

## RAPTORS IN ARCADIA

If you are walking near Bremner Point, Olympus Crescent Lookout, or the top of Gabul Way at dawn, look up, and it's likely you will see at least one of the four raptors which frequent Arcadia: The White-bellied Sea Eagle, Brahminy Kite, Osprey, and Whistling Kite.



### ***White-bellied Sea Eagle***

The White-bellied Sea Eagle has nested for many years on a ridge to the west of Bright Point, back from the coast, but is always to be seen, usually in a pair, circling towards the coast in the early hours, wings upswept, and honking like geese to one another, rising on the thermals to great heights. The Eagle's distinctive white head and front, pale grey and black flight feathers are striking when seen from underneath. Females are larger than males, weighing from 2.8 - 4.2kg, with a wingspan of 1.8 - 2 metres. (Males a bit less in both categories). By comparison, Wedge-tailed Eagles have a wingspan of 2.3 metres (Females are larger in these raptors too).

White-bellied Sea Eagles swoop fast and at an angle to catch a fish, snatching it from near the surface to avoid getting wet. They will take their prey back to the nest for chicks which are waiting or enjoy the spoils if alone. These large powerful birds can include other birds, mammals, sea snakes, even turtles in their prey.



### ***Osprey***

Osprey have been nesting in a hoop pine overlooking Alma Bay for the last six years, near to both Alma and Geoffrey Bay for fishing.

With a reddish-brown back and contrasting white head, distinctive black band through the eye, osprey are often seen perched on vantage points in bare branches, or on high boulders. Taking off on a wingspan of 1.7metres they slowly circle upward, white, and pale grey flight feathers giving them a commanding appearance.



*Osprey.*

The sound they make when in the nest and at a high vantage point reached in the air can only be described as a plaintive call which becomes a high-pitched repetitive scream. It's not loud, but unmistakable, once heard. Hovering above the water, the Osprey bends its wings to plunge straight down, attempting to secure a fish in the process, (but not always successfully) and emerging to fly back to feed a mate, or hungry chicks in the nest, or to enjoy alone.



*Diamond Scale Mullet* - One of the fish found in Geoffrey and Alma Bays, prey for raptors.



*Osprey diving on fish.*

The bird is often wet from being partly or fully submerged, needing great strength to beat its large powerful wings enough to raise itself from the water and not lose its prey (alive and struggling).



*Osprey begins the flight back to the nest.*



*Osprey returns to the nest, fish intact, to feed hungry chicks.*



### ***Juvenile Osprey***

These juvenile Osprey already have large wingspans and are ready for flight. Catching fish will take weeks of practice. Parents still feed them until they are proficient hunters. They will mature in three years.

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### ***Whistling Kite***

Along Jetty Road, near the old Arcadia barge jetty, a family of Whistling Kites have nested in a hoop pine for many years. Their distinctive descending to ascending call can be heard all around Bremner Point, and many a clash can be seen, as Whistling Kites defend territory against Osprey and Brahminy Kites, common raptors in the area. Whistling Kites will catch fish, crabs, small mammals, and reptiles, and eat roadkill. Their wingspan is less than the Osprey and Eagle, at 1.2 - 1.4 metres, females being slightly larger than males. Their golden-brown head and shoulder feathers turn to dark brown wings, and body. There is a distinctive pattern underneath when the kite is flying above.



Juvenile Whistling Kite responding to the call of a parent in the nest above.



A Whistling Kite approaches a stranded Sea-snake on Geoffrey Bay shore.



### ***Brahminy Kite***

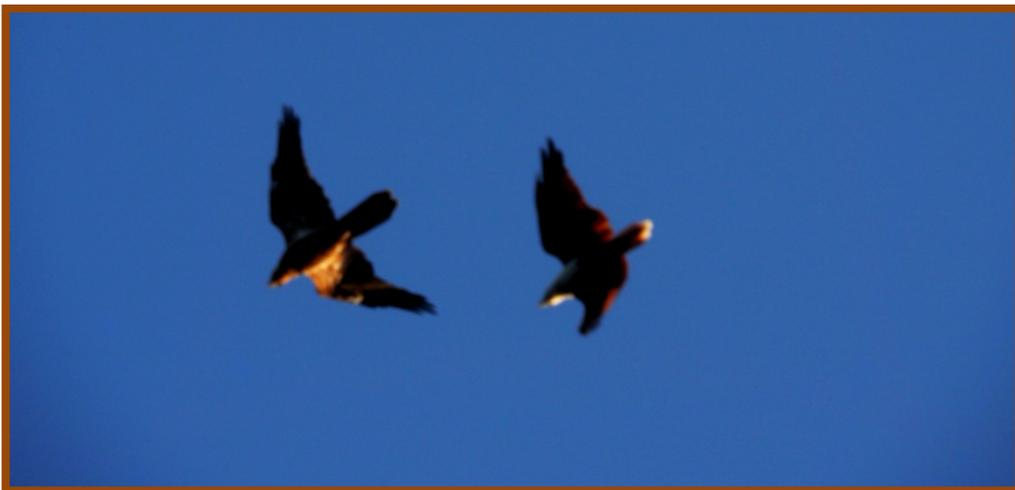
The Brahminy Kite has a white head and breast, with chestnut brown back and black-tipped wings, and a wingspan of 1 - 1.2 metres. Its name is derived from the Indian '*Brahmin*' or sacred. The sun shining through the outspread wings of this kite is a beautiful sight.

They are seen at Alma Bay and Geoffrey Bay and on the headlands, and often seen perched on a hoop pine overlooking the water, where other prey may be found on shore: crabs, dead fish.

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*Brahminy Kites* have a distinctive call, one note extended, emitted when flying in territory, and warning other raptors. Clashes can occur between Eagles, Osprey and Kites.



*Whistling Kite pursued by a Brahminy Kite above Geoffrey Bay.*

All these raptors mate for life and maintain the same nest sites for years. The average number of chicks hatched each season is two. The young seem to keep connection with their nest areas, and are sometimes seen flying with parent birds, but when mature and ready to breed, may leave to establish a nest site with more food availability. Parent birds cannot sustain young ones when they are hatching the next ones.

There seem to be one pair of each of the raptors mentioned here, although their numbers increase with chicks hatching and being dependent on parents for up to a year.

Observations by Vandhana 2022

Photographs by Vandhana 2004 - 2022

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