



Video 2 Teacher Resource – Tasmanian Birds

Tuning in: The following short [video](#) (4:47) associated with the *Where? Where? Wedgie! (WWW!)* project provides a brief overview of bird species in Tasmania. There are around 180 different bird species found across Tasmania. Different species prefer different habitats.



Finding out: Birds are very important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. As seen in the video titled [Bunjil the Eagle](#), the wedge-tailed eagle has a strong spiritual connection with Aboriginal Australians across the country. According to the creation stories of the Kulin nation and Jadawadjali Peoples of south-central Victoria, the wedge-tailed eagle, known as Bunjil, created and protects the natural world. The video describes how after Bunjil created the mountains, rivers, flora and fauna he transformed into an eagle, where he watches over and protects his people.

Sorting out: Before starting the video, remind students of the 'Bunjil the Eagle' video depicting Creation stories about how Bunjil created the natural world, including eagle habitats. Ask students to draw a list with two columns, one marked 'Habitat' and the other 'Bird Species', alternatively this could also be created on the whiteboard or smartboard as a collaborative activity. Under the heading 'Habitat' ask them to list the following: Coastal, Farmland, Towns and Cities, Forest, Freshwater. Remember that some species, such as the forest raven, can be seen using a wide range of habitats; others, such as the azure kingfisher, may be much more specialist. During the first part of the video ask students to record at least one type of bird against each habitat. For bonus points, see if they can also name a raptor most commonly seen in the Coastal, Farmland or Forest Habitats.



Helpful Information for the teacher below:

Habitats of birds in Tasmania

Habitat	Bird species (examples)
Coastal	Gulls; cormorants; waders: oystercatchers, Australian pelican; raptors: grey goshawk, white-bellied sea-eagle
Farmland	Forest raven; cockatoos: sulphur-crested cockatoo, little corella, long-billed corella; raptors: brown falcon, Australian hobby, swamp harrier
Towns and Cities	Blackbird; sparrow; starling
Forest	Yellow-tailed black cockatoo; cuckoos: shining bronze-cuckoo, pallid cuckoo; laughing kookaburra; grey fantail; superb fairy-wren; robins: scarlet robin, flame robin, pink robin; raptors: wedge-tailed eagle, grey goshawk
Freshwater	Azure kingfisher; white-faced heron; black swan; ducks

Show visual examples of some of the birds listed above and see if students can remember which habitat they are most commonly found in. Ask students to discuss in pairs if they have seen any of the birds in the list above, and if so, did they see them in their associated habitat or somewhere else.

Introduced birds

Discuss with students what introduced birds are and why they think they were brought to Tasmania. It would be helpful to show images of these birds to help the students with this question. Further questions could include: What dangers do you think introduced species such as birds create?

Helpful information for the teacher: Birds introduced to Tasmania include the: Little Corella, Long-billed Corella, Common Starling, European Blackbird, Laughing Kookaburra, Superb Lyrebird, Rainbow Lorikeet.



Not wanted! Invasive birds in Tasmania

There are two particular birds in Tasmania that have not been very friendly to the other birds and are impacting on native and endemic bird species. They are the:

Indian myna: If the Indian myna were to become established in Tasmania it could outcompete endangered native bird species like the orange-bellied parrot. It is a major nuisance in urban areas and creates fire, vermin and disease hazards. The Indian myna were brought to Australia to control caterpillars and other insects.

Rainbow lorikeet: Rainbow lorikeets are an emerging invasive threat to Tasmania. If they establish here they would compete with native parrots, such as the musk lorikeet, swift parrot and green rosella, for food and resources. They also pose a potential disease risk.

Question: Can you name some endemic birds (only found in Tasmania)?



