

# 2021 NSW Regent Honeyeater Captive Release Update #3

Hi everyone (Regent Honeyeater email group),

We would first like to acknowledge and thank the traditional owners of the land whose country we have had the privilege of walking on for this release – the Wonnarua people.

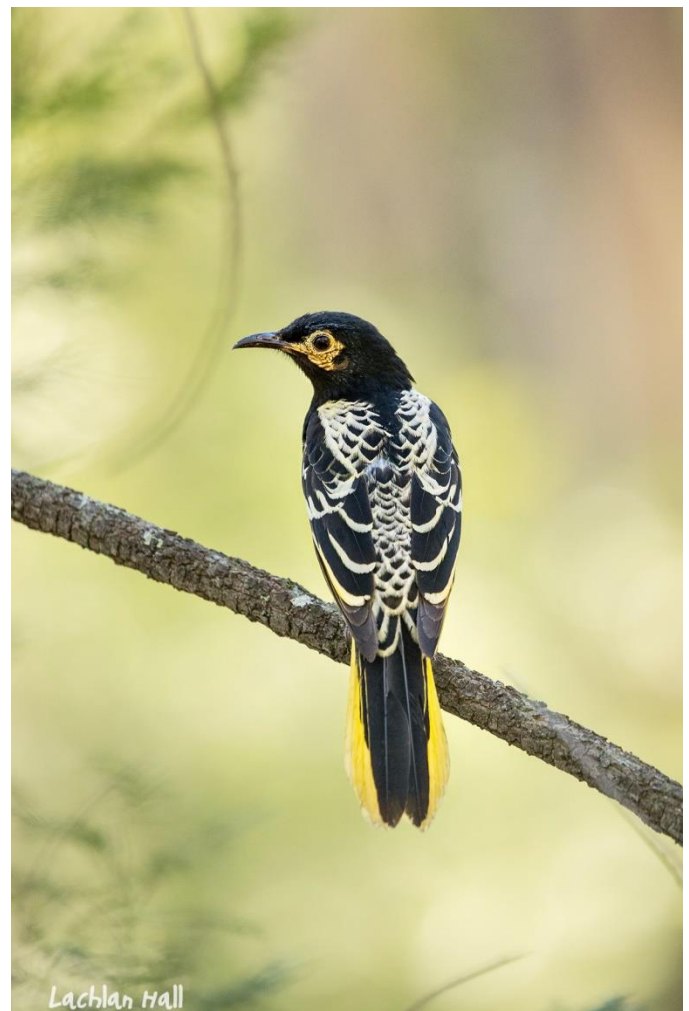
This community update comes approximately five weeks since 58 zoo-bred Regent Honeyeaters were released into the Cessnock-Kurri Kurri woodlands. The birds have settled down in recent weeks and some very promising breeding activity has kept most of the birds anchored in the general vicinity of the release site. Continually improving conditions and the discovery of even more wild Regents in the surrounding area bodes well for the coming weeks.

## We Have Chicks Hatched!

We are absolutely thrilled to inform everyone that in the past few days and in a first for NSW, a zoo-bred Regent Honeyeater pair has hatched chicks in the wild! Although this is still a long way from successfully fledging young, it is a huge accomplishment in of itself, and certainly cause for celebration. Remarkably, RMNR (f) and RMNU (m) are now feeding nestlings just four weeks after having been released into the wild. We will be sure to keep you updated on the pair's success in the coming weeks.

At the time of the last community update the Lower Hunter was coping the brunt of a wet weather system that dropped about 70mm of rain over two days, which was followed by some strong winds. With most of the release cohort having finally settled within the general vicinity of the release area and with pre-breeding activity ramping up, we were certainly nervous that the wild weather could throw a spanner in the works and see the birds abandoning nest attempts and dispersing into the wider landscape once again. We saw this in the first week after the birds were released, when rainfall flushed the nectar out of the blossom around the release site.

Thankfully, that wasn't the case this time, with almost all the birds staying faithful to the same patches of the forest they had been frequenting. This indeed is an encouraging sign that the released birds are content with the current conditions in this beautiful patch of bushland. With the numbers of indicator species such as Noisy Friarbirds and Little Lorikeets seemingly still building and a good amount of bud and blossom across the woodland, it seems likely that the majority of the released birds will stay here for the foreseeable future.



