



Sea eagle project
Newsletter 2008



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.

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Cover photograph by Jon Pear.

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Summary of the 2008 breeding season

The 2008 breeding season was not as successful as it has been in the last couple of years. However, it was the third best year in terms of the number of chicks produced. In addition, two new pairs were located, bringing the total number of occupied territories to 44. The new pairs were located on the Western Isles and in Wester Ross. As in 2007, 35 pairs laid eggs but this year only 21 broods hatched. 20 pairs bred successfully fledging 28 young.

A large proportion of the failures occurred in the Western Isles where only two of 11 pairs bred successfully and this was the main reason for the drop in the number of chicks fledging in comparison to 2006 and 2007. The breeding failures on the Western Isles occurred during incubation and it is likely that poor weather before and during incubation may have contributed to the high rate of failure in this area.

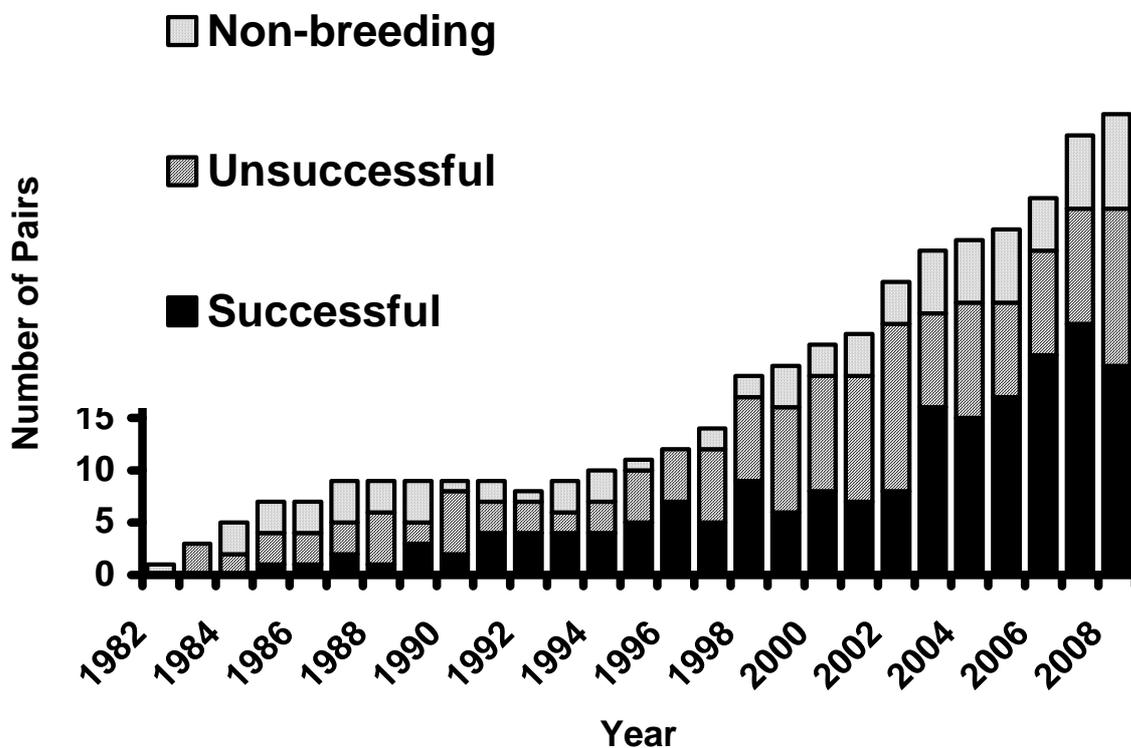
Both adult and sub-adult birds were recorded in a number of new areas in 2008. This is a promising sign for the continued expansion of the population and it is hoped that some of these birds will establish new breeding territories in 2009. In addition, immature birds from the 2007 East-coast release project have been observed on both Mull and Skye this year, whilst wild-bred immatures from the West coast population have also been seen on the east.

