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Paper: Massive bird spotted in Alaska

'He's huge, he's huge, he's really, really big'

Friday, October 18, 2002 Posted: 10:26 AM EDT (1426 GMT)

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (Reuters) -- A bird the size of a small airplane was recently said to be seen flying over southwest Alaska, puzzling scientists, the Anchorage Daily News reported this week.

The newspaper quoted residents in the villages of Togiak and Manokotak as saying the creature, like something out of the movie "Jurassic Park," had a wingspan of 14 feet (4.6 meters) -- making it the size of a small airplane.

"At first I thought it was one of those old-time Otter planes," the paper quoted Moses Coupchiak, 43, a heavy equipment operator from Togiak, as saying. "Instead of continuing toward me, it banked to the left, and that's when I noticed it wasn't a plane."

The Daily News, the largest daily in Alaska, said scientists had no doubt that people in the region, west of Dillingham, had seen the winged creature but they were skeptical about its reported size.

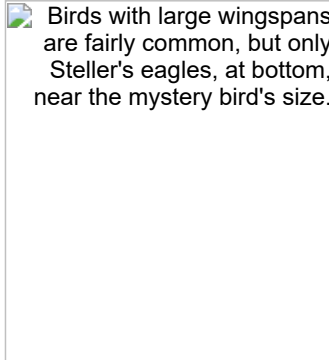
"I'm certainly not aware of anything with a 14-foot wingspan that's been alive for the last 100,000 years," the paper quoted raptor specialist Phil Schemf as saying.

Coupchiak said the bird disappeared over the hill and he then radioed Togiak residents to tell them to keep their children in.

Another local resident, a pilot who had initially dismissed the reports, said he recently saw the bird from a distance of just 1,000 feet (300 meters) while flying his airplane.

"The people in the plane saw him," John Bouker was quoted as saying. "He's huge, he's huge, he's really, really big. You wouldn't want to have your children out."

Schemf and Rob Macdonald of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said there had been several sightings over the past year and a half of a Steller's eagle, a fish-eating bird that can weigh 20 pounds (10 kg) and have a wingspan of eight feet (2.60 meters), the newspaper reported.



Birds with large wingspans are fairly common, but only Steller's eagles, at bottom, near the mystery bird's size.

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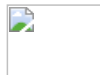
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