



Sea eagle project
Newsletter 2007



This newsletter is produced by the RSPB on behalf of the Sea Eagle Project Team

This newsletter reports on the progress made by the Sea Eagle re-introduction project that commenced in 1975 when young sea eagles, imported from Norway, were released on the West coast of Scotland. With two new translocation projects starting this year, the format has been altered slightly to provide a picture of the recolonisation endeavours throughout the British Isles.

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Cover illustration by Jon Pear.

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Contents

	Page No.
Summary of the 2007 breeding season	1
Ten-year summary 1998-2007	2
Charts showing progress of the breeding population 1982-2007	2
Territory accounts for 2007	4
Breeding season diet	9
Wing-tagging and sightings	10
Selected sightings reported in 2007	12
Recolonisation of former range	
East Scotland	13
Ireland	14
England	15
Wales	15
Public viewing (Isle of Mull)	16
Public viewing (Isle of Skye)	17
Acknowledgements	17

Summary of the 2007 breeding season

2007 was an exciting year for Sea Eagles in Western Scotland. Six new pairs were located, bringing the total number of occupied territories to 42. The new pairs were widely spaced, expanding the breeding range of the species to the N, S and E. 35 pairs laid eggs and 31 broods hatched. 24 pairs bred successfully fledging a record 34 young.

Sub-adult birds have been recorded in a number of new areas in 2007 and based upon the number of young produced over the last five-year period, the population is projected to continue to expand in coming years. One 23 year-old adult, imported from Norway during the first phase of the project, was found dead in 2007. It is now thought that most of the original imported Norwegian birds have been replaced in the breeding population by wild-bred young.

Details of the occupancy and breeding activity in each territory are given on an area-by-area basis.

