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Amazing Animals
Fact sheets

Raptors

Raptors are identified as Birds of Prey that capture their food using their feet. They have three distinguishing features:

large talons (or claws) used for hunting
very keen eye sight to target prey
sharp hooked beak for the tearing up of prey once caught

Wedge-tailed Eagle

With a wingspan of up to 2.74m, the Wedge-Tailed Eagle is the largest raptor in Australia. A lanky bird, it hunts by high soaring flight, circling up on thermal air currents for hundreds of meters and sailing out over the countryside, covering wide areas on upswept wings, its tail fanned and diamond-shaped.
Earlier this century, when eagles were found on dead sheep and lambs, it was thought that they had killed them. Bounties were paid for their destruction. In one year in Queensland 10000 bounties were paid and between 1927-1968 in Western Australia another 150000. The practice has ceased since it has been realized that the eagles usually attack only poor, dying or dead lambs and have little effect on the sheep industry. Today they are protected in all states.

Habitat

The Wedge-tailed Eagle is common over forest and open country on plains and mountains throughout mainland Australia and Tasmania.

Diet

Sighting prey, it sweeps down onto it in a long, slanting swoop, but is often unsuccessful when chasing live prey. Generally it feeds on rabbits, wallabies, small kangaroos and, where these are scare, various ground dwelling and swamp birds and reptiles. Nearly all prey is taken on open ground, and the eagles usually feed where they capture their food. Carrion is also a favourite and eagles sometimes congregate vulture-like in 20s at kills. Only rarely do more than two eagles feed on a carcass at a time, the others standing or perching nearby, digesting or waiting their turn.

Breeding

Acrobatic display flights herald breeding. The male dives down at speed at the female, pulls out and rises on part open wings. She ignores him or turns on her back to present claws, and they may loop the loop, calling much. Often in mid-morning and mid-afternoon they perch together and preen one another. They usually have several nests in their territory, one of which is used each season. Both sexes repair it, bringing in sticks in bill or feet, and the male lining it daily with fresh leaves when the female is incubating the 1-3 eggs. He also relieves her on the nest occasionally, and does all the hunting until the chicks are too old to brood, bringing food to a perch near the nest and passing it to the female. In a good season, two chicks may be reared, but mostly only one survives by killing its sibling. In arid, drought-affected regions, the birds may not breed at all for several years at a time.

Australia Zoo Wedge-tailed Eagle profiles

Amelio

Amelio is one of the longest residing eagles of Australia Zoo and is a proud member of our free flight bird team. Amelio was not raised at the Zoo but he was hand-raised by a loving family after being kicked out of the nest by older siblings. The intention was to release him back into the wild once he was old enough. However, when he was released he continually flew home and made a nuisance of himself, stealing food, practicing his natural hunting instincts around the house, and even ripping up a motorcycle seat!

Endangered Species!

Very low numbers are left in the wild. Raptors are at risk of extinction within the next ten years. The Tasmanian subspecies (Aquila audax fleayi) is listed as endangered by the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

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