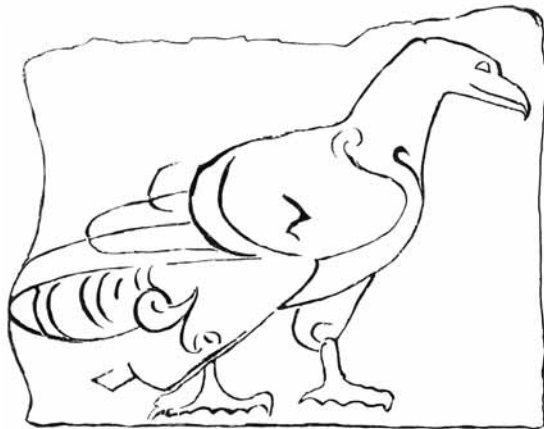


all about...

White-tailed Sea Eagles

The white-tailed sea eagle is **ENORMOUS**. It has wide, rectangular-shaped wings and a wing span of over **8 feet**. It is the fourth largest eagle in the world and is sometimes called the



The Picts on Orkney carved this sea eagle during the iron age.

They are sometimes called the flying barn door. Their skill at catching fish is legendary and the longest of their 8 talons grown up to **4.6 cms** long - No wonder the sea eagle has been a bird of myth and legend in Scotland for thousands of years.



THE EAGLE WITH THE SUNLIT EYE

– IOLAIRE SUILE NA GREIN – A BIRD OF MYTH AND LEGEND

At the Tomb of the Eagles in Orkney the remains of at least eight white-tailed eagles were found in the 3000 year-old tomb. The reasons for this are shrouded in mystery: perhaps these animals symbolised the tribe and so were buried with the dead; or perhaps they believed that the eagle carried the soul of the dead into the next world. We know that some ancient peoples in Scotland left their dead to be eaten by birds of prey before burying the bones.

In previous centuries the fishermen of Shetland thought that the sea eagles (which they called Erne – Anglo Saxon for 'The Soarer') had magical powers that

helped them catch fish. They believed that as soon as Erne appeared overhead, fish would rise to the surface, belly upward, in submission. This led the fishermen to put eagle fat on their bait in the hope of improved catches.

A story from the Shetlands tells of a baby girl that was taken by a sea eagle to her eyrie on Fetlar. A man and his young son went to the nest that was on an inaccessible cliff and using ropes they rescued the baby. The story goes that when the baby grew up, she married the boy who had rescued her and many of the people of Fetlar are today descended from them.

DEAD AS THE DODO?

The white-tailed sea eagle once lived all over Britain, even nesting as far south as the Isle of Wight in 1780. The last known sea eagle in the UK lived in Shetland. She was an albino (all white) and the locals had protected her for over 30 years. Eventually she was shot in 1918 and the sea eagle became **EXTINCT** in Britain. Sea Eagles had been wiped out by persecution by farmers and gamekeepers. One Scottish estate at Glengarry recorded a total of 1372 birds of prey killed between 1837 and 1840 including 27 white-tailed eagles.



RETURN OF THE KING

Although white-tailed eagles were extinct in Britain, they continued to breed successfully in Norway and efforts to reintroduce the birds to Scotland started in 1968. Young birds were transported to Scotland from nests in Norway. The population in Scotland is thought to be around 31 pairs so they are still very **RARE**. Unfortunately the eagles are not safe yet, as many of the nests (also called eyries) need to be constantly watched to prevent egg-thieves from taking their eggs. They are also sometimes found poisoned or shot. Organisations such as Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the RSPB as well as many individuals and local groups are working to protect these amazing creatures.

INTERESTING FACT - BATTLEFIELD SCAVENGERS

Sea eagles scavenged on the Anglo-Saxon Battlefields. Records describe eagles at the Battle of Brunanburh in 937 AD: "the grey-coated eagle, white-tailed, to have his will of the corpses".

VERY FISHY!