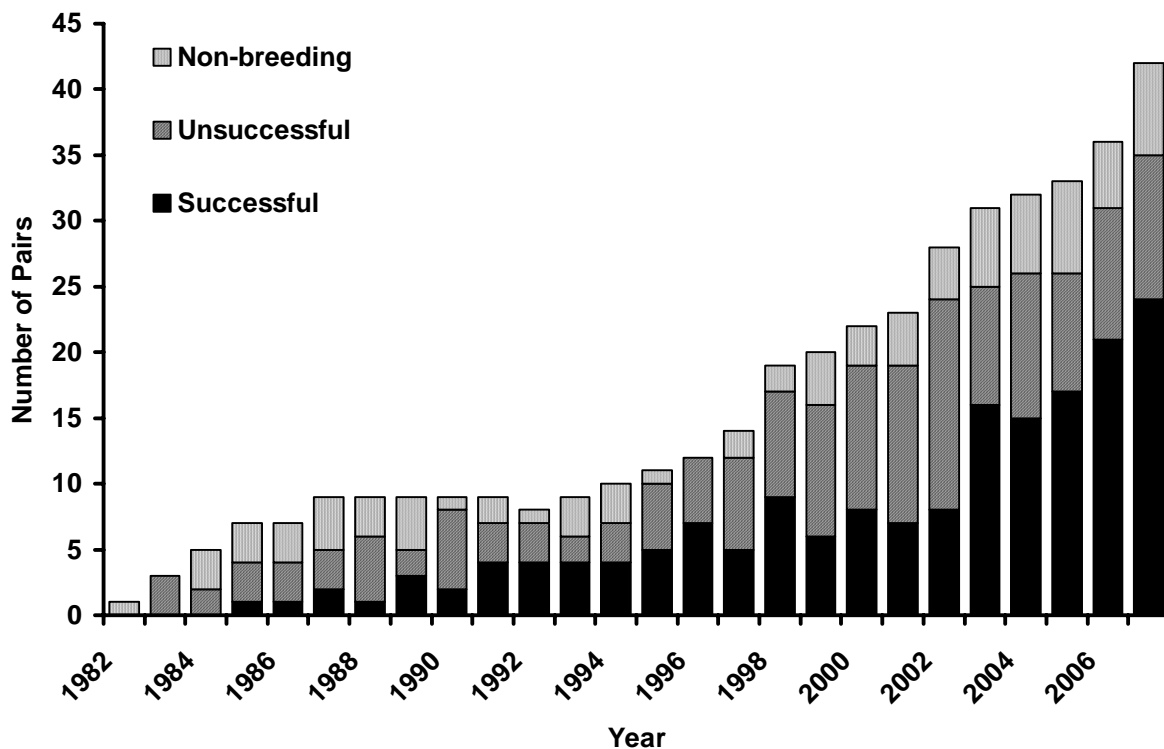


Jon Pear 2007

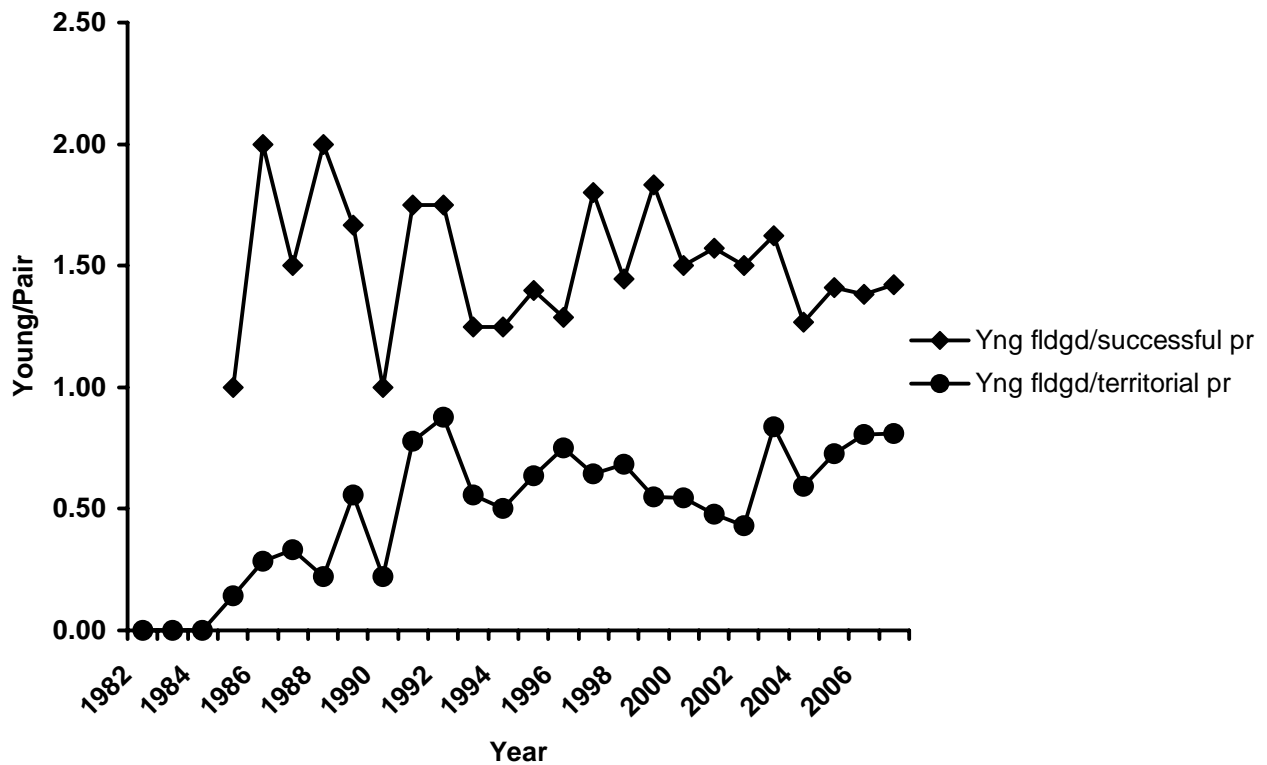
Ten-year summary 1998 – 2007

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Areas occupied	19	20	23	24	26	31	32	33	36	42
Territorial pairs	19	20	22	23	25	31	32	33	36	42
Clutches laid	16	16	19	17	22	25	28	28	31	35
Broods confirmed hatched	9	9	12	10	14	20	19	21	25	31
Successful broods	9	6	8	7	8	16	15	17	21	24
Young fledged	13	11	12	11	12	26	19	24	29	34
Young fledged per breeding pair	0.81	0.69	0.63	0.65	0.55	1.04	0.68	0.86	0.94	0.97
Young fledged per territorial pair	0.68	0.55	0.55	0.48	0.48	0.84	0.59	0.73	0.81	0.81

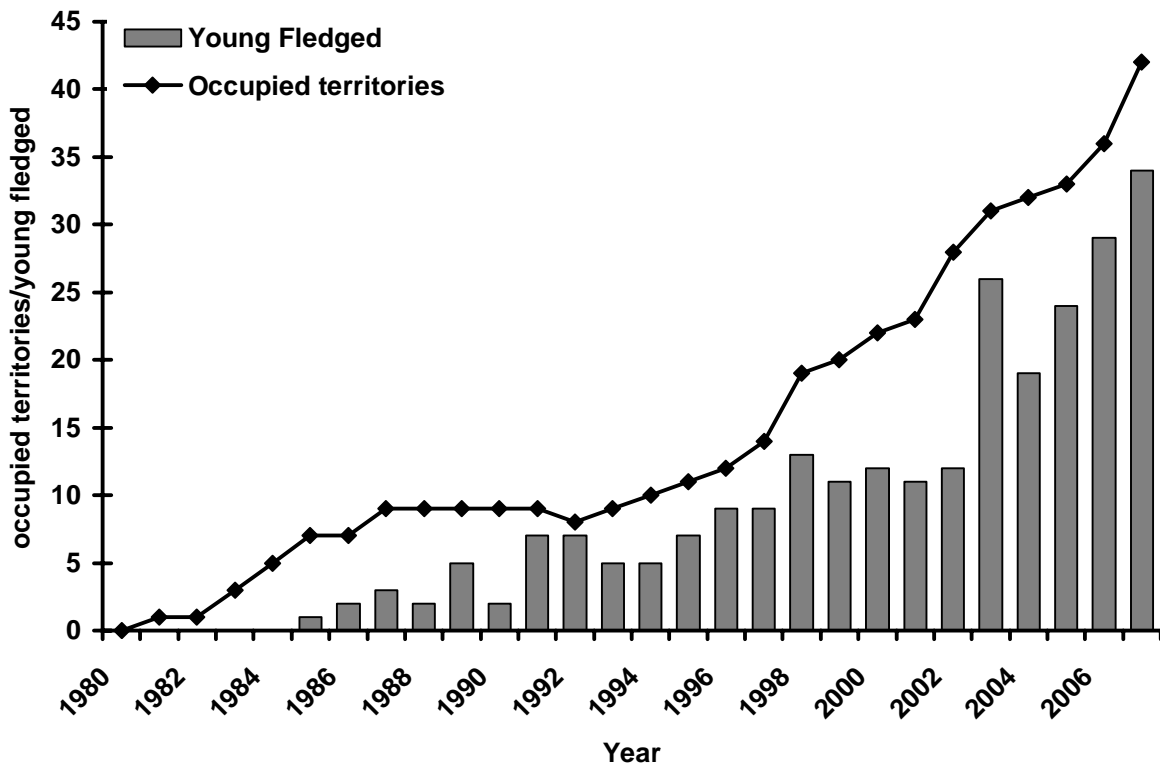
Charts showing progress of the breeding population 1982 – 2007



Number of successful breeding pairs, failed breeding pairs and non-breeding (breeding not proven) pairs of sea eagles in Scotland, 1982-2007.



