

9

From egg to adult

‘[The egg] ... is clouded with large blotches of pale purple, and small specks and dashes of yellowish umber-brown on a stone-coloured ground, and is three inches in length by two and a half in breadth.’

John Gould (1865).

The eagle lays attractive eggs: buff white, speckled, spotted and blotched with purple-brown or red-brown and lavender. When fresh they are glossy but become more matt with age. Some eggs are very heavily marked and others pure white, but most have scattered markings which sometimes merge into large patches or caps, most often at the more pointed end. The eggs within a clutch do not necessarily match; quite often one is much less heavily marked than the others.

The female lays an egg every three days or so until the clutch is complete. Usually, the eggs are rounded oval with one end slightly more pointed than the other, but sometimes almost globular. At 7.3 cm long by 5.8 cm wide, larger in Tasmania and smaller in the northern Australia, they are sizeable. Occasionally there may be a runt among them, as little as half the dimensions of the others, which never hatches. Each egg normally weighs about 120–150 g, equivalent to about three domestic chicken eggs and about 3 per cent of the female eagle’s body weight, 10 per cent for a full clutch of three—a small investment compared with other smaller species. If a clutch is lost or stolen early in incubation, some pairs will replace it, relaying after an interval of about a month.