

Analysis of potential breeding habitat for the White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) in Austria

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Keywords

White-tailed Eagle, *Haliaeetus albicilla*, habitat, CORINE Landcover, GIS

Abstract

This study was undertaken to predict potential breeding habitats for the White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) in Austria and in consequence to estimate how many pairs could still colonise adequate breeding areas in the country. CORINE Landcover and additional data on water bodies were analysed with the help of a geographic information system (GIS) in a grid of approximately 10x10 km. The study was conducted within Austria and its neighbouring countries (Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary). The results confirm the species well known preference for aquatic habitats such as wetlands and water bodies. Furthermore mixed and coniferous forests as well as shrub and herbaceous vegetation associations turned out to be significant for the choice of the breeding place. The assessed size of the national breeding population in future ranges between 30 and 50 pairs. These numbers allow for the possibility that certain detected cells may not be suitable for the White-tailed eagle or that a predicted cell is convenient enough to be colonised by more than a single breeding pair only. Due to the small scale of the data and the consequential inaccuracy the results have to be viewed and interpreted cautiously. Additionally large scaled characteristic of the breeding habitats, such as the availability of nutrition or the stock of old growth and especially disturbing factors like silvicultural, touristic and hunting activities would have improved the prediction of suitable habitats but could not be gathered within the framework of this study. The results provide nevertheless a strong basis for further analysis and support different conservation efforts in favour of the local White-tailed Eagle population in Austria.

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