

2024 NSW Regent Honeyeater Community Update #2

December 2024

Hi everyone (Regent Honeyeater email group)

Welcome to the second NSW Regent Honeyeater Community Update for 2024. Following the August update, when we reported on the wintering flocks of Regents in the Lower Hunter and the captive release in Tomalpin, we report here on a productive spring/summer breeding season. There has been successful breeding in the Upper Hunter and Capertee Valleys, including sightings of a few familiar faces. Some interesting re-sightings of banded birds — both wild and zoo-reared — have kept the monitoring team on their toes with some birds returning to known locations, but also some to rather obscure locations. Read on to find out more!

Acknowledgement of Country

All involved in the Regent Honeyeater recovery program acknowledge the sovereign owners and knowledge-holders of the various lands whose Country we have had the privilege of walking on while we undertake the vital conservation work to recover this uniquely Australian bird. We pay our respects to all Indigenous people and duly recognise that sovereignty was never ceded; it always was and always will be, Aboriginal Land.



Wild-banded male 'BMBO' has bred in the Capertee NP for the past two seasons and one of the oldest Regent Honeyeaters ever recorded, as is explained later in the update (Tim Paasila/BirdLife Australia).

Wrapping Up the 2024 Release

The monitoring of the 2024 Tomalpin Woodlands release of nearly 50 birds wound up not long after our first 2024 community update was aired. Three very interesting observations emerged during and after the completion of that post-release monitoring; each being sightings of 'travelling' birds. One of these was 'UMRY', a male bird released in July 2024 in Tomalpin, photographed by Trevor Robinson in North Gosford in the company of an unbanded (wild) bird.

This observation was exciting for a few reasons. Firstly, it has been a very long time since Regent Honeyeaters were seen on the Central Coast during spring. 'UMRY' was also one of the first song-tutored birds from Taronga to be released into the wild. He was also released without a transmitter and hence couldn't be tracked by the monitoring team, so it was very pleasing to see him alive and well and in the company of a wild bird!



'UMRY' (left) with the unbanded bird in North Gosford on the 9th October (Trevor Robinson).

North Gosford isn't all that far from Tomalpin, but Nethercote most certainly is; 470km far in fact! And that's where one of our other July 2024 released birds was captured on camera by Pam Handyside while it was feeding in flowering bottlebrush in October 2024. We cannot tell which individual it was because the photographs only show the mauve/metal combination on the left leg, but this is the furthest any NSW released bird has been

2024 NSW Regent Honeyeater Community Update #2

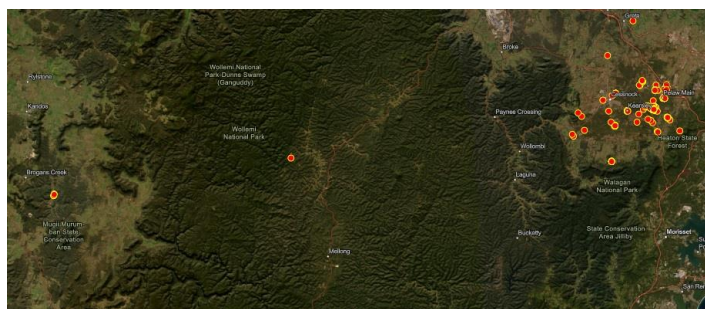
December 2024

recorded from its place of release and is one of the longest-recorded distances any Regent Honeyeater has ever been confirmed to have made.



'UM??' photographed at Nethercote, 470km from Tomalpin on the 24th October 2024 (Pam Handyside)

Another remarkable find was made when Australian National University (ANU) researchers Ross Crates and Liam Murphy were undertaking surveys for Regent Honeyeaters near Putty, wedged between Wollemi and Yengo NPs, when they happened upon one of our 2024 release males, 'UMNO'. Although he had been wearing a transmitter at release, photos revealed he had shed his harness and transmitter since departing the Lower Hunter (as is designed to happen). This was such a chance observation but when one looks at a satellite image showing the Lower Hunter and Capertee Valley it appears he was on a mission to get to where wild Regent Honeyeaters were already starting to arrive.



