

White-bellied Sea-Eagle

Haliaeetus leucogaster



White-bellied Sea-Eagles are large birds of prey. They are graceful in flight and spend their time soaring over the surface of the sea, or perching on rocks or branches beside the water. They live for up to 30 years in the wild.

Diet

These birds hunt fish, tortoises, sea-snakes, waterfowl, reptiles, nestling birds, rabbits and also eat carrion. They are aggressive and skilled hunters both at sea and on the land. Their large talons and powerful curved beaks help them to grab and kill their prey. Thick scales on their legs protect them like armour. Excellent eyesight makes it easy for them to target their next meal. Occasionally, they harass other birds such as ospreys and terns until they drop their prey which the eagles then collect.

Breeding

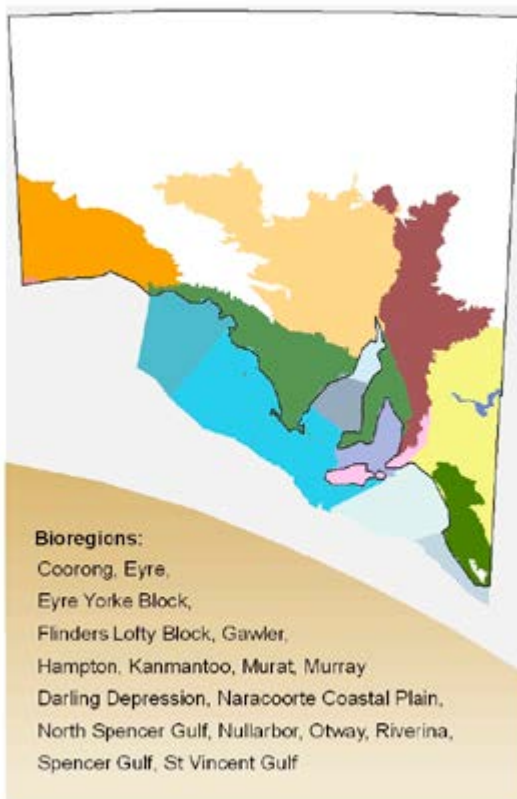
These eagles mate for life and share the same hunting range. In the morning and evening they roost and sometimes sing together. When breeding begins, sometime from May to October, White-bellied Sea-Eagles put on great aerial displays. They soar and call, loop-the-loop, drop fish from a height and then dive to catch it in midair. Nests are built on cliffs or in trees, and sometimes on the ground on treeless islands. Both sexes help with the construction and repair of a nest. Nests are made of sticks, and are huge structures up to four metres deep and 2.5m wide. Nests are lined with stems and green leaves and females lay a clutch of two eggs. Eggs are incubated for around six weeks, mostly by the female. One egg is laid several days before the other, and it is usually only the chick with the head start that survives because the parents feed the noisiest, most active chick first. If the first egg is infertile, or the chick is weak and dies, the second chick has a better chance of survival.

Habitat

White-bellied Sea-Eagles are found throughout Australia along coasts and beside lowland rivers and lakes. They also occur in south-east Asia and India.

Threats

The loss of nesting sites due to development is a major threat to the White-bellied Sea-Eagles. Disturbance of nesting pairs by human activity can cause them to abandon their nests. Deterioration of inland water sources and over-fishing in the ocean makes it harder for them to find food. Competition for food and nesting sites with Wedge-tailed Eagles (*Aquila audax*) is a potential problem.



Map courtesy of Mapping Unit, Customer and Commercial Services.

Map is not intended to indicate spatial distribution of the species, only the bioregions in which the species is found.



Big birds! White-bellied Sea-Eagles have a wingspan of up to 2.2 metres. Their home ranges can be up to 100 square kilometres.

Conservation

You can help the White-bellied Sea-Eagle by:

- always keeping your distance from eagles and their nests as they are easily disturbed by human activity
- protecting areas of native vegetation in your local area
- reporting anyone you see interfering with nests or disturbing sea eagles.

For further information

Public enquiries

For more local information on any of the species in this resource please contact your nearest Natural Resource Centre office on:

Eastwood: (08) 8273 9100

Gawler: (08) 8523 7700

Lobethal: (08) 8389 5900

Willunga: (08) 8550 3400

Education enquiries

For teachers wanting more information about environmental education resources and opportunities please contact the relevant NRM Education sub regional team on:

Northern Adelaide: (08) 8406 8289

Barossa: (08) 8563 8436

Central Adelaide: (08) 8234 7255

Southern Adelaide: (08) 8384 0176

Southern Fleurieu: (08) 8551 0524

