

See the Sea-Eagle

by Ed Parker

Raptors, or "birds of prey", are among the most noble-looking of birds but often are not seen at close quarters.

Just think about the imposing appearance of a wedge-tailed eagle soaring high on thermals, looking eagle-eyed (as we say) for prey on the ground below. The family includes eagles, hawks, kites, ospreys, harriers and falcons.

In the Centenary Suburbs, it is not uncommon to see the silhouette view in the sky of one or other of these birds of prey. Sometimes they are seen being heckled by smaller, more manoeuvrable birds, in some form of strange, aerial combat.

One of the larger of raptors, rivalling the size of the more well-known, wedge-tailed eagle, is the **White-bellied Sea-Eagle**. Apart from its size, up to 0.8m in length, with a wing span of 2.2m, it is resplendent in its white body feathers and grey back.

This Sea-Eagle, known by its scientific name as *Haliaeetus leucogaster*, frequents, as its common name implies, marine and estuarine areas. However, it also inhabits areas near permanent streams and freshwater wetlands throughout the greater Brisbane region.

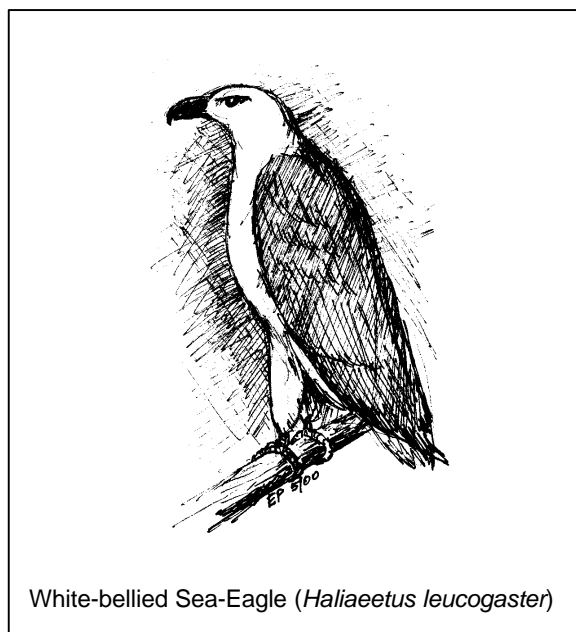
A recent canoe trip along the Brisbane River in Westlake enabled the magnificent Sea-Eagle to be observed at closer quarters than is usually the case, though still high in a tree.

Some 50 metres away, also perched high in another of the blue gums that are a predominant species in the riparian (river) corridor, was the largest nest this writer has ever seen! The Sea-Eagle's nest of sticks and twigs was estimated to be some 2 to 3 metres across.

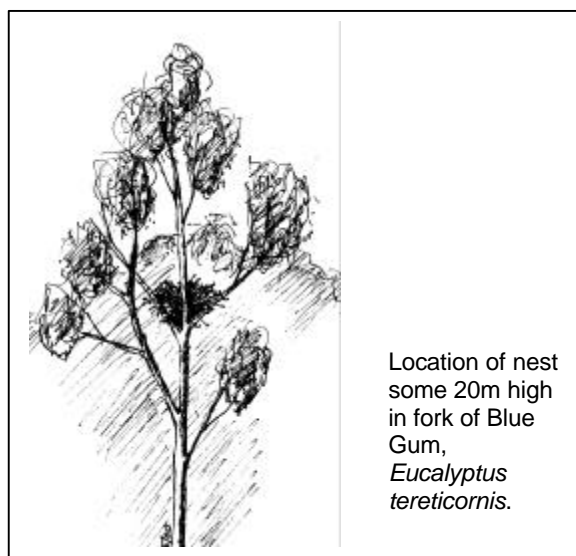
The typical Y-shaped forked or branched trunk habit of the blue gum (*Eucalyptus tereticornis*) lends itself as an ideal perch for such nests.

The location of this nest is on the Pinjarra Hills side of the river, along the east-west reach of the river in Westlake.

It will be interesting to observe the location in the coming months as we move into the winter-spring breeding period for this eagle. At this time, we cannot confirm whether there is a breeding pair, but here's hoping.



White-bellied Sea-Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*)



Location of nest
some 20m high
in fork of Blue
Gum,
Eucalyptus
tereticornis.

This regular Nature Watch column is contributed by your local Centenary bushland care groups.

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