The shortest distance between two points is a straight line! UMNO's location in Putty on the 3rd September is literally directly between the Cessnock forests and Capertee National Park, where wild Regent Honeyeaters had started arriving just before the time of his sighting.



'UMNO' photographed near Putty on the 3rd September closer to the Capertee Valley than the Tomalpin Woodlands where he had been released just 5 weeks earlier (Liam Murphy)

Capertee Capers

After last year's bumper breeding event and 'micro-release' of 14 birds in Capertee National Park, the team were on tenterhooks waiting to see if any birds would return to breed there again this spring. As luck would have it, the very first birds to be located in the Capertee this season were found by BirdLife staff that were running a Regent Honeyeater training weekend hosted by Central Tablelands Local Land Services (LLS) – perfect timing!

This initial sighting was the flag-fall for the BirdLife Australia and ANU team to swing into action and ramp up searches and standardised monitoring across the Greater Blue Mountains. Several more birds started to arrive in the national park throughout September and quickly got to work pairing up and constructing nests. By late September there were at least four pairs of birds with nests active within the national park, as well as a pair along the Capertee River near Genowlan Bridge; a favourite haunt of Regent Honeyeaters in the past and where one pair successfully bred in 2021. Additionally, there were several other unpaired wild birds in the national park but as is nearly always the case with lone Regent Honeyeaters, these were all unpaired males.

2024 NSW Regent Honeyeater Community Update #2

December 2024

Each nesting pair was monitored to gather information such as incubation period, number of nestlings, timing of fledging and importantly, presence of diurnal and nocturnal nest-predators. Once again Needle-leaf Mistletoe and Yellow Box nectar provided the bulk of sustenance for the adult birds while they busily brought invertebrates to their fast-growing nestlings.

Protecting Precious Nests

Whilst birds were busily getting down to breeding business, a nest protection team facilitated by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) began to install trunk guards on trees with nests in an effort to thwart would-be mammalian nest-predators. Additionally, song meters and trail cameras were placed around the bottom of nesting trees to help determine the presence of any predators and record their behaviour. From the cameras we were able to gather evidence of several Common Brushtail Possums and even a couple of Lace Monitors unable to climb past the trunk guards, vindicating these important actions.



A Common Brushtail Possum and a Lace Monitor unable to climb past a tree guard applied to the base of a nesting tree to stop would-be predators reaching Regent Honeyeater nests in Capertee NP.

BMBO – ‘Patriarch Regent of the Capertee Valley’

One of the first returning birds this season was a banded bird ‘BMBO’, although it took some detective work to confirm his actual identity. The blue band above the orange one on his right leg had fallen off and the blue above the metal has appeared to have faded to a bluish-grey. Confirmation of the colour band sequence came from sharp images captured by Tim Paasila of the unique band number on the metal band (‘053-12319’). This confirmed him as BMBO, who was banded by Ross Crates as an adult (2+ years old) along the Upper Nile Road in the Capertee Valley on 4th September 2016, making him at least 10 years old and one of the oldest known wild Regent Honeyeaters ever recorded. After fledging a chick in Capertee NP last year, he successfully raised and fledged two chicks again this year. Interestingly, ‘BMBO’ and his partner nested just 50 metres from their nest tree from last year.



‘BMBO’ busily feeding his hungry fledglings in Capertee NP in mid-November (Tim Paasila/BirdLife Australia)

Return of the Rockstar – ‘RMPP’

Perhaps the most exciting resighting of a zoo-bred Regent Honeyeater in Capertee NP this season was the return of ‘RMPP’. Readers may recall her as the zoo-bred female that successfully fledged two chicks last year, having paired with a wild male. This year she’s paired with a different wild male, ‘RNWM’ no less, which was the wild male we fitted a radio transmitter to at the end of the 2023 breeding season. This year ‘RMPP’ nested in a tree

2024 NSW Regent Honeyeater Community Update #2

December 2024

only 5 metres from her nesting tree from last year and like then, she managed to get two more precious fledglings into the wild. We have no idea where 'RMPP' was post-breeding and in the cooler months, but to see her return and build a nest just a few metres from where she successfully nested last year is a massive boon to the recovery partners and cements 'RMPP' as one of our true 'rockstar' birds.

