

# 2022 NSW Regent Honeyeater Captive Release

## Community Update #5 – 3rd March 2023

Hi everyone (Regent Honeyeater email group),

Welcome to the fifth community update for the 2022 NSW Regent Honeyeater captive release. This update comes to you as summer winds up and we start the transition into early autumn. A run of hot weather led to a profusion of flowering eucalypts in Tomalpin and our Regents have certainly taken advantage of the great conditions. As we pass the end of the 10-week monitoring period the tracking team are preparing for the next stage of this exciting project (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.



PYKM having probes for insects underneath bark in the northern hotspot (Rob Hynson/BirdLife Australia)

### The Hotspots Cool Down

As summer draws to a close, the two 'hotspots' (or 'clusters' of birds) in the southwest of Tomalpin continued to host the majority of the remaining captive release birds, in addition to several wild birds. These birds remained faithful to these areas from December through to mid-February, hanging around to feed on the abundant flowering Grey and Broad-leaved Ironbarks, as well as the invertebrate bonanza associated with the Black Wattles – as reported in our last update.



NYKM at the "Acacia Hotspot" (Tim Paasila/BirdLife Australia)

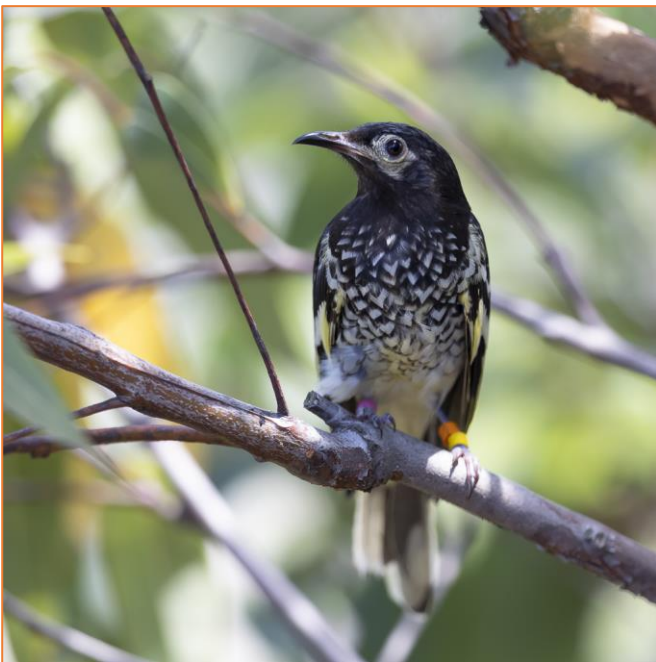
Despite many of the radio transmitters running out of battery, the tracking team were able to monitor them daily due to the site-fidelity of these birds. Alas, all good things come to an end. As the end of February approached many of these birds started moving away from the hotspots as the ironbark flowering waned and birds have now become more difficult to find.

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### Chance Encounters

Several birds have moved to the north-west and have been found feeding in flowering Grey Gums just south of Abermain. On February 27<sup>th</sup>, Mindaribba's Tara Dever received an excited phone call from fellow Mindaribba members in Weston who had seen a Regent Honeyeater feeding in their front garden! Word spread fast and a BirdLife tracker was on the scene in minutes to find OYKM (pictured below) feeding contently in a planted pink-flowering gum.



OYKM having a rest in a flowering gum after a busy morning feeding in a garden in Weston (Rob Hynson/BirdLife Australia)

This garden is one of the most impressive native gardens in the area and shows the importance of planting natives in your garden. It was also very exciting to see OYKM again, because she hadn't been seen since early February when she was part of one of the clusters of birds mentioned earlier. She was one of the birds that was released wearing a transmitter but had lost it after the weak point in the harness broke – as it is designed to do after the ten-week mark.

As our Regents disperse within and out of Tomalpin, the tracking team has been asking the same

question that Regent Honeyeater researchers before them have pondered for many-a-year – *where do these birds go?* This brings us on to the next stage of the project.

### Transitioning Time

Previous NSW releases of zoo-bred Regent Honeyeaters have been limited to a 10-week monitoring period (the length of the transmitters' battery and harness life). This year we were able to procure an additional 10 transmitters to attach to birds from this release, potentially bringing our monitoring period up to as long 20 weeks! This will allow our team to further understand how birds use the region's habitat throughout the year and confirm longer-term survival of captive released birds.

