

# Regent Honeyeaters and Swift Parrots

## An Update from BirdLife Australia

July 2020

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Australian Government

# BirdLife Australia's 'Woodland Bird Program'

- Aim is to reverse the decline of temperate woodland birds (1 in 5 threatened and/or declining)
- It is a “guild” of threatened birds, just like migratory shorebirds and seabirds



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The most threatened 'woodland birds' are....



Swift Parrot

Regent Honeyeater



The 'woodland bird flagships' are....



Regent Honeyeater

Critically Endangered

Swift Parrot





# Introducing the Regent Honeyeater



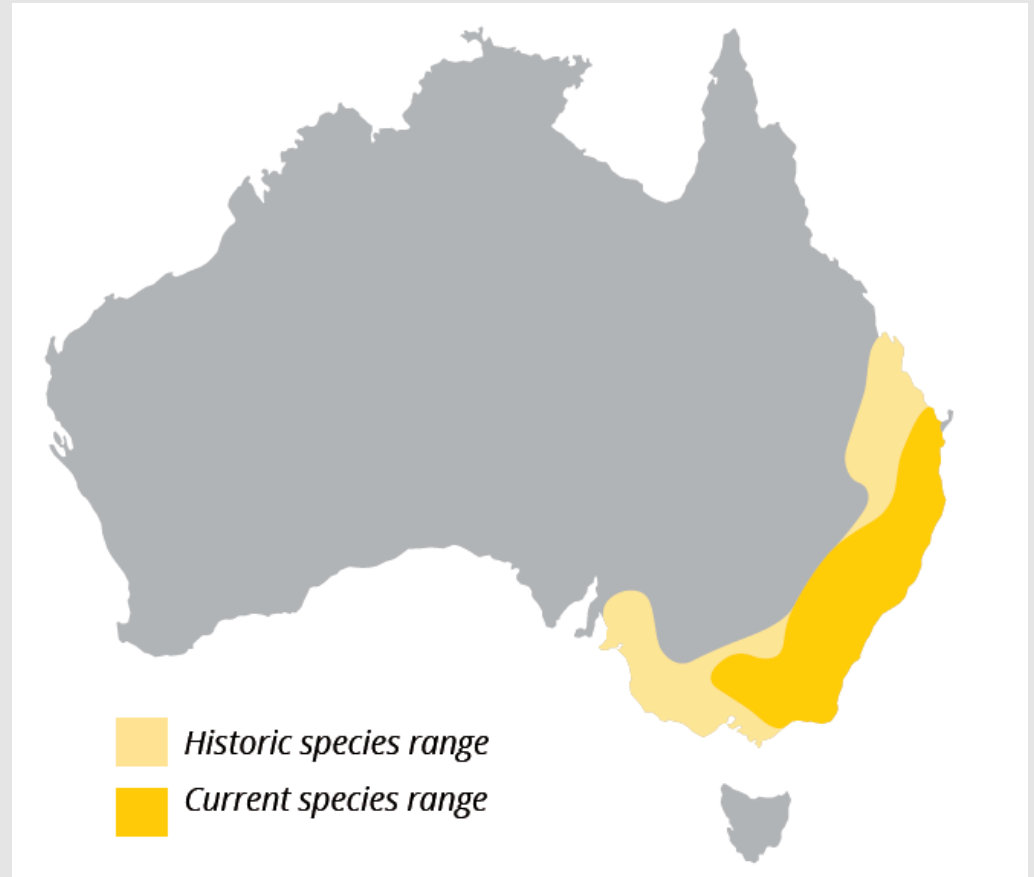
# Introducing the Regent Honeyeater



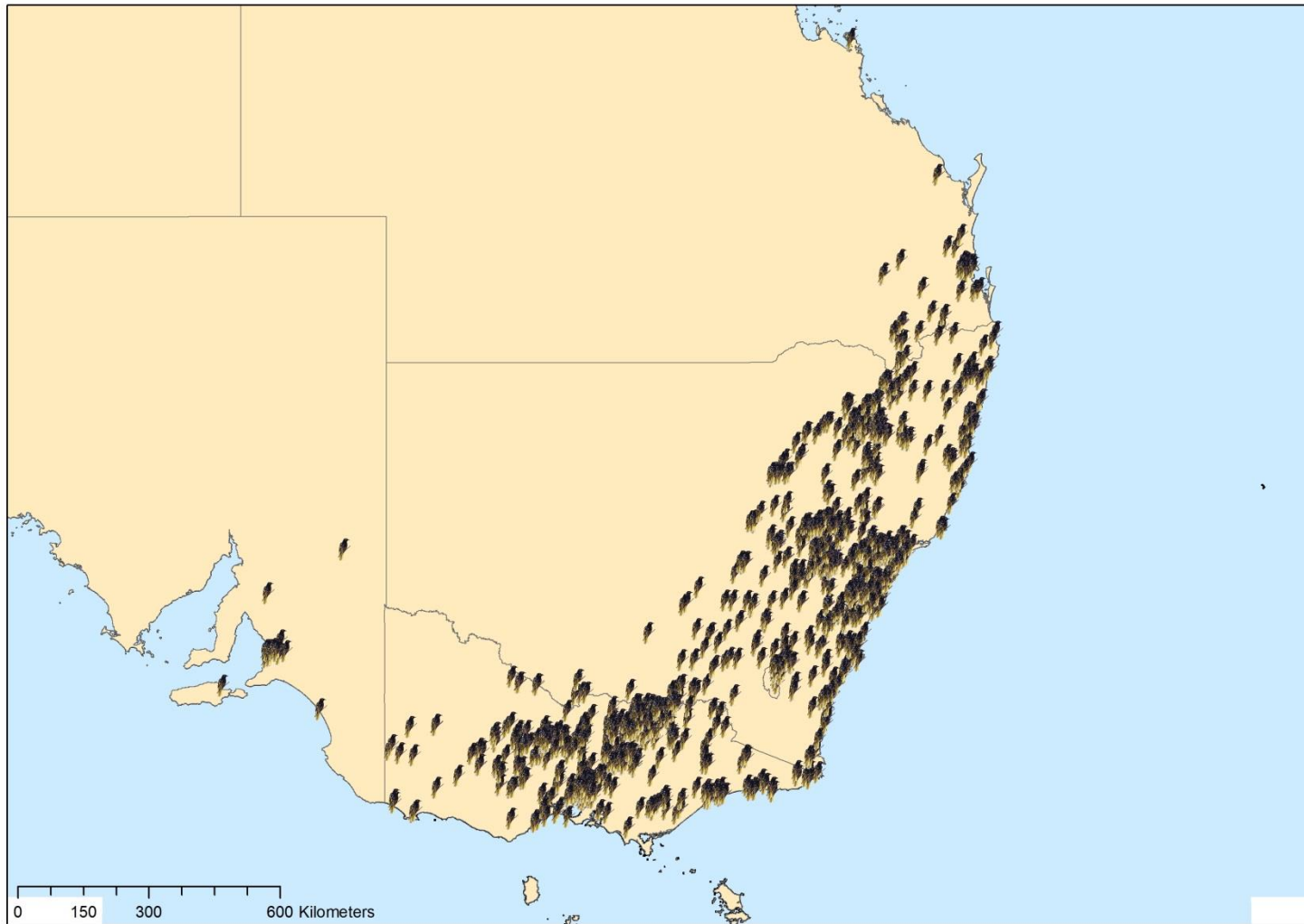
birds

# Regent Honeyeater decline – contraction in range

- Now extinct in:
  - South Australia
  - Western Victoria
- Stronghold now NSW:
  - Vast majority of sightings
  - Vast majority of breeding records

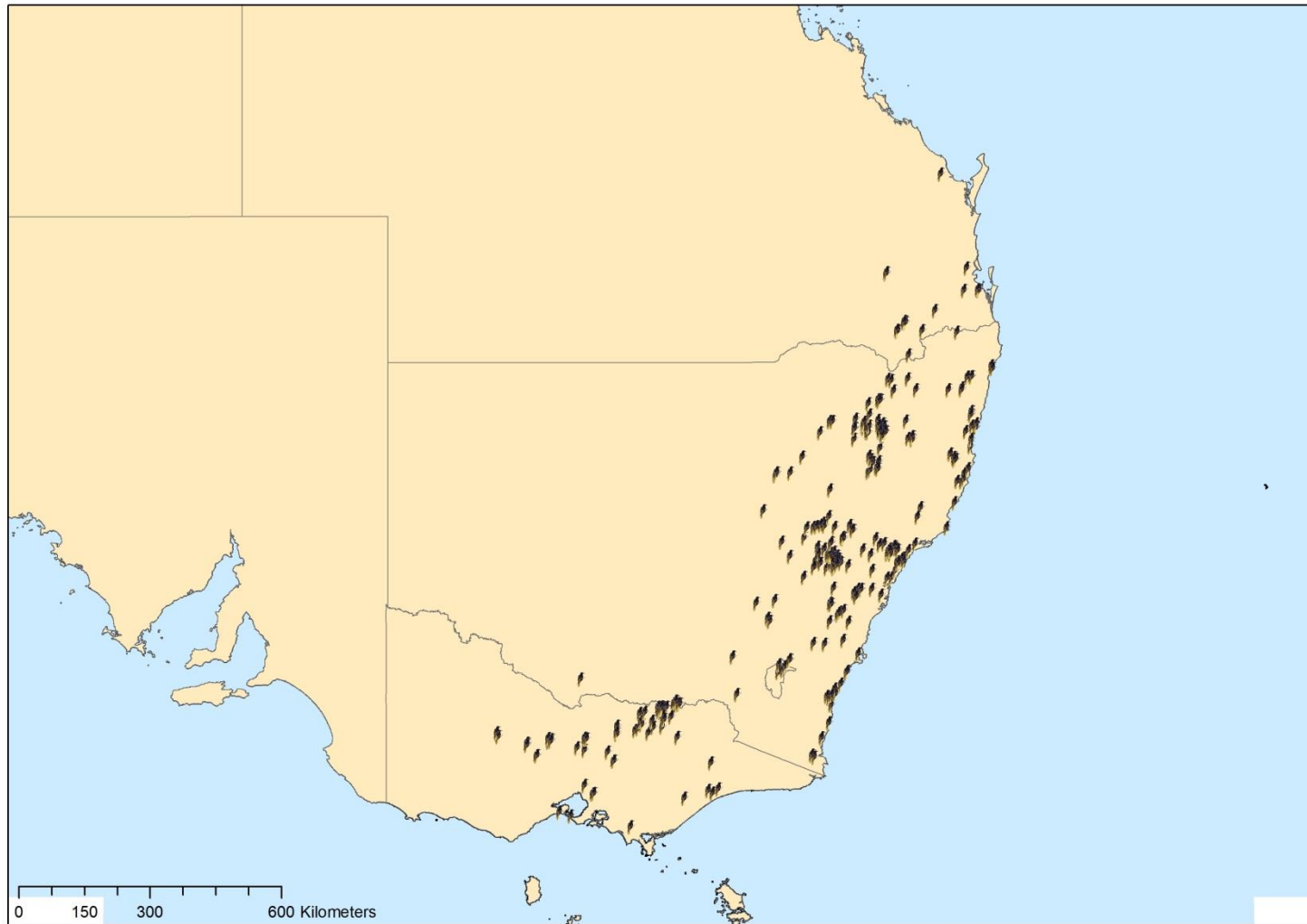


# Regent Honeyeater decline – population crash



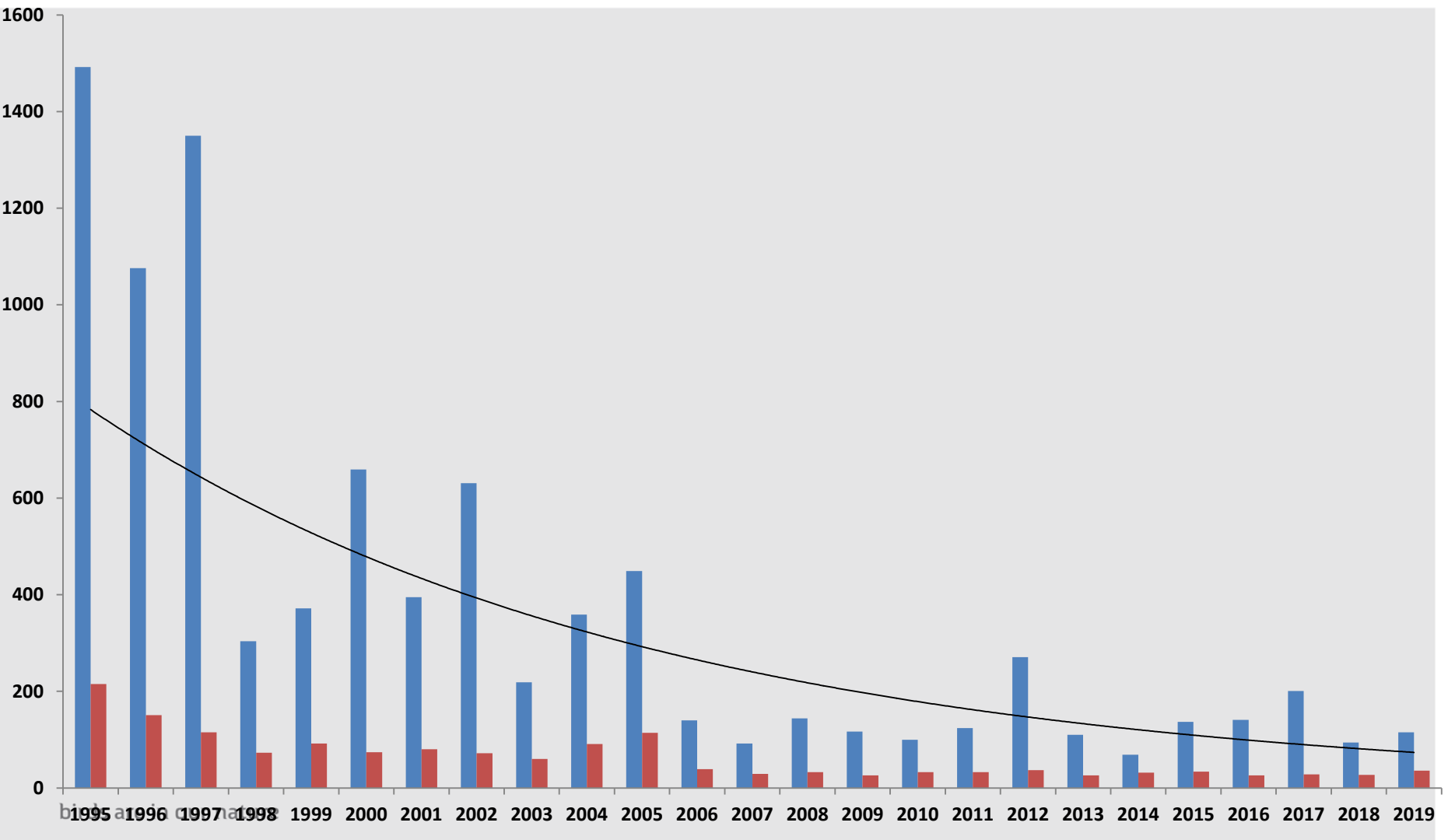


# Regent Honeyeater decline – population crash



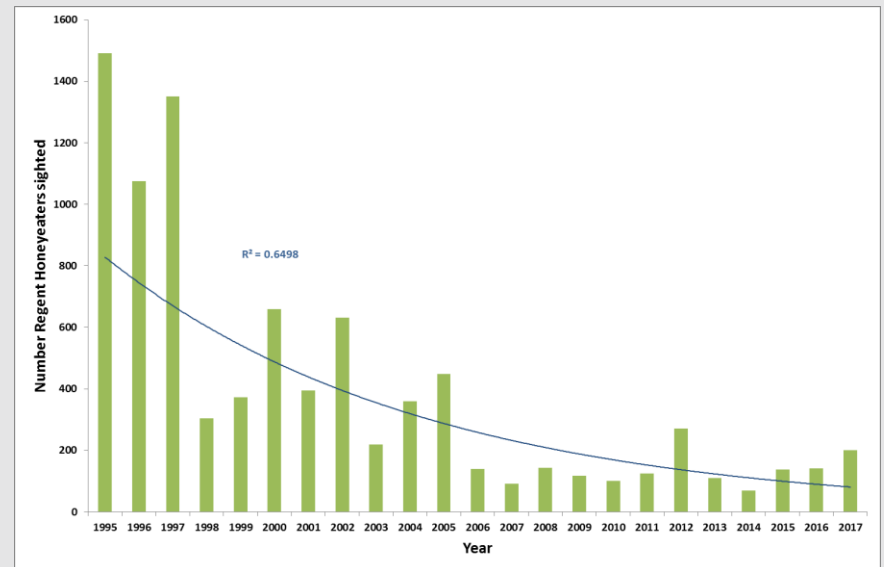


# Regent Honeyeater decline – individuals and sites



# Why the drastic decline?

**The short answer is - we don't know!**



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But loss of habitat is the key driver...