There are 12 Endemic Birds to Tasmania: <https://nre.tas.gov.au/wildlife-management/fauna-of-tasmania/birds/endemic-birds>

- [Tasmanian Native Hen](#) *Gallinula mortierii*
- Green rosella *Platycercus caledonicus*
- Dusky robin *Melanodryas vittata*
- [Tasmanian thornbill](#) *Acanthiza ewingii*
- [Scrubtit](#) *Acanthornis magnus*
- Tasmanian Scrubwren *Sericornis humilis*
- [Yellow wattlebird](#) *Anthochaera paradoxa*
- [Yellow-throated honeyeater](#) *Lichenostomus flavicollis*
- Black-headed honeyeater *Melithreptus affinus*
- [Strong-billed honeyeater](#) *Melithreptus validirostris*
- Black currawong *Strepera fuliginosa*
- Forty spotted pardalote *Pardalotus quadragintus*

Go further: Ask students to consider what would happen if introduced bird species became greater in numbers than the endemic bird species in Tasmania. (Remind them that endemic bird species can only exist in Tasmania.)

Go further: Ask the students which group the **wedge-tailed eagle** belongs to? (Raptors)

What is a raptor?

A raptor is a bird of prey. Raptors are not all closely related. The word 'raptor' comes from the Latin word *rapere* which means 'to seize or take by force'. It is a general term, used to refer to all birds of prey that hunt for food from the air. They have exceptional eyesight which allows them to spot prey from a large distance. Raptors are usually at the top of the food chain, and often have to travel far to find enough food. This means that raptors are often threatened species, as they encounter many different threats to their breeding and survival as they travel. Owls are raptors too, but in this project we focus on day-active (diurnal) raptors).

Reflect and act: Encourage students to consider how important the creation of the natural world is in the story of Bunjil the Eagle. Ask them to discuss why it is so important to protect and value natural habitats such as those of endemic birds in Tasmania, and particularly for the wedge-tailed eagle.

Did you know? The Tasmanian wedge-tailed eagle is Australia's largest bird of prey. The wedge-tailed eagle is so named because of its wedge-shaped tail.

Artwork task

Ask students to view the image of the wedge-tailed eagle below painted by E.E. Gostelow and to respond to the questions, either individually, in small groups or as a class.



The following [artwork](#) of a wedge-tailed eagle is by Ebenezer Edward Gostelow and was created in 1935. It is 63.5cm high and 45.3cm wide and is painted in watercolour. This image is at the National Library in Canberra.

- In this detailed painting what features has the artist emphasised that help us to understand that this is a bird of prey? (Curved beak, eye, talons etc.)
- Why do you think the artist has depicted the wedge-tailed eagle on a branch high in the air?
- How has the artist depicted a sense of space and perspective in this work?
- Can you identify where the artist has used texture in this work and do you think it works effectively?

Because Ebenezer did not have a camera, **he had to paint the wedge-tailed eagle as accurately as possible.** Natural history illustration studies played a really important role in helping scientists learn more about each species. John Kean's book [The Art of Science](#) is a wonderful resource for inquiring into how scientific drawing contributes to exploration, discovery, research and documentation. Curiosity and the imagination are as fundamental to science as they are to artistic endeavour. Kean's book traces the lives, curiosities and observations of artists and explorers, who throughout history often worked in tension to gather and record information.

Drawing an animal or plant is a great way to notice the details of how it's put together, and how it differs from similar species. However, depending on who is doing the drawing - and for what purpose - there lies potential for (inadvertently or otherwise) the 'othering' of people and species. For example, what may have been deemed new and exotic to Western colonisers may not have been for the Aboriginals already living here for milenia.

Sorting out/Reflect and Act: What perspectives and considerations should we be mindful of in our observation and documentation of species?

The process of science strives to be one of discovering how the world works; a process of speculating, building and testing hypotheses that enable inquiry and creative re-imaginings of things. The tools, practices and processes of scientific drawing continue to play an important role for how we document, understand and communicate the unique characteristics and behaviours of species.



- Looking at the photographs below of nine (!) wedge-tailed eagles, would you recognise that this is the same type of bird if you only had the painting to help you know what it looked like?
- While this photograph isn't a close up, it allows us to get a sense of how different the wedge-tailed eagle can look depending on its age. We can glean a lot about the diverse ways in which wedge-tailed eagles can look like (i.e feather colour and texture, the ways they stand, perch and hold themselves)
- What differences/similarities can you see between the photograph and the painting?



