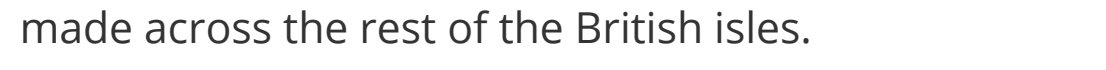




White-tailed eagle guide: how to identify and where to see in the UK

White-tailed eagles, also known as sea eagles, are the UK's largest bird of prey. Our guide reveals how to identify white-tailed eagles, where to see them, and interesting facts about the species.

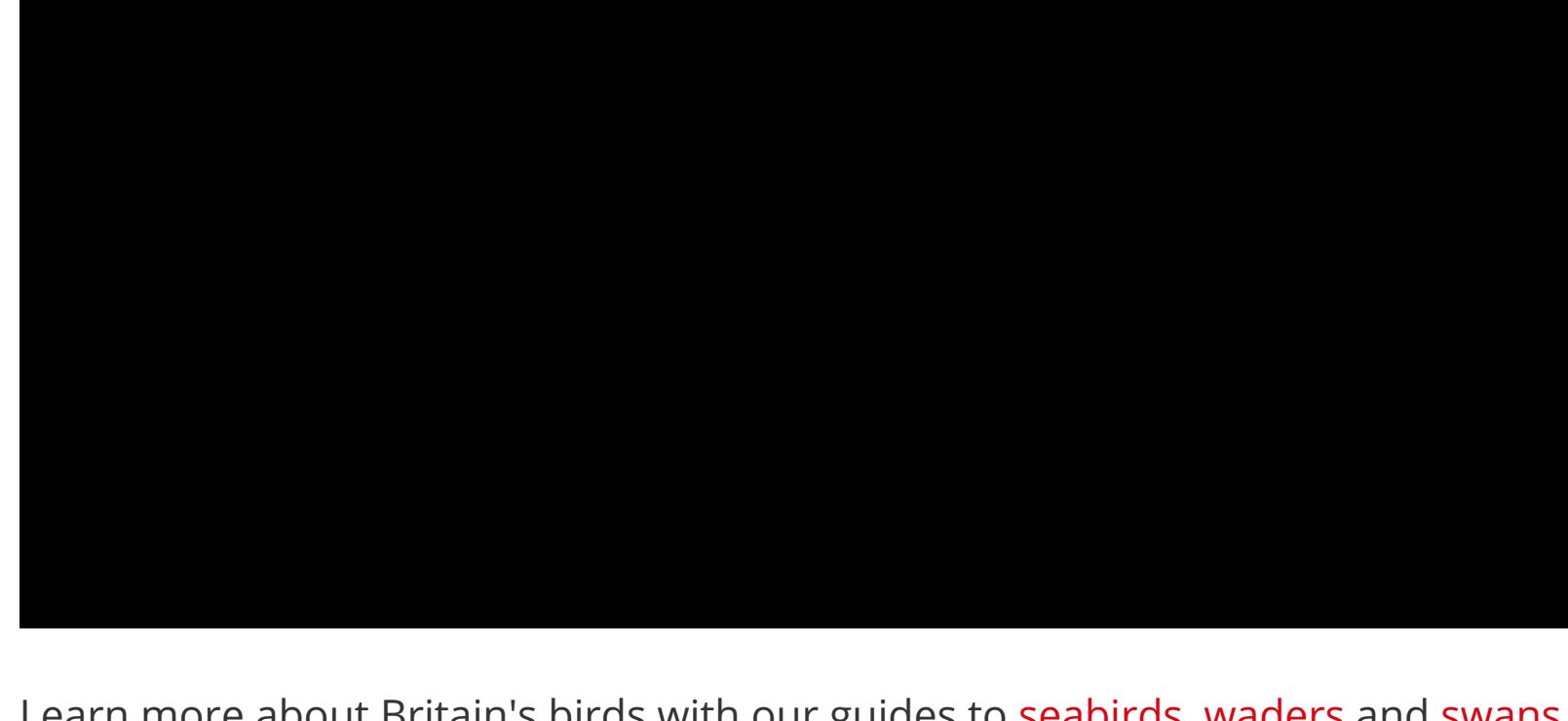
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The white-tailed eagle is the UK's largest bird of prey, but remains scarce. Breeding and reintroduction programmes are particularly prevalent on the west coast of Scotland, but in recent years there have been more intensive efforts made across the rest of the British isles.

