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Weight of wedge tailed eagle

Wedge-tailed Eagle Image: John Fields © Australian Museum The Wedge-tailed Eagle is Australia's largest living bird of prey and one of the largest eagles in the world.IdentificationThe Wedge-tailed Eagle has long wings (wingspan 2.3 m), a characteristic long, wedge-shaped tail, and legs that are feathered all the way to the base of the toes. The bill is pale pink to cream, the eye brown to dark brown, and the feet off-white. Young Wedge-tailed Eagles are mid brown in colour with reddish-brown heads and wings. They become progressively blacker for at least the first ten years of their lives; adults are mostly dark blackish-brown. The only difference in plumage between the sexes is that a female adult is generally slightly paler than her mate. Females (4.2 kg - 5.3 kg) are also larger and heavier than males (3.2 kg up to 4.0 kg). Wedge-tailed Eagles are Australia's largest raptors (birds of prey).Australia's second largest eagle (and second-largest raptor or bird of prey), the White-bellied Sea-Eagle, *Haliaeetus leucogaster*, has shorter, more rounded wings and no feathers on its lower legs. Detached wings, such as this one from a Wedge-tailed Eagle are stored in sealed plastic bags to protect them. They are very useful for studying the wing moult, colour, pattern and shape of a particular species. Image: Jaynia Sladek © Australian Museum The Wedge-tailed Eagle is found from sea level to alpine regions in the mountains, but prefers wooded and forested land and open country, generally avoiding rainforest and coastal heaths. Eagles can be seen perched on trees or poles or soaring overhead to altitudes of up to 2000 m. Wedge-tailed Eagles build their nest in a prominent location with a good view of the surrounding countryside. It may be built in either a live or dead tree, but usually the tallest one in the territory. In some parts of Australia, where tall trees are absent, small trees, shrubs, cliff faces or even the ground may be used. The density of active nests depends on the abundance of prey and other resources. In most years, nests are usually 2.5 km - 4 km apart. If conditions are particularly good, the distances apart may be less than 1 km because the birds require smaller areas to find sufficient food.DistributionThe Wedge-tailed Eagle is found throughout mainland Australia, Tasmania and southern New Guinea. Wedge-tailed Eagles eat both live prey and carrion. Their diet reflects the available prey, but the most important live items are rabbits and hares. Rabbits usually comprise about 30-70% of the diet, but may comprise up to 92%. The introduction of the calicivirus has resulted in the decline of rabbits in many parts of Australia. It is not yet known how this will affect the Wedge-tailed Eagle. Other food items include lizards, birds (weighing over 100 g) and mammals (usually weighing over 500 g). Wedge-tailed Eagles will kill lambs, but these make up only a small percentage of their total prey.Carrion is a major food source; roadkills and other carcasses are readily eaten. Many of the reports of predation on lambs result from birds scavenging already dead animals. Up to 20 birds may attend a carcass, although only two or three feed at any one time.Wedge-tailed Eagles may hunt singly, in pairs or in larger groups. Working together, a group of eagles can attack and kill animals as large as adult kangaroos. This explains the scientific name of the Wedge-tailed Eagle which means 'bold eagle'. Under ideal conditions, an eagle can lift about 50% of its body weight. Often, eagles may cache food items on a branch near the nest area.Breeding behavioursWedge-tailed Eagles are monogamous and apparently mate for life. If one bird of a pair is killed, the survivor will find a new mate. Established breeding pairs are territorial and live in the one area throughout the year, defending around their nest sites from other Wedge-tailed Eagles. (They are also known on occasion to attack intruding model airplanes, hang gliders, gliders, fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters.) Surrounding the territories are large home ranges in which the birds hunt for food but do not defend. There is usually overlap between the home ranges of two or more breeding pairs and of non-breeding birds.The nest is a large structure of dead sticks, usually reused for years, often reaching considerable size. Nests 1.8 m across, 3 m deep and weighing about 400 kg are known. Nests have a shallow cup on the top, lined with fresh twigs and leaves. Sticks are added by a bird while it stands in the nest. If these sticks are dropped outside the nest, no effort is made to retrieve them. Piles of dropped sticks 1.8 m high have been recorded under the nest trees.The timing of breeding may vary from location to location and from year to year according to the local