

Tasmanian Wedge-tailed Eagle

Aquila audax fleayi

Tasmania's Wedge-tailed Eagle is a separate and larger subspecies than the mainland form. As a top predator, it is sparsely distributed, mainly in forested areas, and its entire population probably numbers fewer than 1500 birds.

It has been listed as endangered by both the Commonwealth and Tasmanian governments, meaning that it is facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild in the near future.

A 2004 study in the Bass district of north-eastern Tasmania, conducted by the University of Melbourne for Forestry Tasmania in 2004, modelled the eagle's future over 200 years. It concluded that it faces an extinction risk of 62% from human-induced mortality, other than from logging. With logging factored in, the extinction risk rose to over 90%.

The eagle is distributed across mainland Tasmania and its large islands. Pairs generally mate for life, are highly territorial and depend on forests for nesting. Almost all nests are in the tallest trees in expanses of old-growth eucalypt forest. The birds build up to five nests in their territory, but use only one for actually breeding in any year. When breeding, they are shy and highly susceptible to disturbance which can cause them to abandon a nest; because they only fledge one or at best two chicks in a good year, each failure has a catastrophic impact on the population as a whole.

Threats to the eagles include loss of habitat from clearing, birds being killed by colliding with power lines and other structures, persecution by shooting, trapping and poisoning, and reduced breeding success as a result of disturbance, such as logging old growth forest. Forestry prescriptions since the early 1990s have required only a 10 ha reserve (360 m diameter circle) around a nest and a bar on logging during the breeding season within 500 m or in line of sight within 1 km.

The eagle's fortunes have not reversed in the last 15 years –stringent protection for its breeding habitat in large expanses of old growth habitat is essential to stop it sliding into extinction.

More information

The Tasmanian Wedge-tailed Eagle was listed under the federal *Endangered Species Protection Act 1995* and then under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

A recovery plan was prepared in 1992. A second recovery plan covered the period 1998—2003. No current recovery plan exists, even though the Commonwealth Environment Minister is required to ensure that a recovery plan is in force. A draft was published by the Tasmanian government in 2004 but has not been finalised or adopted.

<http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/index.html>