

White-tailed eagle

The white-tailed eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*), sometimes known as the sea eagle, is the largest bird of prey in Europe and has been successfully reintroduced to Scotland



This huge eagle has a short tail and very heavy bill. The body is brown, and the head and tail gradually become paler as the bird matures. At six-years adults have a creamy head and pure white tail.

Length: 70-90cm; wingspan: 200-240cm

Status in UK

42 pairs, reintroduced and increasing; RED listed; resident

Population trends

Once widespread in the UK, the white-tailed eagle disappeared from England in the 1830s and finally became extinct in Scotland in 1917.

A major project to reintroduce the bird began in 1975 on the Isle of Rum, where young Norwegian birds were released. The birds do not breed until they are five or six, and it was not until 1985 that they finally successfully bred. They are now steadily spreading along the west coast and through the western isles.

A reintroduction programme began in south-west Ireland in 2007 and a feasibility study is underway to investigate a project in East Anglia.

Habitat and distribution

This eagle is a coastal species and breeds on rocky coastlines, as well as large lakes.

Confined to the west coast of Scotland, especially the Inner and Outer Hebrides.

Breeding

The massive nest is usually on a cliff ledge or a large tree and is used year after year.

Feeding

Fish are taken from close to the surface, while birds are usually driven into the water and pursued until they are exhausted; birds up to the size of greylag geese can be taken in flight. Carrion is an important food, especially in winter.