availability of food. Both parents share in the duties of nest building, incubation and feeding of the young.A clutch consists of white eggs measuring 73 mm x 59 mm with varying amounts of reddish brown spots and blotches. These are laid at intervals of two to four days. Incubation starts with the laying of the first egg. Because of the intervals between laying, the eggs do not hatch simultaneously. The first chick hatches larger than the second, which in turn is larger than the third. Survival rates of the chicks vary considerably depending on local conditions, including prey abundance and the amount of disturbance. A breeding pair usually rears only one young per clutch, although in a good year, two chicks may fledge in some nests. Because of the differences in size, the oldest and largest chick has the best chance of surviving. If food is scarce, it will kill and eat its smaller nest mates.Chicks hatch covered with a white down. For the first five weeks or so, the adults must deliver food to their mouths. After this time they are able to recognise bits of food on the floor of the nest and can feed themselves. The young acquire their first feathers during the second week after hatching. If threatened by predators, the chicks lie flat in the nest, but will defend themselves if required. The adults, in contrast, make little defence of the young. The juveniles remain with the adults for about 11 weeks after leaving the nest. Young and non-breeding birds disperse, moving to wherever conditions are suitable. Juveniles are known to have moved over 850 km in a seven to eight month period.Breeding Season: April to September; mainly JulyClutch size: 1 to 3 (usually 2)Incubation: 45 days Wedge-tailed Eagle 23 18 Image: J Bell © Australian Museum The Wedge-tailed Eagle is the most common of the world's large eagles. It is nonetheless affected by several human activities. It has benefited by the opening of forests in eastern Australia and the increased availability of rabbits. Wedge-tailed Eagles however, are sensitive to forestry operations. In the more arid zones, extensive clearing has reduced the nesting resources. If a breeding pair is disturbed when they are preparing to lay eggs, they may abandon the nest. Wedge-tailed Eagles were persecuted for many years for supposedly killing lambs. Bounties were offered for dead eagles, and large numbers were poisoned or shot - 147 237 in Western Australia in 1928 -1968 and 162 430 in Queensland in 1951-1966. Indirect poisoning through Dingo baits and pesticides continues to be a major hazard. In Tasmania, the Wedge-tailed Eagle is threatened by habitat loss and deliberate persecution.ReferencesCopper, J. and Copper, L. 1981. Hawks in Focus. Jaclyn, Mildura.Hollands, D. 1984. Eagles, Hawks and Falcons of Australia. Nelson, Melbourne.Marchant, S. and Higgins, P.J. (eds) 1993. Handbook of Australian New Zealand And Antartic Birds Vol. 2: (Raptors To Lapwings). Oxford University Press, Melbourne.Olsen, P. 1995. Australian Birds of Prey: the Biology and Conservation of Raptors.University of New South Wales Press, Sydney.Olsen, P., Crome, F. and Olsen, J. 1993. The Birds of Prey and Ground Birds of Australia. Angus and Robertson, and the National Photographic Index of Australian Wildlife, Sydney. You have reached the end of the page. Thank you for reading. RangeAustralia and Papua New Guinea are the native homes of the Wedge-tailed eagle. It can be found across most of mainland Australia as well as Tasmania and a number of offshore islands including Flinders, Maria and Kangaroo.HabitatHere they can be found in lightly timbered woodlands, Trans fly savannas, dense forest, mountainous regions and grasslands.ReproductionBreeding occurs from June to August. Wedge-tailed eagles will form monogamous pairs which will never separate. It is also uncommon for one partner to seek a new mate when the other dies.When pairs first meet they will form a pair by performing a series of short dives, touching talons and making a whistle as they pull up from their dives. A pair will defend their territory during the breeding season, perch close together and preen each other.A nest is made in a tree between 1 and 30m (3.2-98.4ft) off the ground. In areas where they cannot find a suitable tree they use a cliff edge or even make it on the ground. It is made from sticks and lined with green leaves and twigs. The nest can measure 2.5m (8.2ft) across and 4m (13ft) deep. This nest is used for many years in a row with some having been used for 50 consecutive years.The female deposits one to three eggs into this nest. They are laid over a period of 2 to 4 days. These eggs are incubated by both parents for 42-45 days. The eggs do not hatch at the same time and in years where there is little food the first chick who is already strong by the time the second hatches may kill its nest mate. Chicks are covered in downy white