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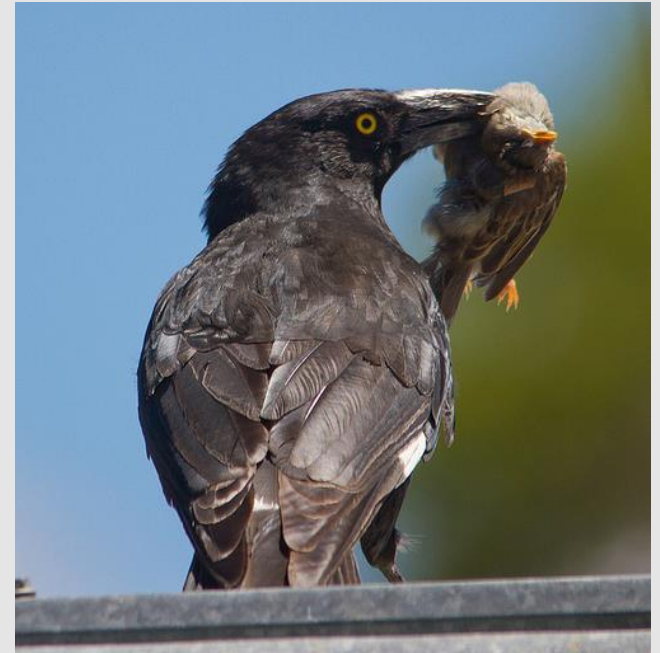
# Why the drastic decline? – “Contemporary threats”

## ***Critically low population is the major threat***

- Inability to breed – low nesting success rate
  - Lack of flocks
  - Paucity of nests
  - Competition with large honeyeaters
  - Predation (avian and mammalian)



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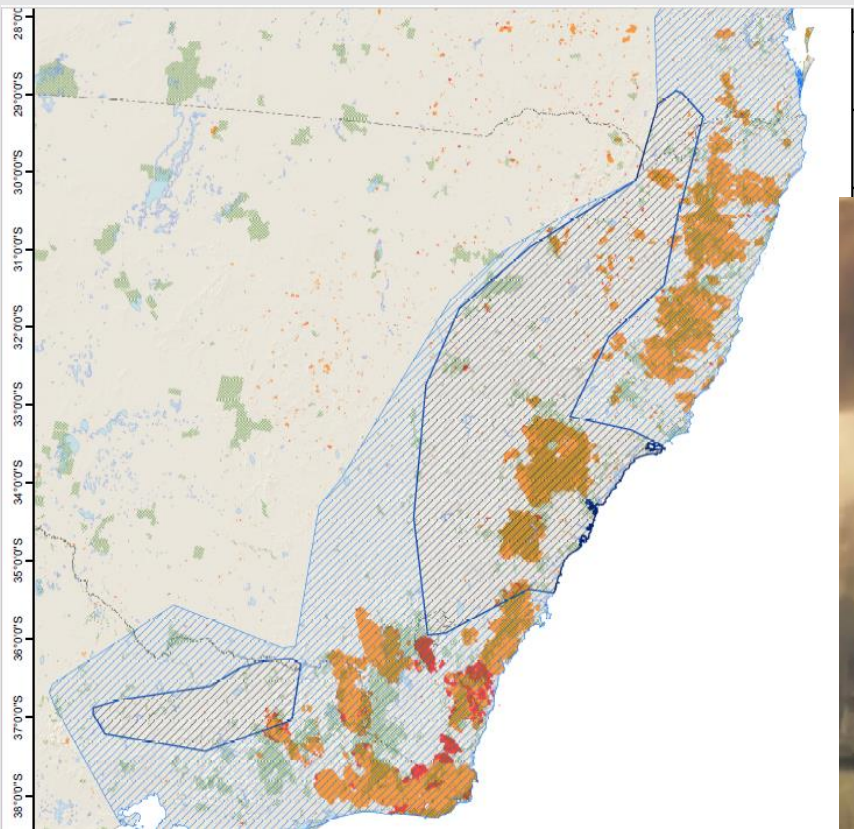
# Why the drastic decline? – “Contemporary threats”

PhD research by Ross Crates (ANU) and Gemma Taylor (UCL/Monash/BirdLife)



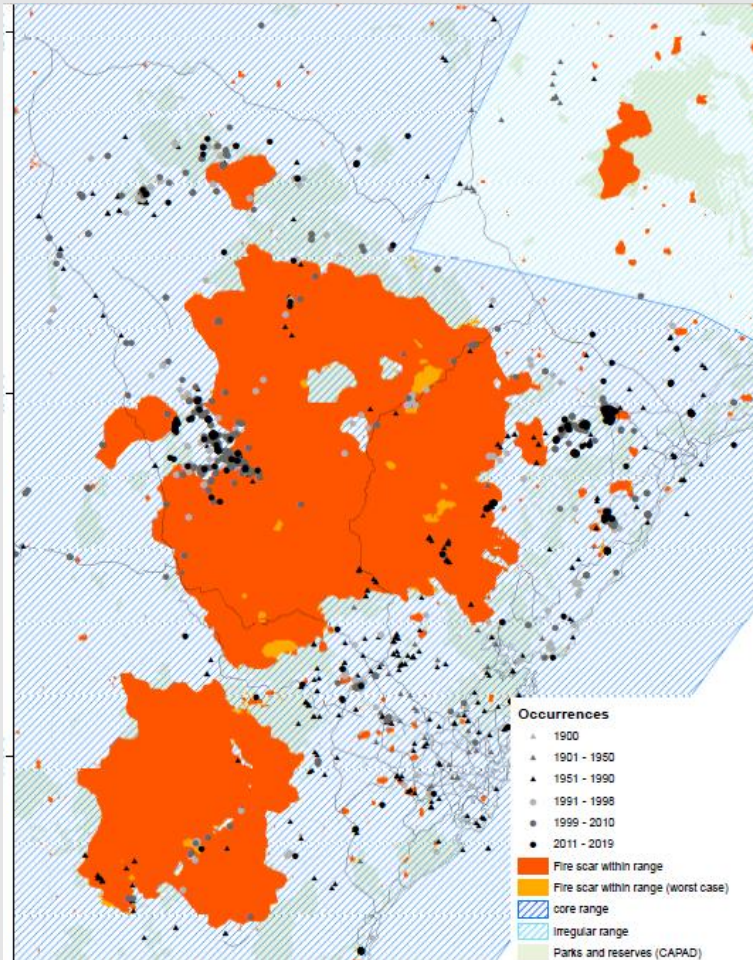


# The most “contemporary threat”?



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# Regent Honeyeater sites under 2019/20 fire scars



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Active nesting sites burnt in the 2019/20 fires

- Widden Valley
- Capertee Valley (Glen Davis)
- Goulburn River
- Wolgan Valley

2017/2018 nesting sites burnt

- Burragorang Valley
- Capertee Valley (NP)

+ much non-breeding habitat



# 2019 birds – winter coastal push once again



>50% of  
2019  
winter  
birds were  
in or near  
Swamp  
Mahogany





# 2019 birds – 'Neranie flock'

12 birds – none banded 😊



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# 2019 Regent Honeyeaters in Queensland



Hardings Paddock (May)  
*Photo: Campbell Paine*

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Springfield Lakes (June-July)  
*Photo: Pauline Brennan*



# 2018 Qld Regent Honeyeaters

Rainbow Beach  
July-October 2018

*Photo: Rod Howie*



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# 2018 Qld Regent Honeyeaters



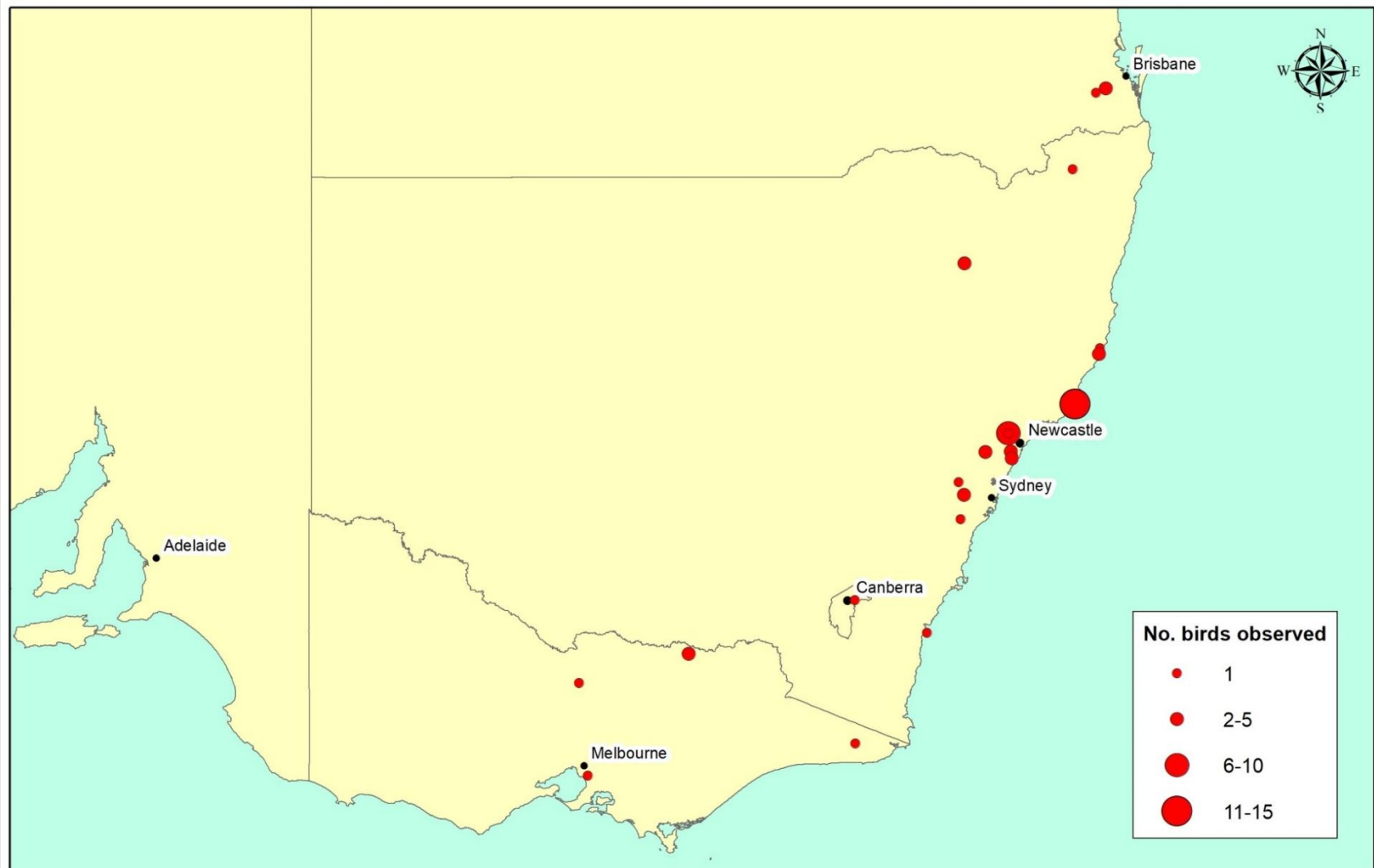
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# Regent Honeyeaters must be breeding in Qld



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# 2019 Regent Honeyeaters





## 2019 breeding success – only 5 confirmed broods



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# 2019 breeding success – two nests in Western Sydney



Mulgoa

*Photo: Gen Kyi*

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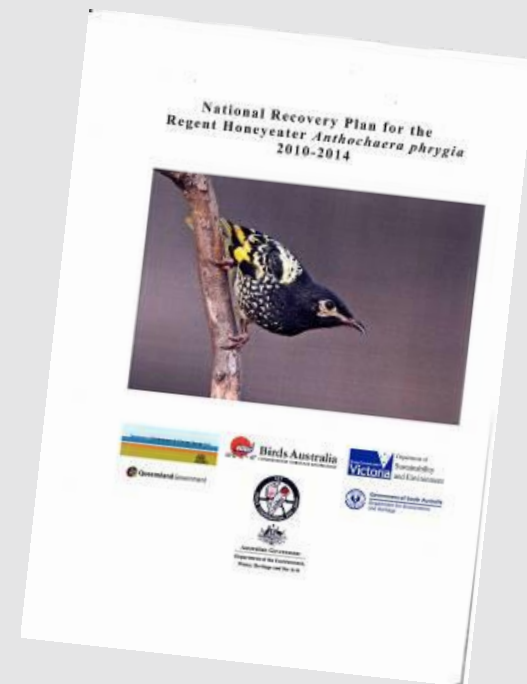
South Maroota

*Photo: Jackie Fiess*

# Regent Honeyeater Recovery Plan



- Recovery Team in place since 1994
- National Recovery Plan (April 2016)



# Recovering the Regent Honeyeater – recovery objectives

1. Restore, **protect and enhance** the value of Regent Honeyeater habitat in 'regularly used areas' and other sites
2. Monitor trends in **population** distribution and abundance
3. Facilitate **research** on strategic questions
4. Manage the **captive population** of Regent Honeyeaters
5. Maintain and increase **community awareness**, understanding and involvement in the recovery program
6. Effectively administer the recovery effort



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# Regent Honeyeater recovery partners



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## Recovery Action – Banding (2018-2019 very lean)



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# Blue-Metal / Red Orange

- Female first banded in adult plumage in November 2013 at Bogee TSR in the Capertee Valley (*Mugga Ironbark*)
- Goulburn River spring 2017 where Ross monitored her nest successfully, fledging 2 birds. (*Yellow Box*)
- July/Aug 2018 Hunter Region Botanic Gardens (*Blackbutt*)
- Late 2019 back in the Goulburn River sitting on a nest! (*Yellow Box*)
- **At least 9 years old, has travelled at least 425km since banding**





# Enhancing Regent Honeyeater habitat

- 'Bully' of temperate woodlands
- The science is in – undeniably a major threat
- Listed as KTP in Vic, NSW and EPBC Act
- Evidence of destruction of active Regent Honeyeater nests



# The “Noisy Miner problem”

- ‘Bully’ of temperate woodlands
- The science is in – undeniably a major threat
- Listed as KTP in Vic, NSW and EPBC Act
- Evidence of destruction of active Regent Honeyeater nests



# Noisy Miner controls (BirdLife and ANU)

- Control at key locations
  - Capertee Valley
  - Upper Hunter
  - Lower Hunter
  - Barraba
- Removing significant numbers of miners
- Research/learnings
- Both PROactive and REactive

