

# Raptors return to Smith Rock State Park

**BY CRISTINA PETERSON**  
For The Bulletin

For centuries, probably longer, golden eagles have nested in the cliffs of Smith Rock State Park. This year will be no exception.



**PARKS**

Eagles are returning to some of the dozen documented nests in the park where they settle in and raise their young. Around this time each year, mating pairs add material to nests from previous years. Females lay one to four eggs and incubate them for about six weeks. They will then care for the fledglings for about three more months. Typically, only one or two will survive to fledge. Juvenile golden eagles reach full independence by sometime in the fall.

Golden eagles are protected by several laws including the

Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, the Migratory Bird Act, and the Lacey Act. The Eagle Act prohibits anyone from harassing, shooting, or possessing a bald or golden eagle or any of its parts. Eagle population numbers were once so low that the birds warranted specific measures to ensure their survival. These efforts have been successful in stabilizing populations.

Golden eagles are extremely sensitive to human disturbance. This can include the visual presence or noise impacts from people who are too close. If eagles encounter these unexpected stressors, they might abandon their nest and leave the young with little chance of survival.

Because of eagles' sensitivity to disturbance, the Monument area of the park is closed to climbing starting Jan. 15. Hikers using the Canyon Trail are limited to groups of four or less

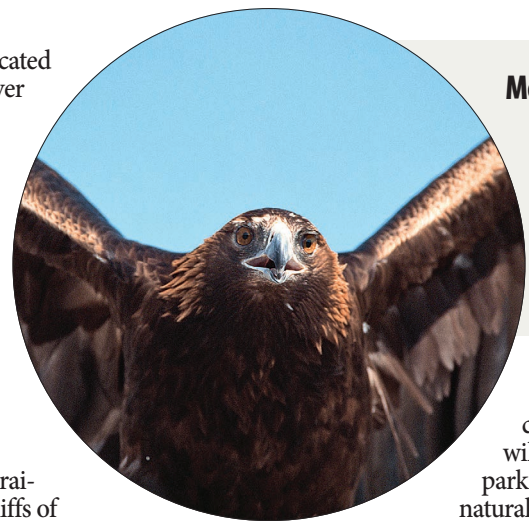
and noise in the area needs to be minimized. Additionally, the park-wide drone ban goes into effect. This ban prevents any unmanned aircraft from getting too close to the golden eagles or to other nesting raptors in the area. These closures will remain in effect until Aug. 1. Park staff post signs to notify visitors of these closures and share the information on their website and several partner websites as well.

Visitors can observe the nests from the small picnic shelter just a short walk from the parking area or from the Rim Trail by looking across the Crooked River, north toward the Monument area. The nests often look like dark areas on the wall but a lot more detail can be seen with a magnified view so don't forget to bring binoculars!

Eagles have also nested at another popular climbing area in Central Oregon known as

Trout Creek which is located along the Deschutes River north of Madras. Trout Creek is on land managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Still, the same laws apply to protecting golden eagles. To avoid disturbance, that area closes to climbing beginning Jan. 15 each year.

Other raptor species, such as peregrine and prairie falcon also use the cliffs of Smith Rock State Park to nest. These birds use pockets or small ledges called "scrapes." Additional climbing areas are sometimes closed in February or later if falcons are observed nesting. Typically falcons use the areas around Kiss of the Leper, but they've also been spotted near the Smith Rock Group and the Voyage of the Cowdog.



Jupiterimages

**Portrait of a golden eagle**

Climbers as a whole typically respect the closures at Smith and Trout Creek and help to ensure others do too. Hundreds of thousands of visitors enjoy Smith Rock State Park each year. Before it was a state park with trails winding through the canyon cut by

**More Information**

Visit Smith Rock State Park's website: [state-parks.oregon.gov](http://state-parks.oregon.gov). Search for Smith Rock State Park and look for any current closure notices.

the Crooked River, and cliffs with premier climbing routes, many wildlife species made the park their home. Protecting natural areas that include valuable habitat for these animals is one of the objectives of Oregon state parks.

Area closures to protect raptors from disturbance during their nesting season is one of the many ways the park upholds this aspect of their mission. The future of these species relies on people's compliance with these closures.



**TOP: A quail looks for food along the edge of thick bushes in front of a Bend business on Jan. 2**

**BOTTOM: An American Kestrel flies along the Deschutes River near the Old Mill District on Jan. 13.**

Ryan Brennecke/Bulletin photos

could lead to a belief that a climate similar to Central Oregon would not be a hot spot for birding.

Yet, compared to areas up north, Central Oregon is warm enough to stay for the winter. During the winter months, eagles and hawks are more common than other times in the year.

Making the hunt for finding and catching a glimpse of a bird is a yearlong activity.

"Every month of the year because birds are constantly in motion, spring and fall is when the most birds are in the area because they are migrating," said Gates. "We get dozens of rare birds every season."

Crabtree, who is a East Cascades Audubon Society member, spent Wednesday afternoon in the Redmond and Terrebonne area, managing to locate 40 different hawks.

"That particular field has been a hot spot for hawks for

the last four years," said Crabtree. "For some reason, there is just a huge concentration around there, not sure what it is, the people who own it let grass grow there. Hawks find it as a good place to hunt and eat during the winter."

Crabtree has been birding in Central Oregon since he moved here in 1981 and was birding 12 years prior to that. He found that being on the east

side of the Cascades, where the weather is more dry, made for better birding due to not having to battle the rain during the winter months.

In the almost 40 years of living in Central Oregon, he has seen the rise in popularity of birding spanning college-aged to retired people.

"When I moved here, there weren't a lot of birders," Crabtree said. "The ranks of birders

grew; now there is a strong contingent of birders. I'm not one of the young ones any more."

And to find a bird, oftentimes, you do not have to go far.

"One of the big attractions about birding is there are birds everywhere," Gates said. "There is nowhere you can't go in North America where you can't find a bird."

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**Birds**

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There are roughly 300 species of birds in Central Oregon, with about 150 that stay year-round, including various types of owls, hawks, geese and robins. The East Cascades Audubon Society lists more than 100 different spots between Deschutes, Crook and Jefferson counties. Three popular locations are Hatfield Lakes, Powell Butte and Crooked River National Grasslands.

"I like the challenge: There are many species that we have that are so similar to one another, it takes a lot of practice to know them apart, which is really rewarding and a lot of

fun," said Chuck Gates, of the Prineville Bird Club. "The best part is how beautiful the birds are. Birds I've seen 1,000 times, I never get tired of them."

Conventional wisdom says that birds will seek warmer climates during the winter, which

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