

WHITE-TAILED EAGLE

Haliaeetus albicilla

non-breeding visitor, vagrant

monotypic

The White-tailed Eagle's breeding range spans Eurasia from Greenland and Iceland to ne. Russia and the w. Aleutian Islands, Alaska (Dement'ev and Gladkov 1951b, Cramp and Simmons 1980, AOU 1998). Many individuals remain in breeding areas year-round but younger birds and some adults can be migratory (Forsman 1999, Zaun 2009). Based on subfossil evidence from O'ahu, Moloka'i and Maui, White-tailed Eagles occurred in the Hawaiian Islands as recently as 3,300 years ago (James 1987, Olson and James 1991, Fleischer et al. 2000, Fleischer and McIntosh 2001) and likely subsisted on seabirds and flightless geese and ibis during its tenure in Hawaii (Ziegler 2002). These authors assume it was a resident breeding species in Hawaii but this would represent a departure from normal breeding environs, and it seems plausible that it could have been a regular migrant and winter visitor.

The only modern record of a White-tailed Eagle in the Hawaiian Islands is of an adult (at least 5 yrs old) that was well documented on *Kaua'i*, and apparently occurred on *Ni'ihau* 30 Dec 2006-2 May 2007 (Zaun 2009; *NAB* 61:531). We consider additional reports of it or other large raptors on Kaua'i through 24 July 2007 to be unsubstantiated, and suspect that this adult departed for breeding grounds soon after 2 May. While on Kaua'i the White-tailed Eagle was observed and photographed at Kilauea Point NWR ([HRBP](#) 5351-5352, 5524-5530, published *NAB* 61:350 and cover of 61[2], *W Birds* 40:36) and along the nearby n. coastline, as well as near Kawai'ele Bird Sanctuary along the s. coast ([HRBP](#) 5675-5676). It preyed upon several adult [Laysan Albatrosses](#) while on Kaua'i (Zaun 2009); thus, we consider a report of two eagles preying upon albatrosses on Ni'ihau during spring 2007 to involve the Kaua'i individual, although we consider only one to be substantiated to species. Large birds observed on Ni'ihau 3 Jan 2008 and at Lehua Islet NW of Ni'ihau 18 Jan 2008 were considered possibly to be the same White-tailed Eagle returning for a second winter but species identification was not confirmed.

[Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

[Literature cited](#)

Citation: Pyle, R.L., and P. Pyle. 2009. The Birds of the Hawaiian Islands: Occurrence, History, Distribution, and Status. B.P. Bishop Museum, Honolulu, HI, U.S.A. Version 1 (31 December 2009) <http://hbs.bishopmuseum.org/birds/rlp-monograph/>