

Living with Wedge-tailed Eagles

The Wedge-tailed Eagle is Australia's largest bird of prey. With a wing-span of more than two metres, it is one of the biggest eagles in the world and holds iconic status in Australia for many people.

Apart from its size it can be recognised by its long, wedge-shaped tail, upswept wings and feathered legs. This helps distinguish it from other birds of prey like the Little Eagle and Black Kite. The Latin name *Aquila audax* means 'bold eagle'.

For more general information, refer to the Wildlife Fact Sheet on [Wedge-tailed Eagle](#).

Wedge-tailed Eagles have cultural significance

In Central and Western Victorian Aboriginal culture, Bunjil is the name of the creator of the land, water, animals and sky. Once Bunjil was satisfied and had completed everything including people and lore, he turned himself into a Wedge-tailed Eagle so he could soar above the land that he created, keeping an eye on everyone and everything.

The Wedge-tailed Eagle holds a connection to Aboriginal Victorians. When you see Bunjil you feel safe, a connection knowing that you do not walk this country alone, you are under the guidance and protection of a greater presence, a creator spirit.

The Wedge-tailed Eagle is an apex predator

When apex predators are removed, the natural order of the food chain can be negatively impacted. Research in various parts of the world has shown that apex predators can potentially reduce the impacts and overabundance of herbivores and medium-sized 'mesopredators' such as cats and foxes. In Australia, this can assist in the recovery of small mammals and reptiles.

Wedge-tailed Eagles also play an important ecological role as scavengers.



Credit: Doug Wilson

Wedge-tailed Eagles are protected under the Wildlife Act 1975

The Wedge-tailed Eagle is protected under the *Wildlife Act 1975* in Victoria and protected across all states and territories in Australia.

In Victoria, it is an offence to disturb, kill, take, control or harm Wedge-tailed Eagles without authorisation from DELWP. The offence carries penalties which include both fines and potential imprisonment and higher penalties apply for the use of poison baits.

Wedge-tailed Eagles do not have any major impact to agriculture

Wedge-tailed Eagles eat both live prey and carrion. They hunt a range of species which varies across Australia according to abundance of prey.

Rabbits often make up a large part of their diet, and in some modified environments this can be more than 90%. Wedge-tailed Eagles swap to native species when rabbits are less abundant. Other prey can include possums, lizards, snakes, kangaroos, birds (ravens, cockatoos, parrots, ducks) and introduced species such as rabbits, hares, cats and foxes.

Wedge-tailed Eagles often scavenge on road-kill, which makes them vulnerable to being injured or killed by vehicles.

Wedge-tailed Eagles will feed on dead livestock as well as infrequently take exposed lambs or kid goats but are

Our Wildlife Fact Sheet

only one of several predators to do so. Spotting a Wedge-tailed Eagle on a carcass does not mean the eagle killed the animal, it may be taking advantage of an abandoned fox kill or a natural lamb death.

Several studies have quantified the estimated number of lambs consumed by eagles as live prey or as carrion.

Overall, predators including Wedge-tailed Eagles contribute less than 2% of total lamb losses compared with more significant factors that kill lambs such as poor mothering and weather exposure.



Credit: Jenny Garley

Landholders can implement protection measures for livestock

Rarely do Wedge-tailed Eagles cause economic losses to farmers, but here are some steps you can take if you do have concerns about eagles in your area.

Farm hygiene	Remove offal and carcasses of sick and weak animals regularly to prevent attracting carrion feeders.
Guardian animals	Dogs/alpacas can scare eagles, so having guardian animals offers protection from a range of predators.

Eagles are wary of people so locate young stock near the house or areas of higher activity.

Shelter for stock Eagles attack prey from above, so provision of tree cover and surrounding wind breaks will provide protection.

Cover for free range chickens Free-range chickens and turkeys are targets for several birds of prey species. Chickens will shelter under cover, so provide something for them to hide under such as corrugated iron, timber boxes and shrubs.

Resident eagles Resident Wedge-tailed Eagles are territorial and may deter other eagles, particularly immature birds that are passing through their territory. Research has shown that the few lamb deaths recorded were by non-breeding eagles rather than the resident breeding birds.

Further reading

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https://www.wildlife.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/115343/Wedge-tailed-Eagle.pdf

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