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Photo courtesy Bryan Bedrosian

Forest Service employee Jack Hatch holds what could be the heaviest golden eagle ever found in the United States. Scientists from a Kelly-based research group captured the animal Nov. 13 in Buffalo Valley.

Raptor may set record

By CORY HATCH
JACKSON HOLE DAILY

A female golden eagle captured as part of a research project in Buffalo Valley might weigh more than any other scientists have found in the United States.

The bird, captured Nov. 13 by Beringia South researchers, weighed 18.5 pounds. Female golden eagles in America typically weigh 8 to 13 pounds.

Bryan Bedrosian, one of the researchers who captured the bird, said the animal's crop, a muscular pouch in a bird's

throat used to temporarily store food, was "about the size of a softball" and full of meat at the time of capture, which may have contributed an extra 1.5 pounds.

But even without the full crop, the animal still has a shot at the record books.

"We didn't realize it at the time, but once I looked into the records I realized how big it was," Bedrosian said. "That [crop] brings the total weight down to about 17, but that's still about 3 pounds heavier than the heaviest birds that have been recorded in the U.S."

Bedrosian said the animal was cap-

tured with a device called a whoosh net as it feasted on a road-kill elk that the researchers had set out for bait. While other eagles were spotted in the area, the large bird had the elk carcass to herself.

"Typically, when a golden eagle goes on a carcass, it dominates," Bedrosian said.

The large female, estimated to be more than 5 years old, was the first golden eagle the team had captured in a couple of years, though it has captured more since.

Beringia South, a research group based in Kelly, is collecting blood samples from

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