

# 2022 NSW Regent Honeyeater Captive Release

## Community Update #3— 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2022

Hi everyone (Regent Honeyeater email group),

Welcome to the third community update for the 2022 NSW Regent Honeyeater captive release. This update comes as 'summer proper' begins to show hints of emerging, with warmer nights and rising humidity. More evidence of summer has come with the sudden emergence of cicadas across the Lower Hunter region and our Regent Honeyeaters have been quick to capitalise on the noisy bounty.

### 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.



RWKM poses for the cameras (Tim Paasila/BirdLife Australia).

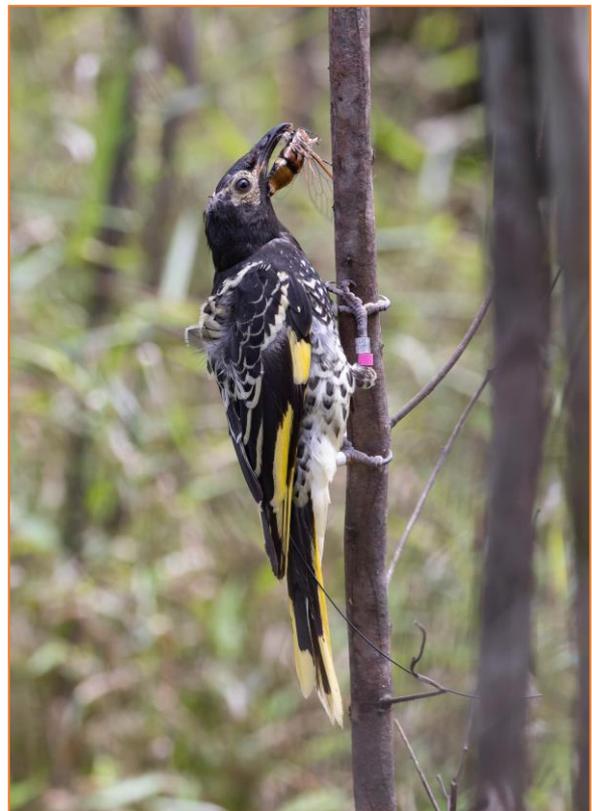
### If at First You Don't Succeed...

Overall, things are going great for a precious released Regent Honeyeaters and the ironbarks just keep churning out the sweet nectar that has now attracted pretty big numbers of Musk Lorikeets with which the Regents are having to share their bounty. It's not all good news though and unfortunately we need to report on the failure of both nests. These

were BYKM paired with a wild male, and White-Metal and her fellow wild partner. BYKM only got about three days into her incubation and White-Metal about eight. The cause of the failures is not known but in both instances the female simply stopped returning to the nest. Both pairs are still using the forest nearby and there's still time yet for them to go again – the ironbarks are yet to peak!

### Crunchy Snacks to go with the Sweets

Although there is now widespread blossom, we have been witnessing a very interesting spectacle at a group of birds we have termed the 'southern cluster'. These ~15-17 birds have for over a week now been spending the majority of their time down low in wattle trees, taking insects from the foliage and branches. Because the zoo-birds are generally more used to people, they have been giving the monitoring team some really thrilling experiences when they come low down in the forest – sometimes perching right at eye-level.



OWKM gets about as crunchy-a-meal as can be had, with a cicada (Tim Paasila/BirdLife Australia)

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BWKM takes a caterpillar from the wattle trees (Tim Paasila/BirdLife Australia)



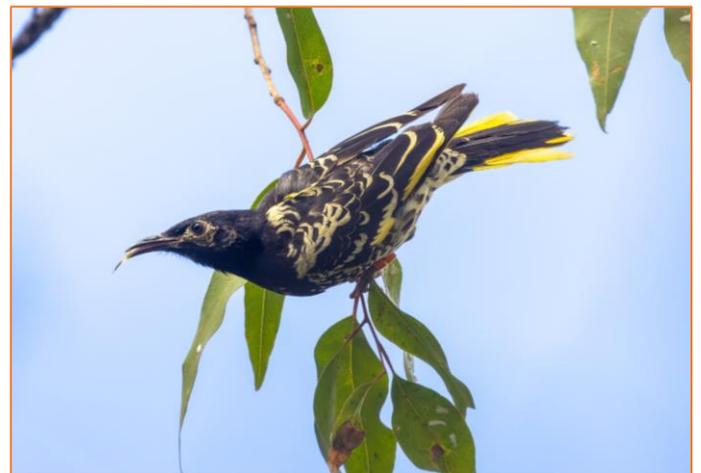
UNKM has a taste for beetles (Tim Paasila/BirdLife Australia)



RYKM won't be outdone, also clutching a cicada (Tim Paasila/BirdLife Australia)

### Lerp – the Good Gear

Lerp is the sugary excretion produced by leaf-sucking psyllid insects to protect themselves during their nymph stage – and it is a food source loved by many Australian birds; perhaps as much as blossom (you often see all sizes of honeyeaters chasing pardalotes around – that's them protecting their lerp stash!). Regent Honeyeaters rely heavily on lerp and many times we have found groups of birds in an area feeding on almost nothing else. Locally, the favourite lerp appears to be that from the Spotted Gum Lerp Psyllid *Eucalyptolyma maideni* (which you can read more about [here](#)). It is therefore heartening for us to watch the released birds getting gobs-full of these amazing little jewels of sugary goodness...and chasing other birds away from their lerp patch!