In typical fashion, a captive-released Regent poses with its leg bands obscured, making identification difficult. At least on this occasion it also made for a nice photo opportunity (Lachlan Hall/BirdLife Australia)

We did observe a few pairs abandon their nest attempts in the days following the wild weather, but it is not uncommon for Regents to abandon a

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nest attempt in the early stages, and then try again, particularly if the nest sustains some damage. We are happy to report that most of these pairs are already beginning to build again in new locations.



A captive-released female Regent Honeyeater (RMBP) gathers twigs for her nest. (Lachlan Hall/BirdLife Australia)

## Wild Regents in the House

A bonus to the birds staying put is that it makes our job tracking them a whole lot more manageable and efficient. With less time spent tracking down wandering birds, our team has been able to spend more time searching the surrounding woodland for wild and non-transmitter birds which has yielded some very exciting results! In the last update we mentioned two sightings of wild male Regents at opposite ends of the woodland patch. We are very pleased to share, that further searches in these areas have turned up an incredible FIVE new pairs of wild Regent Honeyeaters! Not only that, but one wild pair is feeding a recently fledged juvenile, which is a promising sign for our captive-released birds that are currently involved in breeding activities. Including the youngster, this takes the total of known wild birds in the area up to a minimum of 13 individuals.

For the long-term success of the release, it is encouraging that several times now captive-released birds have led us to wild birds. It is hoped that when the birds do begin to disperse from this patch, the captive-released Regents will be able to follow the wild birds to suitable habitat further afield. As such, it has been great to observe the released birds actively interacting with the wild birds on several occasions. Released male, RMRN, has been hanging out in the vicinity of two established wild pairs for nearly two weeks now, opting to stay near the wild birds rather than re-join most of the release cohort about three kilometres away. We also observed another of the released males, RMYW attempting to court a (disinterested) wild female - that male's romantic plans were quickly foiled when the wild male partner returned shortly after.



A wild Regent Honeyeater feeds a recently fledged chick just over 1km from the release site. (Lachlan Hall/BirdLife Australia)

## An Expensive Meal

Unfortunately, since the previous update we have also had our first confirmed death of a captive-released bird. The male, RMYB, had been AWOL for more than a week but after quite some searching, we eventually found his transmitter beneath a raptor nest on private property 12 kilometres from the release site. Sad indeed, but at this stage the overall survival of this release cohort is substantially better than for last year's release and tracking very well against pre-release targets.



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## The Clumsy Couple (Gossip Corner)

Last update, we left you on a cliff-hanger after observing some apparent tension in the RMOW - RMBP - RMBO threesome. Well, in the time since then the female, RMBP (RMOW's original partner) apparently became fed up with her unfaithful mate and decided to ditch him. Abandoning her nesting attempt with RMOW, she was subsequently seen getting cosy with two other males, RMOB and RMYW on consecutive days - on one occasion whilst RMOW was watching on! This week we bring you the clumsy couple, RMPP and RMRU, who are now onto their FIFTH attempt at building a suitable nest. The promising news is that the nests have looked a little better each time. The first attempt was one that not even a pigeon would have been proud of - a loose assortment of sticks and web out on an exposed dead limb high in an ironbark. It was blown straight out of the tree on a windy day. Thankfully, the latest effort looks much sturdier and is better hidden, being tucked in amongst the branches of a Melaleuca along the creek line. The female has certainly become efficient at collecting nesting materials with all that practice, and this new nest is taking shape quickly!



The wild Regent Honeyeater fledgling waiting for its next feed.  
(Mick Roderick/BirdLife Australia)



Two Regent Honeyeaters are difficult to spot in a mass of ironbark blossom and bud (Mick Roderick/BirdLife Australia)

## Acknowledgements

The NSW Regent Honeyeater Release is delivered by the Department of Planning, Industry & Environment, BirdLife Australia and Taronga Conservation Society Australia and forms part of the national Regent Honeyeater Recovery Plan implementation. Funding is being provided by the NSW Government through its Environmental Trust and Saving our Species Program, the Hunter and Central Tablelands Local Land Services through the Australian Government's National Landcare Program, the Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation – an Australian Government initiative, Friends of the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, and several generous donors and philanthropists. The release is being undertaken on land owned and managed by the Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council, and BirdLife Australia recognises and is grateful for the immense contribution of Indigenous people to the knowledge and conservation of Australia's birds, including the Regent Honeyeater.

Please report any Regent Honeyeater sightings ASAP to [woodlandbirds@birdlife.org.au](mailto:woodlandbirds@birdlife.org.au) or call:

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