Class of 2023

There was just one resighting of an individual from last year's 'micro-release' in the Capertee Valley, though the bird was unfortunately missing a colour band on one leg. We were able to narrow it down to 'YMRN', 'YMNN' or 'YMON'. This individual was making calls reminiscent of a Striated Pardalote and interestingly, it was proximate to a wild male that was singing exactly like a Red Wattlebird. On that note, another wild bird in the Capertee was heard singing like a Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, a species that seems to be emerging more often as one 'mimicked' by Regents (e.g. a bird in Pelaw Main in August this year and one in Morisset in mid-2023). Observations like these provide more evidence that the song-tutoring work being undertaken at Taronga is vitally important in restoring the Regent Honeyeater song in the wild.

'PYKM' Makes 2022 History

Two birds from the 2022 Tomalpin release made an appearance this spring. In the first 2024 community update we wrote about a mixed flock of a dozen zoo/wild birds in the Lower Hunter where the male zoo birds had seemingly picked up the song dialect of the wild birds in the flock. Well, the zoo female in that flock was 'PYKM' and she made history this season by being the first of the 2022 cohort to successfully breed in the wild. She had been found paired with a wild male bird along the Goulburn River and this was in fact the first pair of the season to get chicks out of a nest! Although we didn't know the whereabouts of Rockstar 'RMPP' during winter we do know that 'PYKM' was feeding busily on Spotted Gum blossom in the Lower Hunter. We cannot tell if her wild partner was with that Lower

Hunter flock, but it is still great intel to know that she didn't travel all that far from her wintering grounds to her breeding site (~130km). Even better was the fact that a pair of wild birds also succeeded in fledging chicks not far from 'PYKM's' nest.

Another 2022 release bird resighted this season was 'BUKM'; a male released carrying a radio transmitter that he dropped on the 19th Dec 2022. He was located in Capertee NP initially on 24th September and unfortunately remained unpaired for the remainder of the season. He is the 7th NSW Regent Honeyeater sighted >12 months after release.



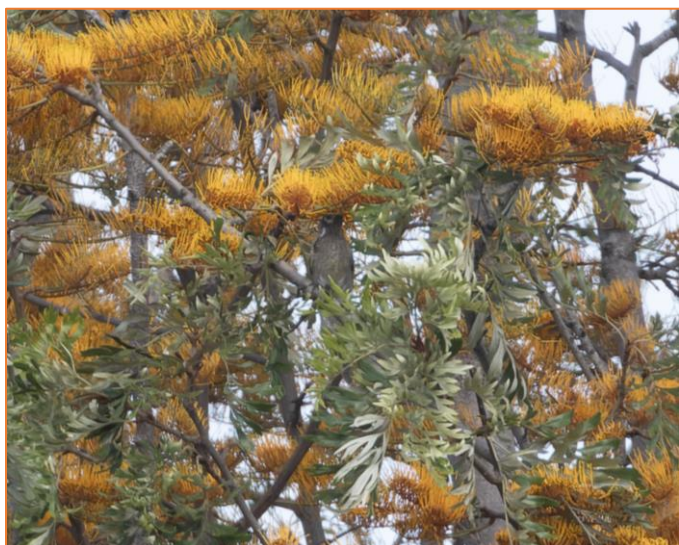
'BUKM'; the male bird from the 2022 captive release spent most of this spring in Capertee NP (Robert Hynson/BirdLife Australia)

Community Members Making Discoveries

Regent Honeyeater conservation relies heavily on members of the public to report sightings of birds. No two better examples occurred this breeding season when Capertee resident Leanne Wicks discovered an adult Regent Honeyeater with a newly independent juvenile along Dunville Loop Rd. This is almost certainly evidence of a nest that went undetected by the monitoring team. The very last Capertee nest for the season was found by a skilled birder from Sydney, Nathan Bligh. Nathan has found many-a-Regent Honeyeater over the years but finding his 'own' nest and reporting it to the monitoring team enabled us to protect it and see it through to fledging a precious chick – the last known nest of the season to fledge.

