

2022 NSW Regent Honeyeater Captive Release

Community Update #4— 31st January 2023

Hi everyone (Regent Honeyeater email group),

Welcome to the fourth community update for the 2022 NSW Regent Honeyeater captive release. This update comes as the calendar ticks over to a new year and we reach the final stages of our initial post-release monitoring period. The temperatures have really felt like summertime which has meant some long hot days (and nights!) for our tracking team as they prepare for the next stage of this exciting project.

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.



RNKM having a rest between feeding in Black Wattle at the southern hotspot (Rob Hynson/BirdLife Australia)

'The Hotspots' (a.k.a 'The Clusters')

The tracking team had a demanding start to their monitoring program as birds moved around frequently in the Tomalpin area in the early stages

of the release. However, in late-December and into January, the majority of birds continued to congregate in two main 'clusters' – a term which morphed into 'hotspots' over the Christmas break – each of which still supporting a hefty number of Musk Lorikeets taking advantage of available blossom. Having birds remain loyal to these defined areas has allowed the team to have a greater focus on observing the behaviors and interactions among particular birds.

The southern hotspot features several species of eucalypts where the birds typically fed in the morning, and a nearby open area dominated by Black Wattle where they hawked and gorged on invertebrates later in the day.

The second hotspot, located 500 metres north along a creekline, had a variety of flowering eucalypts, Black Wattle, and small waterholes. You can't beat sitting a safe distance from one of these pools on a hot afternoon watching multiple Regent Honeyeaters come down to bathe and drink, surely one of the best birding experiences in Australia.



PUKM having a well-earned drink at the creek line hotspot (Rob Hynson/BirdLife Australia)

These two hotspots have been the focal point for the tracking team for many weeks, with several wild birds joining the captive-bred birds here. Over the course of January, the hotspot centered around the creek has slowly moved northward along the creekline, presumably in response to an increased

2022 NSW Regent Honeyeater Captive Release

Community Update #4— 31st January 2023

availability of flowering eucalypts and other resources there.

Debbie's Gang

Several of this year's released birds have been found feeding in residential gardens in the towns surrounding Tomalpin. This has provided an excellent opportunity for the tracking team to engage with local residents and explain to them our project mission. Most of these sightings were brief, with the birds soon returning to the main woodlands in Tomalpin after a day or two.

However, one special garden belonging to our honorary tracking team member 'Debbie', had started hosting 'Red-Mauve Pink-Metal' (RUKM) - a bird that the team thought they would never see again due to signal interference. Debbie was thrilled to have this bird in her garden from late-November, so much so she purchased binoculars to keep track of it! Within days, RUKM was joined by 'Mauve-Red Pink-Metal' (URKM), and in early-January, a non-transmitter bird 'Orange-Blue Pink-Metal' (OBKM) was also sighted there. This was the first sighting of OBKM anywhere since December 2, with this female bird sighted at Debbie's multiple times since.

Debbie observed one of the birds collecting dog hair from her garden, giving hope that two of the trio may be attempting to build a nest. Unfortunately though, we have received no further indication of breeding here in the following weeks. Debbie has been very helpful and sends daily updates of the birds' activity to the team, with the birds still hanging out in her garden at the time of writing.

The tracking team was also joined in late December by Milly Formby (a.k.a 'Microlight Milly'), who spent much of 2022 on her [Wing Threads](#) shorebird flying adventure, traversing the coast of the Australian continent from Broome to Newcastle in her microlight trike, spreading the word about shorebird conservation. It's been great having you along Milly!



Milly tracking the trio of birds in Debbie's garden (Amellia Formby/BirdLife Australia).

Lovebirds

In previous updates we reported that two pairs of Regents had constructed nests in Tomalpin. Unfortunately, both nests failed but there are promising signs of breeding from our captive released birds. Two birds - 'Green-Mauve Pink-Metal' (PUKM) and 'Blue-Blue Pink-Metal' (BBKM) paired up in the north-east of Tomalpin and have been together since November.

They were regularly seen engaging in courtship behaviour and collecting nesting material in December, and were inseparable for many weeks. However, despite several weeks of close observation, nest construction did not progress beyond the very early stages, and thus no nesting was observed. Since then, this pair recently relocated to the northern hotspot with many other Regent Honeyeaters.