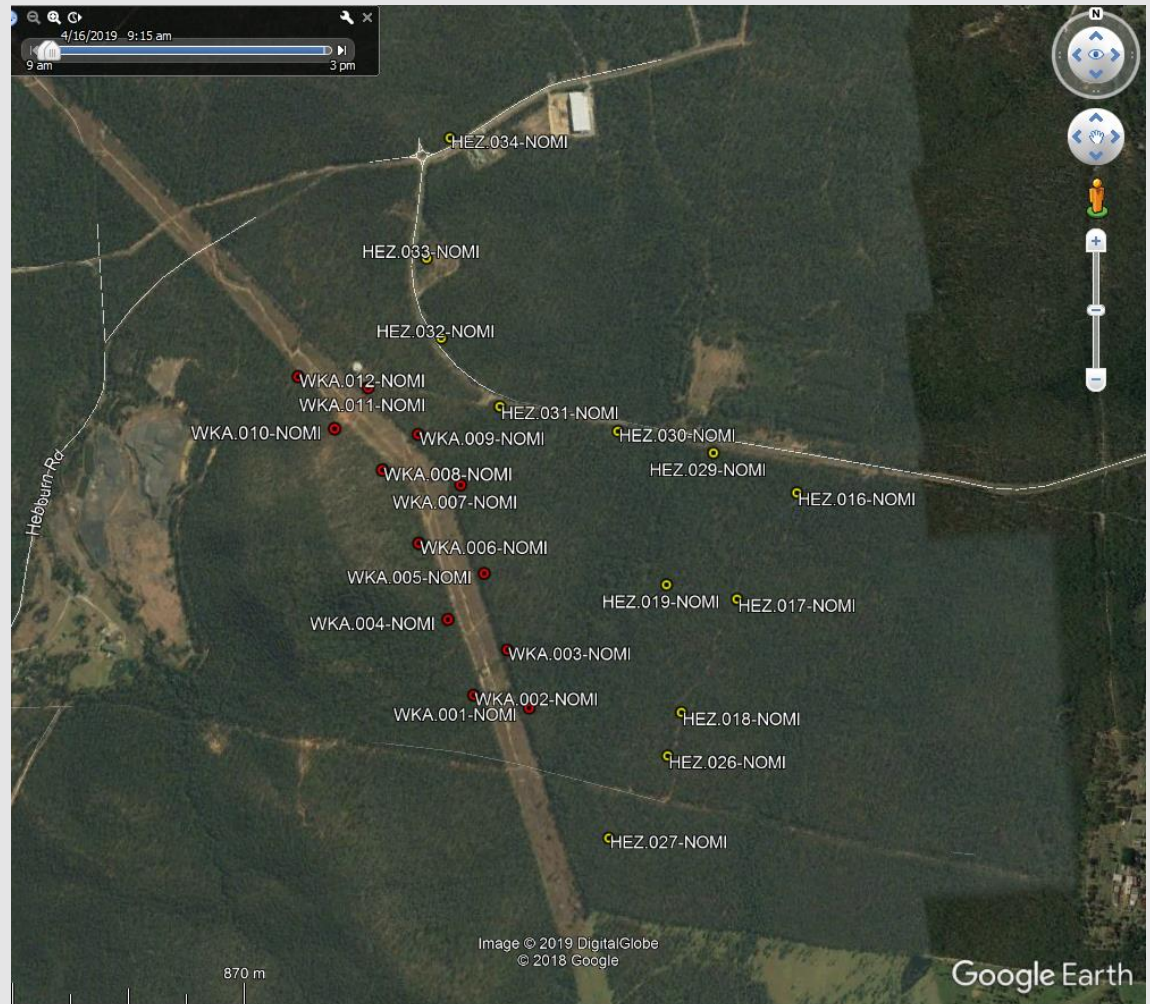




# Noisy Miner proactive controls – Lower Hunter 2019

Near-complete  
removal from HEZ

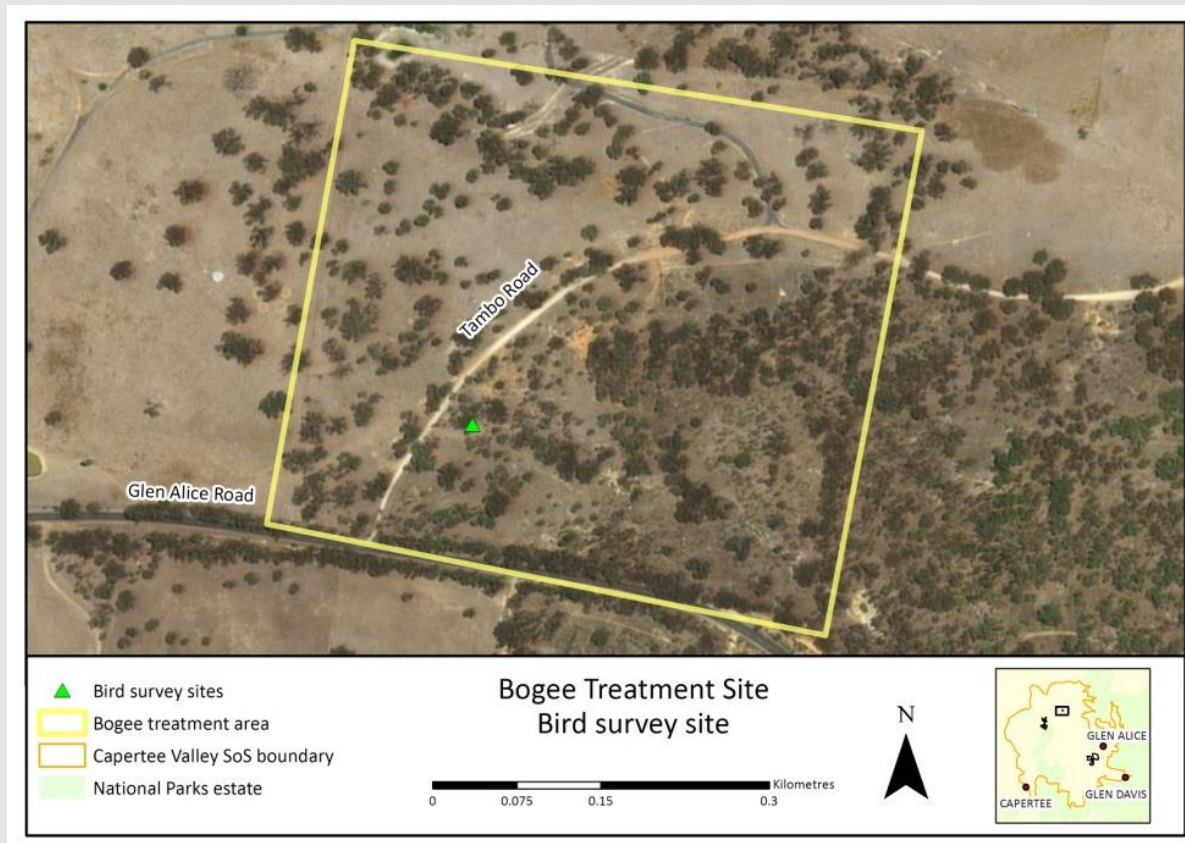
Just a handful of birds  
remain!



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# Noisy Miner reactive control – 2017 example

*5 Regent Honeyeater nests in this treatment area (Travelling Stock Reserve), and several others close by on private property*



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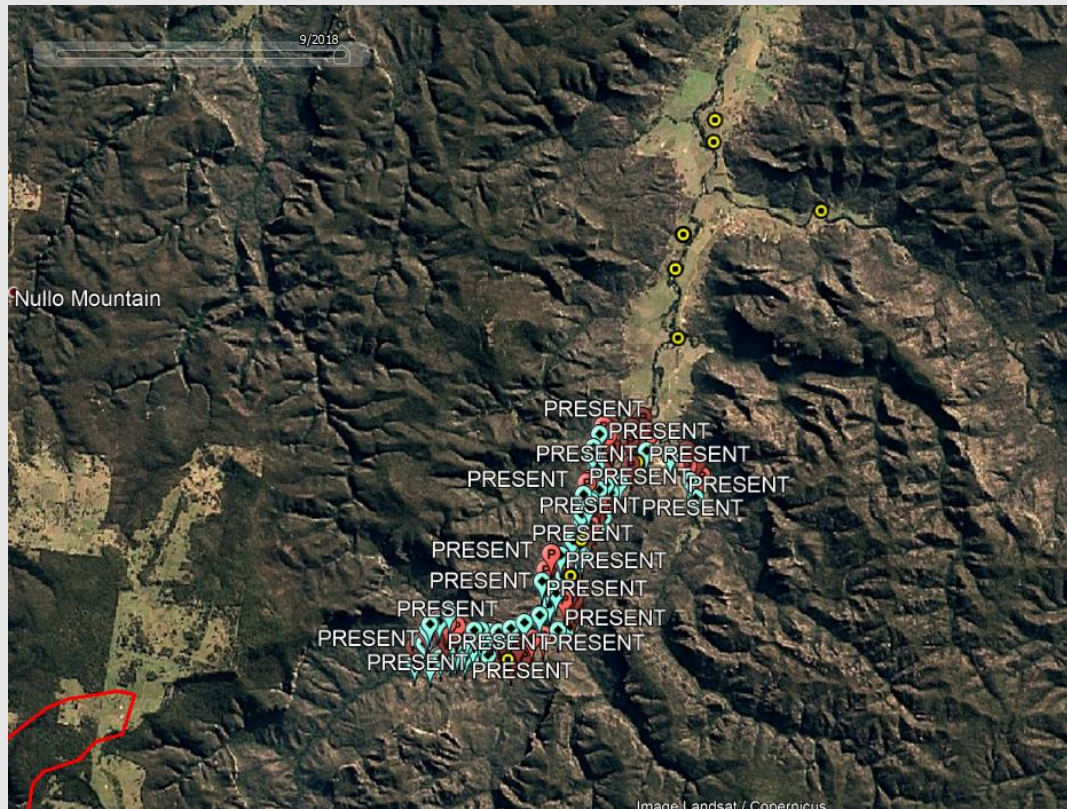
## Noisy Miner controls – 2017 example



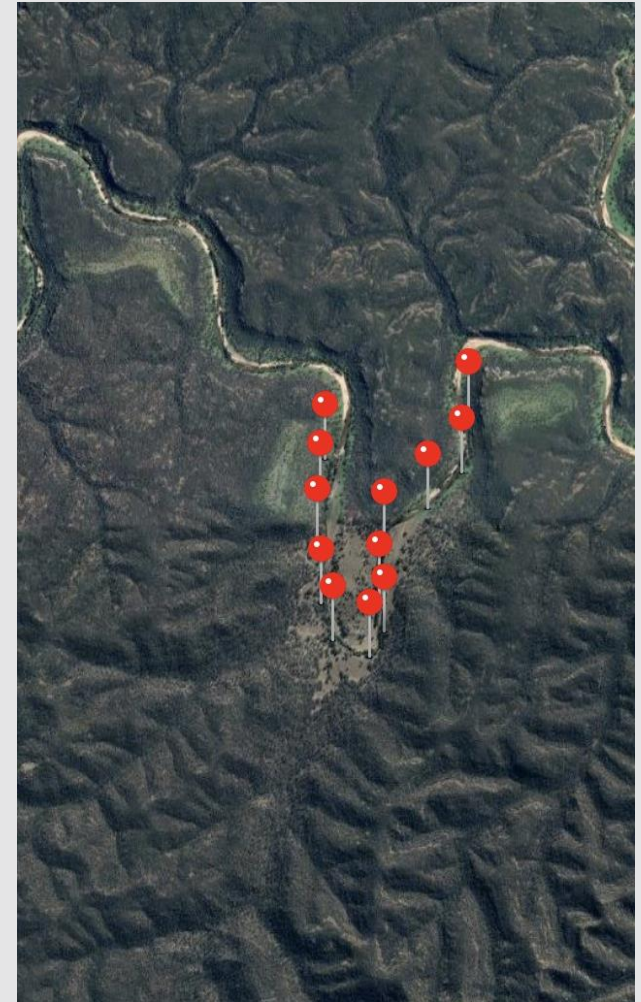
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# Large-scale removal in Widden Valley (+ GRNP)



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# Other nest interventions – Breeding season 2019

Collaboration between  
BirdLife Australia and ANU

ANU field staff were very  
busy in 2019 due to broad  
distribution of nests!

- Capertee Valley
- Goulburn River (2 sites)
- Wolgan Valley
- Western Sydney





## Also deploying cameras at nest sites



birds



# Recovery Action - Captive Breeding & Release

## Managing the captive population of Regent Honeyeaters



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# Recovery Action - Captive Breeding & Release

New aviaries at Taronga Western Plains in Dubbo



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# Recovery Action - Captive Breeding & Release

New aviaries at Taronga Western Plains in Dubbo



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# Captive Releases (pre 2020)

## Southern NSW/North-east Vic

### *Chiltern-Mt Pilot NP*

- 2008 – 27 birds
- 2010 – 44 birds
- 2013 – 38 birds
- 2015 – 77 birds
- 2017 – 101 birds

*2019 – was to be in NSW but postponed*



# Captive release – it does work...

**Captive birds have successfully bred with wild birds**



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# Captive release – it does work...

**Captive birds have successfully bred with each other**



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# And captive-bred birds are capable of travel



2<sup>nd</sup> June 2019  
Oxley Park  
(western Sydney)

*2 birds – one  
wild/unbanded  
One bird from the  
2017 release*

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## And long-term survival...



May 2020  
*Gippsland, Victoria*

*A male 2015-release  
bird*

*2 years old at release*

*First ever 5+ year  
'survivor'*

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# As we speak





## 2020 release – Lower Hunter Valley



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## 2020 release – Lower Hunter Valley

- Small release (20 birds)
- 19<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> June (10 birds each)
- 11 female / 9 male
- 13 wearing radio transmitters
- Will be monitored for 12 wks



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# 2020 release – Media Attention

## Captive-bred regent honeyeaters successfully released in Hunter Valley, giving new hope for critically endangered species

ABC Mid North Coast / By Emma Slossian  
Posted Yesterday, updated Yesterday



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### Top Stories

Man dies of coronavirus in Victoria as state records 20 new cases

Victorians defy NSW Premier's travel edict and fly to Sydney amid Melbourne coronavirus outbreaks

Australians filmed through hacked private security cameras, live streamed on Russian-based website



10 News First  
@10NewsFirst

**#EXCLUSIVE** An Australian bird is hurtling toward extinction with only 350 of the animals left in the wild. | @ChrisBathTV





# 2020 release – Covid-safe transmitter fitting!

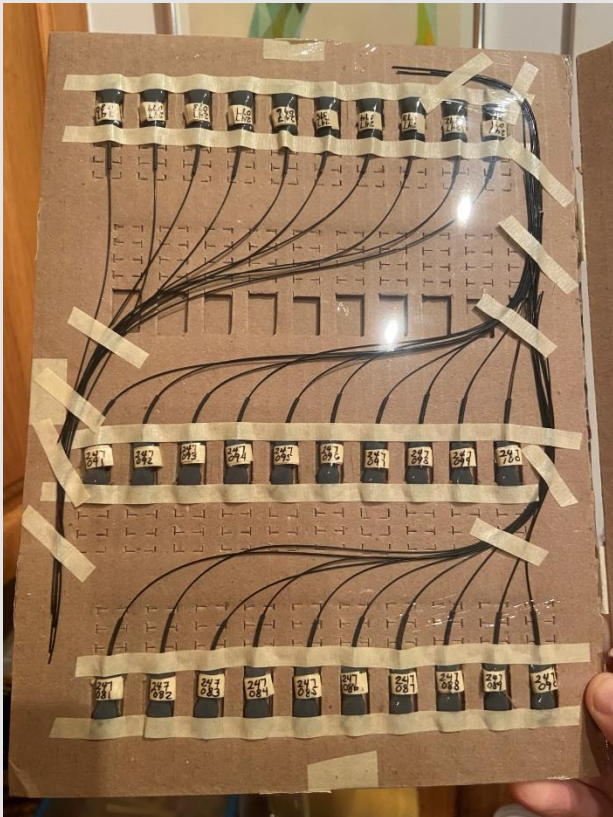


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# Monitoring team underway!

