

# 2022 NSW Regent Honeyeater Captive Release

## Community Update #8 7<sup>th</sup> September 2023

Hi everyone (Regent Honeyeater email group)

Welcome to the eighth community update for the 2022 NSW Regent Honeyeater captive release. This update comes to you on [National Threatened Species Day](#); marking the date of the death of the last Thylacine in Hobart Zoo in 1936. It also comes as spring goes up a gear or two and we look back over some highlights from the previous few months, including winter flocks, an adventurous and well-travelled released bird and a promising start for the 2023 breeding season.

### Acknowledgement of Country

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



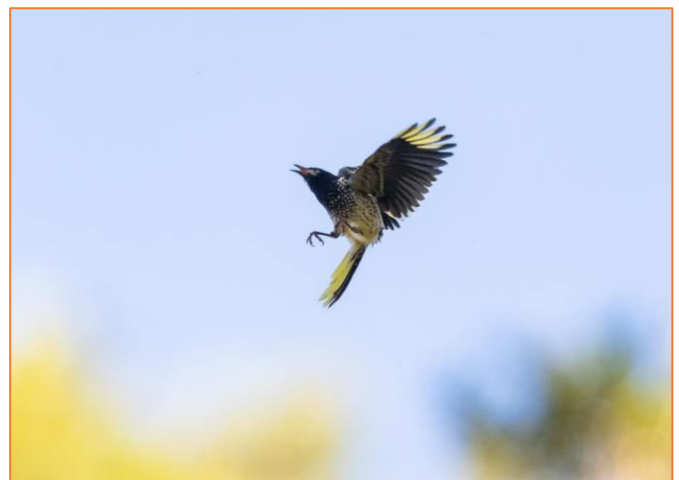
One of up to 11 (wild) Regent Honeyeaters found in south-west Lake Macquarie this winter (James Bennett)

### Lake Mac's Swampy Flocks

As reported in our previous update, the last regular sightings of Regent Honeyeaters were from back in mid-April when both wild and captive-bred birds were seen feeding on *Banksia oblongifolia* in the Kurri Sands Swamp Woodland (KSSW) habitat south of Kurri Kurri. Although some of these birds had been fitted with new radio transmitters, once they left this area in late April they weren't seen again.

June 15<sup>th</sup> was a big day for Hunter Bird Observers Club (HBOC) member, James Bennett, when he found a winter flock of an amazing 11 Regent Honeyeaters in a forested remnant in the south-west of Lake Macquarie. These birds were mainly feeding in the abundant nectar-flows of the local Swamp Mahoganies (*Eucalyptus robusta*), which has been flowering profusely along the NSW coast this winter. Additionally, there were large numbers of other nectarivores feeding with the Regents including many species of honeyeater and lorikeets. As an adjunct to this flock, another group of birds were found by local birder Paul Schofield a few km to the north, where there was a maximum count of 5 birds. So in all, we had up to a maximum of 16 Regent Honeyeaters feeding on Swamp Mahogany in the Lake Macquarie Key Biodiversity Area this winter; the biggest concentration here since 2011!

Over their month-long stay, many interesting Regent behaviours were observed including sallying for insects (see photo below) and lots of vocalisation. Many of the Regents were heard to vocalise their 'near-typical' call throughout their stay but a couple of birds were heard singing like other species such as Little Wattlebird and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater. The 'loss of song' and their uptake of other species song is an interesting but worrying situation and possible actions are currently being investigated by the Australian National University (ANU) and Taronga Zoo.



A Regent Honeyeater found in south-west Lake Macquarie catching insects earlier this winter (James Bennett)

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As if it wasn't exciting enough to have had such a great number of Regents in the area, another HBOC member captured a photo of one showing an antenna from a radio transmitter. This was an exciting find for the tracking team, and although the band combination could not be determined from the photograph it was pleasing to see one of our zoo-bred birds once again associating with wild birds. This was also the first evidence we'd seen of a released bird in the same area as wild birds away from the vicinity of the release site too – exactly the sort of results we're after in this important work!



One of our 2022 released zoo-bred Regents showing the antenna from a radio transmitter in south-west Lake Macquarie (Rob Palazzi)

### The Red Rock Ring

Continuing with the run of coastal sightings, two birds were found in late June on the edge of the northern NSW coastal village of Red Rock by Peter and Judy Smith. As with the Lake Mac flocks, these two birds were feeding on Swamp Mahogany blossom with many other species of nectarivores. After close examination of photographs one of the Regents was noticed to have brown wing coverts and tail feathers; indicative of a first-year bird and evidence of at least one more successful nest somewhere in the 2022/23 breeding season (bringing the total successful breeding attempts to three). With last year's breeding season being one of the poorest on record in terms of nests observed, it was extremely heartening to find another piece of evidence of success had somewhere in their range.



