

2025 Regent Honeyeater Community Update #1 December 2025

*Season's Greetings to the Regent Honeyeater
community update list* 🎄.

Welcome to the first and only Regent Honeyeater Community Update for 2025. The reason that it has taken so long for the first 2025 update to arrive in your inboxes is mostly because we had an extremely quiet first half of the year and then we all got very busy all of a sudden! However, there is much to report in this 'bumper edition', not least of all the news surrounding our largest ever release of zoo-bred Regent Honeyeaters in NSW, which took place in mid-October. This release took place once again in the remarkable Tomalpin Woodlands on beautiful Wonnarua Country in the Lower Hunter Valley.

Acknowledgement of Country

The Greater Blue Mountains region of NSW and its peripheral valleys, streams and flats now represents the stronghold of the Regent Honeyeater. Everyone involved in Regent Honeyeater recovery efforts acknowledge the sovereign owners, custodians and knowledge-holders of all lands within and bordering the Greater Blue Mountains.

The Tomalpin Woodlands are situated at the extreme north-eastern edge of the Greater Blue Mountains, at the lower reaches of the Hunter Valley. For millennia the aquifers from that sandstone massif – much of it via the Goulburn River – have fed these woodlands, that are the largest unfragmented remnant open forest that Regent Honeyeaters still occupy. Similar country was once an abundant resource occupied and harvested sustainably and harmoniously by Aboriginal People.

We pay respect and give special acknowledgement to whose country we have had the privilege of walking on where the 2025 captive release took place – ***the Wonnarua People***. BirdLife Australia and project partners recognise that sovereignty was never ceded; it *always was* and *always will be*, Aboriginal Land.

A Brief Summary of 2025 to Bring us up to Speed

In the last newsletter we reported on breeding in November 2024 in Capertee National Park (NP) and along the Goulburn River. In early 2025 more juveniles were found in the Capertee and Lower Hunter Valleys. Then there was a lull in the 2025 autumn/winter period which was particularly noticeable this year with only a handful of individuals sighted between Sydney and the Pilliga. The Pilliga record was notable and was consistently seen feeding in abundant White Box blossom for around two months in April-June. White Box flowered very well on the western slopes in 2025 and it's possible that the dearth of sightings along the coast indicated many Regents spent the winter inland feeding on this plentiful nectar resource.



A juvenile Regent Honeyeater seen mid-January in a garden near Cessnock was a promising start to the year (Russell Dann).



A Regent Honeyeater feasting on Box Mistletoe blossom in early February in Capertee NP (Paula Bowler/ @paulabowler4).

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"To Release, or Not Release? That was the question. Early in the year the key breed-for-release partner, Taronga Conservation Society Australia, had been under the impression that they might have been getting some reprieve in 2025 with talk of no releases potentially occurring. Then not too much further into the year there suddenly became discussion about potentially two releases – something that has never been attempted before!

As is widely known, the Capertee Valley is a key stronghold for Regent Honeyeaters and in Capertee NP alone, in the past two seasons a total of 24 fledglings have been recorded within the park. Here, the Needle-leaf Mistletoes adorning the River Oaks on the Capertee River are healthy and Noisy Miners are controlled. Thanks to efforts from NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) it is a haven for Regent Honeyeaters to breed.

Thus, with the strong flowering of White Box and the emergence of Yellow Box buds, performing a small release of Regents similar to the one that happened in late 2023 was tabled. At around the same time a sudden appearance of copious Eucalypt bud was noticed in the Lower Hunter, including in the Tomalpin Woodlands. All five Eucalypts that kept Regent Honeyeaters in Tomalpin for nearly 12 months during 2021/22 and supported the 2021 release, were budding up again - bigtime. The captive release sub-group then decided to consider a 'two release' scenario for 2025.

However, the Capertee release would only happen if we could (a) confirm via expert opinion that the conditions were going to be favourable and (b) there was evidence of breeding early in the season (i.e. pairs and lone males were seen by early September). Apiarists warned us that the wet winter would mean late-flowering of the Yellow Box and surveys failed to find any birds apart from a single male Regent in mid-August (the only Regent Honeyeater recorded in the national park this season). We therefore decided to hold off on a

Capertee release until a year when conditions are more productive and breeding occurs.

