

2018 Annual Regent Honeyeater Survey in the Capertee Valley

October 5-7, 2018

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Alas – we saw no Regent Honeyeaters on Saturday October 6 when 17 people took part in the Regent Honeyeater survey in the Capertee Valley. Surveyors included Flynn and Penny Carson, who came with their father, Nick. These surveys started in 1994 and our survey was the final survey in the current format. BirdLife Australia and the Australian National University are consulting to determine a new format for surveying for Regent Honeyeaters now that they have become so uncommon. The new format is unlikely to involve volunteers because surveyors will need a detailed knowledge of Regent Honeyeaters particularly of their calls if the birds are to be detected. Penny Drake-Brockman and Maurice O’Donovan took part in the final survey – both have been involved in the surveys since 1994. On Saturday evening we shared a bottle of Prosecco provided by Penny to celebrate the final survey.

Ted Nixon and the late Doug Bateman organised all the surveys until I took over in 2015.



Figure 1: Crested Shrike-tit: Seen on four survey sites. Photographer: Zik Teo

On the surveys of 11 sites we saw twelve species of nectar feeding birds, including Musk Lorikeets (4 sites) and Little Lorikeets (2 sites) and ten species of honeyeater with Noisy Friarbirds and White-plumed Honeyeaters being the most common. The effects of the drought were noticeable. While the number of species seen was the same as in 2017, we saw fewer numbers of each species with 205 nectar feeding birds counted this year compared with 310 in 2017. There were very few trees with any blossom. We saw 63 species of other birds compared with 60 in 2017 but again the total bird

numbers were much lower with 588 birds counted compared with 1506 in 2017. The numbers of White-browed and Masked Wood-swallows were lower than in 2017 but other species such as Superb Fairy-wrens were also seen in smaller numbers. Despite the drought, there were several highlights of the survey. Diamond Firetails were not seen in 2017 but four birds were seen on three survey sites in 2018. Once again Brown Treecreepers (8 sites) and Willie Wagtails (11 sites) were particularly common and Zebra Finches with a young bird were seen again at the Genowlan Bridge South site. No Restless Flycatchers were recorded during this survey compared with seven birds seen on four sites in 2017. However a Painted Buttonquail was seen on the Glen Davis Pipeline site; this species was not recorded in 2016 or 2017.



Figure 2: Painted Buttonquail: seen on one survey site. Photographer: Zik Teo

On Saturday afternoon, those of us staying at the Homestead in the Capertee National Park walked along the river below the Homestead to the campground seeing many kangaroos and wombats as well as birds – Jacky Winters, Rainbow Bee-eaters, White-throated Gerygones, Diamond Firetails. A few people got good views of Turquoise Parrots near the Homestead and the campground.



Figure 3: Rainbow Bee-eater: seen on three survey sites. Photographer: Zik Teo

On Sunday morning we drove to the Valley Lookout, where there were some trees in flower as evidenced by the calls of Noisy Friarbirds. We heard a Black-chinned Honeyeater but got no sightings of it. There was some rain in the Valley on Friday, which was sufficient to make the dirt road to the Homestead very slippery but hopefully also sufficient to lead to more flowering of trees in the near future.

The survey data go to BirdLife Southern NSW. I hope that the survey data collected by BirdLife Southern NSW, Cumberland Bird Observers Club and Birding NSW over 24 years will be analysed and published.