- Photo credit: James Hanslow, [‘Bird watcher’s Tasmanian wedge-tailed eagle photo shows group’s vulture-like behaviour’](#) ABC News Hobart, April 27th, 2022

The above photo of nine Tasmanian wedge-tailed eagles was captured by amateur photographer James Hanslow, and was [featured in a special ABC news article](#) on the 27th April, 2022.

James Hanslow was birdwatching in Tasmania's Southern Midlands when he spotted a large group of the endangered raptors in a paddock. The ABC News article is accompanied by fascinating commentary from wildlife biologist Nick Mooney.



- Photo credit: James Hanslow, [‘Bird watcher’s Tasmanian wedge-tailed eagle photo shows group’s vulture-like behaviour’](#) ABC News Hobart, April 27th, 2022



Now it's your turn

Reflect and act: Think about what you have learned about bird habitats, different bird species, introduced and invasive birds, endemic birds including the wedge-tailed eagle which is associated with the Kulin nation's Bunjil creation story. Using Ebenezer's artwork as inspiration, work in pairs to create a six-frame cartoon-strip about Bunjil encountering an invasive bird who is ruining the habitats of other endemic Tasmanian birds. Your short cartoon-strip needs to show how wise Bunjil finds a good solution for everyone so that the endemic birds are safe again. Remember to include as much detail on Bunjil as possible, including texture, to emphasise that he is a bird of prey.

You might like to work on paper or use a program such as [Canva](#) to create your comic strip.

Australian Curriculum v9.0 links:

Content Descriptors: Year 3-4

Science (Strands: Science inquiry, Science understanding)

- (Sub-strand: Biological sciences) Compare characteristics of living and non-living things and examine the differences between the life cycles of plants and animals (AC9S3U01)
- (Sub-strand: Communicating) Write and create texts to communicate findings and ideas for identified purposes and audiences, using scientific vocabulary and digital tools as appropriate (AC9S3I06)

Visual Arts (Strands: Exploring and responding, Developing practices and skills)

- Explore where, why and how visual arts are created and/or presented across cultures, times, places and/or other contexts (AC9AVA4E01)
- Experiment with a range of ways to use visual conventions, visual arts processes and materials (AC9AVA4D01)

HASS (Strand: Knowledge and understanding)

- (Sub-strand: Geography) Understand and appreciate the ways First Nations Australians in different parts of Australia are interconnected with Country/Place (AC9HS3K04)
- (Sub-strand: Questioning and researching) Locate, collect and record information and data from a range of sources, including annotated timelines and maps (AC9HS3S02)

English (Strands: Literature, Literacy)

- (Sub-strand: Creating literature) Create and edit imaginative texts, using or adapting language features, characters, settings, plot structures and ideas encountered in literary texts (AC9E3LE05)
- (Sub-strand: Interacting with others) Use interaction skills to contribute to conversations and discussions to share information and ideas (AC9E3LY02)



Victorian Curriculum links:

Level 3 and 4 Content Descriptions:

Visual Arts

- (Strand: Respond and Interpret) Identify and discuss how ideas are expressed in artworks from a range of places, times and cultures, including artworks by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples ([VCAVAR028](#))
- (Strand: Visual Arts Practices) Explore visual conventions and use materials, techniques, technologies and processes specific to particular art forms, and to make artworks ([VCAVAV026](#))

Further Research

Birdlife Australia. (n.d.). *wedge-tailed eagle*. Retrieved from <https://birdlife.org.au/bird-profile/wedge-tailed-eagle>

Burgess, G. (2022). 'Bird watcher's Tasmanian wedge-tailed eagle photo shows group's vulture-like behaviour', ABC News Hobart. Retrieved from: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-04-27/wedge-tailed-eagle-photo-shows-vulture-behaviour/101015390>

Canva. (2022). *Create your own amazing comic strips online with Canva*. <https://www.canva.com/create/comic-strips/>

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Wark. S. (2014, June 2). *Bunjil the Eagle*. Vimeo. Retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/97185996?fbclid=IwAR28YhJv-IGxr3rmF5eignbaV-t4o8xsBb4xBHYB-80TQ4lu5f uxDL7fVo>