- Will be monitored for 12 wks
- 4 people / 7 days a week



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# 2020 release – background

Apiarist's assessment confirmed  
nectar supply for >2 months



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## 2020 birds – Lower Hunter 'wild birds'

- First detected 30<sup>th</sup> May (2 birds)
- Grew to 13 birds by 17<sup>th</sup> June
- Largest concentration since 20 birds at same place in 2017
- Spotted Gum flowering



## 2020 birds – Lower Hunter 'wild birds'

- Stringybark also flowering
- Plenty of bud remaining in stringybark too
- Bud on ironbark and red gums



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# 'Full circle' –released birds descendants of 2012 birds



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# 'Full circle' –released birds descendants of 2012 birds

...birds captured at  
the same place in  
June 2012



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And we have mixed flocks! 😊

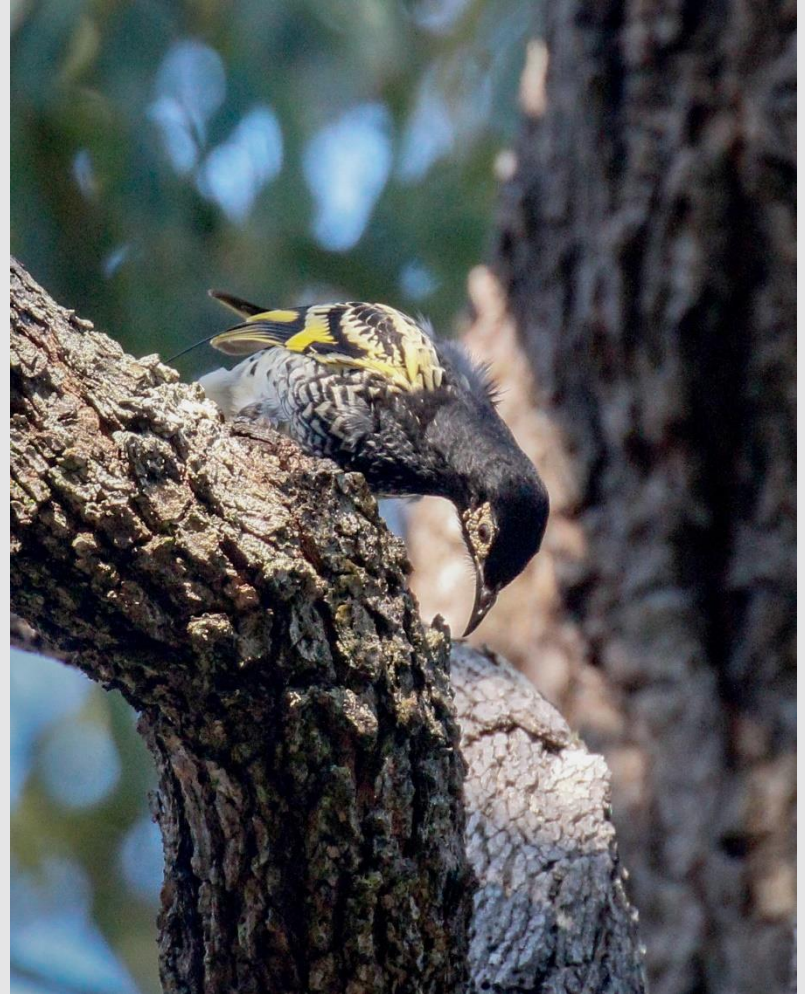


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## Release birds yesterday (6<sup>th</sup> July)



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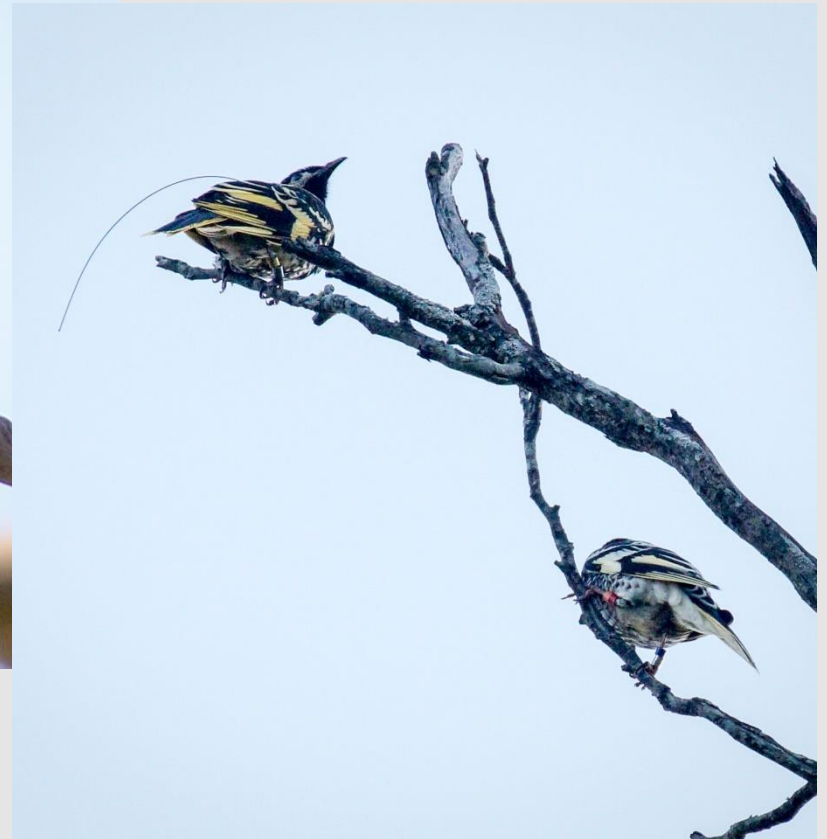


# Banding re-sighting – “ROBM”



“ROBM” – banded at  
Neranie July 2019

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# “Neranie flock” – rare opportunity for Taronga



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## “Neranie flock” – rare opportunity for Taronga

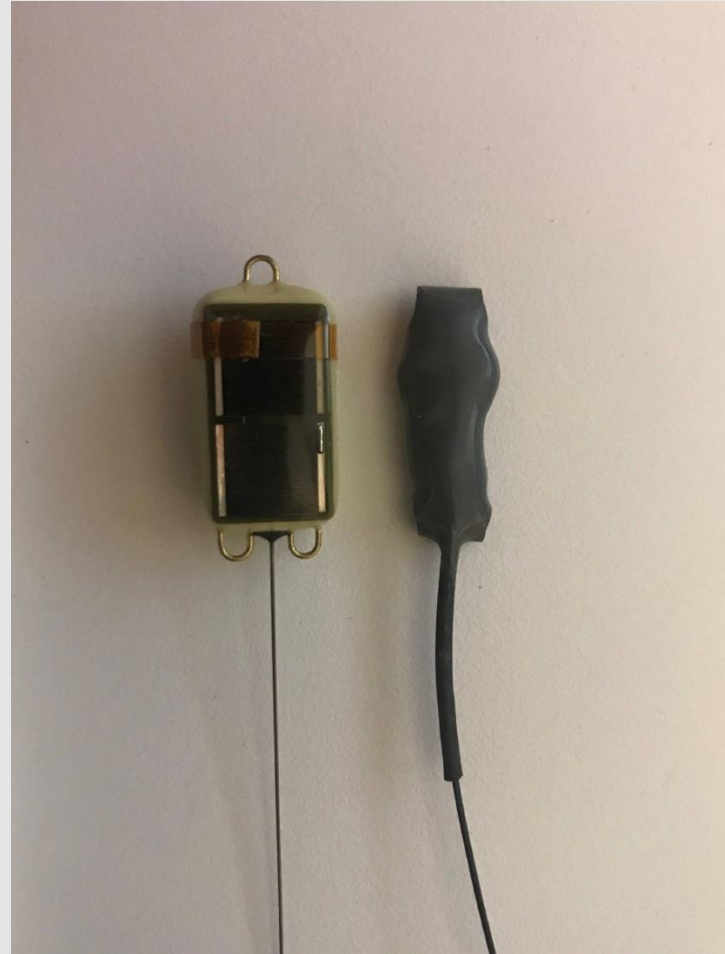


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# Satellite transmitters



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# Satellite transmitters



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# Satellite transmitters (“Reggie”)




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## Neranie trial – bird unable to fly – back to drawing board



# BirdLife campaigns at Regent Honeyeater breeding sites



**Hunter Economic Zone**

**Ask the Federal and State Environment Ministers and Shadow Ministers to protect HEZ and the Tocalpin Woodlands**

5,820 signatures


Dear The Hon Melissa Price MP, Minister for the Environment, The Hon Tony Burke MP, Shadow Minister for the Environment, The Hon Gabrielle Upton MP, NSW Minister for the Environment, The Hon Penny Sharpe MLC, NSW Shadow Minister for the Environment,

Urgent action needed to protect the Tocalpin Woodlands.

The Tocalpin Woodlands provide habitat crucial to the long-term viability and survival of the Regent Honeyeater.

Alarming declines in the population of the Regent Honeyeater are being recorded in the Hunter Economic Zone (HEZ) and the Tocalpin Woodlands.

As you publicise the importance of the HEZ and the Tocalpin Woodlands, please ensure that the Regent Honeyeater is given the same level of protection.



## Fernhill Estate

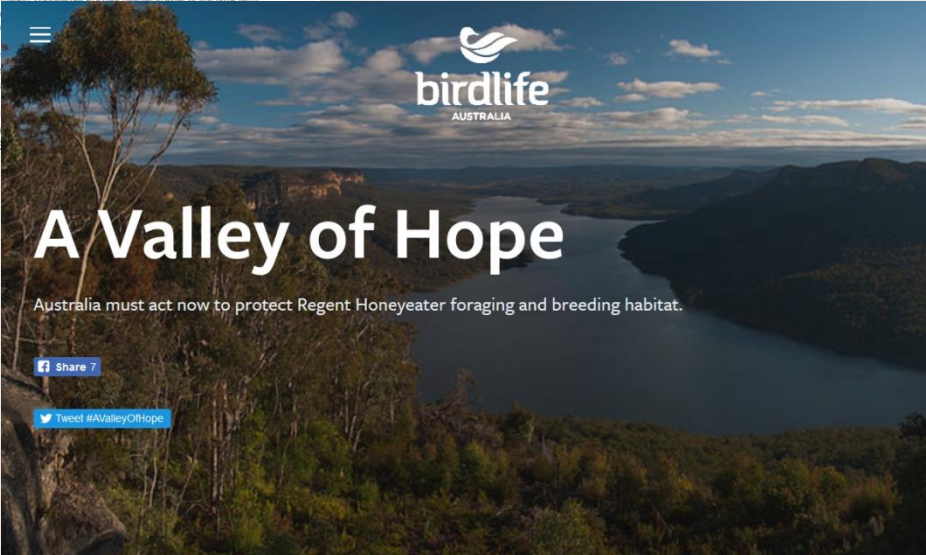


## Conservation Management Plan

October 2019

Prepared for

NSW Department of Planning, Industry & Environment



**A Valley of Hope**

Australia must act now to protect Regent Honeyeater foraging and breeding habitat.

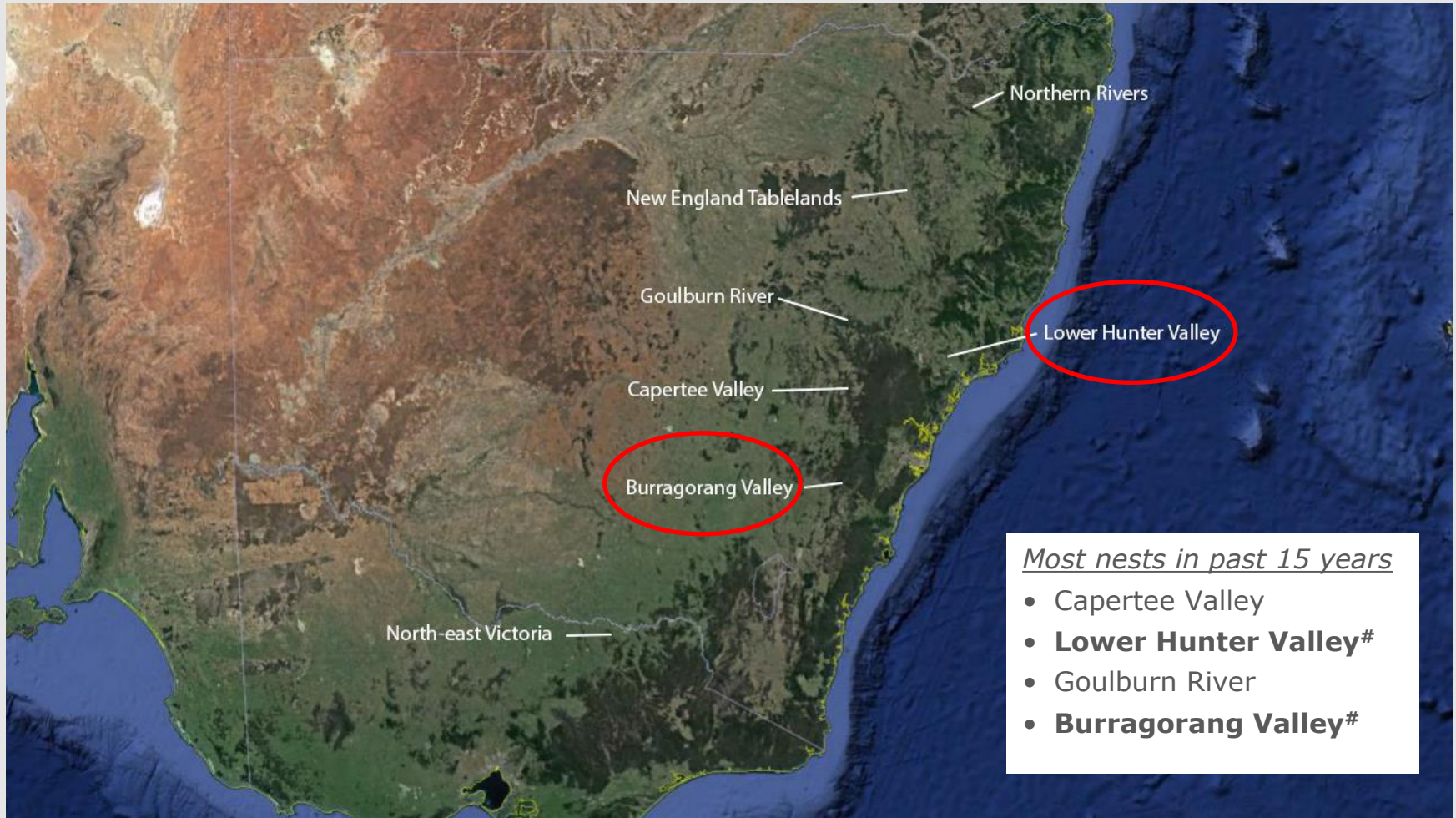
Share 7

Tweet #AValleyOfHope

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# Breeding locations – past fifteen years



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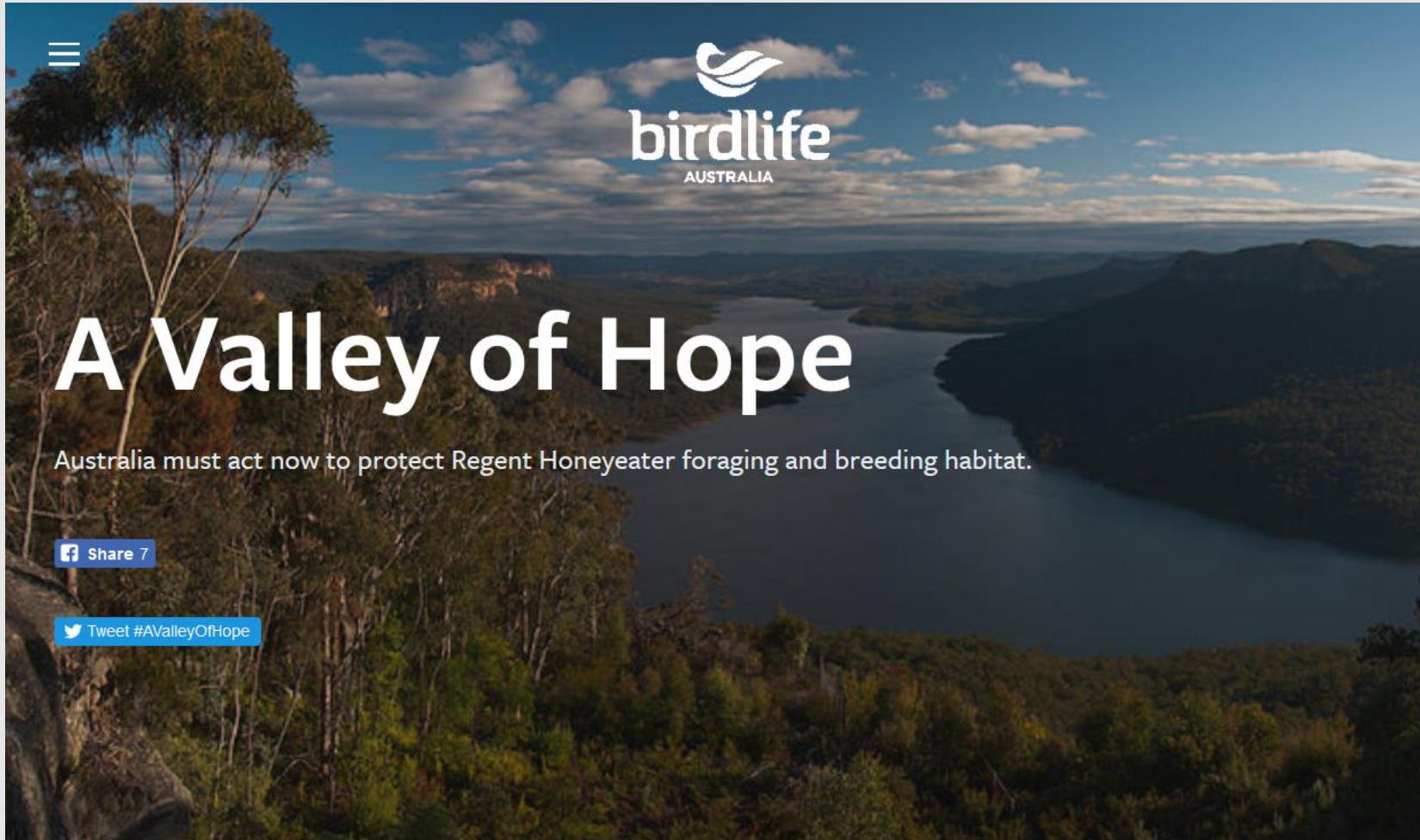
# A vitally important contemporary breeding area under threat