Fledged brood size (young fledged per successful pair) and productivity (young fledged per territorial pair) of sea eagles breeding in Scotland, 1982-2007.



Number of occupied territories and young fledged in Scotland, 1982-2007

Territory accounts

Skye summary 2007- Eleven pairs occupied territories on Skye including two new pairs. Eight pairs laid but only four pairs bred successfully fledging five young. Young were fitted with white wing tags with a black legend.

Site code	Male ID.	Female ID.	Breeding activity	No. young fledged	Tag legends of young
7	01 white S	untagged	This pair laid in an existing nest last used in 2002 and continued to incubate despite a muir burn fire that reached to within 100m of the cliff edge above the nest. However, they failed during a period of poor weather soon after hatching.	0	
8	untagged	untagged	Built a new nest in the traditional nesting area but then moved 1km to build a 2nd new nest a few days prior to laying. The pair failed at the small chick stage during a spell of poor weather. Disturbance from regular boat traffic close to the nest may have contributed to failure at this site.	0	
11	untagged	99 red O	The pair used the same nest as in '06, and fledged one chick. The ringing and tagging of the chick was filmed by the BBC and screened on 'The One Show'.	1	T (female)
24	96 grey 2	untagged	Laid at a new nest site near the '05/06 nest site but failed at incubation or early chick stage for unknown reasons.	0	
31	untagged	untagged sub-adult	Built up and lined the '05/06 nest but not known to have laid. The existing female (98 green N) was observed in early '07 but was replaced by an untagged sub-adult female early in the breeding season. Female '98 green N' has not been sighted since.	0	
35	untagged	untagged	Used the same nest as in '05/06 and fledged two chicks on 21st and 28 th July. Neither young were ringed or tagged due to the precarious nest situation.	2	Both untagged
36	00 yellow V	untagged	Pair located incubating on a new nest in a Scots pine on a neighbouring island 4.5 km from the only other nest in this territory. They fledged one chick that flew the nest around the 24 th July.	1	V (male)
42	untagged	untagged 03/04	Bred for the first time and fledged one chick from the original site 31 nest. The site 31 pair built up a nest just 1km away and there was frequent interaction between the two neighbouring pairs.	1	black spot (male)
43	02 blue P	untagged	Built up the nest used in '06 but did not lay. Other sub-adult and immature birds were seen interacting with this pair within their territory during April.	0	
47	03 pink E	03 pink H	New pair built-up an old buzzard nest in a sitka spruce. They laid, but failed soon after hatching when a 10-day-old chick was found below the nest. A close inspection revealed that the nest had slipped to sit at an angle and this is the likely cause of failure.	0	
50	02 blue T	03 pink X	New pair built up and lined an artificial nest in a spruce but did not lay. This pair also built up a second nest on a small crag approximately 3km from the first. Aggressive interactions were observed between this pair and the site 7 pair that bred 6km away.	0	

Argyll Islands summary 2007- two new pairs established in this area, bringing the total number of pairs occupying territories to eleven. Ten of these pairs are on Mull and one pair (site 48) that established in 2007 is on an adjacent island. Nine pairs laid, eight pairs hatched young and seven breeding attempts were successful, fledging ten young. Young were fitted with white wing tags with a black legend.

Site code	Male ID.	Female ID.	Breeding activity	No. young fledged	Tag legends of young
1	untagged	untagged	Thought to be the same replacement female since 2001 with the same replacement male since 2004. They bred successfully in a nest they last used in 2005. They fledged one chick. The chick was seen nearby in December.	1	E (male)
2	untagged	untagged	Thought to be the same pair as in previous years (now thought to be in their late 20s) nested early in their usual site and successfully fledged two chicks. White M was seen on Mull in January 2008 with several other youngsters.	2	M & P (both female)
18	94 untagged Ringed left leg	92 green L Ringed right leg	Mull's public viewing pair (see later report) built a new nest out of sight and all went well until 1 day after hatch when the two chicks fell from the nest and died after the nest slipped. First failure since 1999.	0	-
19	untagged (93 red X)	Untagged (92 green O)	This pair shifted to the western extreme of their known territory but was unable to repeat their first ever success from 2006 and failed at hatch point.	0	-
20	94 yellow 0	96 grey L	This odd pair continued their familiar quasi-breeding attempts again this year but are not known to have laid or incubated eggs. Last year's new nest was untouched.	0	-
21	94 yellow X	98 green X	The same pair as previously built a new nest on the same sea cliff where last year's fell out. They successfully fledged two chicks which were untagged due to the precarious nest location.	2	Untagged
27	untagged (96 grey O)	untagged (95 white O)	This usual pair moved 2km west and built a new nest in a birch tree. They successfully fledged one chick which was seen flying well nearby in the autumn.	1	A (female)
29	untagged (95 white X)	00 yellow black spot	The same pair used their only known nest again and successfully fledged one chick. He was seen feeding with 8 other young sea eagles nearby in December.	1	G (male)
33	97 blue 9 (remnant of tag)	98 green T	The male was seen with a tiny blue tag remnant under one wing so is now presumed to be the original male and not a replacement as reported in last year's Newsletter. The pair used their original, now strengthened, 2003 nest and fledged one chick, which was seen on Mull in January 2008. Filmed for BBC One's Animal 24:7.	1	L (male)
48	untagged	03 pinkT	This new pair built a nest near the top of a 30m Douglas fir in an area where a roost site has been monitored for several years. They went on to fledge two chicks in their first breeding attempt. There have been several sightings of White J on an adjacent island since it fledged.	2	J (female), F (male)
51	02 blue X	04 green X	This new young Mull-fledged pair frequented a territory spanning north Mull and the mainland. Whilst roosts were located, no known nest yet exists.	0	-

Western Isles summary 2007- one new pair established on Lewis bringing the total number of pairs occupying territories to ten. Eight pairs laid and all breeding attempts were successful fledging thirteen young. Young were fitted with white wing tags with a black legend.

