

The Applecross Trust



Fact Sheet 3

White Tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*)

The white tailed eagle, also known as the sea eagle or the white tailed sea eagle, is the UK's largest bird of prey. It has brown body plumage with a characteristic pale head and neck, which can be almost white in older birds, with broad wings up to 245cm in width. The short, wedge-shaped and pure white tail from which it derives its name is also very distinctive

The sea eagle was persecuted to extinction in Britain in the early 1900's. A reintroduction programme was started about 30 years ago and figures from the 2007 survey show there are now 42 territorial breeding pairs, an increase of 6 pairs since last year. It has also been the most successful year in terms of chicks produced, with 24 successful broods fledging a total of 34 young birds.

Skye, Mull and the Western Isles remain the core population areas but they are now beginning to expand this range and further re-introductions have been made on the east coast. Sea eagles have been seen in the Applecross area over the last few years.

Sea eagles prefer to nest in trees rather than on cliffs and breeding adults tend to stay close to their breeding territory throughout the year although non-breeding birds can range quite far in the search for food.

Their diet consists largely of fish, which they tend to pluck from the surface of the water without getting wet, birds, rabbits and hares with carrion forming an important part of their diet especially in the winter.

Sea eagles tend to reach maturity and start breeding at about five to six years, they form monogamous, life long pair bonds and have an average lifespan of twenty one years. They spend the winter in courtship and nest building with females laying one or two or occasionally three eggs in March. The eggs are incubated for thirty eight days and young birds then remain in the nest for ten to thirteen weeks before fledging. They may continue to beg for food for several more months and then the young eagle will spend about five years in non-breeding areas usually with other young birds.

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