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

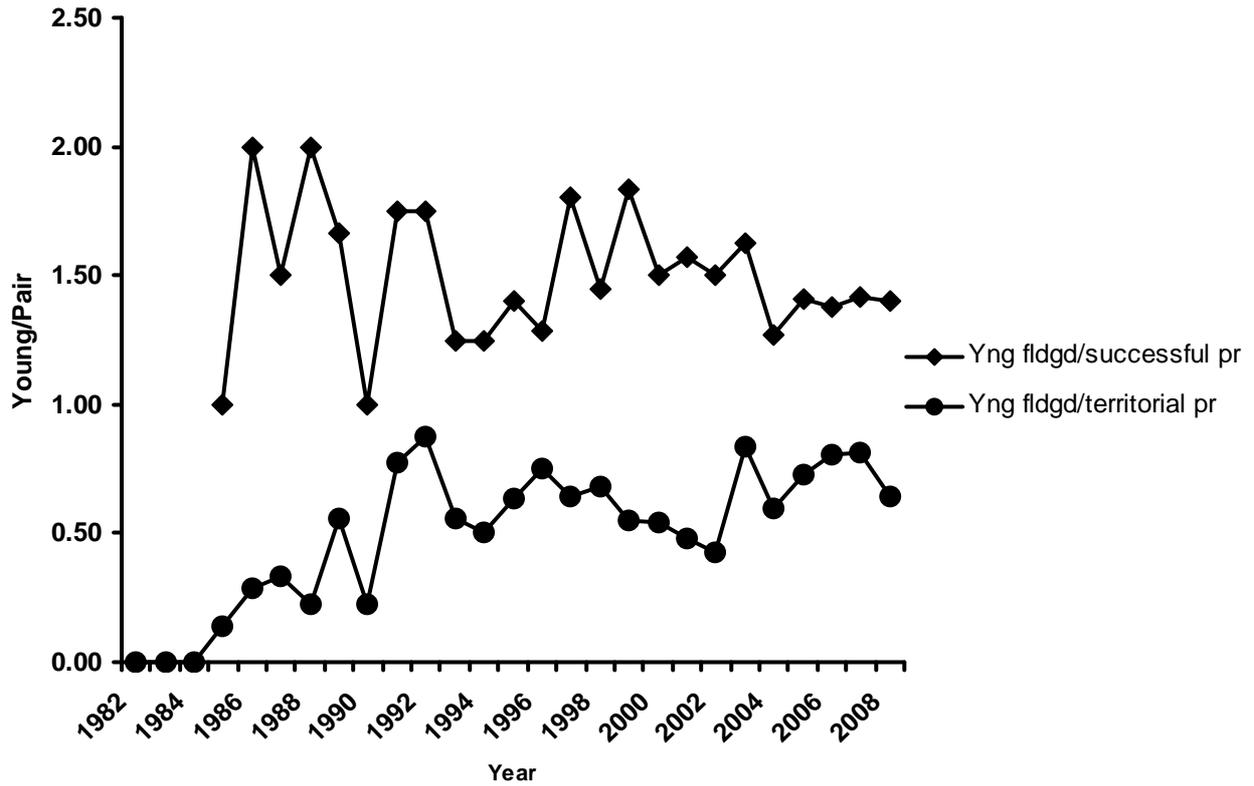
Ten-year summary 1999 – 2008

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Areas occupied	20	23	24	26	31	32	33	36	42	44
Territorial pairs	20	22	23	25	31	32	33	36	42	44
Clutches laid	16	19	17	22	25	28	28	31	35	35
Broods confirmed hatched	9	12	10	14	20	19	21	25	31	21
Successful broods	6	8	7	8	16	15	17	21	24	20
Young fledged	11	12	11	12	26	19	24	29	34	28
Young fledged per breeding pair	0.69	0.63	0.65	0.55	1.04	0.68	0.86	0.94	0.97	0.85
Young fledged per territorial pair	0.55	0.55	0.48	0.48	0.84	0.59	0.73	0.81	0.81	0.64

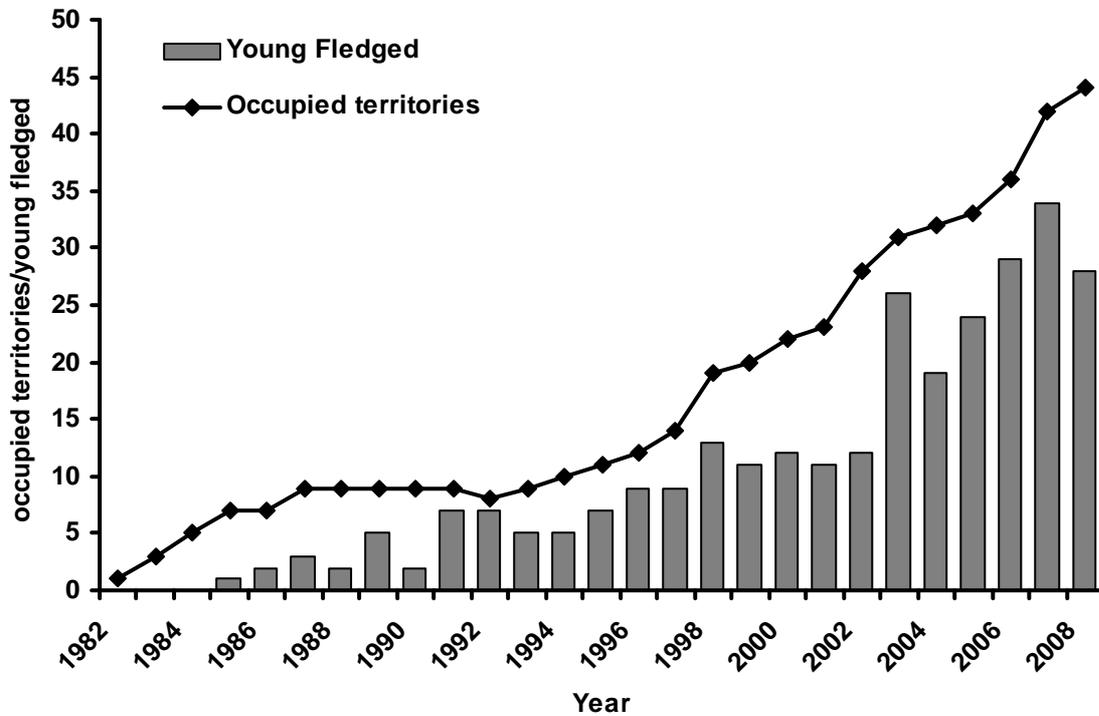
Charts showing progress of the breeding population 1982 – 2008



Number of successful breeding pairs, failed breeding pairs and non-breeding (breeding not proven) pairs of sea eagles in Scotland, 1982-2008.



Fledged brood size (young fledged per successful pair) and productivity (young fledged per territorial pair) of sea eagles breeding in Scotland, 1982-2008.



Number of occupied territories and young fledged in Scotland, 1982-2008

Territory accounts

Skye summary 2008- Eleven pairs occupied territories on Skye. Eight pairs laid eggs, four pairs bred successfully fledging six young, all of which were fitted with BTO and colour rings. The 2008 colour ring combination is white over red.