Site code	Male ID.	Female ID.	Breeding activity	No. young fledged	Tag legends of young
3	untagged	untagged	Bred successfully at the same nest as in '06, fledging two chicks. The remains of a third under-developed chick were found under the nest during tagging. This is only the third time a brood of triplets has been recorded since the reintroduction began.	2	Y (female) X (male)
9	untagged	untagged	Early in the season, the pair was seen on territory and the '06 nest was found to be built up. However, on 4 th April, the male was found dead within 50 m of the nest. Its ring number identified the male as a 23-year-old original release bird and is thought to have died from natural causes. The female was repeatedly seen in the territory along with up to four immature birds on subsequent visits but no replacement male has been seen to date.	0	
17	92 green T	untagged	Bred successfully fledging two chicks from the nest that has been used since 2003. This pair has now fledged twins for seven consecutive seasons and is currently the most productive pair in the population having fledged eighteen chicks since 1996.	2	Untagged
30	98 green F	untagged	Used a new nest at the base of a tree on a cliff 2 km from the '06 nest and over 15km from the first nest built by this pair in 2002. Two chicks hatched but one died at between two and six weeks of age. The remaining chick fledged and was seen on Skye in January 2008.	1	7 (female)
34	untagged	untagged	Used the same nest as in '06 and fledged two chicks. The pair regularly received supplementary fish from a local man.	2	R & S (both male)
39	untagged	untagged	Added to the '06 nest but not known to have laid. The site 45 pair settled just 2 km away and interactions between these neighbouring pairs were observed on several occasions.	0	
41	untagged	untagged	Bred successfully fledging one chick from a new nest 2.5 km from the previous nest. This pair established their territory in 2005 and has fledged one chick each year since then.	1	1 (female)
44	untagged	untagged	Used a new nest on a cliff just 1.5 km from site 17 and successfully fledged one chick for the first time.	1	Black Triangle (female)
45	untagged sub-adult	02 blue K	Built a new nest over 10 km from the previous nest and fledged two chicks in their first breeding attempt. Analysis of the prey remains at this site revealed that a minimum of 98 fulmars were taken to the nest during the breeding season! Both chicks were seen in December at locations over 100km apart.	2	Z (male) O (female)
46	03 pink L	03 pink S	This new four-year-old pair bred successfully in their first breeding attempt fledging two chicks. However, one chick was slow in developing and died soon after fledging. This pair are siblings that fledged from the same nest (site 34) in 2003.	2	9, untagged (both male)

Mainland and Small Isles summary 2007 - one new pair established in Lochaber, bringing the total number of pairs occupying territories to ten. All the pairs laid but not all breeding attempts were successful, six young were fledged. Young were fitted with white wing tags with a black legend.

Site code	Male ID.	Female ID.	Breeding activity	No. young fledged	Tag legends of young
6	untagged	untagged	Both adults, thought to be same as last year, were seen over the traditional nesting area on a neighbouring island throughout the winter. However the pair returned to the same nest they used last year and bred successfully, fledging one chick.. One egg failed to hatch.	1	4 (male)
10	89 yellow (remnant of tag)	untagged	Thought to be same pair as '06 but the male now has the remnant of a tag on the right wing only. Fledged one chick in early July from a new cliff nest site.	1	5 (male)
12	untagged	91 ice blue	The female was the same as last year with just a stub of a blue tag attached to the left wing only. The pair laid in the same nest as last year but the breeding attempt failed before eggs were due to hatch. The reason for failure is unknown.	0	
22	94 yellow 8	untagged	The pair was observed incubating on the same nest that has been used since 2003 but failed for unknown reasons in early May. Eggshell was found below the nest.	0	
23	untagged	untagged	This pair used same nest as '06 and fledged two chicks. Thirteen chicks have now fledged from this territory since it became established in 1998.	2	2 (female) 3 (male)
28	untagged	97 blue 8	Same female as last year, tagged on right wing only. The pair bred successfully fledging one chick from a new tree nest site. This is the second chick to fledge from this territory since it became established in 2001.	1	K (male)
37	01 white T	98 green 0	Despite nesting close to a public footpath, this pair made their first successful breeding attempt, fledging one chick. An additional green tagged adult was observed roosting with the female on one occasion in April. The juvenile was seen nearby in December.	1	H (female)
38	untagged	99 red I	The female was the same as last year with one tag remaining on the right wing. The pair built a new nest in an oak tree but failed for unknown reasons during incubation. This pair has not bred successfully since setting up territory in 2004.	0	
40	untagged	00 yellow O	The pair built a new nest in a conifer but failed at the small chick stage, possibly due to the high level of disturbance from several activities in the surrounding area. One egg failed to hatch.	0	
49	03 pink O	untagged	New pair located in Lochaber. They built a nest in a lodge pole pine in an area of wind throw and successfully hatched one or more chicks but failed in early May for unknown reasons.	0	

Breeding season diet

As in previous years, the diet was studied through the collection of prey remains from nests after young had fledged. In total over 800 items were collected from 22 successful nest sites. The diet was very broad with over 40 species of bird, mammal and fish recorded (see table). However, despite the range of items recorded a few species dominated – mainly sea birds. Fulmars were the most common item contributing almost 50% of all items recorded. Shags, auks and gulls were also common items. On the Western Isles at least 98 fulmars were recorded at one site, whilst 40 guillemots were recorded at another site on Skye. Some of the more unusual items recorded were a mink, a diver species, and a cuckoo.