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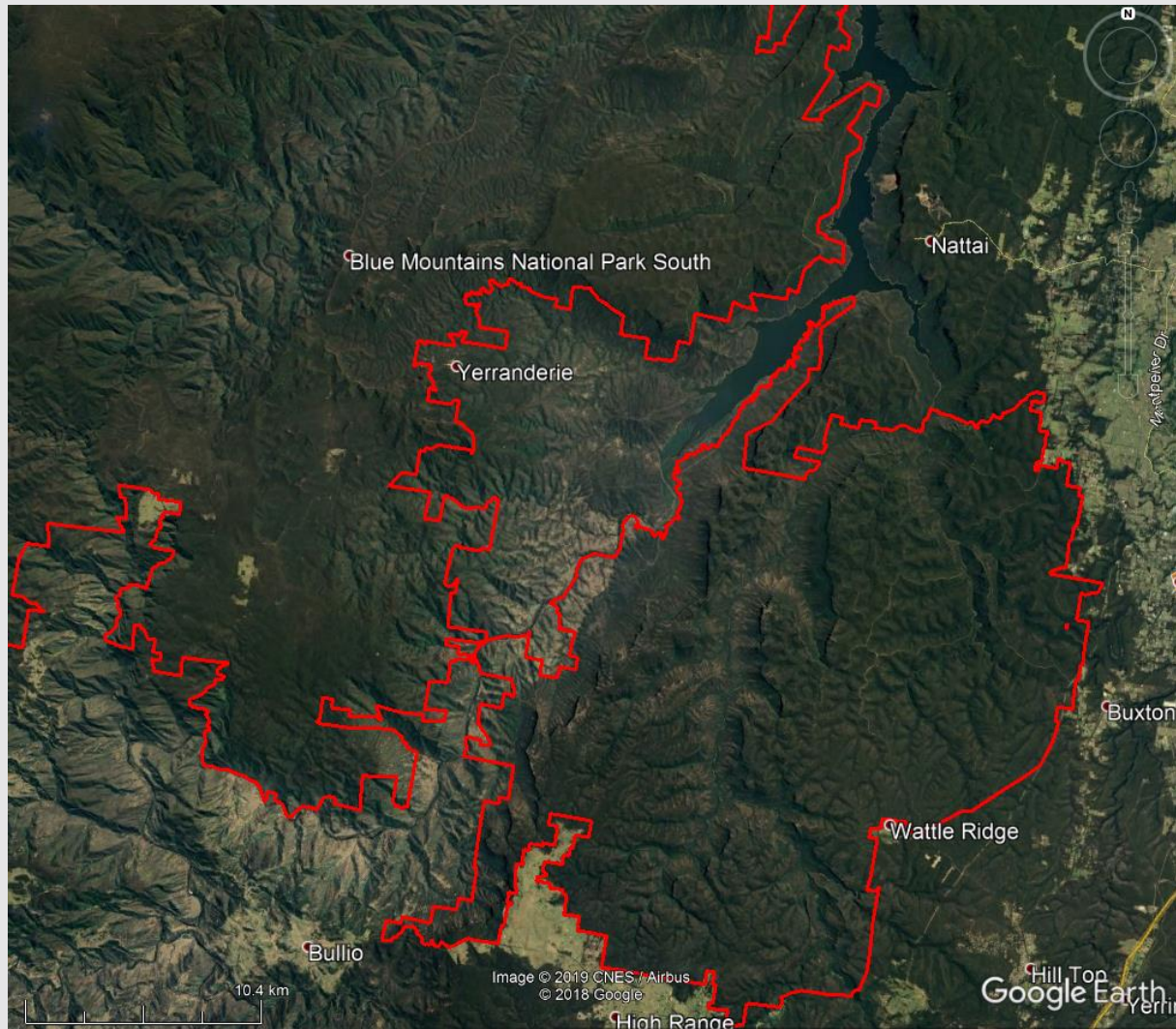
# Support existing *Give A Dam* campaign



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# Amending key Regent Honeyeater KBAs

## Burraborang Valley



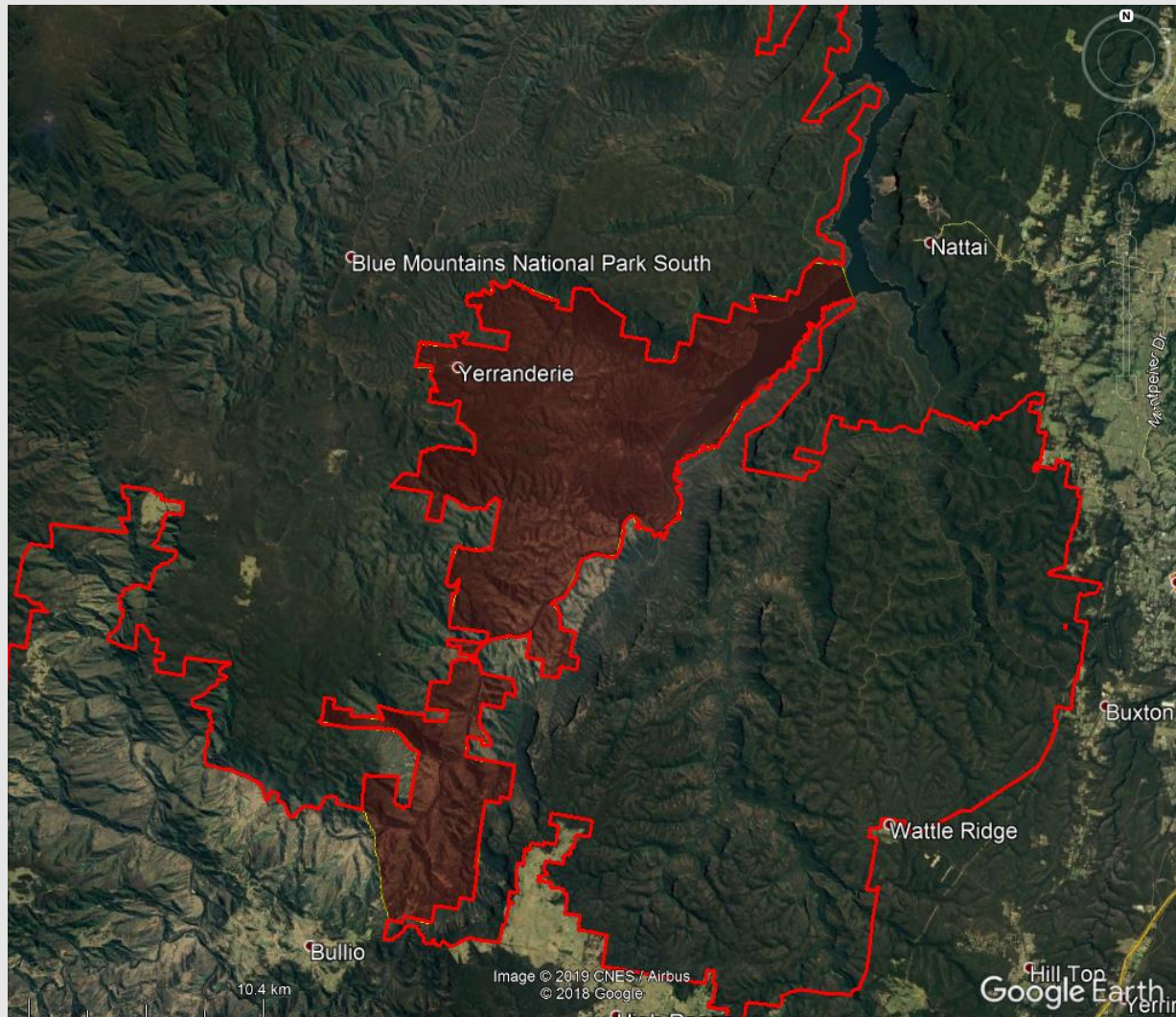
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# Amending key Regent Honeyeater KBAs

**Burraborang  
Valley**

**Also:  
Wolgan  
Widden  
Baerami**



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# BirdLife Campaign on Fernhill

## Fernhill Estate



### Conservation Management Plan

October 2019

Prepared for

NSW Department of Planning, Industry & Environment

## Evidence of past usage of Fernhill

= *site fidelity*

= *very important!*

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## Rare Birds Successfully Breed in Mulgoa

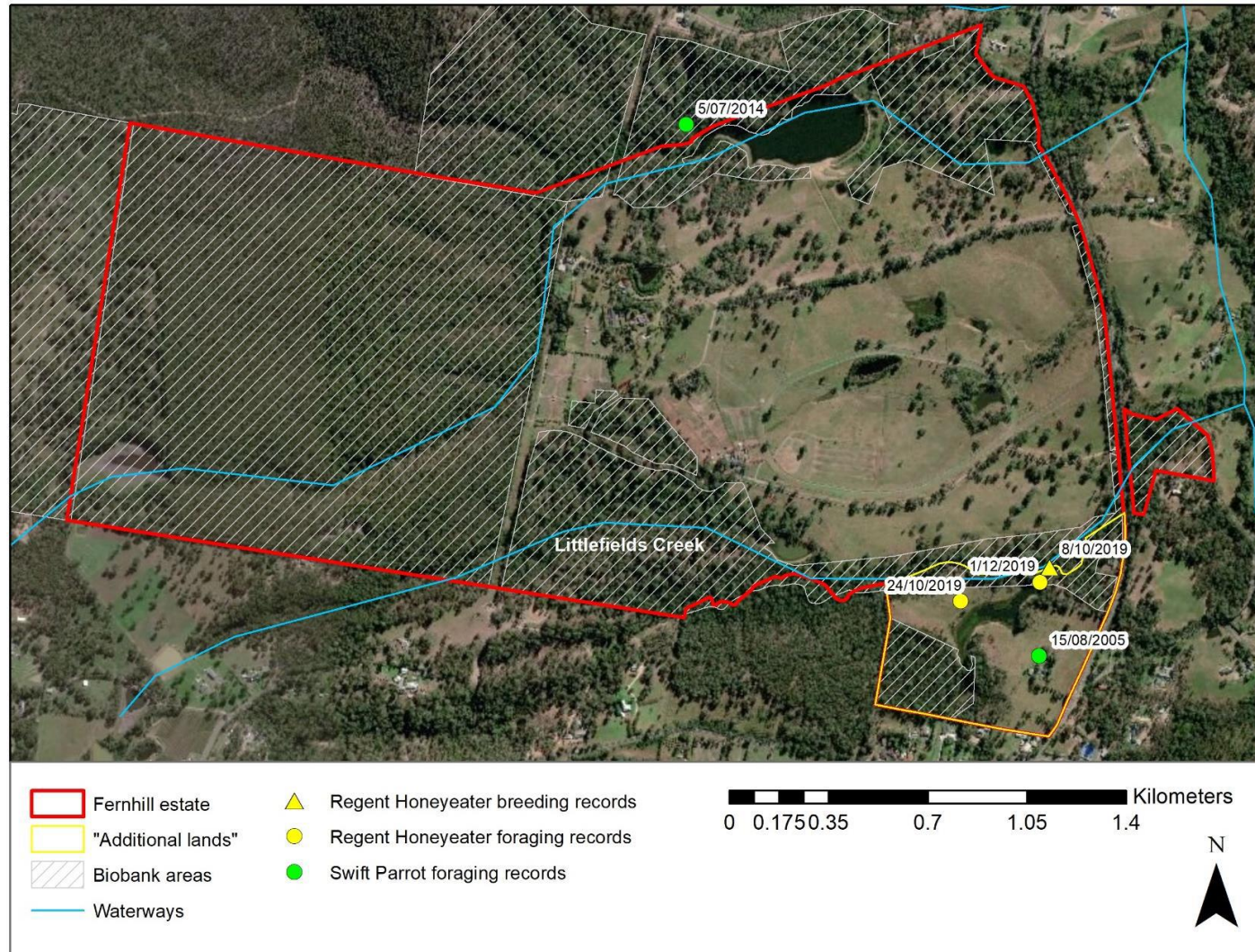
Source: Greater Sydney Local Land Services

Archived 6 Apr 2020 - Posted: 10 Feb 2020





# BirdLife Campaign on Fernhill



birds are in

# BirdLife Campaign on Fernhill

## Fernhill Estate



### Conservation Management Plan

October 2019

Prepared for

NSW Department of Planning, Industry & Environment

**BirdLife coordinated  
submissions to NSW DPIE**

*Thanks to those that  
submitted!*

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## Rare Birds Successfully Breed in Mulgoa

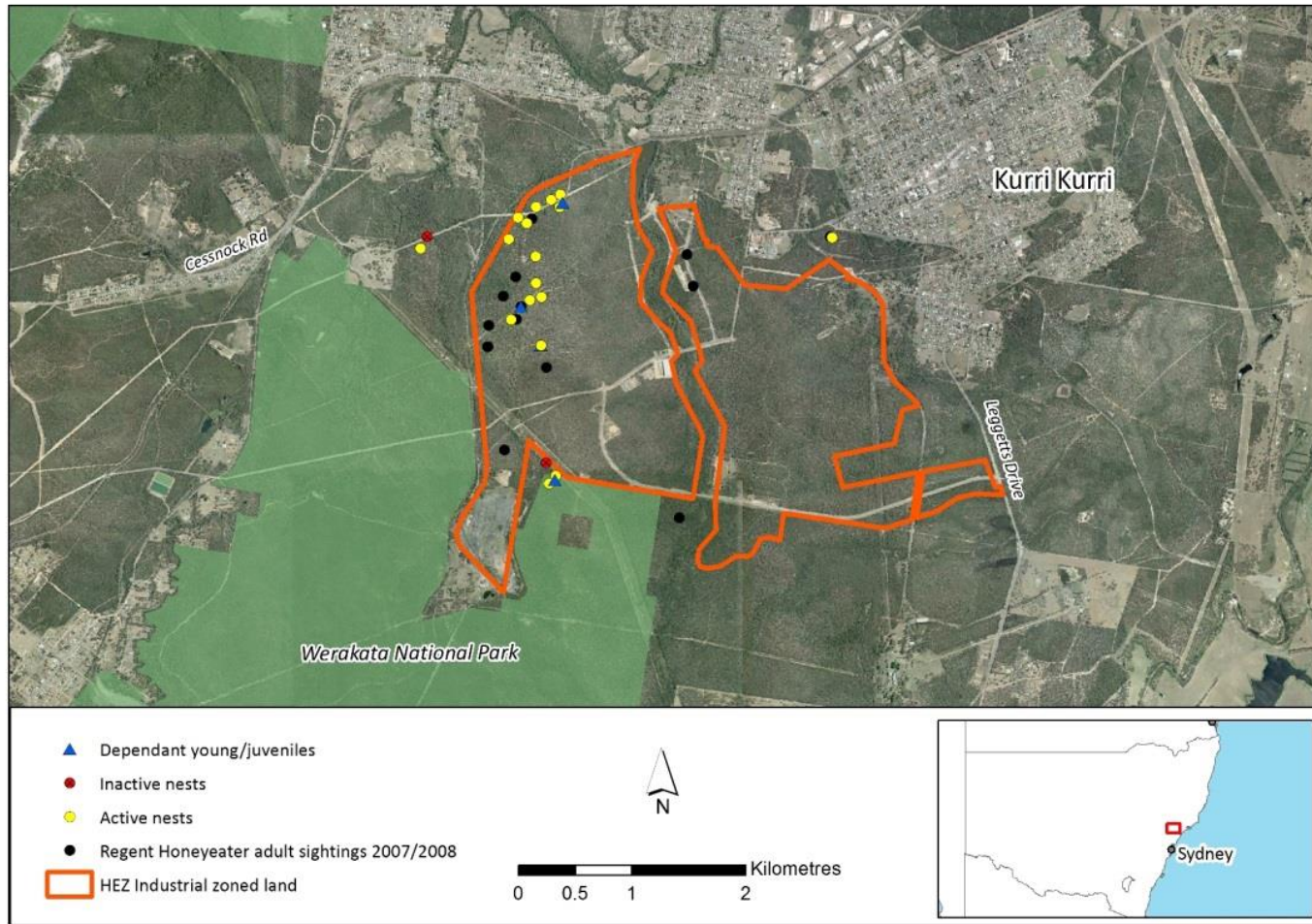
Source: Greater Sydney Local Land Services

*Archived 6 Apr 2020 - Posted: 10 Feb 2020*





# Hunter Economic Zone (HEZ) Campaign



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# Hunter Economic Zone (HEZ) Campaign



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# Only 2018 breeding location also under threat

***40+ individuals***  
***5 broods confirmed***



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# Then this!!