Site code	Male ID.	Female ID.	Breeding activity	No. young fledged	Sex and colour ring number
7	01 white S	untagged	This pair laid in the same nest as '07 but failed before hatching. This failure may have been caused by northerly gales during incubation.	0	
8	untagged	untagged	Built a new nest in a willow in the traditional nesting area. The pair fledged twins around the 20 th July.	2	Male A9/84 Female A9/85
11	untagged	99 red O	Used the same nest as in '06 and '07, despite the nest tree suffering during the winter gales when the top of the tree was blown off, thankfully above nest height. Following this initial disruption they successfully fledged twins.	2	Female A9/81 Female A9/82
24	96 grey 2	untagged	Laid at a new nest site in their traditional breeding area but failed at incubation stage. This is the sixth year in a row that the pair have either suffered early failure or not laid.	0	
31	untagged	untagged	Built a rudimentary nest at the top of a sea cliff but did not lay. The original female (98 green N) was not seen from early '07 until April '08, when she was identified at a different location. She has been observed several times on Skye since, including one sighting at site 31 in August.	0	
35	untagged	untagged	Built a new nest 300m from the '07 nest and hatched two chicks at the beginning of May. One chick was discovered dead in the nest during ringing. The remaining chick was observed on CCTV linked to the Aros Centre in Portree and fledged on the 20 th July.	1	Male A9/76
36	00 yellow V	untagged	Pair located incubating on their original nest after building up the '07 nest during most of February. Gales during the early part of the breeding season may have influenced their choice of nest. This pair laid but failed during incubation, possibly due to disturbance.	0	
42	untagged	untagged	Bred successfully and fledged one chick from the '07 nest (original site 31 nest). This pair have been observed interacting with the neighbouring site 31 birds.	1	Male A9/83
43	02 blue P	untagged	Currently ranging up to 14km from their original territory and are not known to have built up a nest in '08. Other adults, sub-adults and immature birds were seen interacting with this pair within their extended territory over the year.	0	
47	03 pink E	03 pink H	Pair laid but failed during incubation when the top of the nest tree was blown off during northerly gales and eggshell was found below the nest. The pair are still using it for roosting.	0	
50	02 blue T	untagged	Built up and lined the same nest as in '07 but, again, did not lay. Aggressive interactions continue to occur between this pair and the site 7 pair. The female lost her tags over the winter.	0	

Argyll Islands summary 2008 – No new pairs known to have established in this area; the total number of pairs occupying territories remains at eleven. Ten of these pairs are on Mull and one pair established in 2007 (site 48) is on another island in south Argyll. Nine pairs laid eggs, eight pairs hatched young and seven breeding attempts were successful, fledging eight young. Young were fitted with BTO and colour rings. The 2008 colour ring combination is white over red.

Site code	Male ID.	Female ID.	Breeding activity	No. young fledged	Colour ring of young
1	untagged	untagged	Thought to be the same female since 2001 with the same male since 2004. Bred successfully in the nest used in 2007, fledging one chick which was seen flying in a nearby glen in late August.	1	Male A9/66
2	untagged	untagged	Same pair (thought to be in late 20s). Nested early but were disturbed by a photographer early on. Incubated for 62 days (normally 38) but failed to produce young for only 4 th time ever. Man charged and found guilty of reckless disturbance, fined £600. Pair still on territory in late 2008.	0	
18	untagged Ringed left leg	92 green L Ringed right leg	Mull's public viewing pair built a new nest at the south end of Loch Frisa and fledged 2 young. They were fitted with satellite tracking devices as part of a pilot study to look at juv. dispersal. By mid October both chicks, a male and female, had been to the mainland and back to Mull.	2	Female A9/67 Male A9/68
19	untagged	untagged	This pair nested at the western end of their territory and for the first time at this old site fledged a chick, only their 2 nd ever. The fledgling was seen nearby with the adults in August.	1	Female A9/77
20	94 yellow 0	96 grey L	This odd pair continued their quasi-breeding attempts again this year at their '06 nest but are not known to have laid. By May they were, as usual, perching together on rocks near the shore.	0	
21	94 yellow X	98 green X	The pair used their '07 nest. Unusually, after regularly producing twins, they only hatched one chick, which successfully fledged. It was not ringed due to the precarious nest location.	1	Not ringed
27	untagged	untagged	This usual pair moved back to their '07 nest after attempts at a new build nearby blew out. They successfully fledged one chick, which was seen flying well on the mainland in August.	1	Male A9/63
29	untagged	00 yellow black spot	This pair built a new nest at a favourite roost site after many years at their only other nest. They fledged one chick, which was regularly seen on the shoreline with the adults in autumn.	1	Male A9/65
33	97 blue 9 (remnant of tag)	98 green T (right wing only)	The pair built a new nest near their original nest and raised one chick to fledging age – it was seen alive one morning but gone 45mins later and was presumed to have fledged. Sadly, it seems that it died in the nest and fell to the tree base where it was located some weeks later. It was not possible to ascertain the cause of death due to the decayed state of the carcass.	0	
48	untagged	03 pinkT	This same pair repaired their original nest near the top of a 30m Douglas fir on an island to the south of Mull. They went on to fledge one chick in this their second breeding attempt. It was seen with the adults along the coast in late summer.	1	Male A9/86
51	02 blue X	04 green X	This pair continued to frequent a territory spanning north Mull and Ardnamurchan. An early attempt at a nest on Mull never developed beyond a few sticks. The pair are seen regularly and now appear fully adult so hopes are high for a more concerted breeding effort in '09.	0	

Western Isles summary 2008- one new pair established on Uist, bringing the total number of pairs occupying territories to eleven. Eight pairs laid but only two breeding attempts were successful fledging four young. Young were fitted with BTO and colour rings. The 2008 colour ring combination is white over red.