One of the wild Regent Honeyeaters found in Red Rock (Peter Smith)

### The Most Exciting Thing Then Happened...

After several weeks at Red Rock, there were only ever two Regents being seen by local observers. However, on the morning of July 17<sup>th</sup> a third Regent was photographed by Grafton birder, Keith Fisher, who noticed this bird had colour bands. After sending the photos to BirdLife the bird was quickly identified as OPKM ('Orange-Green'); a male bird from the 2022 release! This bird is somewhat of a star; regularly seen by the post-release monitoring team in summer and became the most oft-seen bird reported and photographed by many birders in the Kurri Sands Swamp Woodland during March/April (see our [Community Update #7](#) for a photo of OPKM atop a banksia flower by BirdLife's Rob Hynson).

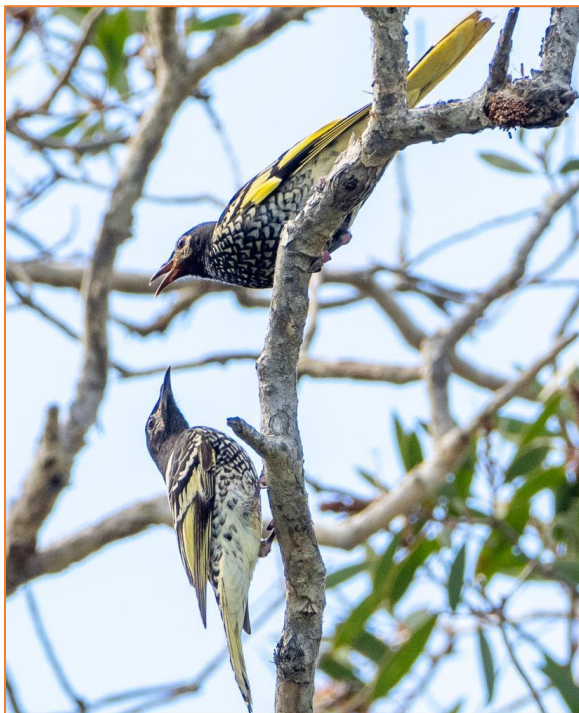


OPKM' making sure there's no doubt about the colours of the bands on his outstretched legs as he takes flight at Red Rock (Keith Fisher)

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OPKM was last seen in Werakata State Conservation Area on April 13<sup>th</sup>, making the distance travelled to Red Rock at just over ~350km in a straight line, not only smashing the previous longest movement of a NSW-release bird by over 300km, but also doing so in less than 3 months! This is the second longest recorded one-way distance travelled by any released zoo-bred Regent, with the record-holder being a bird released in April 2017 in Chiltern (Victoria) photographed in southwest Sydney, some 460km away, in June 2019. Whether or not OPKM had travelled to Red Rock with the wild birds will remain a mystery, but however it came to be, seeing a mixed trio of wild and zoo-bred birds (including a juvenile) so far from the release site is amazing news for the recovery team.



OPKM (top bird) appearing to assert some authority to the young male bird (note the brown wing coverts) in Red Rock (Gail Yager)

### 2023 Season Warming Up

Over the past month, field teams from ANU and BirdLife Australia have embarked on the annual National Regent Honeyeater Monitoring Program. There are well over 1000 sites to be surveyed this season (twice) throughout NSW, south-east Queensland and north-east Victoria. This monitoring program gives us vital information about

not just where Regent Honeyeaters are, but habitat condition, blossom availability, other bird species present (many of them also listed as threatened), as well as crucial data for any Regents located.

At the time of writing, we have located birds at a couple of our monitoring sites and judging by the behaviour of these birds we are quietly confident they have breeding on their minds. Seeing signs of potential breeding so early in the season has buoyed our hopes for a much better season than our Regents had last year. There are only so many of us in the ANU/BirdLife team trying to find Regent Honeyeaters (i.e. not many!) so we heavily rely on the public to report sightings. This is particularly important at this time of year, with the recovery team in a position to implement strategies to assist in getting precious fledglings out of the nest and getting Regents back on the road to recovery.

### Acknowledgements

The NSW Regent Honeyeater Captive Release program is delivered by the Department of Planning & Environment, BirdLife Australia and Taronga Conservation Society Australia as part of the national Regent Honeyeater Recovery Plan implementation. Funding has been 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, 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 by either:**

- **Reporting** online [here](#)
- **Emailing** [woodlandbirds@birdlife.org.au](mailto:woodlandbirds@birdlife.org.au)
- **Calling** Mick Roderick (Regent Honeyeater Recovery Coordinator) on 1800 621056