There are some regional dietary trends emerging with mammals, particularly hares, and strandline birds appearing most frequently at Mull sites, whilst on Skye and the Western Isles the majority of prey items are sea birds. Fish were recorded at most sites but as most fish bones are small and may be digested by eaglets, this prey group is likely to be under-represented in this type of dietary analysis. Outside the breeding season, the diet of both adult and immature birds is known to include a large proportion of sheep and deer carrion.

Bird species

Diver sp.
Fulmar
Manx shearwater
Gannet
Cormorant
Shag
Grey heron
Greylag goose
Mallard
Eider
Shellduck
Red-breasted merganser
Red grouse
Pheasant
Oystercatcher
Curlew
Snipe
Common gull
Herring gull
Lesser black-backed gull
Great black-backed gull
Guillemot
Razorbill
Black guillemot
Puffin
Cuckoo
Mistle thrush
Raven
Hooded crow

Mammals

Brown rat
Mountain hare
Irish hare
Rabbit
Mink
Lamb
Roe deer calf
Red deer calf

Fish

Lumpsucker
Mackerel
Dogfish sp.
Ling
Cod
Hake
Conger eel



Prey remains collected from a single nest in the Western Isles

Wing-tagging and sightings

Tagging

Of the 34 chicks that fledged in the west of Scotland, 27 young were tagged with white wing-tags. Two new translocation projects commenced in 2007. Birds released in Ireland have a coloured bar below the tag legend, while those released in east Scotland are distinguished by a black bar above and below the legend.



West coast
(wild bred)



Ireland
(release)



East coast
(release)

As the west coast population increases it is becoming more difficult to tag all the accessible

young and less important to be able to identify each individual in the population. The Sea Eagle Project Team has investigated less invasive ways of marking young in future. Instead of wing tags, young birds will be fitted with a coloured leg ring that conforms with the International Colour Ringing Programme for sea eagles. The colour of the ring will denote the year that the bird fledged, while the inscription will identify the individual. In addition, fieldworkers have been collecting moulted feathers from adults and mouth swabs from chicks which Natural Research Ltd are using to extract DNA material with a view to identifying the genetic fingerprint of each individual. This project also aims to compare the genetic diversity of the re-introduced population with that of museum specimens collected from the original population pre-extinction.

Sightings

In 2007, field workers, volunteers and members of the public reported over 700 individual sightings of birds from the west coast population. In many cases no tag information was given, however, 309 sightings recorded tag colour and in 133 cases, it was possible to identify the individual bird. The majority of these observations related to non-territorial juvenile, immature and sub-adult birds with '06 yellow-tagged birds being most frequently sighted. In addition, '05 red, '03 pink and, less commonly, '04 green-tagged birds were recorded. Birds known to be of west coast origin were seen as far south as Islay and as far east as the Black Isle. Most untagged individuals sighted in England are likely to be continental birds. For instance, a colour-ringed bird seen in Hampshire in the autumn was identified as a juvenile ringed in Finnish Lapland!

Recent analyses of sightings of wing-tagged sea eagles have given a better insight into juvenile dispersal, juvenile survival and age of recruitment to the breeding population. These important aspects of demography are useful in assessing the health of the population and projecting its future expansion. Ring and wing tag details also provide information on changes in pairings of territorial birds. During the early breeding season in 2007, the recovery of a ring from a dead male at site 9 identified it as a Norwegian bird imported and released in 1984. Although the loss of an adult is unfortunate, it is thought that this bird died of natural causes, possibly in a territorial conflict. The identification of this bird provides useful information about longevity. Its loss represents another step in the transition to a new phase of the re-establishment of a population in the west of Scotland. With the majority of birds imported during the first phase of the project having died, most of the birds in the population are now wild-bred Scottish birds, along with a few Norwegian birds imported during the second phase.

In the six new territories that became established in 2007, ten individuals could be identified by their tag legends. The age of these establishing birds varied from 3-5 years of age and the distance between the natal nest site and the breeding areas varied from 10-152 km. The distances for each individual are given in the table below. As with many other raptor species there was a tendency for females to disperse further than males.

Tagged individual	Sex	Territory of origin	Territory occupied	Distance between natal and breeding area (km)
03 pink S	F	34	46	67
03 pink L	M	34	46	67
03 pink H	F	2	47	130
03 pink E	M	11	47	10
03 pink T	F	11	48	152
03 pink O	M	18	49	79
03 pink X	F	29	50	92
02 blue T	M	11	50	24
02 blue X	M	29	51	25
04 green X	F	2	51	38

Distance between natal nest site and breeding area for ten individuals that paired up in 2007



'06 yellow 8 photographed by Frank Stark



Talons of site 9 male ('84 release found dead in 2007) photographed by Anna Crawford

Selected sightings reported in 2007

(Includes sightings of non-territorial individually identifiable birds).

