

Translocation of sea eagle chicks from Norway to East Scotland in June 2007



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SAMMENDRAG

Den dårlige produksjonen hos havørn i fylkene Møre og Romsdal og Sogn og Fjordane i 2007 medførte at kun 15 av de innvilgede 20 havørnungene kunne samles inn for eksport til Skottland i løpet av de 10 dagene som var avsatt til innsamlingen. Bortsett fra problemer knyttet til den lave ungeproduksjonen, konkluderer vi med at prosjektet har vært vellykket og blitt gjennomført uten problemer. Et middels eller godt produksjonsår for havørn i disse områdene vil gi bedre tilgang på unger, og vi anbefaler derfor at det vurderes å samle inn flere unger i de kommende årene for å kompensere for de fem ungene som ikke kunne samles inn i 2007. På denne måten vil vi kunne nå intensjonen om å samle inn 100 fugler over en 5-års periode.

Eiksund, 29th August 2007

Alv Ottar Folkestad
Leader NSEP

CONTENTS

SAMMENDRAG	2
1. IMPLEMENTATION	4
2. MEDIA COVERAGE	7
3. COSTS	8
4. PARTICIPANTS.....	9
5. CONCLUSION	9

1. IMPLEMENTATION

In 2007, the collection and exportation of sea eagle chicks from Norway was carried out by the Norwegian Sea Eagle Project (NSEP) run by the Norwegian Ornithological Society (NOF). Much of the fieldwork required for the Scottish project was undertaken as part of the routine annual monitoring of the Norwegian sea eagle population.

Fieldwork preparation and execution included the following stages:

1. Late February through March - Remote observation of a number of sea eagle territories to gather information on the phenology and progress of nesting attempts. Priority was given to easily accessible nest sites, checked by project members or other reliable local contacts. Selected territories were mainly concentrated in the Smøla Archipelago and the Ålesund area in the county Møre & Romsdal, and the coastal areas north of Bergen in the county Hordaland.
2. Last week of April to first week of June – Identification of successful/failing nests throughout the source area (county Møre & Romsdal, county Sogn & Fjordane, county Hordaland).
3. Second and third week of June - Visiting and entering nests to make detailed nest records, ring chicks and collect chicks from twin broods.
4. June 22nd - Shipping of the sea eagle chicks to Scotland by the Norwegian Air Force.

Where nests were visible from a distance, twin broods were identified in advance, in order to minimise the fieldwork time required to collect the chicks. However, with sites where it was impossible to identify brood size without entering the nest or otherwise disturbing the birds, nest visits were made as part of the routine NSEP annual visit. The fieldwork costs associated with collecting chicks for transportation were limited to the visits made to twin broods for chick collection. The majority of Norwegian fieldwork costs were therefore covered within the NSEP monitoring programme. Between 10th and 20th June, 15 sea eagle chicks were collected for export, one of which came from the county Sogn & Fjordane and the rest from the county Møre & Romsdal (see table 1).

In the early part of the breeding season, 2007 looked to be a promising year in the areas around Ålesund and Smøla. However, as time progressed, it turned out to be a rather poor season. During the period 25th April to 20th June, field surveyors visited 200 sea eagle nesting territories, in order to identify sufficient donor sites. Only 18 twin broods were identified, of which two broods contained chicks younger than the required minimum age, and one nest was inaccessible. Of the 200 nest sites visited, 68 were successful, 50 of which produced single chicks, and 18 yielded twin broods. The total reproduction in 2007 for the visited territories was 0.43 chicks per occupied territory. This is rather poor, compared to the over all mean for the NSEP period 1974-2006, which averages 0.6 chicks per occupied territory. In 2007, only 34% of nests were successful and brood size averaged 1.27 chicks, compared to the overall mean of 1.35.

Table 1. Details on the collected sea eagle chicks

No code	Ring #	Mol. Gender	Biom. Gender	Coll. date	Municipality	County
WTSEB#001a	ZZ1701	Male	Male	10.06.2007	Gloppen	SF
WTSEB#002a	ZZ1702	Female	Female	11.06.2007	Ålesund	MR
WTSEB#003a	ZZ1703	Male	(Male)	13.06.2007	Ørsta	MR
WTSEB#004a	ZZ1704	Male	Male	14.06.2007	Fræna	MR
WTSEB#005a	ZZ1705	Female	Female	15.06.2007	Haram	MR
WTSEB#006a	ZZ1706	Female	(Female)	17.06.2007	Rauma	MR
WTSEB#007a	ZZ1707	Female	Female	18.06.2007	Rauma	MR
WTSEB#008a	ZZ1708	Male	Male	21.06.2007	Smøla	MR
WTSEB#009a	ZZ1709	Female	?	20.06.2007	Smøla	MR
WTSEB#010a	ZZ1710	Male	Female	20.06.2007	Smøla	MR
WTSEB#011a	ZZ1711	Male	Male	20.06.2007	Smøla	MR
WTSEB#012a	ZZ1712	Male	Male?	20.06.2007	Smøla	MR
WTSEB#013a	ZZ1713	Male	?	20.06.2007	Smøla	MR
WTSEB#014a	ZZ1714	Male	Male	20.06.2007	Smøla	MR
WTSEB#015a	ZZ1715	Female	Male?	17.06.2007	Frei	MR



One of the 15 sea eagle chicks in the voliere prior to exportation to Scotland.