Site code	Male ID.	Female ID.	Breeding activity	No. young fledged	Colour ring of young
3	untagged	untagged	At this remote site, the pair were found to be present in their core nesting area in early April. One of the nests had been built up and the birds were seen on the nest but there was no evidence that eggs had been laid, despite the discovery, on a later visit, that the nest was fully lined.	0	
9	untagged 04	untagged	A new untagged sub-adult replaced the original 23 yr old male that was found dead at this site last year. The old adult female and sub-adult male built up a nest but did not breed.	0	
17	92 green T	untagged	Built a new nest near their core nesting area but failed at incubation. The pair incubated over time and abandoned their breeding attempt in mid May. Two addled eggs were found in the nest. This is the first time in 10 years that this pair has failed.	0	
30	98 green F	untagged	Laid in the '07 nest but failed late during incubation or soon after hatch. Fish farm activities in the area may have caused disturbance at this site.	0	
34	untagged	untagged	Used their original nest and fledged twins for the third year in a row.	2	Female A9/59 Male A9/60
39	untagged	untagged	Returned to the '05 nest site just 2km from the site 46 nest site. The pair laid but failed either during incubation or soon after hatching.	0	
41	untagged	untagged	Laid in their original nest but failed during incubation. A single addled egg was found in the nest in mid May.	0	
44	untagged	untagged	Used the same nest as in '07 within 1.5 km of the site 17 nest. The pair laid but had failed by mid May when the remains of broken eggshell were found in the nest cup.	0	
45	untagged	02 blue K	Used the same nest as in '07 and fledged twins. This was the only pair on Lewis to fledge young. As in '07 the food supply going into this nest was very good with a minimum of 95 fulmars delivered.	2	Male A9/74 Male A9/75
46	03 pink L	03 pink S	This pair built a new nest on a small cliff 1 km from the shore. The pair was observed incubating but had abandoned their breeding attempt by early May when the remains of two broken eggs were found in the nest.	0	
52	04 green N	untagged 04	This territory was first located in early March when the pair of sub-adult birds was seen in display over the mouth of a long sea loch. The pair went on to build a nest at the top a small crag that was also occupied by herons and a pair of peregrines but the eagles did not lay. The male at this site is the '04 fledgling from site 34 just 4 km away from where it has settled.	0	

Mainland and Small Isles summary 2008 – Eleven pairs occupying territories, one new pair located late on in the year in a remote part of Wester Ross. Ten pairs laid and seven pairs were successful fledging ten young. No evidence of breeding was found at the new site. Young were fitted with BTO and colour rings. The 2008 colour ring combination is white over red.

Site code	Male ID.	Female ID.	Breeding activity	No. young fledged	Colour ring 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 and early breeding season. Built up a new nest near to the one used last year but failed during incubation, possibly due to northerly gales.	0	
10	89 yellow	untagged	Thought to be the same pair as last year as they have been seen throughout the winter over their normal territory. Built a new nest on a cliff and successfully fledged twins.	2	Female A9/70 Female A9/71
12	untagged	91 ice blue	Pair laid in a nest last used in 2001. Failed soon after laying, possibly due to poor weather.	0	
22	94 yellow 8	untagged	The pair used the same nest as last year (used repeatedly since 2003), producing twins, which fledged successfully. Unfortunately, in September the smaller of the two fledglings (58) was found injured near power-lines. It is thought to have flown into the lines and, due to the injuries it sustained, had to be put down by a vet.	2	Male A9/57 Male A9/58
23	untagged	untagged	Used same nest as in '05 and fledged one chick. Fourteen chicks have now fledged from this territory since it became established in 1998.	1	Male A9/55
28	untagged	97 blue 8	The pair bred successfully fledging one chick from the same nest used in '07. The chicks' growth rate appeared 'normal' this year, compared to previous chicks. This may have been due to the better weather enabling the adults to hunt more efficiently.	1	Male A9/69
37	01 white T	98 green 0	This pair bred successfully despite nesting close to a public footpath and being observed leaving the nest during incubation due to unintentional disturbance from walkers. The juvenile was seen with the pair near to the nest site in late September.	1	Female A9/56
38	untagged	99 red I	The pair built a new nest in an oak tree but failed for unknown reasons near to hatching. A post-failure nest check revealed egg fragments below the nest and no prey in the nest. This pair has not bred successfully since setting up territory in 2004.	0	
40	untagged	00 yellow O	These birds proved elusive this year and their nest (in a Scots pine) was not located until later on in the season when the chick was too old for ringing.	1	Not ringed
49	03 pink O	untagged	Built a new nest approximately 11km from the original '07 nest and fledged twins. The new nest was built in a large Scots pine and is located over 10 km from the nearest coastline.	2	Male A9/72 Male A9/73
53	04 green	04 green A	New territory located late on in the year. A new nest was found at an inland site. The nest was lined but there was no evidence that eggs had been laid and no prey remains at the nest.	0	

Colour-ringing and sightings

Colour-ringing

For the past 25 years, sea eagle chicks have been fitted with colour wing tags to enable observers to identify individuals and track their progress through the years. While this means of marking may continue with birds being released as part of the translocation programme, the Sea Eagle Project Team have decided that it is time to move to a less obtrusive means of individually identifying birds in the west Scotland population. To this end, they have adopted the International Sea Eagle Colour Ringing Programme's year ring, the colour of which will change annually. In addition, fieldworkers will continue to collect moulted feathers from adults. Mouth swabs were also taken from chicks in 2008. It is hoped that through the extraction of DNA from feathers it will be possible to follow individuals through the population without burdening the birds with wing-tags.



Photograph by Claire Smith

Of the 28 chicks that fledged in the west of Scotland, 26 young were fitted with a coloured leg ring, which conforms to the International Colour Ringing Programme for sea eagles. The colour of the ring denotes the year that the bird fledged, while the inscription identifies the individual. One chick was not ringed due to the precarious location of the nest and a second was too large to ring by the time the nest was located. In addition, 15 chicks imported from Norway and released in east Scotland were fitted with colour-rings using the same system as the west coast. It is hoped that observers will be able to read the colour combination and legends of birds in the field.

Sightings

In 2008, 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, 330 sightings recorded tag colour and in 143 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 '07 white-tagged birds being most frequently sighted. In addition, '06 yellow, '05 red 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 north as Orkney.

The details of a selection of sightings of individual birds are given in the table below. As well as providing information on juvenile dispersal, reported sightings are valuable in informing where new pairs may be establishing a territory. Each year, field workers search large areas of suitable breeding habitat in order to find establishing pairs and to follow the expansion of the breeding population. Report of birds over the year help prioritise fieldwork when searching for new pairs.