## Deal signed for huge coal-fired power plants in Hunter Valley, Hong Kong firm says

**Exclusive: Local mayor briefed that Hunter economic zone site in Kurri Kurri has been earmarked for 2,000MW plant**



▲ The entrance to the Hunter economic zone at Kurri Kurri, the proposed site of two new coal-fired power plants. Photograph: Supplied

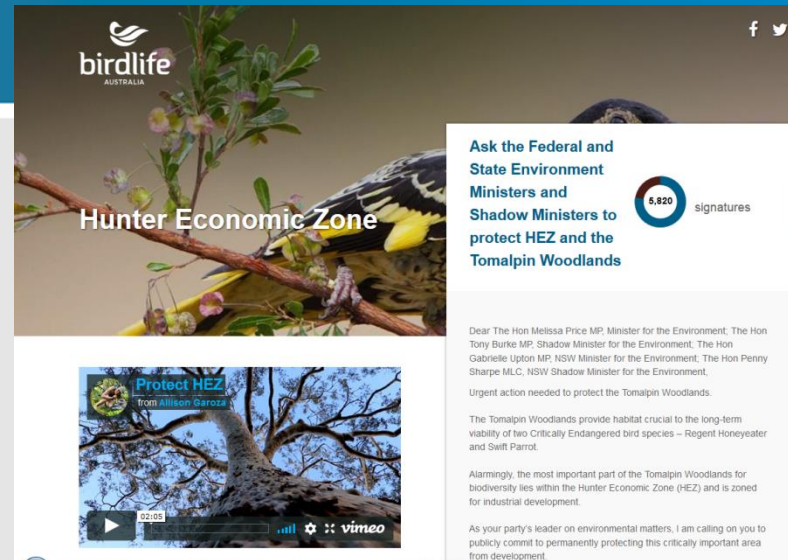


## OPINIONS DIVIDED OVER POSSIBLE KURRI COAL FIRED POWER STATION

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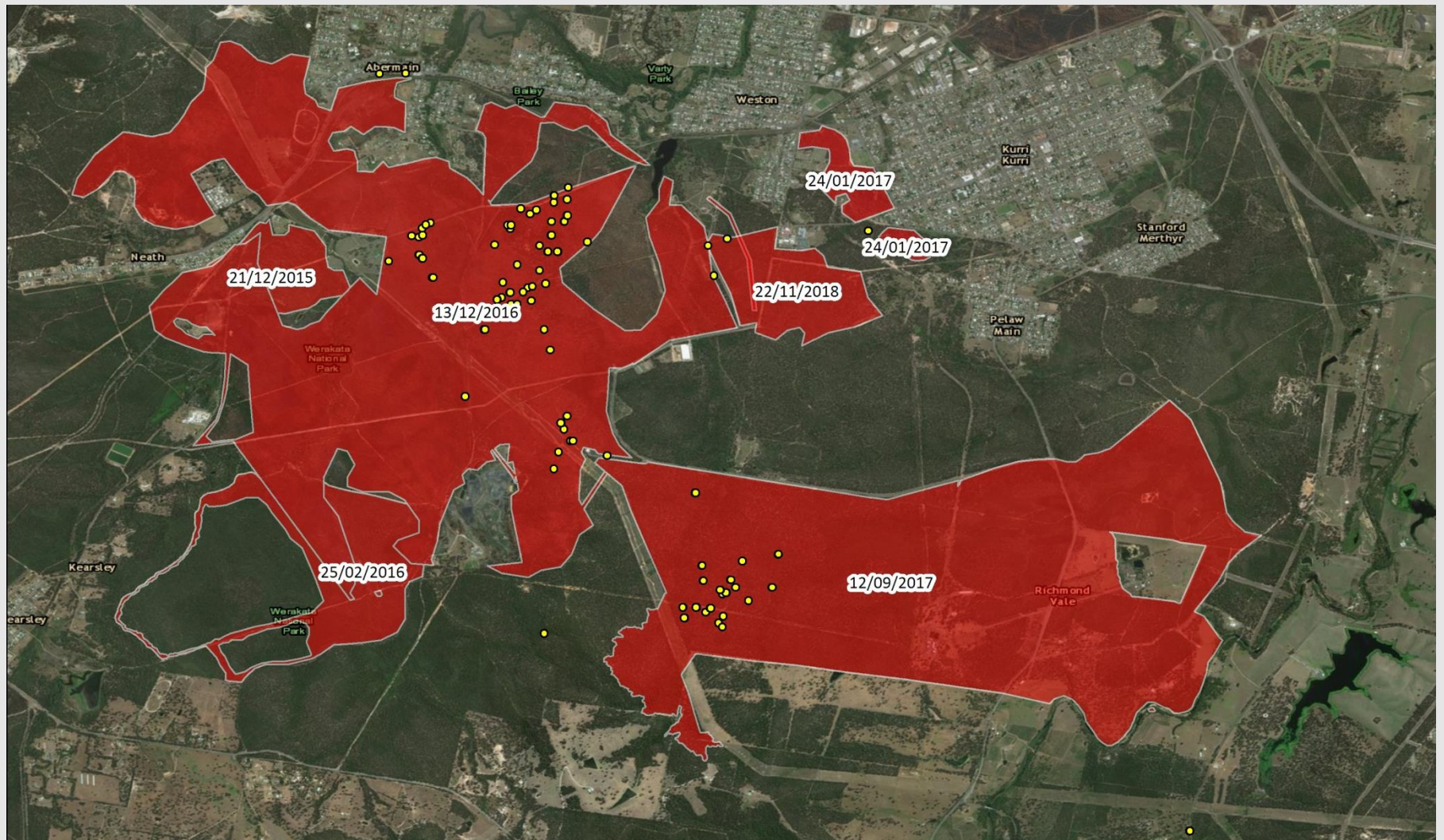
# BirdLife Campaign



Actions	Timeframe
20. Undertake an Environmental Lands Study	Immediate
5. Review the Cessnock Local Environmental Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate the use of environmental zones.</li> <li>To ensure the land uses permissible in each of the environmental zones are consistent with the objectives of the zone.</li> <li>Investigate the extent of industrial zoning within the Hunter Economic Zone (HEZ) in consultation with landowners and State government agencies and rezone significant environmental lands to an appropriate environmental zone.</li> <li>Examine the Urban Release Areas and rezone riparian corridors to an</li> </ul>	Immediate

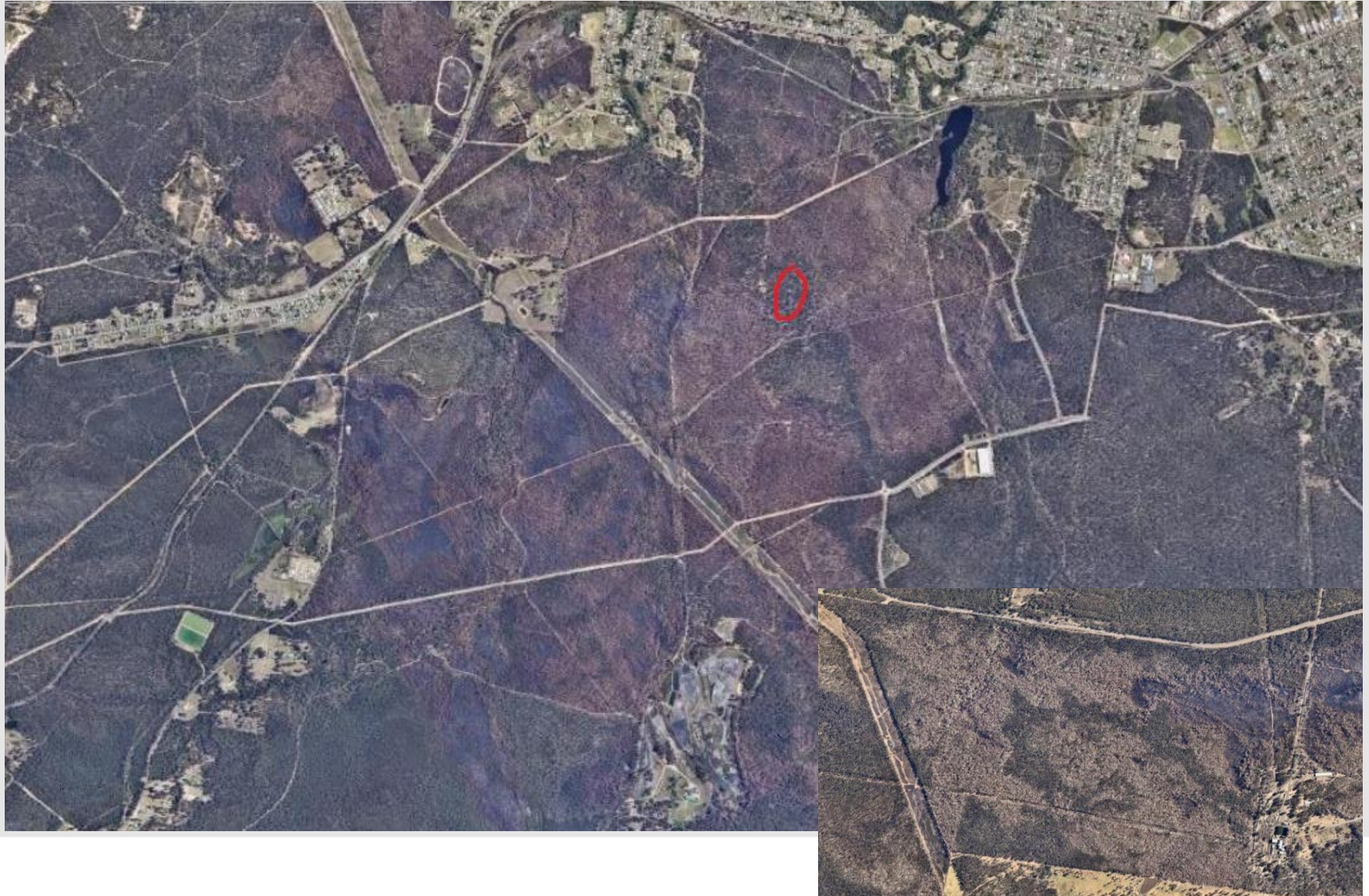
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But also HEZ highly threatened by severe fires....





# HEZ fires have been devastating









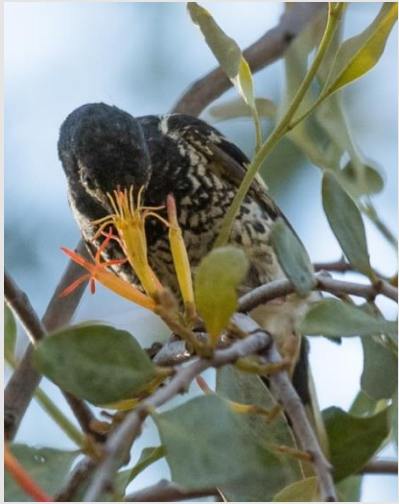
# Profound impacts – mistletoe killed



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# Mistletoe is vital to Regent Honeyeaters here



*Right Photo:  
Andrew Zoneff*

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# Mistletoe recovery in HEZ



Based loosely on  
a City of  
Melbourne  
mistletoe project



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# Mistletoe recovery in HEZ – BirdLife project

Unfortunately the  
fruiting in 2020  
hasn't looked like  
this 😞



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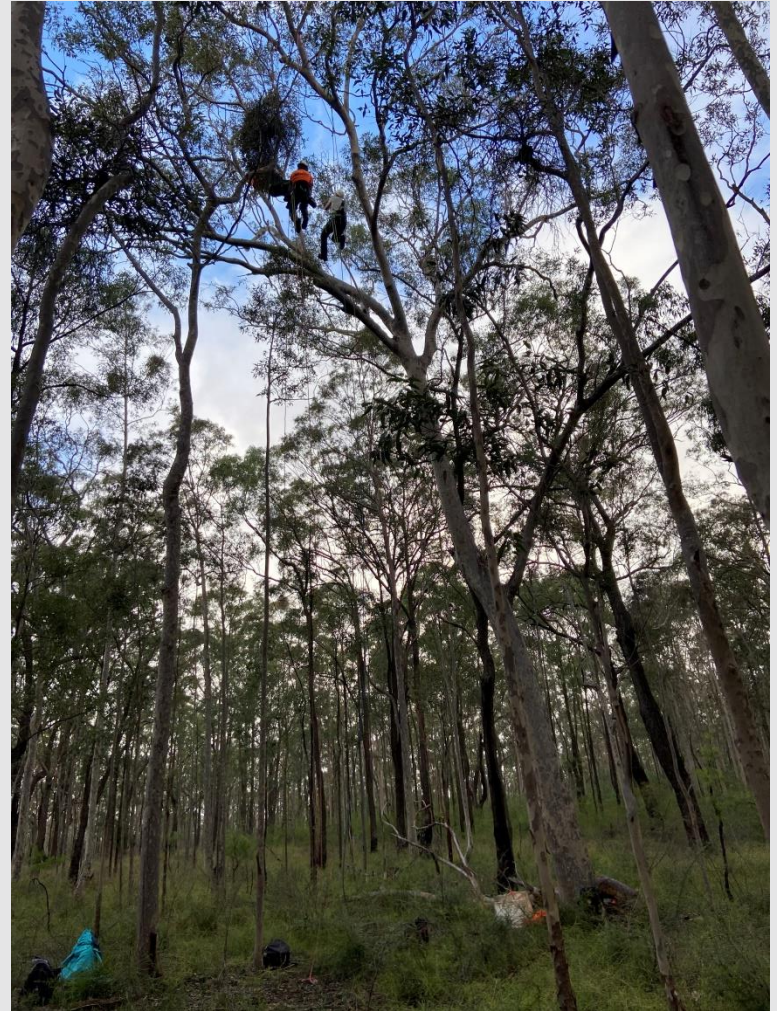




We still managed to get ~60 seeds planted

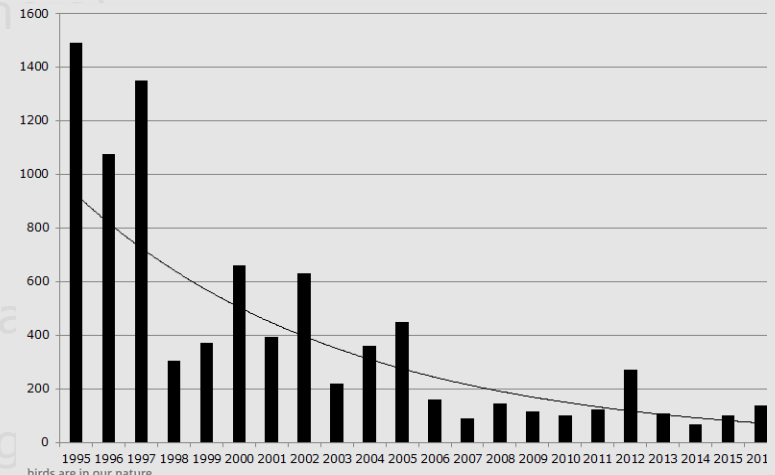


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# Saving the Regent Honeyeater: recovery work summary

