

## Regent Honeyeater captive release Volunteer Frequently Asked Questions.

Each captive release undertaken on Regent Honeyeaters is entirely dependent on the commitment and hard work of community volunteers. In any one release more than 150 people assist with the fieldwork, radiotracking and observing birds in the wild. Since 2008 a total of 186 Regent Honeyeaters have been released back into the Chiltern-Mt Pilot NP across four releases, with birds resighted as far away as Holbrook (NSW) and South Gippsland (VIC) in the years following their release. During the release year itself most birds stay in or close to the Chiltern forest, and we keep track of them during this period thanks to 3+ months of intensive monitoring. Below is a list of key questions most volunteers ask in advance of their first involvement in the project.

### **What is the release process?**

Birds for release have been bred over the previous two years by Taronga Zoo and its partners. They spend some time at Taronga before being transported by road to the release site. Once on site the birds which are going to be fitted with a radiotransmitter are processed (i.e. harness and transmitter is attached), and then all birds are put in temporary holding aviaries to acclimatise to the local environment. On the release morning volunteers and project staff will be assigned locations to watch the release take place, and then the tents are opened. It's then up to the birds to decide when they want to leave! As soon as birds leave the tents the tracking starts, and we start recording data (explained further down).

### **What's in a typical day of field work?**

All staff and volunteers meet at a pre-determined location within Chiltern-Mt Pilot NP, usually at 8:30am (we will tell you where that is beforehand). All volunteers sign in for the day and a quick safety briefing is completed. Teams of at least two people are assigned, and each team is given a list of birds to track and locate for the day. For some teams this will involve walking from the meeting point, for others it will be car-based searching, or it may be a combination of both. Generally participants volunteer for the entire day (until around 4.30pm) but mornings or afternoons only are possible too.

### **How do we record our data?**

In the past we have used data sheets to record a range of observations for each bird we find – leg bands, behaviour, trees being used, and any possible nesting behaviour. This year we will use a smartphone app based system, designed to make data entry easier (both in the field and back at base each night!).

### **How do we navigate around the forest?**

In previous releases we have used handheld GPS units to navigate around the forest, and record waypoints marking the location of birds. Key functions used include using a ‘go to’ function to navigate back to a previously marked spot – good for finding your car again after long walks chasing birds! Each team is also given a selection of hard copy maps as a backup. But again, this year we will use smartphones with built in apps designed specifically for our fieldwork. Don’t worry – you will be given all the training you need to use this method.

### **What happens when we find one of our birds?**

The first thing to do is confirm that the bird you are radiotracking is the one you are looking at, so you need to identify the bird by its unique combination of colourbands. Once you have worked out you’ve got your bird, you will open the Survey 123 app on your (or our borrowed) smartphone and fill in a survey. When you’ve filled in the form you hit ‘submit’ and it’s automatically loaded into our database of sightings. You then radio the coordinator for the day and inform them of the find, then head off in search of your next bird.

### **Do I need to be able to read colour bands?**

It certainly helps, as many birds are released wearing leg bands only. We will train you in how to read the bands, which colours we use, and the techniques which help to reduce eye and neck strain (good binoculars help too!). But...if you can’t read colour bands that’s okay, we can simply pair you up with someone who can. There is still lots you can do without reading colour bands.

### **Do I need to have a car to participate? And if so, does it need to be 4wd?**

At times we do need volunteers to drive around forest to follow birds – and our daily 8.30am meeting points will be in a designated location within the Park. Accordingly a car is highly desirable, however we may be able to pair you up with other volunteers with cars.. The vast majority of tracks within the park are fine for 2wd. If any teams need to go into areas with

4wd access we delegate that to project staff, or experienced volunteers with appropriate vehicles.

### **What should I wear?**

Typical of this sort of work, you will need to dress appropriately to the weather of the day. If it's cold and raining, long clothing, beanies and coats will be needed. But even mid-year some days in Chiltern can be quite mild, so be prepared for sunny conditions too – a hat, sunscreen, and cool clothes. In all instances sturdy shoes, ideally hiking boots or similar, make traversing the bush of foot easier and safer.

### **Is food provided?**

Typically no, apart from training days or other special functions we run during the release. People will need to come self-sufficient with food and water to last the day. The township of Chiltern has an IGA supermarket, several cafes, and the bakery is a regular spot to find Regent Honeyeater project staff and volunteers.

### **Is accommodation provided?**

There is (limited) capacity for out of town e.g. Melb. based volunteers to sleep in a spare bed or lounge room (e.g. mat and sleeping bag on floor) of our Chiltern house which acts as our Regent office and accommodation base for key PhD students and staff. Furthermore there is scope for people to either pitch a tent or set up a caravan in the yard of the same property. Volunteers need to register interest with Liz Wemyss (Email: [Elizabeth.Wemyss@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:Elizabeth.Wemyss@delwp.vic.gov.au) 0417 312 592) But there are plenty of other options too - the Lake Anderson caravan park has cabins, powered and unpowered van sites, and plenty of space to pitch a tent. There is a motel in Chiltern, and there are numerous options further afield (e.g. Rutherglan, Beechworth, Albury-Wodonga). There is also Tuan campsite within the Chiltern section of the park, which offers a spot to wake up amongst the wildlife of the park.

### **What equipment do I need to bring?**

A good set of binoculars, ideally 8 x 42 or 10 x 42, are the key piece field equipment needed. It is virtually impossible to be able to read colourband combinations without them. But if you don't own any, or the set you have aren't quite up to scratch, that's okay – we have a small number of pairs we can loan out each day.

Key additional items:

- Fully charged mobile phone (with specified free Regent survey apps already installed – we will provide further information including links to download at home before arriving in the field)
- Smart Phone charges and cables

### **Can I bring a camera and take photos?**

Absolutely.

### **What about safety?**

Safety is a very high priority for the project. We operate under DELWP's OHS system, and detailed pre-release evaluations are undertaken. Once in the field we conduct morning briefings to ensure everyone is up to speed on changes to conditions, and all teams sent into the field carry first aid kits with them. Furthermore all teams are in constant 2-way radio communications (DELWP radios supplied) and we have mobile phone back up and GPS phone app provisions.

### **Do you do monitoring if it's raining or windy?**

Monitoring is certainly much easier on days when the sun is shining, but the birds are out there regardless. As such the only days of monitoring where we call it quits are those when rain is pouring down or, more importantly from a safety perspective, if it's really windy (we don't want anyone to cop a falling branch on the head!). Where possible that decision is made the night before our fieldwork so we can let everyone know, but often it's made on the day. Basically – if you haven't heard from us please come into the bush ready to track birds!

### **How do I register for Regent Honeyeater volunteer survey participation:**

Email: Liz Wemyss "[Elizabeth.Wemyss@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:Elizabeth.Wemyss@delwp.vic.gov.au)" 0417 312 592

- Provide Full name; email address, home location, mobile phone #, and potential dates available & any other relevant information.