

Information Sheet

Wedge-tailed Eagle

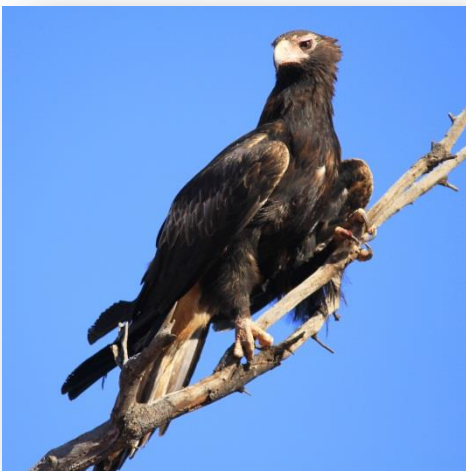
Aquila audax



The distinctive wedge-shaped tail is evident from a great distance.



Immature showing massive bill, reddish plumage and pale gape.



Perched adult showing feathered legs.

Other names:

Eaglehawk. Waalitj (Noongar name).

Description:

A huge, very dark eagle with long wedge-shaped tail, long fingered wings and completely feathered legs. Australia's largest bird of prey and one of the largest eagles in the world.

Adults:

Cap (forehead and crown) black or blackish brown, nape and hind-neck sandy brown or reddish brown, most feathers with black tips. Rest of plumage glossy black to blackish brown with the wing coverts sandy brown to reddish brown, forming a band across the wing. Underwing and undertail blackish. Iris dark brown or yellowish brown; bare skin around eye pinkish, white or bluish white; bill greyish white, tipped black; gape pinkish; cere yellow; feet greyish white.

Immatures:

Are paler than adults, more reddish brown to dark brown.

Apart from its great size and blackish coloration, this eagle can be distinguished from all other Australian hawks by its long wedge-shaped tail, a characteristic that is still discernible when the bird is soaring thousands of metres above the ground. Birds have been recorded soaring as high as 6,800 metres.

Status:

Moderately common in pastoral country and on the Nullarbor Plain, but uncommon elsewhere in WA. Usually in ones or twos.

Description:

Length: 85–106 cm. Wingspan: 185–230 cm. Weight: 3.9–5.8 kg. Females are slightly larger than males.

Call:

A loud piping "psee-ew" and a hoarse yelp.

Breeding:

The nest is used year after year and consists of a massive platform of sticks, lined with sprays of green eucalypt leaves and placed in, or on, a horizontal fork of a tree up to 40 m above ground. Breeding occurs from late June to mid-September. Usually two, rarely one or three, eggs are laid. They are dull chalky white, spotted and blotched with brown; generally the first egg laid is more heavily patterned. The hatchlings are covered in white down.

Life span: between 30–45 years.

Distribution:

Found throughout most of Western Australia including many offshore islands.

Also eastern Australia including Tasmania and southern New Guinea.

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Typical clutch of two eggs showing differences in coloration (darker egg laid first).

Habitat and food:

Mainly lightly wooded country including farmlands.

Wedge-tailed Eagles feed on animals caught by themselves including rabbits, kangaroos, foxes, birds and reptiles and partly on carrion including road-killed kangaroos and dead livestock.

Threats to the species:

Historically, thousands of Wedge-tailed Eagles were shot and poisoned annually on the grounds that they were a pest with a reputation as a lamb killer, causing a severe decline in population size. As a native species, the Wedge-tailed Eagle is protected under the provisions of the *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950*, administered by the Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions (DBCA). The shooting of Wedge-tailed Eagles is not permitted, and landowners should contact DBCA for advice on how to manage eagles around livestock.

References:

Johnstone, R.E. and Storr, G.M. (1998). *Handbook of Western Australian Birds*. Volume 1 – Non-passerines (Emu to Dollarbird). Western Australian Museum pp. 142–144.



High in the landscape, a typical nest of sticks lined with green leaves with a clutch of two eggs.



Nestling covered in white down.



Adult (L) and immature (R) at a roadside kangaroo carcass.