

# GLOBAL RE-INTRODUCTION PERSPECTIVES

*Re-introduction case-studies from around the globe*



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**Cover photo:** Clockwise starting from top-left:

- Formosan salmon stream, Taiwan
- Students in Madagascar with tree seedlings
- Virgin Islands boa

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## Re-introduction of the white-tailed sea eagle to County Kerry, Republic of Ireland

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### Introduction

White-tailed sea eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) IUCN previously Near Threatened, recently downlisted to Least Concern. EU Birds Directive Annex 1. CITES Appendix 1. Status in Europe Rare SPEC 3. Species distributed across Northern Palearctic from E Asia (Siberia, Japan) to W Europe and Iceland. A distinct subspecies *H. a. groenlandicus* occurs in Greenland. Previously extinct in the UK (1916) and Ireland (last bred 1898, extinct c. 1910). Previously widespread breeder especially along the west coast of Ireland. Listed as extinct in Irish Red Data Book 2: Vertebrates. Re-introduced to Republic of Ireland beginning in 2007. Project is collaboration between the Golden Eagle Trust Ltd. (GET), National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, and Project Havørn, Norway. Fifteen birds collected under license from nests in west central Norway in June 2007. Released in August 2007 in Killarney National Park, Co. Kerry, SW Ireland. Release area is Ireland's largest National Park (10,289 ha), including extensive freshwater lakes, open mountain, and native deciduous forest. The site is designated as a Special Protection Area (4038) under the EU Birds Directive. The release site was a historical breeding area probably holding at least one pair of sea eagles.

### Goals

- Goal 1: Establish a viable white-tailed sea eagle breeding population in Ireland.
- Goal 2: Use sea eagles as a flagship species for conservation of the wider terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems through research and education.
- Goal 3: Raise awareness of Ireland's other existing and extinct raptors.

### Success Indicators

- Indicator 1: Adequate survivorship to re-establish a population (33+ birds surviving from 95 released over a 5-year period. 2007 - 2011).



Capture of eagles from source population © Allan Mee



Released eagle © Valerie O'Sullivan

- Indicator 2: First breeding attempts by 2012 - 2013.
- Indicator 3: First successful breeding by 2015.
- Indicator 4: 5 - 10 pairs breeding by 2020.

## Project Summary

Groundwork for the Irish White-tailed Sea Eagle Project began in 2005. Priorities included: assessing feasibility and conservation importance of the re-introduction, identification and availability of a donor population, identification of the optimum

release site within the species former range, habitat assessment including prey availability and threats, populations modeling to determine number of birds required to re-establish a viable population and likely survivorship, impacts on existing species of release, and public consultation especially with farming interests within the species likely future range. Resulting from this were: i) project proposal based on IUCN criteria, ii) release area evaluation document, iii) population viability modeling, iv) environmental assessment of release. Based on this background research we believe re-introduction is a high conservation priority nationally and that likelihood of success is very good. Further, data from 30 years of the successful re-introduction of the species to the west of Scotland has provided both an excellent model and targets for assessment of project success.

Primary concern prior to and during project implementation has been consultation with the farming community regarding re-introduction of the species. Extensive evidence from Norway provided very strong evidence of no risk to livestock, primarily lambs, from sea eagles (no case of predation in last 30 years in pop. of 2,500 pairs). Sea eagles were previously killed as 'vermin' in Norway until protection in 1968 but are now regarded as benign by farmers. However, evidence of lamb 'predation' on Mull, Scotland, was the primary concern for hill sheep farmers in SW Ireland. Data suggests that most of this 'predation' is in fact scavenging, and of primary concern during nesting. Secondary concerns were risk of EU designations for eagles and disease concerns. Despite initial opposition in some farming sectors progress has been made on direct farming community involvement. Since arrival and release, public interest and opinion has been largely positive. Based on evidence from west Scotland socio-economic benefits to rural communities of the sea eagles are likely to be important, especially to the coastal communities of west Kerry and Cork.

During June 2007, 15 birds were collected from nests in west central Norway by Norwegian counterparts in Project Havørn and under license from the Norwegian Directorate of Nature Management. Birds were transported by air to Kerry and housed for two months in isolated cages in Killarney National Park.

Veterinarians assessed the health of birds prior to transport from Norway and pre-release in Ireland. Food was provided on a daily basis using techniques modeled on the Scottish re-introduction. Post-release monitoring (August 2007 - present) has been carried out by the project manager (GET) with logistical support from NPWS. We attached radio-transmitters and patagial wing-tags to all 15 birds prior to release to allow for individual identification and location in the wild. Since release birds have dispersed up to 70 km from the release site but most remain within 10 km. Survival to date has been promising. One bird died in November 2007 from as yet unknown causes. Observation has revealed diet is almost wholly carrion. A further 20 birds are due to be released annually between 2008 - 2011 after which the project will be reviewed.

### Major difficulties faced

- Overcoming the concerns of farmers regarding the threat to livestock from eagles.
- Raising sufficient funds for the project.
- Raising public awareness of threats to eagles (e.g. poisoning).

### Major lessons learned

- Greater cross community support and input to the project from an early stage prior to initiation would have increased 'local ownership' of the project without detracting from the conservation goals.
- Greater input from government biologists at an early stage would have helped allay fears of impacts on other species.
- Other lessons likely to be learn but too early in the project to determine.

### Success of project

Highly Successful	Successful	Partially Successful	Failure
		√	

### Reasons for success/failure:

- Too early to determine long-term outcome as in 1<sup>st</sup> year of project but prospects believed to be good.
- Good survivorship to date.
- Project has focused attention on relationship between man and a previously extinct species, esp. attitude to predators/scavengers in the wider environment.
- Potential for future socio-economic benefits related to sea eagle eco-tourism likely to be positive for conservation of the environment as a whole.