

# Baited Camera Trap Quick Start Guide

## Maine Golden Eagle Study



Baited camera traps are motion-activated trail cameras set up to photograph visitors to a supplied food source. They are an effective way to detect golden eagles that often would not otherwise be observed. Managing a camera trap is the best way to be involved in the full scope of this community science project and creates an excellent opportunity to learn about golden eagles and other wildlife along the way. Anyone who currently monitors baited camera traps, such as hunters or photographers, is welcome to join. Those interested in trying it for the first time or collaborating with friends, family, organizations, or school groups are also encouraged to participate! This quick start guide will give you a sense of what managing a camera trap would be like. If you choose to participate, please be sure to review the complete **Maine Golden Eagle Study Camera Trap Protocol**.



Photo by Albert Ladd

## Select a Site

Choose a site on your own land or where you have written permission to regularly access and monitor a baited camera trap. Sites within historic breeding and observation areas are of particular interest (see map) but other regions are still of great value. Golden eagles prefer isolated forested areas or hilltops. Look for a site with the following features:

### Small Clearings

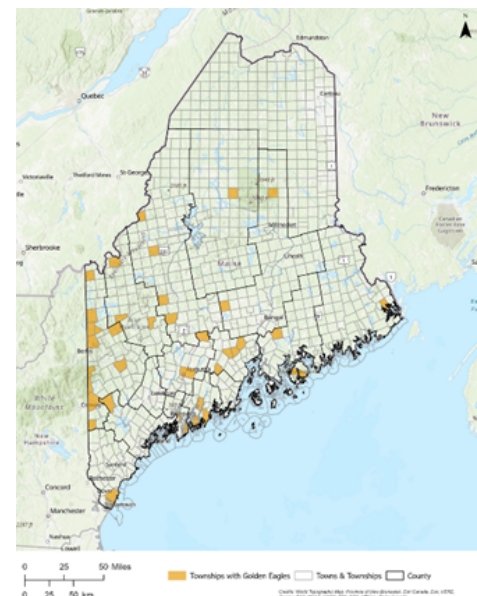
- Eastern golden eagles seem to prefer small clearings. Between 30 and 60 feet in diameter is suitable. A 500-foot diameter is probably too large.

### Large Trees

- Golden eagles prefer to perch in large trees near a carcass and watch it for a while before coming in, so it's good if there are a few big trees 10-30 feet from the bait site.

### Elevation

- Golden eagles come in more readily to areas that are higher than the surrounding area and seem less willing to visit low-lying areas. If a low-lying area is your only choice, give it a try!



Maine golden eagle observations (2013-2023) and historic breeding regions.  
Map courtesy of Conservation Science Global.

## Set Up a Camera Trap

### Test your trail cam

- Make sure your camera is working by putting it in your backyard or somewhere else where you are moderately sure you can get a few pictures and where it won't get stolen. Then go back in a few days to check it.

### Bait the site

- All bait should be lead-free (not harvested or dispatched with lead ammunition). Deer carcasses work well for eagles, but any type of animal will do. Learn about collecting roadkill or connecting with trappers, hunters, or meat processing facilities to obtain lead-free carcasses in the **Maine Golden Eagle Study Camera Trap Protocol**.
- Wire the carcasses to a buried rebar stake if possible to prevent them from being dragged out of view by scavengers, and make a single cut to open the carcass.

### Set up the trail cam

- Attach the camera to a small tree or sturdy stake about six feet from the bait, about 18-24 inches above the ground (or snow surface).
- If possible, orient the camera to the north to avoid photos washed out by bright sun.
- Choose camera settings that allow the camera to take photos in response to motion a minimum interval of one minute.
- Make sure the batteries are fully charged and the memory card is empty and inserted.
- Mark your camera with your contact information.



## Monitor the Site

- **Check the battery** and visit the site to change batteries if needed.
- **Check the position and settings** of the camera, and visit the site to adjust if necessary.
- **Maintain a constant supply of bait.** Let us know if a golden is visiting your site regularly for more than a week.
- **Share all photos taken** regardless of whether an eagle was present, either by downloading the memory card or through your cellular camera website.

## Share Photos

### DO NOT DELETE ANY PICTURES!

- Copy all pictures to a folder on your computer hard drive.
- Review the pictures to ensure that the camera, flash, timer, etc., are all functioning properly.
- Email ([erynn.call@maine.gov](mailto:erynn.call@maine.gov)) to receive a link to a private shared folder where you can upload your photos.



Photo by Laura Zamfirescu

Carefully review the complete detailed **Golden Eagle Study Camera Trap Protocol** before establishing a site and/or joining the study.