The situation in 2007 illustrates the need for monitoring of large numbers of territories and thereby a very large source area in order to supply the required 20 chicks during a poor breeding season. However, in an average season there should be few problems in sourcing this number, and even less so in a good breeding season.

Initially, preparations were made for collecting chicks from three west coast counties, viz. five chicks from each of the counties Hordaland and Sogn & Fjordane to the south, and ten from the county Møre & Romsdal to the north. However, no twin broods were found in the southern most part of this region and only one set of twins was located in the northern part of Sogn & Fjordane. The remaining 14 birds were collected in Møre & Romsdal, with seven of those coming from the Smøla Archipelago. The poor breeding season meant a low frequency of twin broods, and thus required increased effort to compensate for the low number of potential donor sites to provide a reasonable number of chicks for shipping to Scotland. Only the Smøla Archipelago, with its very dense breeding population, gave a high output of chicks for the time invested in the field.



Espen Lie Dahl (left) and Alv Ottar Folkestad handling newly collected sea eagle chicks.

Apart from this, there were no practical problems encountered in neither the collection of chicks nor in the care of birds prior to exportation. The chicks were transported from the nest to the pens or volieres within a few hours on the same day they were collected. The exception was Smøla, where the chicks had to be housed temporarily before being transported to the main holding station a short distance from

Ålesund Airport. The holding pens contained artificial nests, built 1m above the ground to house the chicks while they awaited airlift. The artificial nests were constructed to resemble natural nests as closely as possible, using twigs and branches, and lined with grass and fresh mosses. The chicks were fed with fish and meat in the morning and evening, and all of them fed well. Only one of the chicks required assistance to tear the food apart in the first few days. The birds were placed in twos in each nest, with the exception of the smallest one, which was kept separately. The birds were fitted with BTO rings when put into the cages, and not handled except when taken from their natural nest, when moved from the transport boxes into the pens, and then again when placed in the “kennels” for the transportation to Scotland. The veterinary check was made on 21st June, the afternoon before leaving Norway. Each bird was closely inspected and its appearance and behaviour studied. None of the birds were handled nor were any samples taken during this procedure.



Alv Ottar Folkestad and Espen Lie Dahl with the Orion crew from the Norwegian Air Force that transported the sea eagle chicks to Scotland.

2. MEDIA COVERAGE

On 13th June, a photographer from the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) (Magne Sleire) participated in the fieldwork to obtain film footage for a programme about the translocation project that will be transmitted on Norwegian TV in the autumn (2007). During his stay, six nest sites were visited and one chick collected.

The photographer was supportive of the project and has been a member of the NSEP group since the 1980s.

On 14th June, a film team from Norwegian TV2 followed field staff when visiting another six nest sites, and filmed the collection of one other chick. On the 16th June, this TV company presented a magazine programme about the translocation project.



Alv Ottar Folkestad and Espen Lie Dahl being interviewed for a radio program about the air transport of the sea eagle chicks at the day of departure.

Several newspapers have given presentations on the reintroduction programme, both in Scotland and Ireland, but in addition to the two TV companies mentioned above, only one newspaper has been allowed access to photograph the eaglets in the holding pens (the first two birds), and during preparation for shipping the birds, and their departure from Ålesund Airport. There was a radio program about the air transport of the birds the day of departure.

3. COSTS

The costs incurred in the collection and exportation of chicks from Norway has followed the budget discussed and accepted in Dublin during March 2007. Costs attributed to this project have been limited to transport and manpower when actually collecting the chicks, the cost of housing and keeping the birds and car rental for transporting the birds to the airport. Most of the costs such as preparing for collection, checking nest sites, communication and administration, etc have been

regarded as an ongoing part of the NSEP costs. Close collaboration of the two projects has therefore allowed most cost effective use of resources.

The Norwegian Ornithological Society (NOF) will invoice RSPB for the total costs attributable to this project in Norway in 2007 and as agreed with Duncan Orr Ewing of the RSPB. NOF will then undertake payment of individual Norwegian participants as appropriate. While the final figure is not yet available, it would appear that the costs covered by NOF are well within the budget agreed in Dublin.

4. PARTICIPANTS

Alv Ottar Folkestad, Ålesund area and county Sogn & Fjordane
Espen Lie Dahl, Smøla Archipelago
Per Gunnar Hopshaug, Smøla Archipelago
Tore Hals, Kristiansund area
Øyvind Gjeldnes, Kristiansund area
Are Folkestad
Siv Midtlien
Are Pilskog
Magne Sleire

5. CONCLUSION

Bearing in mind the poor productivity in 2007, resulting in only 15 of 20 birds permitted being collected during the designated 10 day fieldwork period, we conclude that the project has run rather well and with the exception of issues relating to the low reproduction, has been problem free. However, an average or good breeding season would have provided a better yield of chicks. We therefore recommend some thought should be given to requesting collection of additional chicks in the coming years, to compensate for those five lost this year, in order to reach the intended number of 100 birds over the five years planned for the project.