

2022 NSW Regent Honeyeater Captive Release

Community Update #2— 9th December 2022

Hi everyone (Regent Honeyeater email group),

Welcome to the second community update for the 2022 NSW Regent Honeyeater captive release. This update comes as the calendar on the wall tells us it's summertime, but as we all know it's really 'late spring'. And for the most part it has certainly felt that way out in the field, with a glorious run of warm days and cool nights. There were however a few warm, humid and sticky nights in between – and that has been a welcome thing for both the birds and the tracking team (read on!).

Acknowledgement of Country

All involved in the 2022 Regent Honeyeater captive release acknowledge the sovereign owners and knowledge-holders of the land whose country we have had the privilege of walking on for this Regent Honeyeater captive release – **the Wonnarua people**. We also recognise that sovereignty was never ceded; it always was and always will be, Aboriginal Land.

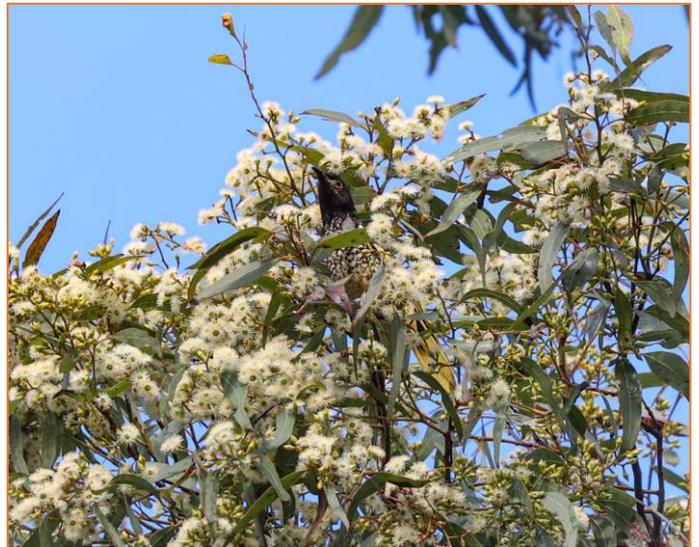


PKKM getting stuck into some Broad-leaved White Mahogany blossom (Tim Paasila/BirdLife Australia).

Humid Nights Getting the Juices Flowing

In the last update we reported on the lacklustre flowering of ironbarks in the area. Well, that all seemed to change after a weekend of warm, humid nights when suddenly we were hearing more Little Lorikeets and White-naped Honeyeaters in the

forests, and then Red Wattlebirds started arriving – the Grey Ironbark had stepped up a couple of notches and was providing great nectar-flows. Since this time we have watched many-a-Regent feeding intently in the ironbark blossom. This source of nectar has come nearly two months later than expected, but the timing is just right for our Regents and we have also noticed the first Broad-leaved Ironbarks starting to flower as well. Combined with other flowering trees, such as Broad-leaved White Mahogany and Forest Red Gum, the birds have a reliable source of Eucalypt nectar for many weeks to come. And of course the mistletoe is far from over too.



UNKM is like a pig-in-mud atop a profusely flowering Grey Ironbark (Mick Roderick/BirdLife Australia).

Of course, the flowering isn't just good news for the birds. The tracking team have welcomed the flush of nectar across Tomalpin because it has likely contributed to a remarkable 'clustering' of birds in some parts of the forest. Although we hinted at early signs of clustering in our last update, none of us expected to see one of the largest concentrations of zoo-bred birds in any of the NSW releases, with no fewer than 17 individuals seen in one small part of the forest on the 6th December. At this location the Regent Honeyeaters are the dominant species of honeyeater, chasing other birds around and being highly visible ...and it is a sight to behold.

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Hope Springs Eternal

In the last update we reported on having found two birds deceased. Since then, we have had two more confirmed mortalities. One of these was almost certainly a predation event, as there were only remains of the bird found at the site of the transmitter. The other was a more intact bird, found by a busy road. The Taronga veterinary team will be investigating the cause of death for this individual.

We also have recovered two harnesses found with no traces of feathers or blood anywhere near the area where it was recovered. On one of the harnesses, it appears that the elastic has slipped out of the crimp, while the other harness broke at its weak point – evidence that birds simply escaped the harnesses. For the duration of the post-release monitoring we are treating these two birds (YBKM/PUKM) as non-transmitter (“non-tx”) birds and we are actively looking for them each day.