Although the Capertee NP didn't host any breeding this year, a pair of Regents were found nesting in the village of Glen Davis, in the south-east of the valley. This pair consisted of a wild male and female YMBB who had been released two seasons earlier in Capertee NP. It was very exciting for the team to see one of those released birds attempting to breed with a wild male, but alas their two nesting attempts both failed, possibly both due to nest-predation.



2023 Capertee release female YMBB at her first nest in Glen Davis in mid-September (Tim Paasila/ BirdLife Australia).

Attention Tomalpin

With the 'two release scenario' off the cards the attention of the release sub-group then shifted to Tomalpin. Given the outstanding conditions, confirmed as being comparable to 2021 by several professional apiarists, there was agreement to try to attempt to release as many birds as possible. Taronga team began working towards selecting birds and preparing for what would become the largest ever Regent Honeyeater release for NSW. Not only were they asked for as many birds as they could manage, but an additional ask of "more females please" was added to the mix. Eventually they would provide no fewer than 69 Regent Honeyeaters to make the journey to Tomalpin from both Sydney and Dubbo by mid-October.

But there had been birds elsewhere in the interim...

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From Around the Grounds

The notion that the Greater Blue Mountains is a clear stronghold for Regent Honeyeaters is not actually what the Recovery Team, or anyone else involved in Regent recovery, wants to be the case. It's very disturbing to realise that it has only been in the past decade or so that two known strongholds (listed and mapped in the 2016 Recovery Plan) have had very few birds reported from them in recent years. These regions are North-east Victoria and the Bundarra-Barraba region of NSW. No Regents were reported from Queensland in 2025.

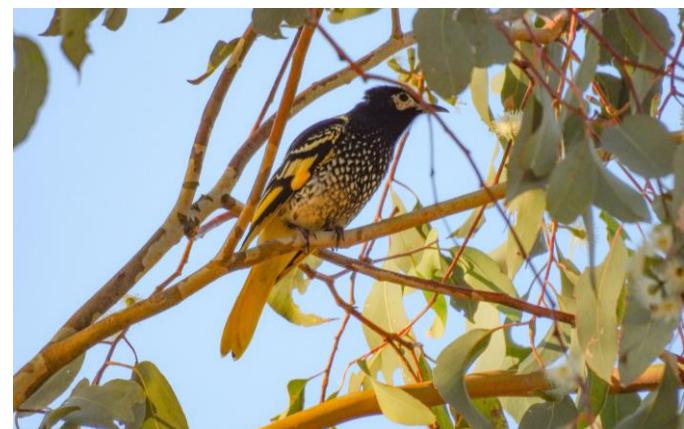
In fact, in 2025 there was literally just one Regent Honeyeater reported in Victoria; well-known local in Wangaratta that was released in the Chiltern over ten years ago. WURM was originally released in April 2015 as a very young (four & half month old) bird into Chiltern Mt Pilot National Park and seems to have taken up a residency of sorts along the One Mile Creek region in Wang. He is certainly one incredible survivor, but we are ever-hopeful that he will cross paths with a female Regent one day.



WURM, here photographed on 4th August at One Mile Creek, Wangaratta, later found a few more times in 2025 (Steve North).

In NSW, reports came from atypical locations such as St Helens Park (south of Campbelltown), Manly Dam (northern suburbs of Sydney), the Hunter Wetlands Centre on the outskirts of Newcastle and an emaciated bird at Pelaw Main after severe weather in late May. We mentioned earlier that there was one bird recorded in the Pilliga over a two-month period. There was actually one report of

two birds there in late May. Of interest, two Swift Parrots were recorded at the exact same spot two weeks apart in mid to late May. This was at the same location where up to 25 Swift Parrots were found in winter 2022. This part of the mighty Pilliga is obviously a very productive location!



The mainstay Regent present in the southern Pilliga for nearly two months, with his favourite White Box blossom visible (Julie Squire).

Two Regent Honeyeaters made the headlines in Port Macquarie when the Hastings Birdwatchers, on their August monthly outing, found a Regent Honeyeater at the Jolly Nose Mountain Bike Parking Area Nature Reserve. In fact, the story goes that a Regent was the very first bird seen on the outing and the remainder of the day's plans were thwarted by this significant finding! Two birds were later confirmed, feeding on White Mahogany blossom.