Date	Bird details	Location seen	Ringing location
10-Jan	2006 juv. Yellow O	Loch Ba, Mull	Mull
10-Jan	2006 juv. Yellow G	Glen Cannel, Mull	Mull
19-Jan	2004 imm. Green F	Loch Scridain, Mull	Wester Ross
2-Feb	2006 juv. Yellow H	Loch Scridain, Mull	Mull
12-Feb	2005 imm. Red O	Loch Scridain, Mull	Mull
22-Feb	2005 imm. Red E	Glen Seilisdair, Mull	Skye
22-Feb	2006 juv. Yellow Black Spot	Glen Seilisdair, Mull	Small Isles
26-Feb	2004 imm. Green A	Dunvegan, Skye	Mull
26-Feb	2005 imm. Red 3	Dunvegan Skye	Wester Ross
3-Mar	2005 imm. Red H	Luirbost, Lewis	Lewis
5-Mar	2006 juv. Yellow L	Loch na Keal, Mull	Mull
5-Mar	2006 juv. Yellow F	Claggan, Morvern	Mull
10-Mar	2005 imm Red T	Glen Eynort, Skye	Skye
23-Mar	2006 juv. Yellow 9	Quidinis, South Harris	Lewis
25-Mar	2006 juv. Yellow A	Loch Ba, Mull	Mull
26-Mar	2006 juv. Yellow 9	Loch Bhalamus, Lewis	Uist
28-Mar	2006 juv. Yellow L	Loch Ba, Mull	Mull
29-Mar	2006 juv. Yellow T	West Loch Tarbert, Harris	Skye
31-Mar	2004 imm. Green 2	Kilmory, Rum	Lewis
13-Apr	2005 imm. Red 4	Isle of Raasay	Wester Ross
6-Jun	2004 imm. Green T	Kilmory, Rum	Skye
26-Jul	2003 sub-ad Pink F	Baile Ailein, Lewis	Wester Ross
4-Aug	2006 imm. Yellow Y	Baile Ailein, Lewis	Harris
5-Sep	2005 imm. Red 4	Portree, Skye	Wester Ross
19-Sep	2004 imm Green T	Uig, Skye	Skye
26-Sep	2006 imm. Yellow 2	Central Skye	Wester Ross
29-Sep	2006 imm. Yellow X	Portree, Skye	Skye
1-Oct	2006 imm. Yellow L	Loch Eynort, Skye	Mull
1-Oct	2005 imm. Red S	Uillin, Morvern	Mull
27-Oct	2006 imm. Yellow C	Killiechronan, Mull	Mull
27-Oct	2006 imm. Yellow E	Killiechronan, Mull	Mull
5- Nov	2006 imm. Yellow P	Loch Scridain, Mull	Mull
12-Nov	2006 imm. Yellow 4	Loch Tarbert, Jura	Lewis
16-Nov	2006 imm. Yellow Black Spot	The Oa, Islay	Small Isles
22-Nov	2006 imm. Yellow 6	Glen Eynort, Skye	Small Isles
23-Nov	2004 imm. Green 2	Loch Carnan, South Uist	Lewis
4-Dec	2005 imm. Red H	Nunton, Benbecula	Lewis
11-Dec	2006 imm. Yellow 5	Haarsal, South Uist	Small Isles
19-Dec	2006 imm Yellow X	Glen Cannel, Mull	Skye

Re-colonisation of former range

2007 was a landmark year in the programme to re-establish sea eagles across their former range in the British Isles. Not only did the west coast population take significant steps in expanding its range, but two new nuclei were established with the release of imported chicks in the east of Scotland and in Ireland. Projects in England and Wales are also still active at the planning stages. A summary of each project is presented below.

East Scotland

East Scotland Sea Eagles is a partnership project between RSPB Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS), releasing 15-20 chicks a year between 2007 and 2011 in Fife with the aim of establishing a white tailed eagle population in East Scotland. It is hoped that this will infill part of the birds' range and strengthen the Scottish population as a whole. As in the two previous release phases in the west of Scotland, birds are sourced from the large Norwegian population, with single chicks collected from nests containing twins by the Norwegian Ornithological Society. This time the birds were collected from the Møre og Romsdal area, over 500km southwest of sites where young were collected for the Phase I and II releases.

The 9 males and 6 females aged 6-8 weeks were flown to RAF Kinloss by the Norwegian Air Force and after some media scrutiny were driven down to the release site. Here they spent the next two months in pairs and trios in large aviaries containing perches and artificial nests and were fed a varied diet of fresh and frozen fish, rabbit and venison through a small hatch which prevented them seeing people and associating them with food. The open-fronted cages allowed them a great view of the landscape and some lively exchanges with nearby green woodpeckers and passing buzzards and ospreys! Prior to release, all birds were fitted with wing tags and radio backpacks. The radios weighing 70g have a five-year battery life allowing us a unique insight into their movements and use of habitat right up until they settle on breeding territories. Wing tags conformed to the white colour for 2007, but East coast birds have bars above and below the legend:



Juvenile photographed by Andy Hay

White Wing tag	Sex (DNA)	Release date
F	Male	10/08/07
5	Female	14/08/07
T	Male	10/08/07
Y	Male	14/08/07
2	Female	14/08/07
7	Female	13/08/07
C	Female	07/09/07
H	Male	10/08/07
K	Female	13/08/07
L	Male	13/08/07
3	Male	11/08/07
1	Male	11/08/07
N	Male	13/08/07
X	Male	14/08/07
V	Female	10/08/07
F	Male	10/08/07
5	Female	14/08/07

Wing tags, sexes and release dates of 2007 birds

The birds, weighing between 4.3-5.6kg, were released between the 10th and 14th August, with most birds leaving the cages within 30mins of opening and one taking off over my head as I opened the hatch! For the first week, all birds stayed within 1km of the release site. After two weeks males N & F moved north up the coast. F reached Stonehaven in September, before moving onto St Fergus where he stayed for a few months and N stopped at Forfar Loch and then the Montrose basin.