(Above) OOKM gleaning lerp from foliage and (Below) insets from the same image showing the lerp on the leaves and one glistening in the very front of OOKM's bill (Tim Paasila/BirdLife Australia).



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### Harness Houdinis

We reported in the last update about a couple of birds having ‘done a Houdini’ and broken free of their harnesses. This has happened twice more and fortunately those birds are part of the ‘southern cluster’ we are monitoring, so we are still seeing these birds each day. Once they leave the cluster they will be much harder to find again!

There are now several birds at the southern cluster without transmitters – not just the Houdinis but at least two non-transmitters birds plus an omnipresent wild male. This male bird is quite distinct, having a dark mark in one of his tail feathers. Photos reveal that he wasn’t part of the wild / zoo cohort that were present here from May to August this year. With no 2021 released birds seen so far during this post-release monitoring foray, this begs the question - “*where did those wild / 2021 zoo birds go!?*”

Well that's a question this we are hoping to go a long way towards answering over the course of the next 6 weeks or so. The one ace we still have up our sleeve is doing dusk roost-checks. This was the key method for getting accurate counts and identities of both wild and zoo birds in January/February this year when we had a maximum count of nearly 40 birds across two roost sites.



The wild male present at the southern cluster, mixing it with up to sixteen zoo-bred birds (Tim Paasila/BirdLife Australia).

### Nest-raiding and Bark-tearing

One of the most endearing birds from the 2021 release was female bird, Red-Metal Blue-Blue, or “Blue Blue” for short. Well, her namesake in this year’s release “Blue-Blue Pink-Metal” is making a name for herself, having paired with male Green-Mauve Pink-Metal. Right towards the end of the pre-Xmas monitoring she was watched tearing nesting material from a Noisy Friarbird’s nest, just like wild bird White-Metal was seen doing a few weeks ago. It is great to see the zoo-bred birds being so resourceful though we are yet to confirm if they are constructing a nest or just ‘trying it on’. On the same day, another female in the northern cluster (RRKM) was seen tearing at paperbark and juggling it in her beak, almost appearing to chew on it.



BBKM tears nesting material from a Noisy Friarbird nest (above) while RRKM rips strips of paperbark from lower down in the forest at the northern cluster (Mick Roderick/BirdLife Australia)



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### One More Crunchy (but aborted) Snack

Probably the most conspicuous bird in the Tomalpin Woodlands at this time of year (particularly when the ironbarks are flowering) are Noisy Friarbirds. Many of them are nesting at the moment – and indeed we saw White-Metal busily tearing strips of material from a friarbird nest a few weeks ago. One bird was observed recently attempting to ‘bring home the bacon’ and impress the whole family by catching a Giant Wood Moth *Endoxyla cinereus*. This is no ordinary moth. It is said to be heaviest known moth in the world and a traditional food resource to Indigenous Australians (one of a group of Cossid moths with larvae known as Witchetty Grubs). The moth in question (even though a male; females are larger) was enormous and put up a great fight in the tussle, with the friarbird eventually aborting the attempt to take it back to its nest.



A Noisy Friarbird takes on a Giant Wood Moth – the world’s heaviest known moth – before admitting defeat (Mick Roderick/BirdLife Australia)

### Hope for the Future

While we would all love to see more nesting attempts in the Lower Hunter this “spring” it has been encouraging to see how well the zoo-bred birds are feeding on nectar, insects and lerp resources. The zoo birds are interacting with up to eight wild birds in the Tomalpin Woodlands, and this is now Week Six post-release. The tireless tracking team will be continuing to look for more good news stories as they continue to monitor across the festive season.

### 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.



A magnificent Square-tailed Kite soaring low over the canopy at the northern cluster of Regent Honeyeaters in mid-December – another threatened bird species that breeds in the Tomalpin Woodlands (Rob Hynson/BirdLife Australia).

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*The entire Regent Honeyeater captive release planning and monitoring team would like to extend best wishes for a safe and enjoyable Christmas break to all of our readers, supporters and their families.*

*We will be back in mid-January 2023 with our next update.*

Please report any Regent Honeyeater sightings ASAP to [woodlandbirds@birdlife.org.au](mailto:woodlandbirds@birdlife.org.au) or call: Mick Roderick (BirdLife Australia) 1800 621 056

And check out the latest story on our exciting [mistletoe restoration project](#) as well.



Red-Black Pink-Metal amongst the wattles at the southern cluster (Tim Paasila/BirdLife Australia)