One of two Regent Honeyeaters found during a Hastings Birdwatchers outing in early August in Queens Lake Nature Reserve near Port Macquarie (James Bennett).

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Rejoicing Mistletoe Long Before Christmas

With early parallels to the 2021 Tomalpin release, there was one major exception; the lack of wild birds detected in the lead-up. This was partly due to the fact that field staff had been busily scouring the Capertee to confirm if birds were present there. But it was also because there was breeding occurring in the Upper Hunter. The catchment of the Goulburn River is a mainstay breeding area for Regent Honeyeaters, with similar habitat to the Capertee Valley where birds mostly breed in riverine vegetation where Needle-leaf Mistletoe and Yellow Box occurs. In the lead-up to the Tomalpin release successful breeding had been recorded along the Goulburn River itself and along Widden Brook. A common theme for these Goulburn River breeding sites, aside from the healthy Needle-leaf Mistletoe, is that they are virtually Noisy Miner-free thanks to efforts by the Australian National University (ANU) and the NSW NPWS over the past few years.



A pair of recently fledged Regent Honeyeaters along the Goulburn River in early October 2025 (Billy Bray/ANU).

There was however, one 'pair' of sightings of Regents inside Tomalpin prior to the actual release. This occurred quite literally as birds began to arrive from Sydney at the release site, when a few km away a pair of unbanded (wild) birds were located feeding on Forest Red Gum blossom; the main nectar source at the time and a crucial early-flowering species that underpinned the team's decision to release. Minutes later and a few

hundred metres to the east a familiar face was spotted – UMRO – a male from the 2024 Tomalpin release. Perhaps most significantly was the fact that he was vocalising both wild and zoo calls as he busily sought to attract a female...which he eventually did...

Advances in Communication

Many previously released zoo-bred Regent Honeyeaters (mostly before UMRO's time) have displayed a distinctive "zoo type" call which is short, trill-like and not reminiscent of a wild bird's song (to the human ear anyway). These "alternative calls" are potentially a barrier to successful pairing/breeding if wild females are not impressed!

So, another ace up our sleeve for this release came from the progress that Taronga and ANU researchers had made with song-tutoring birds at Sydney and Dubbo. To counter this, Taronga have been song-tutoring candidate release birds with the aid of recordings of wild calls, combined with adult male "tutors" that were collected from the wild, mostly from Neranie (Myall Lakes) in July 2019. These wild males not only sing wild Regent song, but their calls are complex and what researchers dub the "full Blue Mountains song". The quality of the 2025 release cohort was evident to the monitoring team (familiar with Regent song), as wild-type calls emanated from the tents in the lead-up to the release.



UMRO – a male released in July 2024 in Tomalpin – found on his own feeding in Long-flowered Mistletoe blossom on the same day that zoo-bred birds began arriving for the 2025 release (Mick Roderick/BirdLife Australia).

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Unzipping the Future

So...on a fine mid-October morning in the Tomalpin Woodlands, the first cohort of the 2025 Regent Honeyeater release took place when the zips on the holding tents were undone. 30 zoo-bred birds were released in the presence of the planning team, local Aboriginal community, the media and school students; the latter who featured heavily in the media coverage. Half of this cohort were fitted with radio transmitters so that we could track their movements.



"There's no better feeling...it's so awesome" NSW DCCEEW Trainee Imogen Ward describing her excitement being involved in the 2025 Tomalpin release to NBN News (Lucas Grenadier/NSW DCCEEW).

A few days later the second cohort of 39 zoo-bred birds, 10 of them wearing transmitters, were set free when the zips were undone mostly by children after we all received yet another warm welcome to Wonnarua Country by Elder, Uncle Richard Edwards. Now synonymous with Regent releases, Uncle Richard's words were soaked up by all present and it was fitting that above his head moments after his welcome, the air and the tops of the ironbarks were filled by a loud gathering of about 30 released Regent Honeyeaters. Everyone present was taken back in time ever-so-briefly; to a time when Regent Honeyeater song and colour filled the canopies of our temperate woodlands. And when that flock flew westwards towards the blossom-rich creek that drains the Tomalpin Woodlands, they carried with them the hope that the species may once again dominate the canopy of at least parts of their former range.

