

## Press Release 30/04/2012

### BirdWatch Ireland welcomes the return of nesting White-tailed Eagles

Nesting White-tailed Eagles have been confirmed on a small island on Lough Derg, near Mountshannon in County Clare, which marks the first documented evidence of breeding since the species became extinct from Ireland over 100 years ago.

Human persecution was the primary reason behind the disappearance of the White-tailed Eagle from Ireland during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. However a reintroduction scheme was initiated by the Golden Eagle Trust in 2007 with the aim of re-establishing these birds in Ireland.

Through the reintroduction scheme young White-tailed Eagles have been taken under licence from nests in Norway and released in Killarney in County Kerry every summer for the past five years. These birds have since matured and dispersed and travelled throughout the country, however the pair which have settled on Lough Derg are the first which have been confirmed breeding. The re-introduction project was initiated in 2007 by the Golden Eagle Trust, under license and in partnership with the National Parks and Wildlife Service. One hundred White-tailed Eagles have been released between 2007 and 2011 in Killarney national Park, Co. Kerry

Nest building began in recent weeks with the birds spending much time in and around the nest site before laying at least one egg. If everything goes accordingly, hatching will occur around the last week of May. The breeding pair, a four year old male and three year old female collected on the island of Frøya off the west coast of Norway, settled in the Mountshannon area in early 2011.

The movements and behaviour of these birds have since been closely monitored with anticipation by Dr. Allan Mee, project manager of the White-tailed Eagle reintroduction scheme for the Golden Eagle Trust. He commented "*We had hopes that this pair might try and build a nest but because the birds are relatively young we really didn't expect them to breed*", Dr. Mee added. "*The odds are stacked against young first-time breeders because they have no experience of nest-building, mating and caring for eggs and young. They have to get everything right to succeed. But so far so good*".

Commenting on the positive news, John Lusby, Raptor Conservation Officer with BirdWatch Ireland said "*It was through human influence that these magnificent birds were previously driven to extinction in Ireland, the significant efforts on the part of the Golden Trust, the NPWS and the other bodies involved in this project have been well rewarded by this news of breeding, which is the first step in rectifying the historical losses. Although there may be tentative moments ahead, we hope that the pair will be successful and that by the end of the summer the first Irish born White-tailed Eagle in over 100 years will be back in our skies*".

Lusby added "*given the nature and historic relevance of this news, it is likely to attract the attention of many people who will want to witness these impressive birds, however we strongly urge anyone who intends to visit the area to abide by the requests of the Golden Eagle Trust and under no circumstances to approach the island on which the birds are nesting, as such disturbance could be detrimental*".

The nest itself can be easily viewed from the nearby pier in Mountshannon, and telescopes and binoculars, as well as information on the birds will be provided by the Golden Eagle Trust.

Alan Lauder, Chief Executive of BirdWatch Ireland commented *“this success represents a phenomenal milestone for bird conservation in Ireland and BirdWatch Ireland extends warm congratulations to the project team and hope we can offer support to the GET’s efforts to see further success in future.*

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Jimmy Deenihan has also welcomed the development.

“Already the white-tailed eagles are a wonderful asset to tourism around Killarney and wider afield in Kerry, and their spread will benefit business as well as giving joy to anglers and naturalists around the Shannon,” Mr Deenihan has said.

## Notes for Editors

1. BirdWatch Ireland is the largest independent conservation organisation in Ireland and its focus is on the conservation and protection of Ireland's birds and their habitats. It is a registered charity with over 14,000 members and 25 regional branches. For more information, please visit [www.birdwatchireland.ie](http://www.birdwatchireland.ie).
2. The White-tailed Eagle re-introduction project was initiated in 2007 by the Golden Eagle Trust, under license from the National Parks and Wildlife Service. One hundred White-tailed Eagles have been released between 2007 and 2011 in Killarney national Park, Co. Kerry. To date 20 birds have been recovered dead. In addition, the Golden Eagle and Red Kite re-introduction projects are managed by the Golden Eagle Trust in partnership with the National Parks & Wildlife Service of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in the Republic of Ireland.  
See <http://www.goldeneagle.ie/portal.php?z=248> for further information.
3. Over the past four years White-tailed Sea Eagles have dispersed throughout Ireland and beyond. Many eagles have been reported from Northern Ireland and at least six birds have travelled to Scotland. One male that spend 8 months away from Kerry in 2009 travelled over 2,000 kilometres to the Orkney Islands off the north coast of Scotland before returning to Kerry. In early 2011 this male was found paired with a female in south Kerry. Immature White-tailed Sea Eagles may disperse over a wide area but once birds begin to mature and pair up at 4-5 years old they establish territories along the coast and inland lakes where they are resident throughout their lifetime.
4. The Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (NINA) and the Norwegian Ornithological Society were the partner organizations for the White-tailed Eagle Reintroduction in Norway.

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