, while he was yet up to the chin in the water, the old eagles returned, and, missing their young, quickly fell upon the plunderer, and, in spite of all his resistance, dispatched him with their beaks and talons.

The nest of the eagle is usually built in the most inaccessible cliff of the rock, and often shielded from the weather by some jutting crag that hangs over it. Sometimes, however, it is wholly exposed to the winds; as well sideways as above; for the nest is flat, though built with great labour. They are at first white: then inclined to yellow; and at last