

Groëetus isidori Nest Life (slides)

By F. C. Lehmann, Colombia

The Aguila Real de Montana of Isidor's Crested Eagle inhabits the Andes from the Merida area in Venezuela to extreme northwestern Argentina in the province of Jujuy. Specimens have been taken in Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and more recently Argentina. So there is no gap in its distribution.

The species was described by Des Murs, and the type specimen came from Santa Fe = Bogota, Colombia.

Very little was known of its biology, and even specimens in collections are not abundant. No one has it alive now, and only Brehm mentions one specimen in the last century. His observations on the behavior of that bird are in accordance with my own experiences with this eagle in captivity.

It has been thought to be a rare bird, and it is, but not perhaps as much as one would think. Probably most of the specimens that have found their way to museum collections have been taken by collectors that found them on many occasions away from their favorite habitat, so the picture of their distribution was a patchy one. The available material indicated that it was altitudinally distributed from the sea level at Honda, Colombia to the Paramos in Venezuela, and rare everywhere. Last month I saw five adults migrating at Cueva de los Guacharos, Huila, Colombia.

My studies of this eagle since 1936, when the first nest was found, seem to indicate that Groëetus, as its well applied generic name indicates, is an inhabitant of the mountains at medium altitudes, but wandering in search of food from the tropical to the Paramo zones.

For their nests they select localities at 2,000-2,100 m. above sea level. The country is usually very precipitous and covered with dense woods of the cloud-sub-tropical type. The areas where I have found their nests are very rainy too.

The nest is a large structure of small branches that the birds break themselves from live trees, usually oaks, by diving and using the impact to break them. Sometimes they carry the oak twigs for long distances, when oaks are not close to the nesting site.

The construction of the nest takes about two months and the egg is laid usually in late March or April. Incubation period is not known, but is probably a little over a month; the young is born generally in May, in the central and western Andes of Colombia.

The eaglet makes its first short flight at the age of four months and stays in the nest area at least one month more, before venturing further.

The parents feed the younger eaglet at first with squirrels and perhaps other small animals, but later they bring large birds like guans (*Penelope*, *Chaemepetes*, *Aburria*) and poultry.

It is believed that *Quecuetus* also preys on woolly monkeys and coatis, but I have not been able to prove this.

The parent birds, while incubating the brooding stay continually at the nest; mostly the female, while the male is the one that brings the food. When the eaglet is about two months old, the female stands guard from nearby trees, hidden among the branches and bromeliads, and the mimetism is perfect. This large eagle, when motionless, cannot easily be seen.

The male leaves the nest between 8 and 9:30 in the morning in search for food and is back between 10 and 11:30 a.m.

When they cannot get a prey in the morning hours, or if hungry, they go out again from 2 to 3 p.m. and return between 3 and 4 generally.

In the midhours of the day both adults stay in or near the nest.

Sometimes they perch also in tall dead branches to overlook the countryside. It is believed from what we know now that Oreosetus lays a single egg. Leo Miller collected the only known egg of this eagle at Incahuasi, Bolivia, in 1915, but it has been lost. He describes it as being of "spheroidal shape, white, washed and spotted with chocolate-brown". Measurements given are: 51 x 33.58 mm. The egg was fresh when collected on May 20, 1915.

Of five nests studied, all contained one single young, and were located in dense upper sub-tropical or lower temperate zones in Colombia.

Cornell University
Ithaca, New York
June 17, 1962