Settling In, or Stretching Wings

After a record-breaking 69 birds had been released, the tracking team had a massive job on their hands, tracking 25 birds wearing transmitters and a whopping 44 birds that did not. Those birds they would need to find without the aid of radio-tracking assistance, quite the challenge! With Red Forest Gum and Grey Ironbark flowering, it was a relief when most of our birds remained within Tomalpin for the first week of their new life in the wild.

As with all releases there were a few early "runners". These are birds that appear to head away from Tomalpin and eventually get so far away we lose signal for them. One of these birds flew north and west of Tomalpin and was last seen near Pokolbin, one of the furthest sightings immediately post-release. Even a flight in a light aircraft only managed to locate one of these runners, but most birds stayed within Tomalpin, faithful to the abundance of nectar on offer. One fascinating movement was MgRR / MgUY. This pair were seen displaying not far from the release site and we were expecting to see them to start nest-building. The next morning there was no sign of them and no radio signal we could gather. Later that day, a signal was detected from a Tomalpin high-point, with the pair being way off to the west towards Kearsley. Following up on the signal the pair were found together in bushland not far from Kearsley and lo and behold they were constructing a nest!



MgRR & MgUY shortly before leaving Tomalpin for new pastures (Tim Paasila/ BirdLife Australia).

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One thing that continues to baffle the tracking team is how difficult it is to find wild birds in Tomalpin. The pair seen before the first release, despite many searches, could not be relocated. Eventually things changed and in the third week post-release the sound of two begging fledgling Regent Honeyeaters filled the air in a tiny corner of Tomalpin. Considering the amazing conditions, this was not a total surprise. In fact, being familiar with the fledgling calls is one of the best ways to find wild Regents – and is certainly the source of an adrenaline rush for anyone that hears it!



One of eight Regent Honeyeater fledglings seen so far in the Tomalpin Woodlands in the past month (Rob Hynson/ BirdLife Australia).

Aside from zoo-bred birds in the past not singing like their wild counterparts, research has noted that in the wild population some male Regent Honeyeaters are performing the song of other birds, particularly larger honeyeaters. The male parent to these fledglings was singing a mix of Little/Red Wattlebird song. Although it's disheartening to hear a wild Regent singing the 'wrong' song, it does give hope that this particular bird was still able to pair and breed successfully with a wild female.

From there the news just got better. This family was to be the first of at least six broods that were confirmed having successfully produced fledglings within Tomalpin; all discovered after the release.

And they weren't all unbanded birds either. We have witnessed first-hand birds from previous Tomalpin releases successfully breeding in the same patch of bush they were released in three years ago. The first of these was BBKM, a female from the 2022 release, paired with a wild male and having a begging juvenile at-foot with the help of her wild male partner.

Another nest had two of our lucky team members watch the fledglings actually leave the nest for the first time! There were several special components to this pair's story, not least of all that the male (UWKM) was from the 2022 release and one of the zoo birds found within a flock of zoo/wild birds in Quorrobolong in May last year. At that time he was singing mostly wild-type song and it was thought that he (and another 2022 male with him) had learnt the wild song from the unbanded counterparts they were associating with. The proof is perhaps in the pudding, because UWKM has become the first zoo-bred male to pair with a wild female Regent Honeyeater; in every other zoo/wild pairing recorded thus far the female has been a zoo-bred bird. UWKM and his wild female partner (subsequently banded as RYMv) managed to fledge two chicks in the week before this update was published.



Wild female RYMv feeds her fledglings on the afternoon they left the nest (Lucas Grenadier/NSW DCCEEW).

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Stretching the Friendship

One of the features of the 2022 release was a 'mega cluster' where up to 18 Regent Honeyeaters were regularly seen in the one location, feeding in Eucalypt blossom early in the morning and then later in the morning coming down low to feed on insects in Acacias. The 2025 release has seen a similar cluster emerge, with a single area holding up to 20 birds recorded on the same day. Birds here have been attracted to a waterpoint but again have been observed feeding on insects low down in Acacias. This provided the tracking team an opportunity they couldn't resist; to stretch the tracking period by catching birds and putting new transmitters on.

