

Wedge-tailed Eagles

Aquila audax

Description

The wedge-tailed eagle is Australia's largest bird of prey : a huge dark eagle with long powerful wings and a long wedge-shape or diamond tail. The legs are feathered right down to the feet and are baggy in appearance. It has a long neck, a small head and large beak.

Adults are sooty or brownish black while the juveniles are lighter in colour: brown with golden to reddish brown ruff around the nape of the neck.

Sizes

Female birds of prey are about a third bigger than the males.

Length – 85-105cm

Wingspan – 185-230cm

Weight – males 3.2kg, females 4.2kg.

Distribution and Habits

The wedge-tailed eagle occurs throughout mainland Australia and Tasmania as well as the southern parts of New Guinea. Each pair occupies a home range or territory. The eagle patrols its territory and will attack intruders with a low swoop and dive.

Adults usually mate for life and will remain in their territory throughout the year although they will hunt separately and only come together at breeding season.

Food & Hunting

Wedge-tailed eagles generally hunt early morning or around sunset when it is cooler. They hunt mammals, rabbits, large lizards and snakes as well as birds. However being an opportunist they will feed on road kill whenever it presents itself, placing themselves in grave danger.



Breeding

The breeding season is April to September. The nest is a large platform of sticks, built high up in the fork of a tree. One to three eggs are laid and these hatch about 45 days later. For the first 4 weeks the female stays on the nest, with the male doing all of the hunting. After this she joins her mate to hunt for food. The young chicks are in the nest for 80-90 days before they fledge. Young wedge-tailed eagles are dependant on their parents for up to six months after leaving the nest. Sexual maturity is reached at three years, although they seldom breed before six or seven years of age.

Understand

- that eagles take off into the wind
- that you are driving through their backyard
- that they are big birds and take a long time to get air borne
- that when a wedge-tailed eagle is killed, there are probably chicks in the nest that will die as well.

What you can do to help....

- slow down as soon as you see them
- hit the horn! Keep your hand on the horn from the time you see them, until you are level with the carcass. This lets them know that danger is approaching and gives them time to take off before the car is too close.
- move carcasses clear off the road and into the bush. Many other animals such as Northern Quolls, Echidnas and monitor lizards also feed on carcasses.

.....and most importantly.....

pass the word around!!!

**Keep your hand on the
horn until you pass the
carcass**



Threats and Conservation

Wedge-tailed eagles were formerly persecuted for their supposed impact on domestic livestock, which has now been shown to be negligible. There is a decline in numbers in the south through habitat disturbance due to farming and human settlement.

Wedge-tailed eagles are protected in all states. They are not tolerant of human activity and will move away and abandon their nest. They frequent the hot arid regions of the Western Central and Southern regions.

What to do if you find an injured Wedge-tail Eagle please STOP !

- If the bird is alive and lying still, approach quietly and carefully place a blanket or thick towel over the bird's head. Wrap the rest of the bird up, taking extreme care to stay away from the feet . Place the bird in a box or a container as you do not want the bird to get loose in the car. Call the number of the nearest town listed below.
- If the bird is mobile, try to corner him. He should lay down , then proceed as above.

Contacts

Perth - Yvonne Sitko
Bird of Prey Centre-0438 388 383
Geraldton - Janelle Ende
Just Raptors - 0429 028 711
Meekatharra - Jo Burgemeister
0428 952 791
Carnarvon - Mary Geyer
PWCA - 0439 694 317
Karratha - Rose Best
PWCA - 0438 924 842
Broome - Lesley Baird
Chelonia Wildlife - 9193 5409

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