



# East Scotland Sea Eagles

Newsletter No.1 December 2007



East Scotland Sea Eagles is a five year project (2007-2011) returning white-tailed sea eagles to East Scotland. The project is a partnership between RSPB Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) who host the release site.

This newsletter will provide updates on the project, but more information can also be found on our website [www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk) and in the project blog.

## Chick arrival

During May & June large aviaries were built and the freezer stocked ready for the eagles' arrival. Fifteen chicks (9 males and 6 females) were collected from nests containing twins in Norway by the Norwegian Ornithological Society and flown to Scotland by the Norwegian Royal Air Force, arriving at RAF Kinloss on the 22<sup>nd</sup> June.



The chicks were then driven to the release site and checked by vets before being placed on artificial nests in pairs and a trio. Blood samples were taken allowing us to sex the birds, the Norwegians had estimated sex from bill and foot measurements, but had a couple of surprises as some 'females' turned out to be large males!

Although only 6-8 weeks old, the chicks already weighed between 3-4.5kg!

## Captivity

The chicks were kept in the cages for 2 months and fed a varied diet of rabbit, venison (provided by FCS), whole fish and fish off-cuts kindly supplied by M&M Spink who produce famous Arbroath smokies. The birds are fed through a small hatch and fabric sleeve in the back of the cages so that they don't see people and associate them with food. It is also important that the birds do not get used to people walking in front of the cages, which is why we keep the release site quiet, treating it like a nest.



The birds are able to see out of the front and roof of their cage and had some lively exchanges with nearby nesting green woodpeckers and passing ospreys and buzzards!



growing feathers they may just be used to new bits sticking out!

The radio backpacks weigh 70g (1-2% of body weight) and sit between the birds' wings, held on by a harness, which will eventually drop off. Each one transmits on a unique frequency and they have a range of 10-15 miles.

For the first two weeks the birds sat very quietly on their nests. They then started moving out onto their perches known as 'branching'. The two older birds in cage 5 gave me a fright one day making loud banging sound as they jumped on their perches exercising their wings! As the weeks passed, all the birds began to exercise in this way or hold onto the mesh on the cage fronts and flap. Such big wings really make a racket!



### **Wing tags and radios**

On the 27<sup>th</sup> July the birds were measured and weighed again and fitted with their wing tags and radio backpacks. Wing tags are a standard method used for marking red kites, buzzards, hen harriers and west coast sea eagles. They are fitted using a wire pin and washers to the flap of skin along the wing edge and sit flat on the wing as the birds fly. Oddly, the birds do not appear to pull at them but as they are young birds constantly

### **Release**

The 9<sup>th</sup> of August was a busy day getting hides set up for the project team and RSPB photographer and squeezing in some last minute visits to the cages by some of our neighbours. We were back on site at 4am the next morning to get everyone in place before opening the hatches on the front. Andrew Cole (Project Assistant) had the honour of opening the first 2 cages returning young sea eagles to East Scotland for the first time in over 150 years.

### **What next?**

After release we put food on the cage roofs to mimic adults feeding their young in the wild. For the first week all the birds stayed within 1km of the release site. After that they explored

the surrounding area and reports started to come in from all over Fife and Tayside. They were all finding their own food by the end of October.



Sadly, 2 birds have been found electrocuted, although it is worth remembering that this also affects birds in Norway and we are in discussion with electricity companies to reduce this threat. Even more tragic is the alleged killing of an eagle in Angus.



#### Far and wide

'F' a male released on 10<sup>th</sup> August is our furthest flung bird, moving north to Stonehaven where he spent several weeks and has been at St Fergus, over 100 miles from the release site since October. He has been seen eating pink-footed geese, rabbits and a cygnet!

However, at time of writing in early December birds are in St Fergus (Aberdeenshire), Carnoustie, the Carse of Gowrie, Loch Leven, and along the Tay and Almond rivers and we have received over 350 sightings which combined with radio-tracking help build up a picture of where the birds are going and what they're doing.



**If you have any queries or sightings please get in touch:**

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RSPB Scotland is part of the RSPB - the UK charity working to secure a healthy environment for birds and all wildlife, helping to create a better world for everyone. Regd charity England and Wales no 207076, Scotland no. SC037654