Photograph by Bryan Raines (Wild About Mull)

All sightings are, of course, invaluable. Here are two examples of reports of tagged birds reported this year. Yellow H is an immature male that fledged from the Frisa territory on Mull in 2006. It has since been seen several times on Mull (photographed at Loch Scridain) but also as far away as the Park peninsula on Lewis. Blue T is a six-year-old male bird that has recently established in a new territory on Skye. The photo below was taken approximately 10km from its core area and is an example of how far territorial birds regularly travel.



Photograph by Kevin Robinson

Selected sightings reported in 2008

(All sightings are of non-territorial individually identified birds).

Date	Bird details	Location seen	Ringling location
06-Jan	2005 imm. Red E	River Ba, Mull	Skye
06-Jan	2006 imm. Yellow A	River Ba, Mull	Mull
09-Jan	2006 imm. Yellow F	Loch Frisa, Mull	Mull
09-Jan	2006 imm. Yellow H	River Ba, Mull	Mull
12-Jan	2006 imm. Yellow 8	Grimersta, Lewis	Uist
17-Jan	2005 imm. Red 4	River Cassley, Sutherland	Wester Ross
01-Feb	2007 juv. White E	Loch Teacuis, Morvern	Mull
06-Feb	2006 imm. Yellow H	Tabost, Lewis	Mull
07-Feb	2005 imm. Red 4	Ob Mheallaidh, Wester Ross	Wester Ross
08-Feb	2005 imm. Red 6	Loch Ba, Mull	Small Isles
14-Feb	2007 juv. White Black Spot	Drumbuie, Morvern	Skye
20-Feb	2007 juv. White P	Orbost, Skye	Mull
01-March	2007 juv. White Black Spot	Glen Seiliseir, Mull	Skye
03-March	2004 imm. Green 3	Loch Shell, Lewis	Wester Ross
10-March	2007 juv. White Black Triangle	Loch Eport, Uist	Uist
10-March	2007 juv. White 1	Loch Eport, Uist	Lewis
10-March	2007 juv. White O	Lochmaddy, Uist	Lewis
26-March	2003 sub-adult. Pink P	Loch Slapin, Skye	Skye
30-March	2007 juv. White G	Gruline, Mull	Mull
01-April	2007 juv. White Black Triangle	Tolsta, Lewis	Uist
11-April	2006 imm. Yellow A	Portree, Skye	Mull
16-April	2006 imm. Yellow N	Snizort River, Skye	Mull
26-April	2006 imm. Yellow V	Glen Colbost, Skye	Skye
07-May	2006 imm. Yellow N	Tusdale, Skye	Mull
18-May	2004 sub-adult. Green F	Loch Linnhe, Lochaber	Wester Ross
18-May	2006 imm. Yellow L	Beinn Chlaonleud, Mull	Mull
16-June	2007 imm. White E	Shira Dam, Argyll	Mull
05-June	2005 imm. Red 2	Snizort River, Skye	Wester Ross
13-June	2006 imm. Yellow Black Spot	Glen Colbost, Skye	Small Isles
4-July	2007 imm. White 4	MacLeods Maidens, Skye	Small Isles
14-July	2007 imm. White E	Allt an Stacain, Argyll	Mull
17-July	2006 imm. Yellow P	Sgriob na Cailliche, Jura	Mull
05-Aug	2006 imm. Yellow N	Kraiknish, Skye	Mull
26-Aug	2006 imm. Yellow 7	Hinnisdal, Skye	Lewis
04-Sept	2005 imm. Red 8	Rona, Skye	Harris
19-Sept	2007 imm. White J	Croulin, Lochaber	Argyll Islands
10-Oct	2006 imm. Yellow V	Loch Sgiobaclete, Lewis	Skye
5-Nov	2006 imm. Yellow K	Gleann Dubh, Morvern	Argyll mainland
24-Nov	2007 imm. White 3	River Oykel, Sutherland	Wester Ross

Re-colonisation of former range

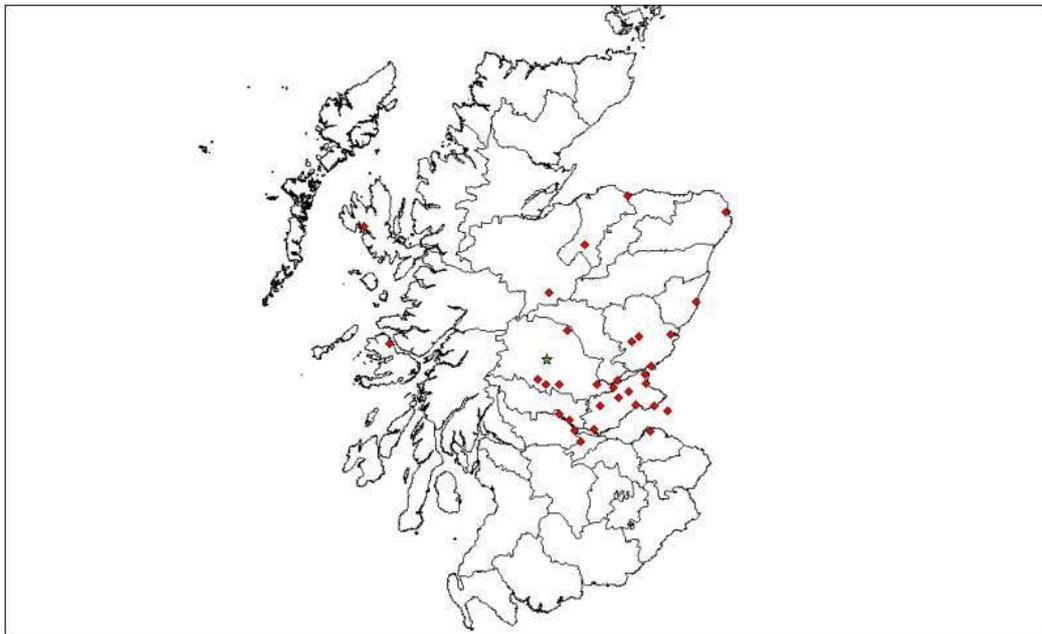
East Scotland

Winter movements of birds released in 2007

The birds' movements followed the geese throughout the winter, using the straths of Perthshire and the Forth Valley. One male stayed on the Isle of May for six weeks over Dec/Jan. A short-term communal roost was established in Strathbraan in Perthshire and a more permanent site has been used by one male and four females since February at Loch Tay. Two birds returned to the release site in March. Sea eagles have shared roosts and carrion with red kites throughout the year in central Scotland. Three birds have gone west to Mull, Skye and Ardamurchan. Bird F was the first found roosting with the Loch Frisa pair in February. The birds returned East in the spring and two moved west again to Ardnamurchan in October. Eleven of the 15 birds released in 2007 remain alive.