Another bird, 'Red-Red Pink-Metal' (RRKM) was seen mating with an unidentified Regent after a prolonged period of calling. The tracking team spent many hours watching 'RRKM' to see if any pairing and nest building was taking place, but sadly no further breeding behaviour was observed.

2022 NSW Regent Honeyeater Captive Release

Community Update #4— 31st January 2023



RRKM having a look around after mating at the creek hotspot (Rob Hynson/BirdLife Australia)

Although no successful breeding has been confirmed during this season's release, a key point of optimism is that we have seen instances of breeding behaviour and many interactions between both wild and zoo-bred birds since November. This is a promising sign to see that our latest birds are fancied by their wild counterparts. But with no clear signs of courtship since early January, it seems that the time for breeding has now passed for our birds – despite the continued abundance of food on-site. However, we still hold out hope that a breeding event has passed under the radar elsewhere, and that some cute juvenile Regents will be seen in the coming weeks – in our local patch or yours!

The Night Shift

As we approached the end of the 10-week monitoring period early in the new year, the inevitable happened (albeit earlier than expected). One-by-one in quick succession the batteries in the transmitters were dying. This presented a challenge to our tracking team with the task of finding birds without a friendly beep from their receivers to help guide the way to each individual. Despite this, the team are coping well now that all transmitters are no longer producing a signal, with most of the

remaining birds located in the two main hotspots and the majority of them being logged almost daily.

Anticipating the end of the road for the original 39 transmitters, a further 10 transmitters were ordered ahead of our next mission – re-trapping and re-fitting remaining birds with new transmitters! But with batteries dying left and right, we had to move quickly to use the remaining battery in active transmitters to help guide us to location of roost sites, in preparation for potentially re-trapping birds as they leave roost sites at first light.

The tracking team subsequently made repeated efforts at dusk looking for roosting sites, and in doing so, we discovered two roosts. The first search detected a total of six birds roosting across two sites - with two individuals near the southern cluster and four north of the creek cluster. In subsequent roost searches our highest count was seven birds roosting at each of the southern and northern clusters. However, at least 11 birds were seen in fading light this particular night at the northern cluster before we lost sight of four of them and were unable to get a precise roosting location. Knowing the location of these roosts is highly valuable and gives us options for capturing birds to attach the new transmitters and removing any old trackers.



Three Regent Honeyeaters settle in for the evening at a roost in a Black Wattle tree (Tim Paasila/BirdLife Australia)

2022 NSW Regent Honeyeater Captive Release

Community Update #4– 31st January 2023

This 10-week extension of the project will provide valuable data for the late summer/autumn period - a time of year where Regents seemingly “vanish” and disperse across the landscape, making it very hard to monitor them. The use of these additional transmitters could provide insights into the species’ movements during this time of year, and possibly lead us to new birds (both zoo-born and wild-born).

Where The Wild Things (Still) Are

An intriguing aspect of this year’s release has been the sightings of wild Regent Honeyeaters with our captive release birds. The over wintering wild Regents left Tomalpin in mid-August 2022 and weren’t seen again until late November. How many wild birds have we seen recently? Many wild birds sighted are unbanded, but we’ve seen at least three banded birds, including a bird with only a metal band on its left leg, with the partial code “053-123??” (the last two digits not visible). This bird can be narrowed down as one of 22 birds that were banded in the Capertee Valley during 2015/2016. This is a fascinating re-sighting as it is the second bird banded in the Capertee to be re-sighted in Tomalpin this season, indicating how mobile Regent Honeyeaters can be in search of productive woodlands. At the time of writing, the Tomalpin Woodlands remain the only place in the range of the Regent Honeyeater where we know (wild) birds are.



The wild bird seen in Tomalpin after being originally banded in the Capertee Valley in 2015/2016 on not seen since (Tim Paasila/BirdLife Australia)

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



Noisy Friarbirds are constant companions to the tracking team (and the Regents!); this one stretching to take fruit from an *Exocarpus* plant (Mick Roderick/BirdLife Australia)