feathers.For the first 30 days the male will do all the hunting while the female keeps the chicks warm. After this she will join him to go hunting.75 to 95 days after hatching the chicks will be ready to fledge. They are dependent on their parents for food for another 3 to 6 months though. While they are immature these animals are more of a golden brown colour.Sexual maturity is reached at 3 years old but often it is not until six years old when they have adult plumage that they will first mate. The Australia's mightiest bird of prey - the king of Australian skies. In terms of coloration it bears resemblance to the golden eagle (Aquila chrysaetos), yet it has a larger beak, it is also one of twelve Aquila genus eagles with dark feathers on almost whole its body. What else we are to know about the wedge-tailed eagle? ClassificationClass: AvesOrder: AccipitriformesFamily: AccipitridaeGenus: AquilaSpecies: Wedge-tailed eagle (Aquila audax)Wedge-tailed eagle, eaglehawk (Aquila audax).Areas of occurrenceThis eagle habitat includes the whole of Australia, Tasmania and the southern regions of New Guinea, yet it favors the open spaces of southern and eastern Australia plus the lesser islands: Maria Island, Flinders Island, and Kangaroo Island.It often takes off using dead trees, telegraphic poles, or rocky hills as a starting ground. It nests in the forests and savannas, as well as on woodless plains, whereas it can be observed in crop fields or in close proximity to human settlements extremely seldom.Wedge-tailed eagle, eaglehawk (Aquila audax).CharacteristicsSizeFemales weigh from 3 to over 5 kg (6.6 - 11 lb) while males reach from 2 to 4 kg (4.4 - 8.8 lb) of weight. The mean body length ranges between 81 and 106 cm (32 - 42 in), whereas the wingspan is 182 - 232 cm (72 - 91 in). As this species inhabits the wide open-air areas, many eagles achieve remarkable wing sizes; the wingspan of the largest eagles may even exceed 280 cm (110 in).This species can be distinguished by the impressive length of its wedge-like tail, reaching 45 cm (18 in) - this eagle surely is a mighty and very characteristic bird. Wedge-tailed eagle, eaglehawk (Aquila audax).FeatheringLong, but relatively narrow wings have distinctive stripes on their bottoms, with dark brown feathers with bright edges topside. The head is rather small and flat, equipped with a huge, crooked beak, the legs are covered with dark fluff from thighs to tarsi.Adult eagles are dark brown or brown-to-black, apart from the brick red nape feathers and grey-brown speckles on the upper wings. Tail coverts are light brown and the primaries' coverts are beige.This bird has a brown iris, its face and feet being cream-colored. Both genders are very similar in terms of coloration, yet females reach larger size and body weight than males.Wedge-tailed eagle, eaglehawk (Aquila audax).OffspringImmature eagles are easily distinguished from the adult ones, as its feathers gain a dark brown tone with red edges, the nape, back and top of the wings are usually russet - the stripe of golden feathers is wider than among adult eagles and spreads along about 50% of the wing width. The head and breast of an adolescent eagle are brighter, it has more colorful streaks, just as the bottom of the wings and tail.Sometimes a completely black adolescent eagle may be observed.Most of the 'underage' eagles have grey or bright brown eyes and a yellowish face and tarsus. Young birds are darker than adults and must remain patient, as they do not reach mature coloration until 7-8 years of age.SubspeciesThere are two identified subspecies of the wedge-tailed eagle: Aquila audax fleayi and Aquila audax audax. The former inhabits Tasmania and its distinctive feature is the white, cream-colored or brick red feathering on its nape. Adult eagles rarely have black feathers, which is nonetheless often observed in the continental subspecies - Aquila audax audax.Wedge-tailed eagle, eaglehawk (Aquila audax).Diet and hunting strategyThe wedge-tailed eagle can glide on extensive altitudes for many hours, yet it has not been established if these flights are hunt-related. It is known for certain that it has outstanding eyesight allowing it to recognize prey, it also senses the air currents perfectly, so it can ascend freely without substantial energy expenses - just like albatrosses. PreyIt most often attacks animals on the ground, choosing the victim over the criteria of its own convenience and capabilities. Since the Europeans' arrival and introducing the brown hare (*Lepus europaeus*) into the ecosystem, it has become the main element in the eagle's diet. Apart from them it often hunts for: foxes, feral domestic cats, small kangaroos, feathertail gliders, koalas and bandicoots, it can also eat other birds: cockatoos, mallards, crows and ibises.It rarely feasts on reptiles: frilled-neck lizards (*Chlamydosaurus kingii*), monitors