Mimicking their wild counterparts, the remaining birds began to make exploratory trips throughout Fife and Tayside, moving to the coast, following rivers or seeking out lochs. Birds dispersed until there was a sociable group of six left at the food dump until late October. After some trips south to the Forth, Doune and Flanders Moss, five of these birds reunited to use the Tay and other lochs and rivers near Perth, before Christmas. They remain in pairs and trios often checking in on each other. The birds have been observed eating rabbits, gulls, pink-footed geese, carrion, cygnets, a hare, and a heron! Unfortunately, two birds have been electrocuted on transformers, something that also affects young birds in Norway, but we are in discussion with electricity companies to address this. There has also been a suspected persecution in the Angus glens and a fourth bird (V) was found dead in November on Forvie NNR. The cause of death is unknown. However, public response to the project has been fantastic with the birds already drawing birdwatchers and over 400 sightings received by the end of December. A programme of work with local schools commences early in 2008, when it will be time to start preparing for the next arrivals!

For updates on the project's progress, check out our blog at www.rspb.org.uk Sightings of east coast birds can be reported to Claire Smith at eastscotlandsea eagles@rspb.org.uk or phone 01738 630783.

Ireland

After an absence of 110 years, the programme to re-establish a viable self-sustaining breeding population of sea eagles in southwest Ireland was launched with the release of 15 chicks imported from north central Norway. After careful consideration, the Killarney National Park in County Kerry was selected as the release site likely to give the best chance of success. The long, indented coastline provides ideal habitat, with good populations of seabirds, wintering geese and waterfowl.



Irish release site photographed by Allan Mee

Employing techniques developed in the west of Scotland project, birds were housed in a number of secluded aviaries until they were fully feathered and fit for release. Prior to their release, the birds were fitted with radio transmitters and wing tags (white on the right and yellow on the left) to allow project managers to track their progress.

TAG	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	---	X	▲	/	█
SEX	M	M	M	F	F	M	M	F	M	M	M	F	F	F	F



The young eagles were then released in two phases in early and late August. After familiarising themselves with the environs of the park for a few weeks, they gradually increased the length and frequency of their sorties with visits to the Dingle Peninsula, the Skelligs, the Blaskets (illustrated in photo) and the Slieve Mish Mountains near Keel. By the end of the year, one bird had died from unknown causes, but the remaining 14 birds were doing well, spending much of their time in the vicinity of the upper lake in the park or

making trips for several days at a time from the park into the surrounding area.



Norwegian sea eagle chicks about to be released into Killarney National Park in Ireland. Note yellow wing tag (with white basal bar) on left wing and white tag (with yellow basal bar) on right wing.

The Irish White-tailed Sea Eagle Reintroduction Programme is managed by the Golden Eagle Trust Ltd, in partnership with the National Parks and Wildlife Service. For more information on the project visit www.goldeneagle.ie and follow the link for white-tailed eagle.

Photographs by Allan Mee

England

Natural England is leading the project that hopes to reintroduce sea eagles, sourced from Poland, to the south east of England. The Project Team, comprising RSPB, Anglia Water, Suffolk Wildlife Trust and Natural England, is currently investigating a range of alternative sites and strategies for a release programme, taking into account concerns regarding the nationally important bittern population and other issues raised during early consultations. On selection of a site, the project team will undergo a lengthy local consultation in order to inform future decisions on the proposal.

Wales

Following a discussion seminar held in 2003, the Countryside Council for Wales commissioned a preliminary assessment on the possible re-introduction of white-tailed sea eagle, among other candidate species, to Wales. The report (Marquiss 2005) suggested that given the food resources and suitable habitat available, re-introduced white-tailed sea eagles would stand a good chance of success. However, budgetary constraints and statutory obligations prevented CCW continuing the study. In 2006, Professor Edward-Jones of the University of Wales in Bangor convened a meeting to rekindle the project. A project steering group comprising volunteers and members of staff from the University of Wales was subsequently formed and it was agreed that they would undertake the second phase of a feasibility study. Detailed assessments of habitat and prey availability are currently underway, in order to fully evaluate the potential and identify the most suitable locations for the birds. An initial approach to the Norwegian Ornithological Society regarding a donor population proved favourable.

Public Viewing Loch Frisa, Isle of Mull 2007

The Territory 18 adults (15 year old female 'Frisa' and 13 year old male 'Skye') had spent a great deal of time over the winter and in early spring at their usual haunt at the south end of the loch. They were frequently seen on their 'usual' nest and it was assumed that they had chosen their nest site for 2007. Wrong! With just a few days to go before laying was expected, they were suddenly observed frantically nest building at a site above the forestry track and out of view from the hide position. On closer inspection, it was already a sizable structure and they had clearly been sneakily building it on and off throughout the winter. Sure enough on the appointed day, incubation commenced. The nest had looked secure and well placed high in a mature sitka spruce and all proceeded well throughout incubation under the watchful guard of the Mull Eagle Watch volunteers around the clock. There were exciting clashes with the golden eagles who this year seemed unusually aggressive towards their now familiar neighbours. On hatch day, food was taken in and although we could not view the nest directly, the behaviour of the adults suggested all was well. But a day later, all that changed.