Locations visited by sea eagles released in Fife since August 2007.

Star = location of roost site.



2008 chicks

A further fifteen chicks (8 males and 7 females) were imported in June this year. Health screening of chicks in association with Edinburgh University and Natural Research continued. All birds were fitted with colour rings (see photo on page 8) and radio backpacks and released between the 10th and 18th August. The release of four birds on the 14th August was broadcast live on BBC Breakfast and BBC radio network. Landward and the Scotsman also covered releases.

At the time of writing six birds continue to use the food dump. Early movements have been consistent with those of the 2007 cohort, with birds using the Carse of Gowrie, Montrose basin, Loch Leven, Loch of Kinnordy and Strath Earn. A small male turned up on the Isle of May on the 23rd August (ten days after release), where he stayed for a month before moving to St Fergus - an area used by one of last year's males for three months. Three of last year's females (tags C, 5 & 7) have wandered back into Fife to mix with the new releases.

Public Engagement

Eleven local schools received a special visit from the Sea Eagle Project Officer and a further 45 local schools have had sea eagles incorporated into RSPB's 'Bird Friendly Schools' programme. A more extensive three-year education programme is planned to start in August 2009. Twenty talks on the project were delivered to a range of audiences during 2008.

East Scotland Sea Eagles is a partnership project between RSPB Scotland, SNH and Forestry Commission Scotland who host the release site. We would like to thank the Hutchison Family, Mrs Thomas and Ardmore Highland Single Malt for their kind support of the project.

Updates: <http://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/projects/eastscotlandeagles/index.asp>

Sightings can be reported to Claire Smith at eastscotlandseaeagles@rspb.org.uk or phone 01738 630783.

Ireland

Of the 15 birds released in August 2007, all spent much or all of the winter in the release area. From October-December birds roosted in oakwoods on the lakeshore before switching to a more sheltered site of large Scots Pine south west of the Upper Lake. Deer stalking outside the park, as well as evidently abundant sheep carrion, provided a major attraction in valleys west of the park. By mid-winter several birds also began using a roost in hills west of Killarney National Park (KNP). After November, sheep carrion formed almost all of the biomass of food consumed (observation and pellets). Corvids were also taken. Two birds remained on L. Lein in KNP throughout the winter with the first observations of successful fishing in January 2008. Despite a good run of salmon and post-spawning mortality, there was no evidence of birds locating this potentially rich food source. Later in the year, birds took heron chicks and occasionally attacked gulls.

Most dispersal did not take place until late March-April 2008. Two birds spent the summer in Northern Ireland before returning to Killarney in Sept-Oct 2008. Other confirmed reports, but not identified to an individual, have been from the Ox Mountains in Mayo-Sligo, Co. Sligo, Cos. Galway, Mayo, and Waterford.

Mortality

Four dead birds were recovered between November 2007 and May 2008. Post-mortem and toxicology results determined that the latter three had died from ingesting sheep carrion laced with the poisons Alphachlorolose and Nitroxinil. The fourth bird also had traces of Alphachlorolose. The locations of three dead birds within 1km of each other, suggest that one individual may have the source of the poisoning. The death of a bird in late May, well after the lambing season has finished, also suggests that eagles may have been deliberately targeted rather than resulting from accidental ingestion of poisons meant for foxes and crows. Visits by Dept. of Agriculture officials resulted in the landowner being ordered to remove all dead carcasses and prosecution by Gardai is pending. The eagle deaths received a very high profile in national television (RTE), radio and press coverage. This resulted in much public support and a high level of awareness in the farming community of the threats posed by poisons to non-target species. Legislation brought into effect in January 2008 banned the use of legally available poisons on meat baits for the control of corvids.

2008 chicks

The second year of the project began with the collection of 20 chicks in west central Norway and their transport to Kerry in June 2008. These were released in August and Sept in KNP and by early November, all birds were located in the KNP area, although most birds had left for several days and returned. By early December, most known dispersal has been south-east into west Cork (up to 60km).

The tag colours used in 2008 were a white tag on the right wing and red tag on the left wing. Each tag carries a basal bar which reflects the colour of the tag on the other wing.

Tag	A	C	D	E	H	J	K	L	N	T	U	V	Y	Z	=	●	:	▲	!	?
Sex	M	M	F	F	M	M	M	M	F	F	F	M	M	M	F	F	F	M	M	M

Tag legends and sex of White-tailed Sea Eagles released in Killarney National Park in 2008.



Juvenile on its first flight, Killarney NP, 7 August 2008 (photo Barry O' Donoghue)

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.

England

Natural England, the RSPB and Anglian Water, have been investigating the feasibility of reintroducing the white-tailed eagle to East Anglia, as this region of England has the most productive wetland habitat of the type favoured by eagles. North Norfolk is the preferred location and public consultation is underway to inform local people about the project and identify any concerns they might have. The consultation will involve landowners and farmers and must address any possible impacts between eagles and livestock.