and eastern brown snakes (*Pseudonaja textilis*). It can also hunt down an emu, yet we have no information on its largest flying prey.Wedge-tailed eagle, eaglehawk (Aquila audax).Adaptation in relation to the hunting strategyThe wedge-tailed eagle shows considerable adaptive abilities, which allow it to hem e.g. a wild goat, sheep or a kangaroo into a steep slope, to block their escape and separate them from the rest of the group.It normally chooses the most feeble animals for its prey, and however its hunts are usually solitary or aided by one partner, it happens to hunt in small groups nonetheless (on such occasions the hunted animal may be larger - an emu or a kangaroo).Carrion proves to be quite a substantial element of its diet, as for the Australian raven (*Corvus coroneides*), which circles around the dead animal it finds, to lower its flight and subsequently begin its meal. The wedge-tailed eagle is often observed in rural areas, abundant with domestic animals, which regularly become roadkill.Wedge-tailed eagle, eaglehawk (Aquila audax).Lifestyle and characterThe wedge-tailed eagle moment an intruder enters its territory, the wedge-tailed eagle performs a dive towards the trespasser. The bird may allow itself to be impetuous and aggressive, for it is an apex predator, without any natural enemies. However, it has to protect its eggs and nestlings from other predators e.g. ravens, currawongs or other eagles.Wedge-tailed eagle, eaglehawk (Aquila audax).Aggressive bird reputationThe wedge-tailed eagle is said to be aggressive, but attacking only as an act of territorial defense (although such behavior is hardly an attack, as no 'strikes' resulting in wounds or any other harms to the human body were recorded). The sole presence of this eagle evokes panic among lesser birds e.g. butcherbirds, masked lapwings, or noisy miners, which often results in harassment of the eagle predator by those small, relatively combative species.Wedge-tailed eagle, eaglehawk (Aquila audax).BreedingThe mating process involves spectacular aerial stunts over the eagle's own territory. Sometimes males perform dynamic diving flights towards their partners, to ascend right behind the female again, circling above it with its wings widely spread; a female may ignore the courtship or join the male as an act of acceptance.The hatching season lasts from April to December, depending on the inhabited region, e.g. the populations of Northern Australia reproduce between January and February, whereas the Tasmanian pairs - between August and September.Wedge-tailed eagle, eaglehawk (Aquila audax).NestA pair builds or reinforces the nest, which will be used throughout many years, after multiple developments it can be 2 - 5 m (6.6 - 16ft) wide in diameter and also 2 - 5 m (6.6 - 16ft) deep.The nest is usually built on a large tree, sometimes on rocks or cliffs or even on the ground. Green leaves and twigs provide building material. One pair may have several nests on their territory, yet usually only one is in use. Wedge-tailed eagle, eaglehawk (Aquila audax).OffspringA female usually lays 1-2 eggs which are incubated by both parents for the next 42 - 48 days. Nestlings grow feathers after around 70 - 95 days after hatching, staying under parental supervision for the first 3 - 6 months - in this period they are fed by their parents. After these several months, young eagles leave the home territory. Sexual maturity is reached between 3 and 5 years of age, but they start to reproduce 2 or 3 years later.Wedge-tailed eagle, eaglehawk (Aquila audax).Detailed characteristics / sizeWedge-tailed eagle (Aquila audax)Length: 81 - 106 cm (32 - 42 in)Wingspan: typically 182 - 232 cm (72 - 91 in), largest recorded: 284 cm (112 in)Tail length: 45 cm (18 in)Weight:females: 3.0 - 5.77 kg (6.6 - 11.2 lb)males: 2 - 4 kg (4.4 - 8.8 lb)Speed:flight: to 80 km/h (50 mph)dive speed: no dataLifespan:20 - 25 years in the wildup to 40 years in captivitySexual dimorphism is apparent in terms of size - females are larger and heavier than males.Wedge-tailed eagle, eaglehawk (Aquila audax).Wedge-tailed eagle is the largest raptor in Australia.The wedge-tailed eagle is able to glide at an altitude of 1800 m (5900 ft).The wedge-tailed eagle's eyes allow it to see in infrared and ultraviolet light.The wedge-tailed eagle is able to hunt down an emu.Tasmanian wedge-tailed eagles are rivals with white-bellied sea eagles (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) over nesting spots.Some nests are used for over 50 years, obviously by several eagle pairs.The wedge-tailed eagle profile has been used in the badge of the New South Wales Police Force.The wedge-tailed eagle is a noisy bird, it emits loud whizzes and squeals, plus gentle vocalizations resembling 'sii-tju'.Wedge-tailed eagle, eaglehawk (Aquila audax).Recommended

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