- Continue to monitor the population
- Use innovative techniques to answer questions about movements (satellite tags)
- Continue competitor control (Noisy Min)
- Investigate predator dynamics (ANU)
- Investigate Mistletoe loss
- Continue tree-planting / habitat restoration (and protection)
- Continue community awareness-raising
- Whilst maintaining the captive population and expanding the captive release program





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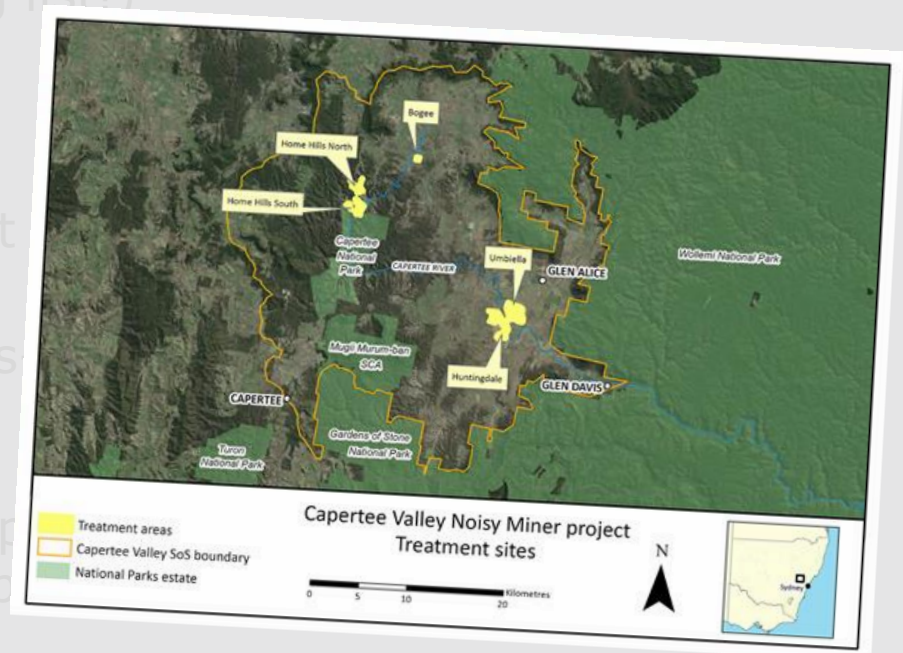
# Saving the Regent Honeyeater: recovery work summary

- Continue to monitor the population
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- Continue competitor control (Noisy Miners)

- Instigate predator control (long list!)
- Investigate Mistletoe loss

- Continue tree-planting / habitat (and protection)
- Continue community awareness

- Whilst maintaining the captive population, expanding the captive release program



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# Saving the Regent Honeyeater: recovery work summary

- Continue to monitor the population
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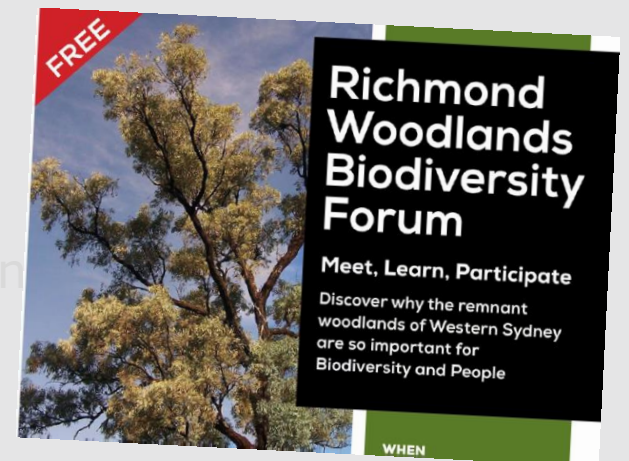
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# Saving the Regent Honeyeater: recovery work summary



- Continue tree-planting / habitat restoration (and protection)
- Continue community awareness-raising
- Whilst maintaining the captive population and expanding the captive release program

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# Saving the Regent Honeyeater: recovery work summary



- Whilst maintaining the captive population and expanding the captive release program

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# Swift Parrot recovery

- Woodland bird program mostly involved with mainland issues and promotion of reporting birds & the sightings database
- Dean Ingwersen current chair of Swift Parrot recovery team



IF YOU SPOT A SWIFT PARROT, CONTACT US:

**03 9347 0757**  
[woodlandbirds@birdlife.org.au](mailto:woodlandbirds@birdlife.org.au)

For more information on the Swift Parrot or if you would like to help support our programs visit: [www.birdlife.org.au](http://www.birdlife.org.au)

A GUIDE TO IDENTIFYING THE CRITICALLY ENDANGERED  
**SWIFT PARROT**

**HOW TO FIND A SWIFTY**  
Swift Parrots aren't easy to find, but there are cues that increase your chances:

- Look for profusely flowering eucalypts (especially ironbarks, box and spotted gum).
- Search for other nectar-feeders, like lorikeets and small honeyeaters.
- Learn the calls – Swift Parrot calls have a distinctive loud 'pip-pip-pip', particularly as they fly off. This is often the only way you will know they are there. You can hear the call by visiting here: [www.birdlife.org.au/bird-profile/swift-parrot](http://www.birdlife.org.au/bird-profile/swift-parrot)

**ECOLOGY & MOVEMENT**



**IF YOU SEE A SWIFTY, LET US KNOW**  
With such a vast potential distribution, searches and sightings by birdwatchers are critical to scientific knowledge and conservation of the Swift Parrot. One of the best ways to record a sighting is to take a photo, no matter how poor the quality may be. This can allow us to age the birds, help determine behaviour and identify the habitat they're using. Wherever possible, it is also important to document:

- Date and time of observation
- Location (as specific as possible)
- Number of Swift Parrots seen (and/or heard)
- Behaviour and other species present
- The presence of flowering eucalypts, iron or other food

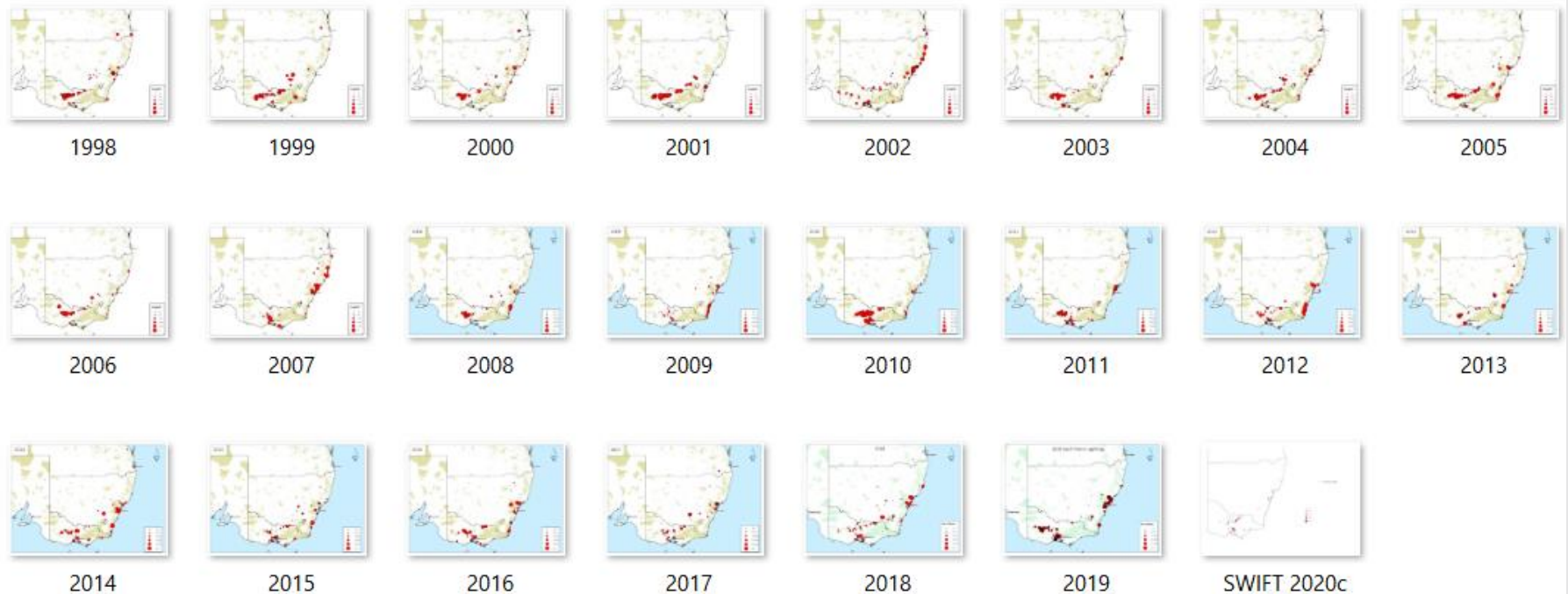


# Annual variation of Swifty mainland distribution

- Over time we get a good grasp on what are high priority areas / sites (and hence where to focus recovery work)
- Only possible with volunteer support and reporting birds