Independent study has shown that white-tailed eagles were once widespread across England, however, the birds could take decades if not hundreds of years to spread from Scotland without assistance. This ambitious project would return one of the UK's rarest and most spectacular birds to England. Before attempting to return a species that has been lost for so long, it is important to understand its potential effect on both wildlife and people. Whilst there is no evidence to demonstrate the white-tailed eagle would impact upon Norfolk's wildlife, it is equally important to understand how people might react to the birds' return. Early consultation results have been encouraging and an opinion poll conducted in local towns surrounding the potential release site found that 83% of people were in favour of the reintroduction and only 1% against. It is hoped that the project will be approved and all preparations in place for the first birds to be imported from Poland in 2009 - 2010.

Wales

A project for Wales is understood to be in development, and members of the Project Team have contributed expert advice in an individual capacity. However, a proposal has yet to be received for formal consideration by statutory conservation agencies or the Project Team.

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Satellite tagging on Mull

Mull Eagle Watch, with the help of the Highland Foundation for Wildlife and Natural Research Ltd, started a pilot project on Mull this year, to look at the dispersal of young sea eagles once they leave their nest area. With the expert help of Roy Dennis, two satellite tags were fitted to the two chicks (a male and a female) at Territory 18 (Loch Frisa). The batteries on the small 70gm Argos GPS tags are charged by mini solar panels



Photographs by Gordon Buchanan (BBC) 2008

and should continue to provide regular data on the movement of the chicks for many years. If the birds survive long enough to form territories of their own in 3-5 years time, we will have a detailed log of where they've been, how long they have stayed in certain areas, their use of particular habitats and how they select potential home ranges. Funding for this pilot project came from SNH with future funding for a wider study for the Sea Eagle Project Team from FCS, RSPB and NR Ltd.

Thank you to Roy Dennis, the Data Management Unit at RSPB Scotland and Katie Fuller at the RSPB web team for their help.

Follow the chick's progress yourself online at www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/tracking/mulleagles and at www.roydennis.org

Lamb losses in Wester Ross and Skye

It was a quiet year for reports of lamb losses attributed to sea eagles – that was until August / September when the lambs were gathered off the hill to be taken to market. The realisation that numbers were significantly reduced from that which had been put out to the hill in May/June led to claims that the sea eagles were responsible for killing and consuming hundreds of lambs in the west Highlands around Gairloch and on Skye.

At a rather heated public meeting in Poolewe on 29th September, 150-200 crofters gathered to express their concerns and relate their individual losses, anecdotal observations and experiences. SNH presented a brief resume of the 1999-2002 Mull study and its conclusion (that less than 40 viable lambs were taken by sea eagles on Mull annually), the status of management schemes in Wester Ross and a brief account of the handful of reported incidents thought to involve sea eagles over the past six years. Information on the number of sea eagles present in Wester Ross, their biology, status and diet was presented by the RSPB in order that the claims could be considered in context. There were numerous claims of birds watching over lambing fields, attacking lambs and nests adorned with lamb remains but it became evident and was clearly stated by one individual that the actual cause of all the losses is a mystery. The meeting concluded with agreement that SNH would fund a study to examine the causes of lamb losses. Around this time, crofters on the Isle of Skye raised a petition requesting the removal of sea eagles from the north of the island.

Following on from this meeting, representatives of the Scottish Crofter's Foundation met with staff from SNH, SGRPID and RSPB to discuss the manner in which the study into lamb losses will be taken forward. With the emphasis placed on a detailed cohort study of lambs, whereby the animals would be radio-tagged with mortality tags, it is envisaged that information will be gathered on the outcomes of a significant number of lambs within several areas (eg Skye, Wester Ross). In addition, data will be collected on sea eagle ranging behaviour and diet in the study area(s) and data compiled on lambing percentages and losses over the same areas in the past 10 years. With the continuing declines in sheep flocks annually, it is intended that the study will commence in 2009 in order to provide answers as early as possible.

Sea Eagle Disturbance Court Case

A man from Aberdeen was charged for disturbing the Territory 2 pair during incubation on 4 March. He was a photographer and spent a prolonged period near the nest, disturbing the birds from incubating the eggs at a critical time. Mull Eagle Watch volunteers reported the individual to local police. The case was heard at Oban Sheriff Court, where he was found guilty and fined £600. This is the first successful prosecution for 'reckless disturbance' of sea eagles. The pair failed to hatch eggs this year. We are grateful to the Fiscal, Strathclyde Police and witnesses for their work on this case.



Smøla windfarm, Norway

The Smøla wind farm has been fully operational since 2005. Unfortunately, there is no sign of a reduction in the number of white-tailed eagle collision fatalities with nine casualties reported in 2008, bringing the total found to 21. Most collisions have been recorded during April into early May, when territorial activity and display are greatest, hence, although all age groups feature, a high proportion of these birds are breeding adults. A recently completed MSc thesis, by Espen Lie-Dahl of the Norwegian University of Science & Technology (NTNU, Trondheim), provides evidence of significantly lower breeding success on territories within or close to the wind farm, compared with the same territories before the wind farm, with significant effects up to 3km, diminishing with increasing distance from the wind farm. The Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (NINA) has secured funding to continue its research studies at least until 2011, with the combined aims of understanding the impacts of wind turbines, notably on white-tailed eagles, and finding mitigation solutions.

Poisoned Sea Eagle in Tayside

In May 2008, a young sea eagle from Mull (2007 White G from Territory 29) was found dead near a sporting estate in Angus, Tayside. A post mortem revealed he had been poisoned. Over 30 poisoned baits including a mountain hare were found on and near the boundary of the estate and the poisons matched those in White G. An investigation launched by Tayside police is continuing. White G was seen many times on Mull during his first winter, which he survived in good shape. At the end of March 2008, he was watched and filmed trying (unsuccessfully) to grab a fish from an otter near Lochdon. Soon after, we believe he left Mull and headed east. Indiscriminate illegal poisoning remains the biggest threat our sea eagles face. The practice of using poison baits by some staff on a few sporting estates to kill protected birds and mammals continues to tarnish the image of sporting estates in Scotland. We are grateful to the neighbouring landowner who reported White G and the many people who support the RSPB's Bird of Prey Campaign.