Sea eagles are **PREDATORS**, this means that they are hunters and eat meat. Fish is one of their main foods, but they also enjoy sea birds, ducks and mammals like rabbits. They are also **SCAVENGERS**, picking over the carcasses of dead animals like deer or sheep as it takes a lot less energy than fishing and hunting.

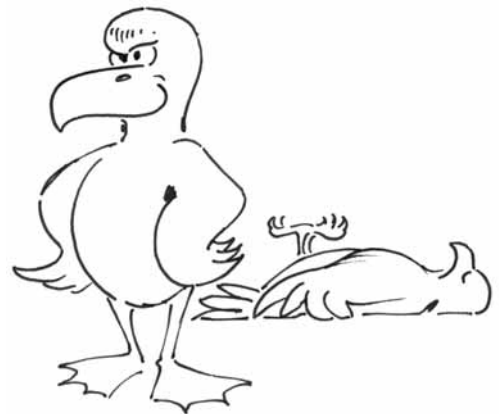
SEE EAGLES

Sea Eagles are still extremely rare but there are now some areas in Scotland that you can see them nesting. There is a pair on the Isle of Mull that you can visit during the nesting season.

For **more** details contact SNH's Oban Office, Glencruitten Road, Oban, Argyll, PA34 4DN. Tel. 01631 567228

INTERESTING FACT - THE FULMAR'S REVENGE

The fulmar almost caused the downfall of the sea eagle reintroduction programme. Fulmars produce an extremely sticky and smelly oil that they use for defence and feed to their chicks. The four sea eagles that were released on Fair Isle in 1968 started catching and eating fulmars. Three of them disappeared and the last one was found heavily covered in fulmar oil. It died a short while later.



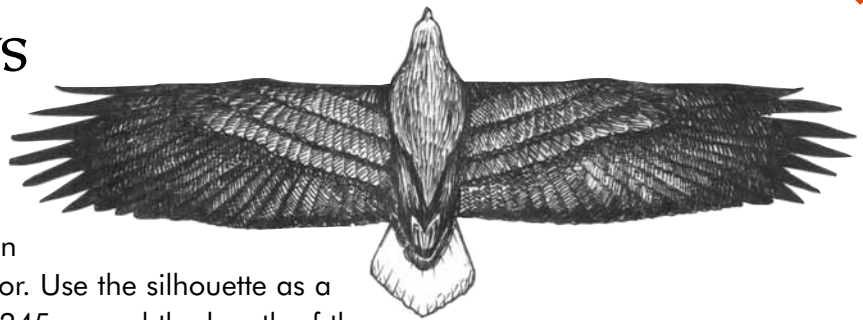
SEA EAGLE FACTS:

- In birds of prey the female is heavier than the male. The female sea eagle weighs 6 kilos.
- The heaviest eagle is the Stellar's sea eagle which weighs in at 9kg.
- There are now 31 pairs of sea eagles in Scotland.
- Sea eagles don't breed until they are 5 or 6 years old and they live for 20-25 years.
- Females lay 1-3 eggs (usually 2) in an eyrie on a cliff or in a large tree.
- 26 chicks fledged in 2003 – the best year yet.



EAGLE ACTIVITIES

How many children does it take to make a sea eagle?



