

23/04/2024

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White-tailed Eagle breeds in Belgium for first time in 500 years

White-tailed Eagle has bred in Belgium for the first time in some 500 years, with a pair hatching at least one chick at a nest site in West Flanders.

The chick hatched on 18 April at De Blankaart nature reserve – and a second youngster is expected soon.

White-tailed Eagle was lost as a breeding bird in Belgium half a century ago, with a modern-day status of a scarce winter and passage visitor. However, following an increase in populations in neighbouring countries, especially the Netherlands, a pair nicknamed 'Paul' and 'Betty' set up shop at De Blankaart in 2023.



White-tailed Eagle has bred in Belgium for the first time in half a century (Clive Finlayson).

European eagles

A no-access area around the nest has been established by local conservationists with a hefty €500,000 fine for anyone caught breaching it.

White-tailed Eagle has a large global range, from Greenland to eastern Siberia and Japan. In Europe, it declined significantly during the 19th and 20th centuries, but thanks to various protection measures, the ban on certain chemicals and the depollution of lakes and rivers, its numbers have been increasing since the 1970s.

There are currently around 6,000 pairs on the continent – more than half of them in Norway and European Russia – and reintroductions have been carried out successfully in Great Britain, Ireland and Denmark.

Dutch recovery

In France, White-tailed Eagle disappeared as a breeder in the 1950s from their last vestige on Corsica, but began nesting again in Lorraine from 2011 in Lorraine. A reintroduction project is underway at Lake Geneva, too.

The return of the species to France is linked to the good health of the German population, which increased from 160 pairs in 1990 to 570 in 2007 and 700 in 2010. This trend is also thought to be behind the return of the species to the Netherlands in 2006, where the population reached 36 pairs in 2023.

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