

FIELD NOTES

RESEARCHER: *Simon Cherriman*
PhD Candidate; Environmental Educator

STUDY SPECIES: *Wedge-tailed Eagle*
STUDY LOCATION: *Western Australia*



Simon holding a Wedge-tailed Eagle. Photo by Judy Dunlop

BACKGROUND:

As a young boy, I often watched magnificent Wedge-tailed Eagles (WTEs) soar above my home in the Perth Hills, and I became fascinated by them. I went on to learn at university that hundreds of thousands were culled during the 1900s after being blamed for killing lambs. In 2013, I began a pilot study and fitted two adult Wedge-tails with GPS/Argos PTTs to test if movement ecology data could be gathered effectively. This led me to commencing a PhD project on WTE movement ecology in 2016. A huge part of my work is public engagement, and I'm passionate about using eagles as a flagship species to spread a broader environmental message about biodiversity conservation.

OBJECTIVES:

Even though the WTE has great ecological importance as an apex predator, few studies have been conducted at the population level, making accurate predictions about population trends and the species' broad-scale habitat requirements difficult. The last population-scale study in Western Australia (WA) was conducted in the arid zone during the 1960s and 1970s by the CSIRO Division of Wildlife Research. This study's conclusion emphasised the need to: 1) continue research as environmental changes occur, and 2) conduct long-term population studies. My PhD research uses nest-density data from two breeding populations in different parts of WA, in conjunction with satellite-tracking data from territorial adults and dispersing juveniles, to investigate how the WTE population integrates with the current landscape.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- What is the areal extent that adult WTEs occupy?
- How/when do juvenile WTEs disperse from nests and where do they go?
- What habitats are used by WTEs?



Wedge-tailed Eagle. Photo by Simon Cherriman

APPROACH:

For movement ecology questions I use Teflon harnesses to attach GPS/Argos PTTs to eagles. Juveniles are captured when still in the nest and about 10 weeks of age, placed carefully into a handling bag and lowered to the ground where their PTTs are fitted, then returned safely. MTI has supported my research from day one and I am so excited about the findings that await us as this project continues! More information is available at: www.wedge-tailedeagletracking.blogspot.com.au