

Black Eagle Project Roodekrans

BEPR Status Thursday 05th December 2013 - No 14

Photos by Garth Hydenrych

Some not so frequently asked questions

Q. Do black eagles sweat?

A. No. They do "thermoregulation" (control their temperature) by panting with their beak open or by heat loss through the unfeathered legs and feet.



Q. How do eagles find their nest?

A. Since the nests are so large, it's probably pretty easy, especially if they haven't gone too far! In that case, since eagles are diurnal (daytime) fliers, we believe they use familiar landmarks to guide them to the general area, and once there, use more familiar and specific cues to find their particular am/river and then the nest tree. These birds obviously store great amounts of information or memory of the landscapes in their lives, as they easily move 80 – 160 km on a winter's day in search of food.

Q. What is the largest prey animal that a black eagle have been known to kill?

A. Good question. The key word here is "kill". Black eagles are much more opportunists than killers, meaning that if they can get an easy meal without expending much energy (i.e. by killing something) they will do that. Reports of black eagles feeding on the large carcasses of animals are usually because they found it already dead. Eagles are capable of killing small antelope (especially if they are already somewhat debilitated), but can take prey weighing 2-3 kg, which would be their max.

Q. How many will live to be adults?

A. This varies with the population in question but about 2-3 could survive. Mortality is highest for eagles in their first year of life, especially their first six months. The first winter is crucial. Some biologists have estimated mortality as high as 70% within one year of fledging (leaving the nest). Other studies estimated that only 10% of eagles are alive after 3 years of life. In general, we believe that only about 3 in 10 eagles survive to adulthood.

Q. How old are they before they can fly?

A. 13-14 weeks, when they leave their nest.

Q. Why do black eagles have such big nests if they only have one or two eggs?

A. They are large birds and their young become quite large, demanding of lot of space to fit all the birds and their 2 m plus wingspan.

Q. About how long does it take for the black eagle's eggs to hatch and how long until it can fly?

A. Mostly 44/45 days to hatch, then one chick remains in nest for 13-14 weeks plus, until fledging.



Q. How do scientists test black eagle's navigational patterns?

A. Testing their navigational skills has deduced some of their pathways and patterns from marking numerous birds and then receiving sightings or recovering dead birds. Also by affixing both conventional and new satellite radio telemetry devices to the birds then following their movements and analysing where and when they go, deducing clues from their movements.

Q. Can a black eagle swim?

A. Never seen one swim!



Q. How old does a juvenile have to be to leave its natal territory?

A. Preferably 14 weeks after having fledged is ideal but on fewer unfortunate occasions, juveniles may get chased away at 8 weeks or less. The adults never teach it hunt and hunger will force the youngster to find its own once it has left the adults' territory.

Q. When was the first black eagle ever spotted?

A. I don't know, but they were around before human beings; fossil remains of ancient eagles date back some 25 million years, long before humans.

Q. How many kilograms of food does a black eagle eat in a day?

A. Approx. 500gr – 1.5 kg per day – during breeding seasons.

Q. What are the eagle's enemies?

A. Occasional leopard, caracal, baboon, python and human beings.

Q. How exactly are transmitters attached to the eagle?

A. As a "backpack", exactly like the one you might wear to school. Straps in front of and behind both wings are stitched together in the front.

Q. Do the same eagles come back each year to the same place?

A. Generally, yes they do, which is why it is so important to protect those areas eagles are known to use.

Q. I know that the eagle's favourite food is hyrax (dassie), what else will they eat?

A. Although hyraxes are preferred when they can get them, they also hunt rock rabbit, scrub hare, mongoose, guinea fowl, francolin and occasionally tortoise. It would be great to check the nests each year, looking for prey remains that would indicate what they have been eating.

Q. Does the black eagle mate with others?

A. No. The pair is monogamous and only when one eagle disappears, will they search for another mate. Although occasionally an intruding adult (not one of the pair) comes in and battles the resident bird for the territory, sometimes then taking over. If one of the pair dies, the other will find a new mate and usually keep going in the same territory.

Q. How fast and how far can a black eagle fly when flying for 30 minutes?

A. That depends on what the eagle is doing. If it is just flying from one feeding area to another or from its nest to the end of its territory, it probably flies about 30-50 km/h. Eagles seldom flap their wings; rather, they use thermal updrafts to gain great altitude and then soar in a long, descending glide within which they can hit 80-120 km/h easily.

Q. What is the black eagle's diving speed?



A. Pretty fast when they do it, I'd guess 120km/h plus, although they very occasionally dive, they mostly catch prey by surprise, using the other eagle as a decoy with the other swooping from another direction and capture the prey.

Q. How long does the black eagle live?

A. Typically in the wild probably between 20-30 years. Some eagles in captivity have lived up to 50 years, but in the wild they would not live as long.



Q. How do you determine a black eagle's age?

A. By plumage until they are 4 years old, thereafter you cannot age them.

Q. In what kind of habitats do black eagles live?

A. Mountainous with sheer rocky cliff faces, occasionally in tall trees depending on prey availability and artificial nesting platforms.

Q. How long does it take the eaglet's feathers to turn black?

A. Approx. 3-4 years.

Q. Does a female black eagle look the same as the male?

A. Yes, they look identical. The female is larger than the male. The female has a much broader fanned tail than that of the male that is narrower in flight.

Q. Explain how an eagle sees animals on the ground while soaring high above ground?

A. They have extremely keen vision. Their eyes are specially designed for long distance focus and clarity. The eye is large with a large retinal surface area with a high concentration of cones (all of our eyes have rods and cones which allow us to see) which aid in visual acuity and colour perception, among other features. It has been estimated that eagles can see 3-4 times farther than humans and that they can see another eagle soaring nearly 70 km distant.

Q. Is the age of an eagle different than human years? If so, how is the age calculated?

A. No.

Q. When do eagles learn to fly and how?

A. At between 13-14 weeks as they first leave the nest (fledge), and then with more and more practice to and from the nest and surrounding trees over the next month or two.

Q. Does the black eagle mate with other eagles?

A. No.

Q. If a black eagle was in captivity and then released into its habitat, would the eagle be able to survive in the wild?

A. That would depend upon how long the eagle had been in captivity and whether or not it was imprinted to eagles or to human beings. If one was recovered sick or injured and held in captivity so it could fully heal, even if that took up to 2 years, it would still likely be able to be released and survive.



Q. Could you teach a black eagle to talk and do tricks?

A. No.

Bits & Pieces

- ✓ Thanks to Arthur Cossey for his guess when the juvenile will fledge...come on peeps, those parties on Africam are far more interested than anyone on the home front and there **are prizes to be won!!**
- ✓ So the eaglet has been named "NESSIE" unsure what language it is, but it does stand for Miracle...which is great, after all, this is a summer breeding season and the adults have already been to hell and back to ensure that this babe will survive during the summer heat and Highveld rain storms!
- ✓ Peeps, looks like we're going to get those new golf shirts in time for this year and it's highly probable that we will have them in time for our next committee meeting – about time...it was a mission and I thank Christine, Dorothy and Phil for their input, without them it could not have been achieved – this year!!
- ✓ We are entering the juvenile stage soon and this weekend the lad/lady will be 70 and 71 days old on Saturday and Sunday respectively or 10 weeks' time certainly flies when you're having fun! I'm really looking forward to this!!



Eagle greetings...

Bo van der Lecq

BEPR & RCP