Public Viewing Loch Frisa, Isle of Mull 2008

Territory 18 adults (16 year old female 'Frisa' & 14 year old male 'Skye') were present all winter in their usual haunts around Loch Frisa. They were nest building one morning in late January in a larch on the north west side of the loch but this attempt quickly fizzled out. Ten days later they shifted to the south east end of the loch and were building in a Sitka spruce. This attempt progressed well and it is where they went on to incubate eggs and raise two healthy chicks to fledging. The excellent new Forestry Commission Scotland hide was moved into position and fitted out in time for opening to the public at Easter staffed by Julie Paton (MICT), Steve Irvine (FCS) and Chris Griffin (RSPB). It was officially opened by the Minister for the Environment Michael Russell MSP on 4 March. A viewpoint and picnic table with a clearer line to the nest was provided in an adjacent field. Luckily the off duty bird was invariably in view on a favourite perch tree so even though the nest itself was difficult to make out, most visitors saw at least one of the adults.

The 2 chicks were ringed on 4 June and a small cctv camera was attached to a branch above the nest with the aim of beaming live pictures back to the hide. However, the adult birds were clearly unsettled by this so the equipment was quickly removed allowing the adults to resume normal feeding duties. Instead, the camera was placed near a swallow's nest above the hide door. Visitors were also treated to regular views of golden eagle, hen harrier, peregrine, osprey, birds on a feeding station and sand martins nesting just outside the hide windows. The booking service for trips was completed in July when a new 'drop in' experiment commenced (the staffed hide opened Friday to Tuesday 1000-1600) for visitors to drive in unescorted. This trial ran successfully until the hide closed for the season in mid September. The adults and recently fledged chicks were seen daily throughout this period and many visitors appreciated the extended season. The two chicks (a male 'Mara' and a female 'Brèagha', named by Salen Primary Gaelic Unit) were fitted with satellite tags as part of a pilot research study into juvenile sea eagle dispersal. Their progress can also be followed online via www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/tracking/mulleagles where a regular blog keeps people up to date.

A 'Fledge Party' - thank you event, which over 60 people attended, was held at the hide in August. Mull and Iona Primary Schools visited the hide as did wildlife youth groups from Lochgilphead and Lochaline; over 4000 people visited and over £10,000 was raised (split 50:50 between Mull Eagle Watch and local good causes on Mull & Iona); the project again received widespread media coverage being featured on BBC One's 'Animal 24:7', BBC Two Scotland's 'Landward', BBC Radio 4's 'Open Country' and the sat tag story was filmed throughout the summer for this year's 'Autumnwatch'.



"Mull Eagle Watch" (Forestry Commission Scotland, RSPB Scotland, Mull & Iona Community Trust, Scottish Natural Heritage, Strathclyde Police) is a member of 'Wild Scotland'. Thanks to: volunteers, Island Engineering, Sea Life Surveys and Crerar Hotels. Sightings received from wildlife tour companies, fish farms, farmers, locals and visitors. Optical equipment provided by Viking Optical Ltd. Sat tag project assisted by Roy Dennis' Highland Foundation for Wildlife. Bird feeding stn provided by RSPB Lochwinnoch reserve and volunteers. We're grateful to the police which assist each year and to our funding partners: SNH, the HLF, the Nàdair Trust, BBC Wildlife Fund and to all who supported, visited and donated to the project in 2008. Finally, special thanks to the McDowall family and Mr & Mrs Leeming at Loch Frisa for their continued cooperation and involvement with the sea eagles and the public viewing project throughout the year.

Public viewing Aros Centre, Isle of Skye 2008

The exhibition opened in time for an early Easter with fresh hopes that the camera that remained on site over the winter would bring live footage from the first stages of incubation. In the run up to egg laying the situation was indeed looking hopeful, but severe northerly gales in mid March induced a sudden change of tack with this pair and others elsewhere on the island. Another nest was rapidly constructed in a less exposed situation, and just in time as the eggs were laid soon after.

As in previous years, a change in nesting location meant a delay in installing the camera as the possibility of the birds abandoning the nest at such a sensitive time was too high a risk to take. However, all was not lost as Alv Ottar Folkestad, the leader of Project Sea Eagle in Norway, had installed a camera on one of his regular breeding sites and the pictures were available through a newspaper website (www.smp.no). Armed with a bank of recorded Skye sea eagle footage from previous years and the live footage from Norway, Chris Tyler had visitors spell bound watching the dedication and commitment of adults sitting tight through incubation with storms raging and heavy



Photograph by Alison MacLennan

snow falls accumulating around and on top of the bird in the nest. It was fascinating and provided such a stark contrast to the later footage of juveniles messing around and interacting with flies attracted by the food remains.

Live footage from our Skye nest came on-stream by mid June and provided entertainment and amusement to a host of visitors, through until early October with the single youngster continuing to return to the nest infrequently after fledging. In all, over 7500 visitors came to see the sea eagles over the season.

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 (in particular to John Cameron, Alan MacDonald, and Graham Ross), to Chris Tyler for his continued dedication and the crofters, landowners and fishermen 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 the Sea Eagle Re-establishment 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 reported sightings, contributions and support in many different forms are invaluable to 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. We are most grateful to Björn Helander, co-ordinator of the international colour ringing programme, for providing the colour rings and to Natural Research Ltd for the DNA analysis and chick gender determinations.

Get involved!

Have you seen a sea eagle?

The Sea Eagle Project 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 are 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. You may wish to make a note of these details before you call.

Date	
Time	
Location	
Grid reference (if possible)	
Number of birds	
Age of birds	
Distinguishing marks	
Activity	

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The Sea Eagle Project Team is a partnership between RSPB, Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, Natural England and individual experts. Other organisations and experts participate by invitation.



Jon Pear 2008

If you would like further information on sea eagles go to www.rspb.org.uk
or if you would like additional copies of this newsletter visit
<http://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/library/newsletters.asp>



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