

Eagles FACT SHEET

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BIRDS OF PREY

The term 'bird of prey' refers to birds that hunt and feed on other animals. It usually refers to a group of birds known as *raptors*. Their superb vision, powerful hooked beaks and sharp talons are shared features of raptors. Australia has 24 raptors including kites, goshawks, eagles, osprey, harriers, buzzards, kestrels, and falcons.



Australia's largest bird of prey/raptor is the Wedge-tailed eagle. They can grow to be one metre long, weigh 6 kilograms and have a wingspan of up to 2.5 metres. Wedge-tailed eagles have dark brown to black plumage and are characterised by the long diamond/wedge shaped tail that gives them their name. They have pale pink to cream beaks and legs that are feathered all the way to their off-white feet.

Wedge-tailed eagles are both hunters and opportunists as they eat both live prey and carrion (dead animals). Their diet consists mainly of small mammals (rabbits, rodents and marsupials), birds and lizards. Carrion also makes up a large proportion of their diet and they can often be seen feeding along the edges of roads on the road-kill.



Wedge-tailed eagles make huge nests (made from dead sticks) up to 1.8 metres across and 3 metres deep. They generally like to build these nests in the tallest tree around but have been known to nest in cliffs if there is a lack of tall trees. These nests are often reused for many years.

CONSERVATION

In years past, farmers would often shoot and kill Wedge-tailed eagles for fear of them feeding on the lambs on their property. It has since been found that lamb/mutton only makes up a very small percentage of a Wedge-tailed eagle's diet. They will eat lamb/mutton but usually only when the sheep has died from other causes and is lying as carrion on the ground.

Through education, most farmers now realise that these birds of prey are actually an asset for their properties. They help to clean up any dead animals, on both the farm and in the local area, therefore reducing the breeding fly population and decreasing the chance of fly-strike amongst the cattle and sheep. The reduced carrion also means less introduced predators like cats, foxes and wild dogs are attracted to the farm.





Eagles ACTIVITIES

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Read the fact sheet and watch the Dr Dave 'Eagles' video to help you answer the following questions.

1. Eagles are types of _____, also called _____.
2. Why are these eagles called Wedge-tailed eagles?

3. Complete the following measurements for Wedge-tailed eagles:
Length:
Wing-span:
Weight:
4. Pretend you are a farmer. Explain the reasons as to whether you would be happy if you found some Wedge-tailed eagles had moved onto your land.

5. Dr Dave and Stacey are observing the Wedge-tailed eagles in the *Valley of the Eagle* at Gundabooka National Park in New South Wales. What are the reasons Dr Dave gives about why this is a perfect place for Wedge-tailed eagles?

6. What role do Wedge-tailed eagles play in the landscape?

7. Describe the colour change that a Wedge-tailed eagle will go through during its life.