



ACT
Government

Environment and
Sustainable Development

JUNE 2013



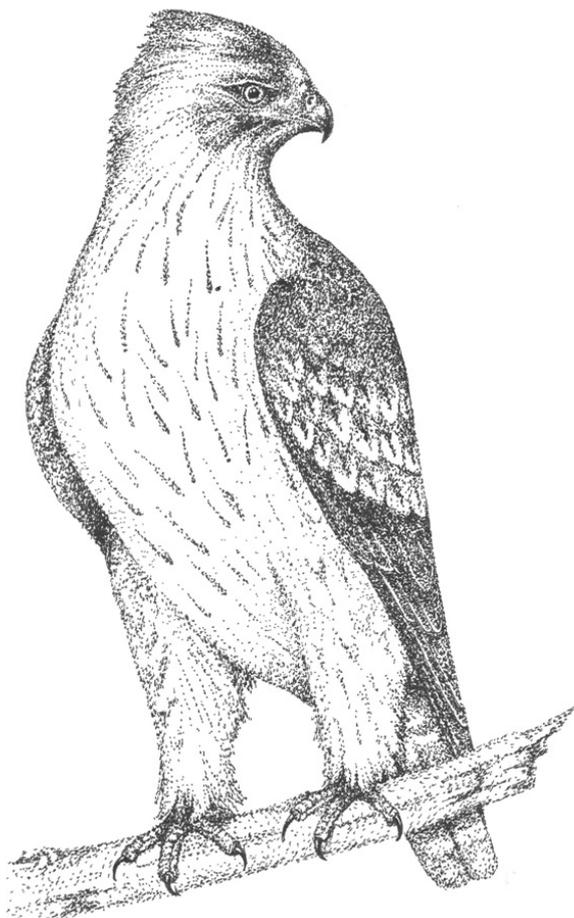
Little Eagle

One of the smallest eagles in the world, the Little Eagle (*Hieraaetus morphnoides*) risks becoming extinct in the ACT region in the medium-term future unless active steps are taken to protect its habitat.

Originally found throughout mainland Australia, the Little Eagle was declared a vulnerable species in the ACT in 2008. It is also listed as vulnerable in New South Wales.

Little Eagles are stocky, powerful birds with a wingspan over a metre. The females weigh almost twice as much as the males. They usually live in woodland and open forest, nesting in mature trees on hillsides in open woodland and along tree-lined watercourses. They build stick nests and line them with leaves and may use nests of other birds such as ravens.

Females lay two eggs in late August to early September. They hatch after about five weeks and are fledged about eight weeks after hatching. Adults defend their nesting territory with soaring, undulating flight displays, conspicuous perching and or calling.



The birds forage widely, often many kilometres from their nest. They spy their prey while soaring above the woodland or from lookout trees then swoop down quickly to take their food from the woodland floor, trees or bushes. Prey mainly consists of juvenile rabbits, smaller birds, insects, reptiles and occasionally carrion.

Sightings of the Little Eagle have been recorded across much of the ACT, but the breeding range is restricted to the lower parts of the northern ACT such as the Murrumbidgee and the Molonglo river corridors.

Numbers of the Little Eagle have been declining over the last 30 years. In the ACT, the number of breeding pairs has reduced to only one in 2012. However, there have been sightings of several non-breeding birds.

Conservation threats

Given that approximately 80% of the estimated area of lowland woodland in the ACT at the time of European settlement has been lost, the main threat to the Little Eagle appears to be loss of habitat due to:

- encroachment of urban development on Little Eagle habitat
- human activity, which may deter Little Eagles from settling in suitable habitat near urban areas
- difficulty in protecting areas that are large enough to meet the birds' needs, given they often forage several kilometres from nest trees.

Research is required to investigate claims the Little Eagle may be threatened by competition from the larger wedge-tailed eagle, by secondary poisoning such as from eating poisoned rabbits, and other possible threats.



Conservation actions

The ACT Government proposes to maintain, in the long term, a viable, wild population the Little Eagle by taking actions to protect the bird and conserve its habitat. These actions will be driven by the Little Eagle Action Plan, the ACT Lowland Woodland Conservation Strategy, ACT Lowland Native Grassland Conservation Strategy and ACT Aquatic Species and Riparian Zone Conservation Strategy.

Conservation actions focus on:

- gaining better information about the birds and their ecology to better understand and manage ecological threats and develop management strategies
- identifying and protecting critical habitat where the eagles can hunt and establish breeding territories
- retaining adequate foraging and breeding habitat
- cooperating with state and local government agencies and the Australian Government to formulate and implement conservation measures
- increasing community awareness of the need to protect the species and its habitat and
- supporting community-based conservation action.

More information

- Action Plan No. 33, Little Eagle (*Hieraaetus morphnoides*)
- Action Plan No. 27: Woodlands for Wildlife: ACT Lowland Woodland Conservation Strategy
- Action Plan No. 28: A Vision Splendid of the Grassy Plains Extended: ACT Lowland Native Grassland Conservation Strategy
- Action Plan No. 29: Ribbons of Life: ACT Aquatic Species and Riparian Zone Conservation Strategy.
- Canberra Ornithologists Group

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Acknowledgements

Photo courtesy of Julian Robinson

Drawing by Leslie Wallington.