

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE OF WHITE-BELLIED SEA-EAGLES IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

T. E. DENNIS¹ and A. F. C. LASHMAR²

¹P.O. Box 232, Kingscote, Kangaroo Island, South Australia 5223

²Deceased, formerly of Penneshaw, Kangaroo Island

Received 3 April, 1994

A survey conducted between 1988 and 1994 located 55 occupied territories of White-bellied Sea-Eagle in South Australia. Survey methods included: information from the literature; systematic survey in the Great Australian Bight region, southern Eyre Peninsula and Kangaroo Island; opportunistic survey elsewhere; and contact with other people.

Eighteen (33%) of these territories were found on the mainland, including three from inland river systems on Coopers Creek and the Murray River. The majority of the breeding population (67%) was found on offshore islands, including Kangaroo Island where 17 occupied territories are known. The remaining 20 occupied territories were found throughout the island groups off the far west coast, Eyre Peninsula, and through Investigator Strait.

Extensive areas of typical coastal habitat in the south-east region of the State, on Yorke Peninsula and around Spencer Gulf and Gulf St Vincent were found to be vacant despite historical records of White-bellied Sea-Eagles breeding in those regions. This suggests that the distribution of the breeding population and the abundance of this species has declined in South Australia.

Many of the occupied territories on the mainland and on Kangaroo Island are regarded as vulnerable to further decline unless residential and tourism development and particularly coastal recreation, are carefully managed.

The South Australian population was found to be physically isolated with the nearest occupied territories 860 km to the west, and 700 km to the east.