There have been two 'catches' which have been successful in placing new transmitters on seven Regent Honeyeaters. This will enable the team to track birds beyond Christmas. In the past, extending the tracking period has resulted in some incredible findings, such as up to 40 Regent Honeyeaters across two roost sites by extending the tracking of the 2021 release and finding the only two juveniles anywhere (in a previously undocumented habitat) by extending the 2022 release tracking.

Perhaps the highlight of the seven birds fitted with transmitters during these catches was the fact that a pair of the birds that were fitted with transmitters were the successful parents; UWKM and RYMr (astute readers would have noticed the antenna from RYMr's transmitter in the image where she's feeding her fledglings). RYMr becomes only the second wild bird to be tracked in these NSW releases and the first female. For now, she is busily feeding her fledglings, but it will be fascinating to watch where she heads to next (and if UWKM follows!).

And finally in a fascinating twist; with so many tutored birds having been released it was a complete surprise to find one of the Myall Lakes males that was banded and released while the tutor birds headed to Taronga.



2022 release male and new father UWKM after being fitted with new radio transmitters in Tomalpin in late November (Mick Roderick/ BirdLife Australia).

RWBM was banded at Neranie (Myall Lakes) 18th July 2019 and not seen until the 28th November 2025 in Tomalpin when he was observed calling at a 2025 release bird, photographed soon after, then not seen again. That's 2325 days between the day he was banded and his only resighting during this release! RWBM has a claim-to-fame as being the first (and only) wild Regent Honeyeater to trial a new harness with a GPS (satellite) tracker. Unfortunately, the harness design wasn't quite right and he was to be banded-only. One wonders if only the GPS tracker could have been fitted to the bird, what stories it could have told us...



RWBM, the only wild Regent to be trialled with a GPS tracker, being held by Dean Ingwersen at Myall Lakes in July 2019 (Mick Roderick / BirdLife Australia).

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Festive Lovebirds

As we approach a pause in tracking our precious Regents over the Christmas break, we are still seeing males singing to females and pairs displaying as if they have breeding still on their minds. We hope to bring you news in our next update early in the New Year, reporting on the sound of begging Regent fledglings filling the air in this most remarkable of places; the Tomalpin Woodlands on beautiful Wonnarua Country.



Sunrise over the Tomalpin Woodlands. Ironbark blossom is discernible in the bottom left of the image (Ally Suzzi/NSW DCCEEW).

Acknowledgements

The Regent Honeyeater recovery program, including the 2025 Regent Honeyeater captive release, has been delivered by the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, BirdLife Australia, Taronga Conservation Society Australia, Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council, NSW Local Land Services, the Australian National University and NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service as part of the National Regent Honeyeater Recovery Plan implementation. Recovery efforts have been supported through funding from Hunter and Central Tablelands Local Land Services through the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust, and through the Australian Government's Saving Native Species program. Recovery efforts have been supported by funding from the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust and Saving Native Species program, and the NSW Government through its Saving our Species and Environmental Trust programs. Funding has also been provided by the Friends of the Australian Wildlife Conservancy and several generous donors and philanthropists. The 2025 captive release was undertaken on land owned and managed by Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council and BirdLife Australia recognises, and is grateful for, the immense contribution of Aboriginal people to the knowledge and conservation of Australia's birds, including the Regent Honeyeater.

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Two Portraits to Round Out The Year



2022 release male PUKM quickly poses for the camera in between his duties after having paired with one of the 2025 release females MgUP that made a start on several nesting attempts (Tim Paasila/ BirdLife Australia).

PLEASE REPORT ANY REGENT HONEYEATER SIGHTINGS ASAP to woodlandbirds@birdlife.org.au or by visiting <https://birdlife.org.au/what-to-do-if-you-see-a-regent-honeyeater>



MgWO was released in the first cohort but returned on a few occasions to visit the second cohort that were inside the holding tents. He was to later pair and construct a nest with female MgNU who was inside the tents at the time of his visits and released in the second cohort ❤ (Mick Roderick/ BirdLife Australia).

No Artificial Intelligence was used in the production of this Community Update