Our guide takes a closer look at this spectacular bird, revealing information on how to identify them, what they eat, where they live, mating behaviour, reintroduction programmes, and wingspan.



Learn more about Britain's birds with our guides to [seabirds](#), [wadlers](#) and [swans](#).



The Isle of Mull is a good place to spot white-tailed eagles/Credit: Getty

How to identify a white-tailed eagle?

White-tailed eagles have brown bodies with pale heads and necks, but what's most striking about them is, of course, their white tails.

Their wings are long and broad, spanning between 20 and 24 cm, while their tail is short.

How big are white-tailed eagles?

The white-tailed eagle is the UK's largest bird of prey. Adults are usually about 90cm (3ft) tall, with a wingspan that can stretch to 2.5m (8ft).

Why are white-tailed eagles also known as sea eagles?

The bird takes its name from its love of lochs and other coastal locations.

White-tailed eagles have a wingspan that can stretch to 2.5m/Credit: Getty

Reintroduction of white-tailed eagles in the UK

Once native and widespread in the British Isles, these massive top predators were hunted to extinction in Britain and Ireland by the early 20th century. In 1700, there were more than 200 pairs of white-tailed eagles spread across the UK as far south as the Isle of Wight, but by 1916 they were extinct.

But as time and industrialisation marched on, the birds also began to decline in their previous European strongholds.

"By the 1960s environmental pollutants had caused severe population declines for sea eagles in much of Europe," says James Reynolds from RSPB Scotland.

"So, in 1975, a reintroduction programme began on the Isle of Rum. Young eagles were brought from nests in Norway, as that country had the only population robust enough to act as a donor."

In 1700, there were more than 200 pairs of white-tailed eagle spread across the UK/Credit: Getty

White-tailed eagle population in the UK

There are approximately 150 white-tailed eagle pairs currently in the UK, based on a 2020 estimate.

Read more

- [UK's oldest white-tailed eagle pair celebrate their silver anniversary with 25th chick](#)
- [Scotland's golden eagle population soars](#)

How do white-tailed eagles mate?

White-tailed eagles mate for life. They are quite long-lived birds, surviving until about 20 years of age, and mate for life, although if one partner dies, the other will readily find a new one.

White-tailed eagles have a spectacular courtship display, locking claws in mid-air and cartwheeling downwards, sometimes stopping only a few feet above the ground or water.

White-tailed eagles mate for life/Credit: Getty

Where to see white-tailed eagles in the UK

The white-tailed eagle is once again dominating the coasts of western Scotland, 40 years after its reintroduction, here are a couple of places you may spot one:

Kyle Rhea Narrows

On this ferry crossing from Glenelg to Kylerhea on Skye, spot white-tailed eagles, otters and seals.

Sound of Jura

See the majestic birds on the boat trips from Tayvallich, Crinan and Loch Sween to the Gulf of Corryreckan.

Tentsmuir Point

The Tay Estuary is a good place to look for Scotland's east coast eagles.

The Small Isles

Top spots include the Isles of Rum and Canna.

Loch Sunart

Visit the Garbh Eilean viewing hide in the Ardnamurchan peninsula.

Isle of Mull

With the highest density of white-tailed eagles in the land, this an ideal place to watch the birds.

Golden eagle

The golden eagle is the UK's second-largest bird of prey. It often soars with its long, broad wings held in a shallow 'V' shape. The white-tailed eagle's wingspan is half-a-metre longer than a golden eagle's and its silhouette is more rectangular. Adult white-tailed eagles have pale heads and white tails, younger birds are darker.

When can you see white-tailed eagles in the UK?

White-tailed eagles can be spotted all year round in the UK, particularly on the west coast of Scotland.

What do white-tailed eagles eat?

While they mainly eat fish, white-tailed eagles also hunt for other birds, as well as rabbits and hares.

When they're catching fish, sea eagles fly low over the water, stop in mid-air for a moment and then suddenly drop to catch the fish when they surface.

White-tailed eagles eat mainly fish/Credit: Getty

The story of Skye and Frisa

Skye and Frisa are the UK's oldest white-tailed eagle pair. They have been together since 1997, when they paired up on the Isle of Mull. Since then, they have produced many young and have contributed heavily to the re-established population of white-tailed eagles in the UK.

In 2022, [Skye and Frisa celebrated their 25th anniversary together with their 25th chick](#)

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