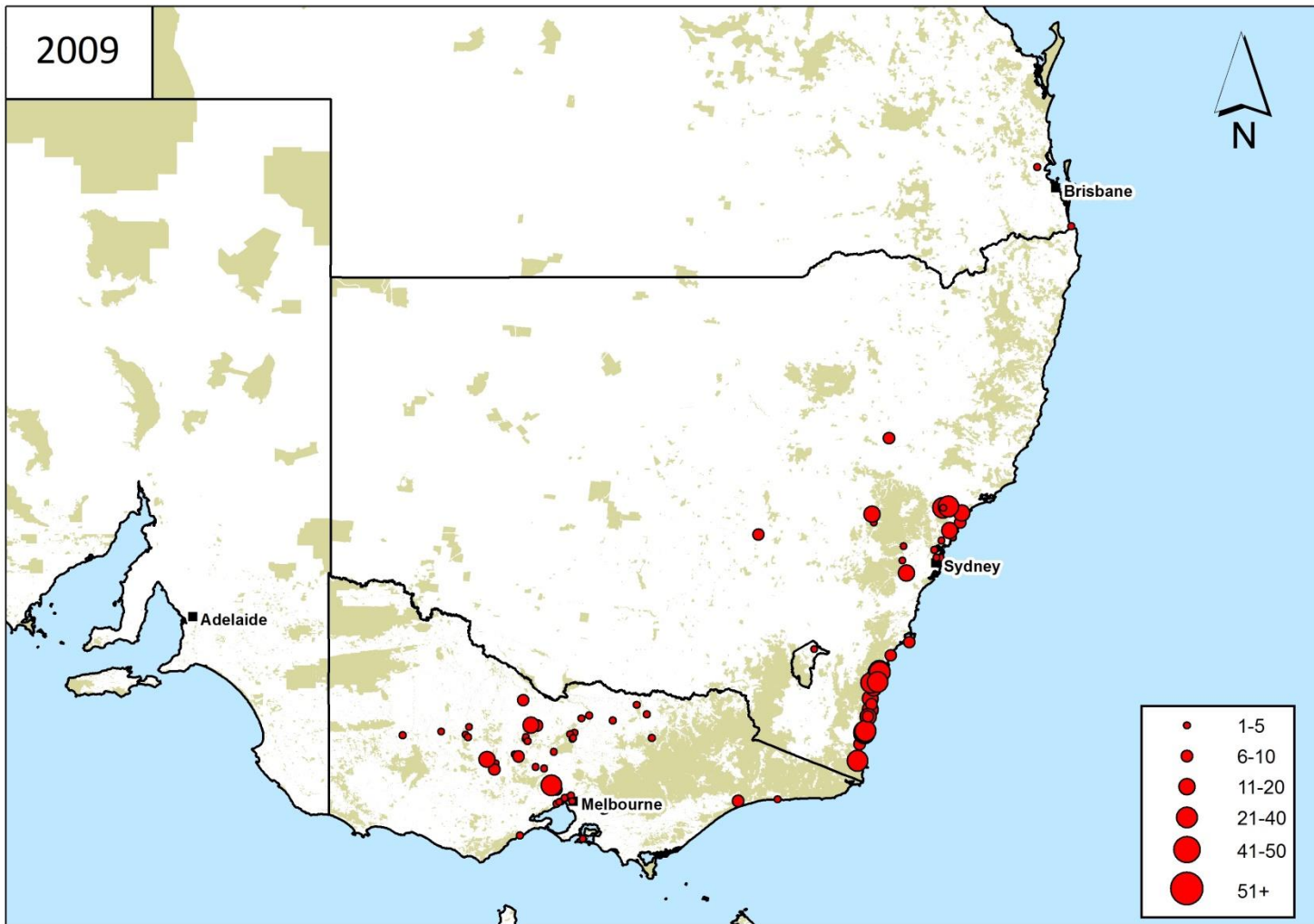


# Annual variation of Swifty mainland distribution



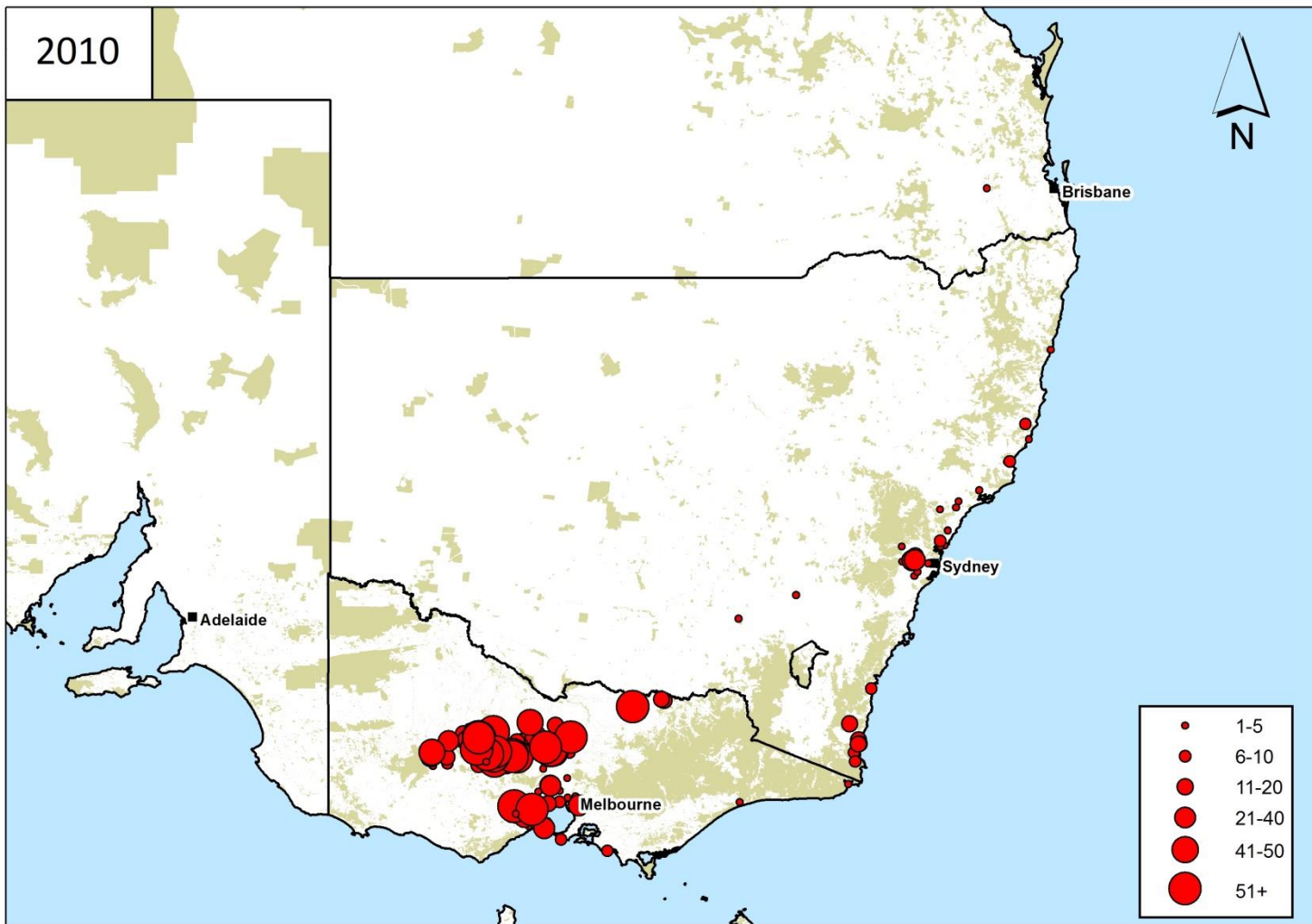


# Annual variation of Swifty mainland distribution



birds are in

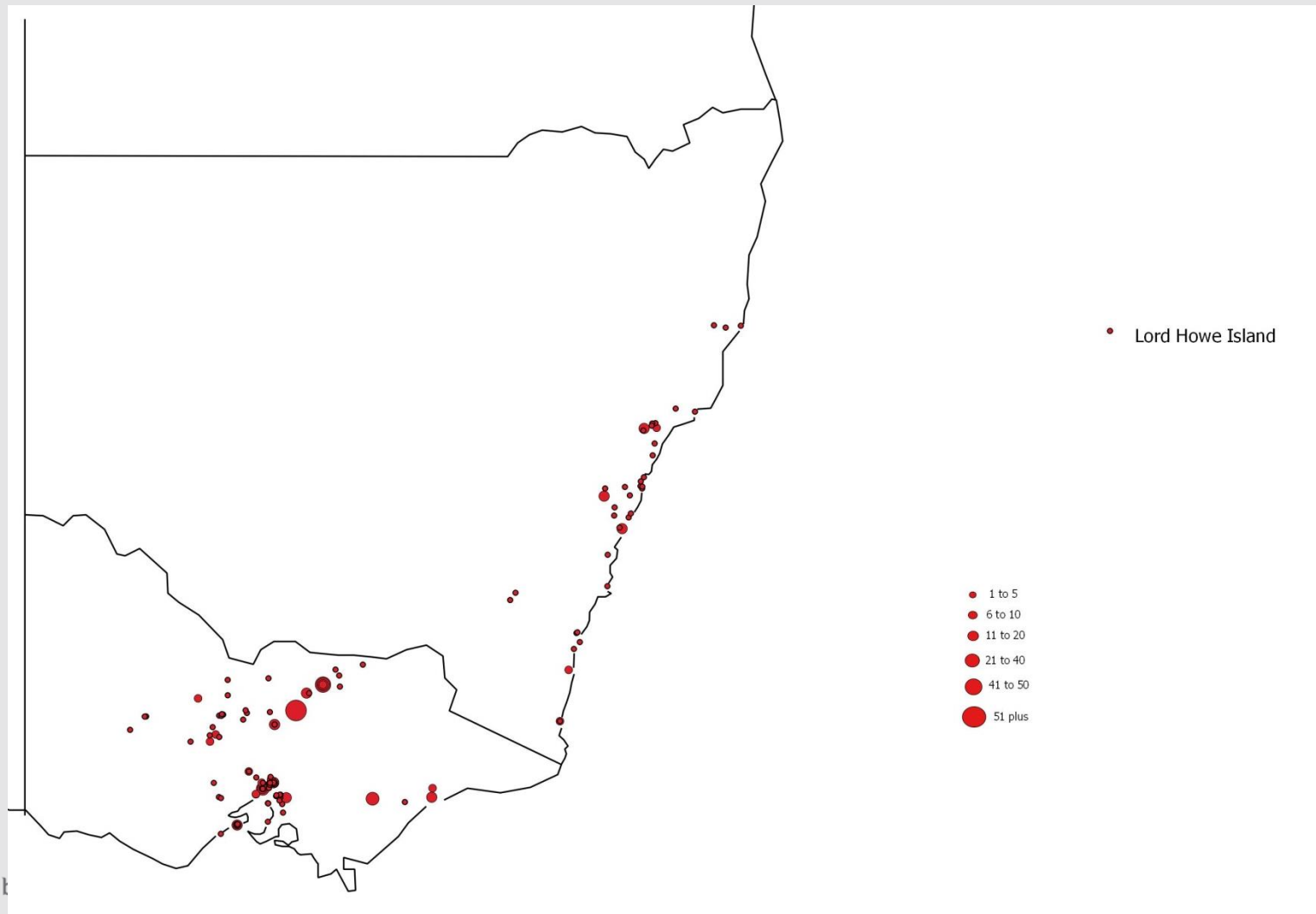
# Annual variation of Swifty mainland distribution



birds are in



# Swift Parrot – so far in 2020 – *not many in NSW/Qld*



# Yes that red dot in the Pacific is correct!

Image: Supplied: Jack Shick

## Critically endangered swift parrot found in chook pen on Lord Howe Island, miles off migratory course

On Your Afternoon with Jane Longhurst

Share



Download 3.29 MB

Ornithologist Mark Holdsworth tells Jane Longhurst about a swift parrot found in a chook pen miles off its migratory course.



“Houdini”

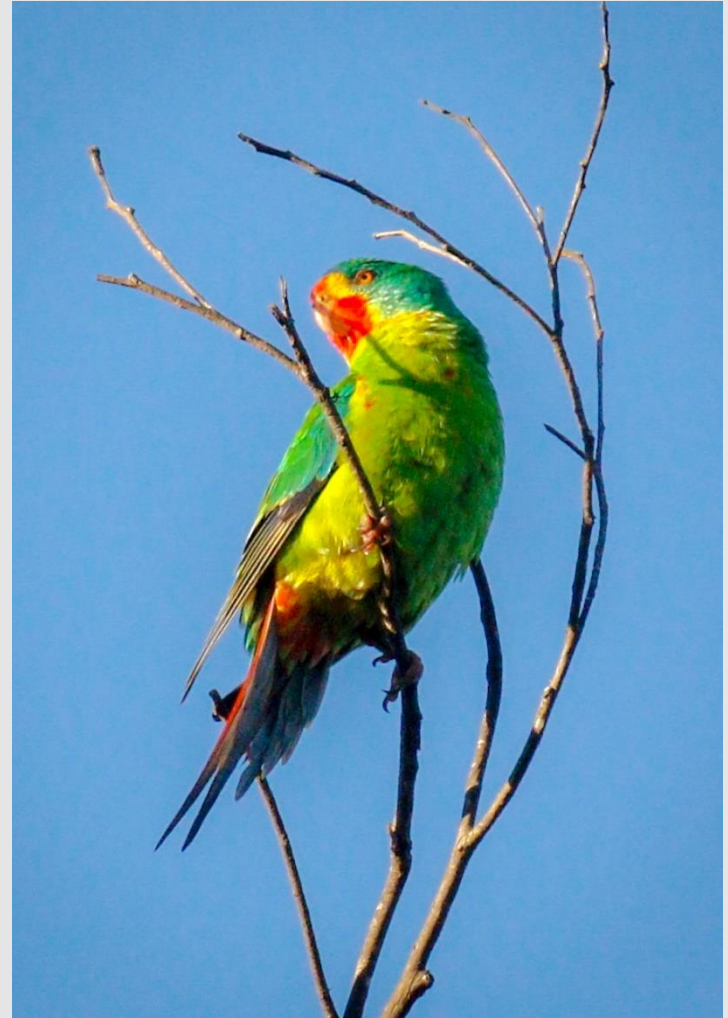
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# Freedom!

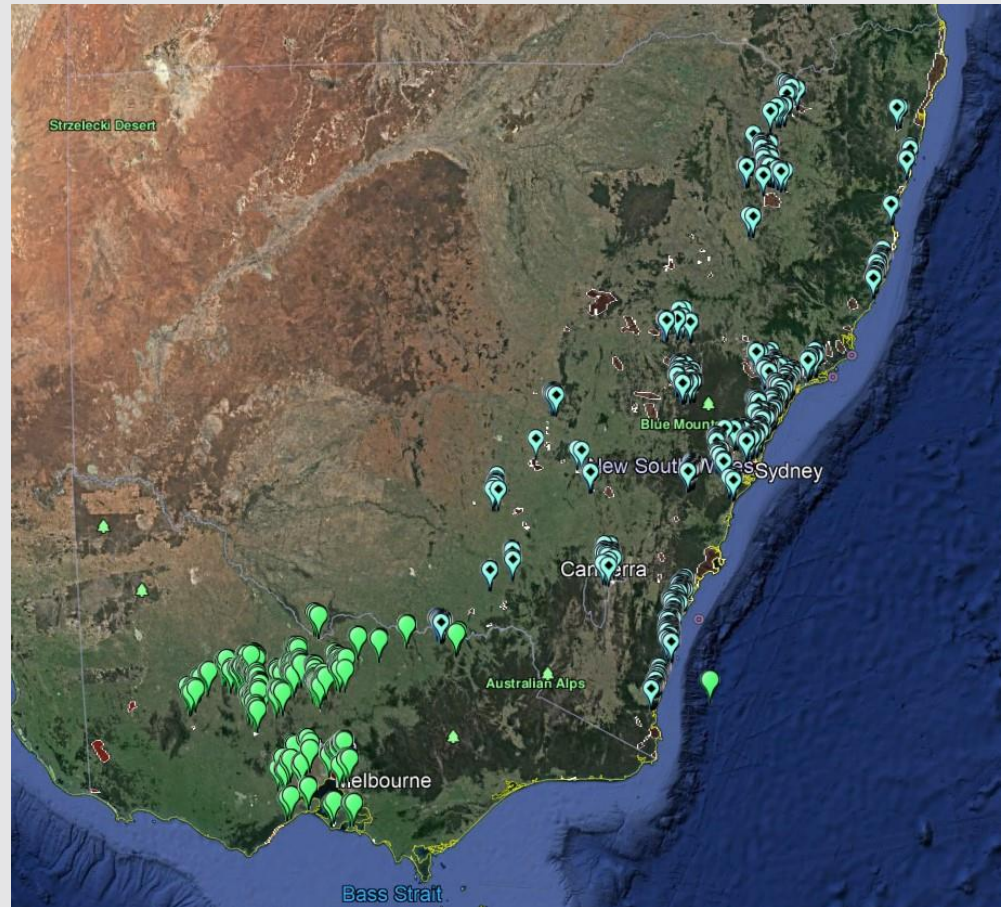


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# Swift Parrot mainland monitoring – *a change is the air*

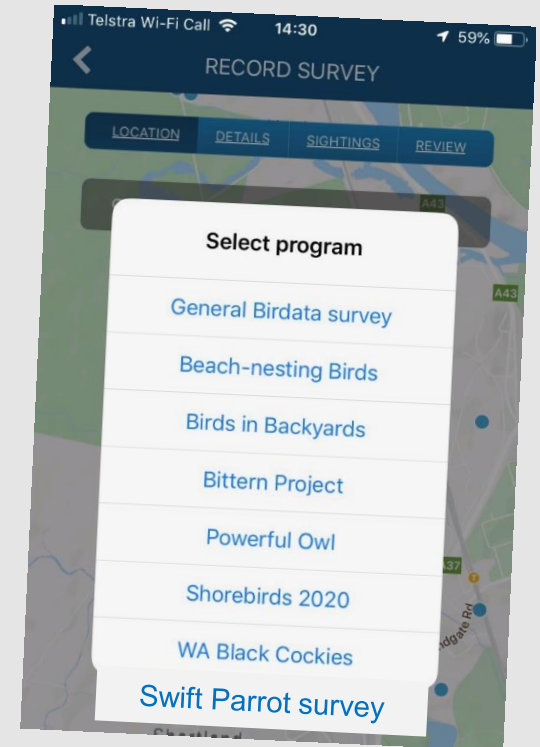
- In conjunction with ANU
- $\pm 4000$  survey points
  - All on public land
  - Where SP known to occur historically
  - Where they could potentially occur based on habitat, landscape, climate, etc.
- Robust and repeatable scientific data collection
- Continental-scale flowering patterns





# Swift Parrot mainland monitoring

- Survey points visited twice per year
  - 4-6 week period in Autumn
  - 4-6 week period in late Winter / early Spring
- Rapid assessment: 5 minute – 50 metre radius
  - Presence of Swifties
  - Counts for all other bird species
  - Flowering intensity of various eucalypts
- Support material for birdwatchers
- Apps, website and datasheets for data
- 2019 ground-truthing, trial-run 2020, full roll-out 2021



# Swift Parrot Nature Laws Campaign

- Particularly important in wake of fires
- As much as 30% of Swift Parrot habitat on the Australian mainland has been fire-affected

## Proposed NSW logging laws value timber over environmental protection

by Oisín Sweeney, The Conversation



Increased logging in NSW could affect threatened species. Credit: Nativesrule,...



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# Plenty of materials available –booklets, magnets etc

**A GUIDE TO IDENTIFYING THE CRITICALLY ENDANGERED REGENT HONEYEATER**

**INTRODUCTION**  
The Regent Honeyeater is a medium-sized bird living in woodland and forest in south-east Australia. They are known as a 'rich patch nomad', moving around the landscape to follow flowering (more accurately the nectar flows) of their favoured tree species.

**HOW TO FIND A REGENT**

1. Look for flowering gum trees (especially ironbarks, box and spotted gum).
2. Check flowering mistletoe in gum trees or river.

**POPULATION DECLINE**  
In the mid-1800s Regent Honeyeaters were enthusiastically described as occurring in 'thousands' in some locations, and as recently as the early 1900s were at times the most common species in an area. Unfortunately this is no longer the case with fewer than 500 estimated to still survive in the wild. Now considered extinct in western Victoria and South Australia, the

**ANTHOCHAERA PHRYGIA**

**Report a Regent!**

Regent Honeyeaters are **Critically Endangered** in Australia

All Regent Honeyeater sightings are important. Report a sighting to BirdLife Australia on 1800 621 056 or [dean.ingwersen@birdlife.org.au](mailto:dean.ingwersen@birdlife.org.au) or [mick.roderick@birdlife.org.au](mailto:mick.roderick@birdlife.org.au)

This project is supported by Local Land Services, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program

**Woodland Birds of south-east Australia**

Identification booklet

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birdlife AUSTRALIA

**IF YOU SPOT A SWIFT PARROT, CONTACT US:**

**03 9347 0757**  
[woodlandbirds@birdlife.org.au](mailto:woodlandbirds@birdlife.org.au)

For more information on the Swift Parrot or if you would like to help support our programs visit: [www.birdlife.org.au](http://www.birdlife.org.au)

**A GUIDE TO IDENTIFYING THE CRITICALLY ENDANGERED SWIFT PARROT**

**HOW TO FIND A SWIFT**  
Swift Parrots aren't easy to find, but there are cues that increase your chances:

- Look for profusely flowering eucalypts (especially ironbarks, box and spotted gum).
- Search for other nectar-feeders, like lorikeets and small honeyeaters.
- Learn the calls – Swift Parrot calls have a distinctive loud 'pip-pip-pip', particularly as they fly off. This is often the only way you will know they are there. You can hear the call by visiting here: [www.birdlife.org.au/bird-profile/swift-parrot](http://www.birdlife.org.au/bird-profile/swift-parrot)

**ECOLOGY & MOVEMENT**

Core Range  
Secondary Range

**IF YOU SEE A SWIFT, LET US KNOW**  
With such a vast potential distribution, searches and sightings by birdwatchers are critical to scientific knowledge and conservation of the Swift Parrot. One of the best ways to record a sighting is to take a photo, no matter how poor the quality may be. This can allow us to age the birds, help determine behaviour and identify the habitat they're using. Wherever possible, it is also important to document:

- Date and time of observation
- Location (as specific as possible)
- Number of Swift Parrots seen (and/or heard)
- Behaviour and other species present
- The presence of flowering eucalypts, ironbark or other food

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## Contact details

***To report Regent Honeyeaters (or Swift Parrots)***

Freecall 1800 621 056 / 0421 761237 / [mick.roderick@birdlife.org.au](mailto:mick.roderick@birdlife.org.au)

Or [woodlandbirds@birdlife.org.au](mailto:woodlandbirds@birdlife.org.au)

National survey weekends – 3<sup>rd</sup> weekend in May + 1<sup>st</sup> weekend in August each year – **EXCEPT 2020!**

***Just as important to be looking any time...***

***And records are very important at any time***

# Thanks for listening!



birds are in our nature