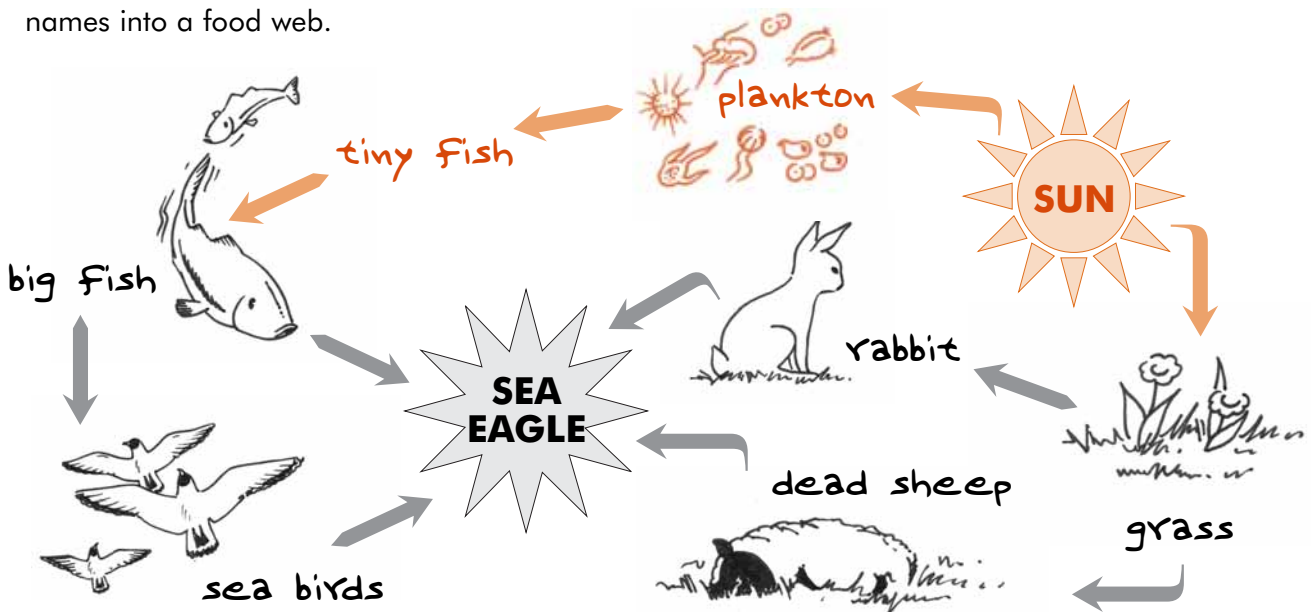
Draw the outline of a sea eagle on newspapers or in chalk on the floor. Use the silhouette as a pattern. The wingspan should be 245cm and the length of the body from beak to tail 100 cm. How many children lying down will fit into the outline of the eagle?

Eagle Stories

Imagine how the ancient people of Scotland felt about the sea eagles. Write your own legend or story about Scottish sea eagles.

Construct a simple food web incorporating the sea eagle and its food

Below is an example of a food web including the sea eagle. For a more simple food web, leave out the brown section. The arrows show the flow of energy in the system. Produce cards with the names of the plants and animals on. In groups, ask the students to arrange the arrows and names into a food web.



EAGLE WORD PLAY

The answers to all of these questions are in the fact sheet. You can use the anagram to help (the letters of the answer mixed up).

Clues (numbers of letters in brackets)	Anagram	Answer
Place where the last sea eagle was shot in 1917	S H A L T E N D	□□□□□□□□
The group of birds in which the sea eagle belongs	B I P E D S O R F R Y	□□□□□ □□ □□□□
Sea eagles are still in danger from these people	E V E G E T S I G H	□□□ □□□□□□□
Eagles feed on dead animals. They are _____	S E V E N C R A G S	□□□□□□□□□□
This caused the extinction of the sea eagle in Scotland	S I N C E R E P O U T	□□□□□□□□□□
There is a public observation hide for sea eagles on this island	I S M E L L F O U L	□□□□ □□ □□□□

Hamish wants to help Scotland's wildlife. What should he do? Read each of the phrases in each pair and then **circle the one that Hamish should do**. The letters in bold should spell home for an eagle.

A

- cover your garden in **p**atio and decking
- farm organically**y**
- drop crisp **p**ackets and bottles wherever you like
- use alternatives to peat **i**n your garden
- m**ake a compost heap



B

- plant a wildlife **g**arden
- use **l**ots of pesticides on crops
- r**ecycle as much as you can
- use peat products in your garden**n**
- p**ut garden and kitchen waste in the bin



**SCOTTISH
NATURAL
HERITAGE**



Answers to word play: Shetland, Birds of prey, egg thieves, scavengers, persecution, Isle of Mull
Answers to Hamish's problem: BABAA