



## A Golden Fall from Grace

A golden eagle rescued by two Idaho Falls women  
learns to soar once again

By Alisa Clickenger

Photos Courtesy of Teton Raptor Center

**F**or many of us, living in Idaho Falls means we have the ability to get outside and be close to nature. There are endless opportunities for hiking, camping, hunting, dirt biking, and snowmobiling all within close proximity to city limits. On August 19, 2012, Angie Homer was out horseback riding with her good friend Kristi Davis, when the two of them got up close and personal with nature in a way that most of us never get to experience.

Angie and Kristi were horseback riding near Kelly Canyon, when Angie spotted a large bird perched close to the ground on a fallen tree. A professional animal handler, Angie immediately sensed that something was wrong, dismounted, and went to investigate. "I knew where he was didn't seem right," said Angie. "He was so close to the ground." As she approached, the bird hopped off the branch onto the ground, and then proceeded to fall beak-down into the leaves.

Mrs. Homer suspected it was a golden eagle, and did the correct thing by calling the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. The Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, also known as the "Eagle Act", prohibits the

transport or possession of eagles or eagle parts without a special license, of which Angie was aware. Dan Kelsey was the Conservation Officer on call that day, and Angie explained the animal's behavior as well as her guess that the bird was a golden eagle.

Normally the Idaho Department of Fish and Game recommends that people leave animals as they find them. Yet in this particular eagle's case, it was clear that the fallen-over raptor would not survive left on its own. Thanks to Angie's willingness to get involved to move the bird, Mr. Kelsey agreed to meet the women and take custody of the golden eagle.

The only problem was, the two women were deep in the woods on a narrow path and could not explain exactly where they were. The eagle was so ill and inactive that it was decided that Angie would attempt to wrap up the eagle and transport it via horseback to the road where the horse trailer was parked, and where Mr. Kelsey would know where to meet them. Undaunted by the complexity of the situation and a problem no one thinks to prepare for, Angie and Kristi set to work.





The two women had a good laugh over the best material to use for eagle wrapping, which turned out to be Kristi's shirt (she was wearing a sports bra underneath). Eagles have extremely sharp beaks and powerful talons, and can quite easily hurt a human being. Covering the bird's eyes and protecting Mrs. Homer the best they could, the two women rode for over two miles while Angie successfully carried the eagle cradled in her arms on horseback. "It never crossed my mind that it might not be a good idea," said Angie. "I felt so sorry for the bird."

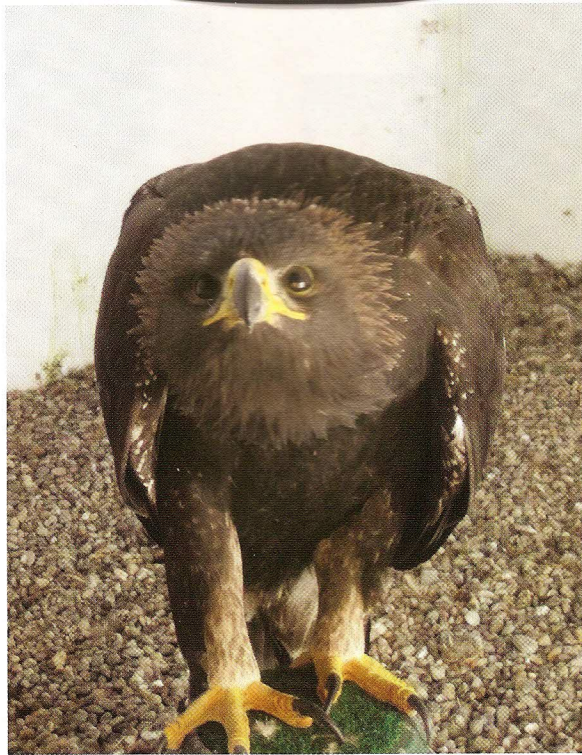
The golden eagle was given to the Conservation Officer, who in turn took it to a local falcon rehabilitator. After a couple of days without improvement, the eagle was once again transported to the Teton Raptor Center in Wyoming. The Idaho Fish and Game Department has an agreement with the State of Wyoming enabling them to transport wildlife across state lines, and a well established connection to the Teton Raptor Center. If anyone could save the bird, they could.

The Teton Raptor Center is located at the Hardeman Ranch, a Jackson Hole Land Trust protected property outside the town of Jackson Hole. The Teton Raptor Center is a non-profit organization that helps birds of prey, and is able to provide veterinary care and rehabilitation to raptors in an effort to return the birds to the wild. The facility boasts medical examination space and an intensive care unit, and has treated eagles, owls, hawks, falcons, and osprey.

At the Teton Raptor Center they determined that the bird was a young eagle hatched late in the season. The young bird was both emaciated and dehydrated, yet had no signs of injury so they thought it had an







excellent chance of survival. It's quite common for juvenile raptors and other bird species to jump out of the nest before they are fully ready to fly, usually due to mites or parasites in the nest. Normally the parents continue feeding their young until they can fend for their own, yet in this young eagle's case, it wasn't clear why it was no longer being supported.

At the Raptor Center it didn't take long for the young bird to thrive. It was given water and appropriate food to gain weight, and a short period of physical therapy. When exposed to older eagles it exhibited "food begging" behavior, which was taken as a good sign. Adult eagles will often feed any young eagle of the same species that begs, whether or not they are their own. This juvenile was fit to fly and exhibiting normal, healthy behavior. It was time to plan his release.

Exactly one month later, on September 19th, the young golden eagle was transported back to Idaho. Rob

Cavallaro, Regional Wildlife Biologist for Idaho Fish and Game, and Rob Dan Kelsey had identified an active nest of golden eagles near the Ririe Reservoir. The hope was that since the young raptor had exhibited "food begging" behavior at the Teton Raptor Center, by being released in proximity to other eagles, it would "food beg" from them and thus ensure its survival.

Angie Homer and Kristi Davis were invited to attend the eagle's release into the wild. Everyone expectantly gathered at the chosen release site, and after a few moments of confusion at being liberated, the young eagle took flight. The foursome quietly watched the majestic bird soar over the reservoir, satisfied with the successful release of the raptor. When they lost sight of the eagle they were confident they had done everything they could to ensure his survival. The rest was up to Mother Nature. **IFL**







**“The whole thing was a sacred experience. I think it had a deeper meaning,” said Angie Homer.**

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**Idaho Department of Fish and Game**

208-334-3700

<http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/>

**Teton Raptor Center**

5450 West Highway 22

Wilson, WY 83014

[www.tetonraptorcenter.org](http://www.tetonraptorcenter.org)

307-203-2551