2024 NSW Regent Honeyeater Community Update #2

December 2024



Hiding in the flowering Silky Oak along Dunville Loop Road was an independent juvenile found late in the season by a member of the public and likely from an undetected nest (Tim Paasila/BirdLife Australia).

From Around the Grounds

The only reports of Regent Honeyeaters outside of the 2024 breeding grounds have come from an unusual observation of two birds at Batehaven, near Batemans Bay. The report was of two birds and a photo was provided of one bird, which was unbanded. As this update is going to press we are also chasing up a legitimate report of a Regent Honeyeater near Killawarra in Victoria, which will become just the second reported sighting of a Regent Honeyeater in Victoria in 2024.

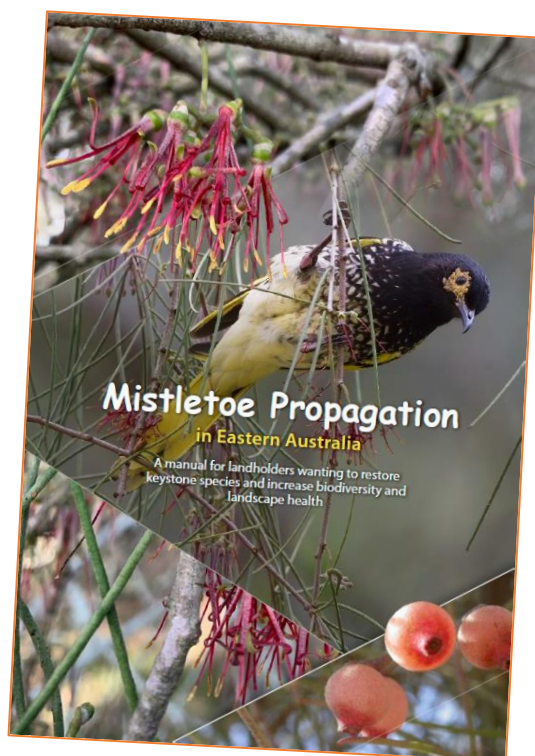
2024 in an Egg Shell

2024 has been a productive year for the Regent Honeyeater Recovery Team and recovery effort partners. There is room for some 'cautious optimism' after having located >30 birds in the Lower Hunter during autumn/winter (including the largest single congregation of wintering birds since 2017), a successful release of nearly 50 zoo-bred birds in Tomalpin in late July, then having at least 10 fledglings recruited into the wild this breeding season.

One final achievement from 2024 that we would like to share is the publication of Australia's first Mistletoe Propagation Manual. Produced by

BirdLife's Kristy Peters in partnership with Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council and several of Australia's mistletoe experts, this amazing new resource outlines ways that anyone can help foster one of the most important breeding resources for Regent Honeyeaters and many other Australian birds. Just about every single Regent Honeyeater nest in the Capertee and Upper Hunter in these past two breeding seasons has been placed in or adjacent to mistletoe clumps, with parent birds also feasting on the nectar the flowering clumps provide.

We're in the process of printing and distributing this, but in the meantime it can be accessed by visiting this [page](#).



The new Mistletoe Propagation Manual will become an important resource in ensuring ample food and breeding resources for Regent Honeyeaters and other birds remain in the form of this amazing family of Australian native plants...and just in time for Christmas!

2024 NSW Regent Honeyeater Community Update #2

December 2024

Acknowledgements

The 2024 NSW Regent Honeyeater recovery effort has been delivered by the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, BirdLife Australia, the Australian National University, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and Taronga Conservation Society Australia 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. Funding has also been provided by the New South Wales Government through its Environmental Trust and Saving our Species Program, the Friends of the Australian Wildlife Conservancy and several generous donors and philanthropists. The 2024 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 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 via the BirdLife Australia web form [What to do if you see a regent honeyeater](#). Also check out our new [Regent Honeyeater ID video](#) and access [Regent Honeyeater ID guide](#)



In a sense, 'BMBO' is the Regent Honeyeater equivalent of "Wisdom" the [Laysan Albatross](#), being probably the oldest known individual Regent Honeyeater and returning to the Capertee Valley to successfully raise young. Here he is seen taking lerp from the foliage of a Yellow Box tree in Capertee NP (Tim Paasila/BirdLife Australia).