On the morning of 17 April, both adults launched themselves out of the top of the wood and soared high into the clouds and away to the south. Something was clearly very wrong. A dash to the base of the tree confirmed our worst fears. There, lying in the mud were two dead day old chicks. They had died either from the impact of the fall or from hypothermia on the dark, wet forest floor. It was a huge blow to everyone involved in the Mull Eagle Watch but it was a natural loss and the first time this pair has failed completely since 1999. A close inspection by FCS staff showed that the nest must have slipped sometime overnight on the 16/17 April causing the chicks to roll out.

With no active nest to attend to, Frisa and Skye became less reliable on a daily basis but were still frequently seen by the 3500 people who visited the hide. Immature birds were sometimes seen and the CCTV equipment was switched to a very busy buzzard's nest with two chicks, and a great spotted woodpecker nest nearby. A young tawny owl, a bird feeding station, regular golden eagle, peregrine and hen harrier sightings were all added bonuses. As the season progressed, Skye and Frisa returned to their usual post-breeding pattern, roosting and perching in their favourite trees, so sighting rates increased again. Most of Mull's Primary Schools visited the hide; over £10,500 was raised (split 50:50 between Mull Eagle Watch and local good causes on Mull & Iona) and the project received widespread media coverage following the loss of the chicks. The project was featured on the BBC's 'Saving Planet Earth' and 'Animal 24:7' series and Frisa and Skye starred in their own TV Special on BBC called 'Mull – Eagle Paradise'. The 'Saving Planet Earth' programme resulted in a grant to Mull Eagle Watch from the BBC Wildlife Fund for £5000 following donations from viewers.

In summary, a 'difficult' season was turned around by staff Julie Paton, Steve Irvine and Sacha Beard into another successful year and it proved that while the sea eagles are still the stars of the show for everyone who visits, there's a great deal more in the natural world to show people in the fabulous Loch Frisa area.



"Mull Eagle Watch" is Forestry Commission Scotland, RSPB Scotland, Mull & Iona Community Trust, Scottish Natural Heritage, Strathclyde Police and volunteers. Local businesses: Island Engineering, Sea Life Surveys, Richard Henderson Builders and Crerar Hotels. Sightings are received from land and sea-based wildlife tour companies, fish farms, farmers, locals and visitors. Optical equipment is provided by Viking Optical Ltd. We are grateful to police forces in the UK which assist each year and to our funding partners: SNH, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Nàdair Trust, BBC Wildlife Fund and to all who supported, visited and donated to the project in 2007. Finally, special thanks to the McDowall Family at Lettermore for their cooperation and involvement with the sea eagles and the public viewing project throughout the year.

Public viewing Aros Centre, Isle of Skye 2007

Yet again the sea eagle pair occupying this territory surprised us in their site selection for the 2007 season. After putting a lot of effort into building another new nest not too far from last year's site, at the last moment (it seemed) they opted for an alternative location almost a kilometre away. As it turned out this may have proved to be the undoing of their attempt to raise a family this year.

The new site was on a relatively low ledge exposed to the northerly winds, which, in recent years, have become a regular feature of our spring weather. The cliff location and low aspect of the site presented a different setting for a camera and our hopes of some refreshingly different views of the nest were running high. Everything seemed to be progressing as normal, until one day in late May, after five days of bitter northerly winds blasting the nest, the adults distressed behaviour suggested all was not well with their three-week old chick. On closer inspection, it was revealed that the nest was empty. The exact cause of the failure is unknown, as the body of the chick was never recovered.

As luck would have it, an opportunity arose to place a camera on another sea eagle nest elsewhere on the island. The cctv camera was installed, and the pictures beamed back to the Aros Centre via the internet. This site and the behaviour of the adult pair, provided quite a contrast to the former situation. The two chicks reared provided entertaining viewing at the Aros Centre from July through until October – an unexpected bonus since they continued to use the nest as a roost, feeding and perching place long after they had fledged. Over 7000 visitors to the exhibition enjoyed the antics of the two siblings and an insight into life after learning to fly. The displays and close up views of life in a sea eagle nest at the Aros Centre, provide an inspiring and informative compliment to the live views of sea eagles seen around the island.

The Sea Eagle Exhibition was established in 2000 as a partnership project between the Aros Ltd, RSPB Scotland, The Highland Council, Skye & Lochalsh Enterprise and Scottish Natural Heritage. We are grateful to the directors and staff at Aros Ltd and the crofters and landowners who continue to support this project.

Acknowledgements

In addition to all the individuals and businesses acknowledged earlier we would like to take this opportunity to express our very sincerest thanks to all of those who have supported and continue to support this project in many differing ways. As the support grows with the population, it becomes nigh impossible to mention everyone by name. Perhaps suffice to know that your contributions and support are invaluable in the continued success of re-establishing the sea eagle where it rightly belongs. Scottish Natural Heritage, Northern Constabulary, Strathclyde Police and Forestry Commission Scotland in particular are thanked for their continued involvement and contributions. Kate Griffiths of Glasgow University is thanked for her gender analysis work. We would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge support for our work at the Aros Centre from the Scottish Executive's Biodiversity Action Grant Scheme and the Leader + Programme.

Get involved!

Have you seen a sea eagle?

The Sea Eagle Project Team is a partnership between RSPB, Forestry Commission Scotland and the UK statutory conservation agencies. Other organisations and individual experts participate by invitation. The Team is keen to receive sightings of sea eagles and encourage observers to send reports to the RSPB who collate the information on their behalf. Many birds have distinctive wing-tags and as of 2008, young birds in the west of Scotland will be fitted with a coloured leg ring. Details of these and their inscriptions are especially important. Please phone or send any information to your local RSPB office, or to the North Scotland Regional Office in Inverness.



Jon Pear 2007



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