WNKM asserts his authority over a Lewin's Honeyeater (who has probably not encountered a Regent Honeyeater before!) at the cluster site where 17 birds were recorded on one morning of monitoring (Tim Paasila/BirdLife Australia).

Our Stringybark Homemakers

In our last update we reported on the two pairs of Regents that were starting to get busy collecting nesting material. These birds are Blue-Yellow; the zoo bird that has paired with a wild male, and White-Metal; the wild female banded in spring 2017 paired with another wild male. White-Metal was watched ‘borrowing’ material from a Noisy Friarbird nest. Subsequently, both birds turned their attention to one particular stringybark tree that they continually stripped sections of bark from.

The more experienced White-Metal (who is at least six years old based on the banding data, possibly even older) and her partner were satisfied with her first construction, and we are pleased to report she is now sitting on the nest. The male bird is doing an amazing job at driving away any bird that enters a ~20m radius of the nest. After each pursuit he lands back on a favourite perch, preening and looking quite pleased with himself! This nest is the first nest that has been found this season since a nest near Carboor (Victoria) was found in early October. That nest unfortunately failed due to the heavy rain experienced at the time.



White-Metal busily collecting her own nesting material this time, from the ‘favourite’ stringybark that both females (and several other species) have been tearing strips of bark from (Tim Paasila/BirdLife Australia).

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The wild male bird paired with White-Metal displaying with wings outstretched and tail fanned – likely associated with the selection of the nest site (Tim Paasila/BirdLife Australia).

Blue-Yellow on the other hand, was only hatched in August 2021, so this is her first time at trying out nest-construction. So, we are not surprised she abandoned her first attempt at building a nest. No sooner had her first effort been abandoned, that her second attempt was started. We're hoping this new nest is a "keeper". She's still collecting bark fibres from the same tree that White-Metal was collecting from....and Noisy Friarbirds, Fuscous Honeyeaters and other birds - it's a very popular tree!



Blue-Yellow tearing bark-strips off the popular stringybark (Tim Paasila/BirdLife Australia).

More to be Wild About

There was more cause for excitement when one of the tracking team were homing in on a signal from male bird PPKM, when they noticed an unbanded bird. We quickly checked the other wild (unbanded) birds that were still at the nest-building sites and the birds were still there concurrently – so we had found a new wild bird! Not only that, but on the following day a second wild bird was found at this location as well. To top all of this off, there was a non-tx bird (OBKM) in amongst the wild birds and PPKM as well – a “mini mixed cluster” of wild and zoo birds.

Feathers, Fur, Frogs and Flowers

One of the pleasures of traipsing around the Tomalpin Woodlands looking for our Regent Honeyeaters is encountering a wide range of other threatened flora and fauna that inhabit the area. On the first page of this update there is a photo showing PPKM feeding on the blossom of a Broad-leaved White Mahogany. Well, literally in the tree right next door to that mahogany was a Koala, doing what they do best (not much) high up in the canopy of a Grey Gum. There have been reports of Koalas in Tomalpin in recent years, including a mother with a joey, but this is the first photographic evidence we have seen. The main Koala feed trees found in these forests are Grey Gums and Forest Red Gums.



The Koala found near PPKM (Tim Paasila/BirdLife Australia).

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Two nationally threatened plants – *Rutidosia heterogama* and *Grevillea parviflora* ssp. *parviflora* – virtually growing on top of each other – found during the monitoring. Both are common in the Tomalpin Woodlands (Mick Roderick/BirdLife Australia).



A Green-thighed Frog *Litoria brevipalmata* photographed in the Tomalpin Woodlands in mid-November; a threatened and very rare amphibian, particularly in this type of habitat (Tim Paasila/BirdLife Australia).

With the onset of Broad-leaved Ironbark blossom, supplementing the Grey Ironbarks that have finally opened their buds up across the region, things are looking very promising indeed. It's no coincidence that wild birds have arrived (if they ever left?) and that loose aggregations of up to 17 released birds are forming; the conditions are ideal and the release planning team can feel vindicated in choosing this incredibly productive patch of forest to host this crucially important release.

Acknowledgements

The 2022 NSW Regent Honeyeater Captive Release is delivered by the Department of Planning & 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 New South Wales 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 Commonwealth Environment Restoration Fund, as part of the Threatened Species Action Plan – Priority Species funding, 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 or call: Mick Roderick (BirdLife Australia) 1800 621 056