To recapture this season's birds a team led by Emily Mowat comprised of Hunter-based bird banders and BirdLife Australia staff was assembled to implement a catching strategy. Three approaches were identified. The first approach was to find night roosts by tracking birds at dusk. Regent Honeyeaters will roost communally in small trees, often only around three metres off the ground. After identifying these sites, mist nets can be assembled round the roost trees and the birds can be trapped in the nets when they leave their roost in the morning.

The second approach was to target birds at the two hotspots where most of the birds fed and drank during the day. Close observation of where these birds fed low down in Black Wattles or where they came to drink guided mist net placement. The final approach was to target birds that had been frequenting a garden in Mulbring. These birds often feed in the same trees around which nets can be assembled.

Multiple roost searches were undertaken over a couple of weeks to identify potential mist netting sites. The banding team erected mist nets in the northern hotspot where a regular night roost was

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identified. These nets are tied up at night and unfurled very early in the morning before the birds wake up. Several attempts at catching birds were made but each drew a blank, leading the team to implement Plan B.

A second attempt was made by targeting birds in the daytime at the northern hotspot. Mist nets were erected where birds had been observed feeding down low. In quick succession, three birds were caught. PPKM, OWKM and RNKM were processed by the banding team and weighed to make sure they were over the threshold weight to have a new transmitter attached. Each bird exceeded the weight and transmitters were fitted and off they flew to feed as if nothing had happened. OWKM has since moved into the north west of Tomalpin with several other birds while RNKM appears to have moved out of the area; a current mission for the tracking team! PPKM has a habit of leading the tracking team a merry dance with many wild wanderings keeping the teams' daily step count up. True to form, PPKM is currently residing in an inaccessible area off the western slopes of Mount Sugarloaf.



PPKM about to receive his new transmitter so that we can follow his next adventures (Rob Kyte/Conservation Matters)

A final attempt at recapture was undertaken in Mulbring. In the last update we reported on "Debbie's gang", who had been in her garden since November. Remarkably two of this trio are still being seen in her garden! This attempt was undertaken at a much more civilised hour and in the mid-morning OBKM was caught.



OBKM was caught in Mulbring where she has spent the past few months but was still too light to carry a harness and transmitter (Mick Roderick/BirdLife Australia).

This female had never carried a transmitter as she was too light at the original release, weighing in under the threshold weight. Promisingly, she has put on 3.3 grams of weight since being released, an increase of 8% body weight! This shows how well these birds are doing out in the wild. Unfortunately, she was still just under the threshold weight to have a transmitter attached so she was released immediately after processing.

*Having three birds fitted with fresh transmitters has taken this release into an exciting new phase where we effectively double our post-release monitoring period.*

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### Meeting the Locals

As we have seen in previous updates, spending time in the Tomalpin Woodlands results in a plethora of other wildlife observations. Over the three months of monitoring the tracking team have seen snakes, goannas, frogs, bats and of course a vast array of birds. With a species list close to 200 birds strong, this is an extraordinary patch of bushland that is an absolute privilege to explore. In the process of targeting the Regents, the banding team inevitably caught some of those other bird species that call Tomalpin home.



A Koala watches over the banding team in Tomalpin (Tim Paasila/BirdLife Australia)



An Azure Kingfisher (left) Tawny Grassbird (top right) and an Eastern Spinebill (bottom right) caught as 'bycatch' by the banding team in Tomalpin during the catching of Regents for transmitter re-fitting (Emily Mowat/BirdLife Australia)

To cap it off, one sunny morning they again hit the jackpot while attempting to catch Regents at the northern hotspot by spotting another Koala! Although previously considered a rare sighting in Tomalpin, this is the second observation of Koalas the team have made during the post-release monitoring. Anecdotal evidence from members of the public suggests that they are now resident and breeding here.

**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**

We are now considering options for capturing more Regents to fit the final batch of radio transmitters to. Despite the dispersal we are currently seeing, we are still able to follow several birds and re-deploying transmitters will help us find more – including wild birds that we have now lost track of. With the project moving into uncharted territory with an additional 10 weeks of radio-tracking we hope to learn much more about this enigmatic species.

### 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.