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
The **most threatened** `woodland birds’ are....

Regent Honeyeater

Swift Parrot
The ‘woodland bird flagships’ are....

- Regent Honeyeater
- Swift Parrot

birds are in our nature
Introducing the Regent Honeyeater
Introducing the Regent Honeyeater
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...
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)
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

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*

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

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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
2019 Regent Honeyeaters
2019 breeding success – only 5 confirmed broods
2019 breeding success – two nests in Western Sydney

Mulgoa
*Photo: Gen Kyi*

South Maroota
*Photo: Jackie Fiess*

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Regent Honeyeater Recovery Plan

- Recovery Team in place since 1994
- National Recovery Plan (April 2016)
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
Regent Honeyeater recovery partners

MONASH University

University of New England

NSW Government

Local Land Services
Greater Sydney

Local Land Services
North West

TARONGA
Conservation Society Australia

Australian Government
National Landcare Programme

Australian National University

Biodiversity Conservation Trust

Chiltern

Local Land Services
Hunter

NSW Government

Local Land Services
Central Tablelands

State Government
Environment, Land, Water and Planning

Friends of Chiltern McPilot National Park

NSW Government

Parks Victoria

TRUST FOR NATURE
Habitat forever

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Recovery Action – Banding (2018-2019 very lean)

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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

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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
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.
Noisy Miner controls – 2017 example
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
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
Recovery Action - Captive Breeding & Release

New aviaries at Taronga Western Plains in Dubbo
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 birds have successfully bred with each other.
And captive-bred birds are capable of travel

2nd 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’
As we speak
2020 release – Lower Hunter Valley

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2020 release – Lower Hunter Valley

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

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

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

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

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2020 release – Covid-safe transmitter fitting!

birds are in our nature
Monitoring team underway!

- Will be monitored for 12 wks
- 4 people / 7 days a week
2020 release – background

Apiarist’s assessment confirmed nectar supply for >2 months
2020 birds – Lower Hunter ‘wild birds’

- First detected 30\textsuperscript{th} May (2 birds)
- Grew to 13 birds by 17\textsuperscript{th} 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
‘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
And we have mixed flocks! 😊
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Release birds yesterday (6th July)
Banding re-sighting – “ROBM”

“ROBM” – banded at Neranie July 2019

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“Neranie flock” – rare opportunity for Taronga
“Neranie flock” – rare opportunity for Taronga
Satellite transmitters

birds are in our nature
Satellite transmitters

birds are in our nature
Satellite transmitters ("Reggie")

birds are in our nature
Neranie trial – bird unable to fly – back to drawing board
BirdLife campaigns at Regent Honeyeater breeding sites

A Valley of Hope
Australia must act now to protect Regent Honeyeater foraging and breeding habitat.
Breeding locations – past fifteen years

Most nests in past 15 years
- Capertee Valley
- **Lower Hunter Valley**#
- Goulburn River
- **Burragorang Valley**#

*birds are in our nature*
A vitally important contemporary breeding area under threat

Warragamba Dam expansion

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Support existing *Give A Dam* campaign

A Valley of Hope

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

Burrarorang Valley
Amending key Regent Honeyeater KBAs

Burragarong Valley

Also:
Wolgan
Widden
Baerami

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Evidence of past usage of Fernhill
= site fidelity
= very important!

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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!

Rare Birds Successfully Breed in Mulgoa

Source: Greater Sydney Local Land Services
Archived 6 Apr 2020 - Posted: 10 Feb 2020

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Hunter Economic Zone (HEZ) Campaign

birds are in our nature
Hunter Economic Zone (HEZ) Campaign

birds are in our nature
Only 2018 breeding location also under threat

40+ individuals
5 broods confirmed

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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

birds are in our nature
### Actions

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<tr>
<td><strong>20.</strong></td>
<td>Undertake an Environmental Lands Study</td>
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<td><strong>5.</strong></td>
<td>Review the Cessnock Local Environmental Plan:</td>
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<td>- Investigate the use of environmental zones.</td>
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<td>- To ensure the land uses permissible in each of the environmental zones are consistent with the objectives of the zone.</td>
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<td>- 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.</td>
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<td>- Examine the Urban Release Areas and rezone riparian corridors to an</td>
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Birds are in our nature
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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Unfortunately the fruiting in 2020 hasn’t looked like this 😞
We still managed to get ~60 seeds planted
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 Miners)
- 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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birds are in our nature
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
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
Annual variation of Swifty mainland distribution
Swift Parrot – so far in 2020 – *not many in NSW/Qld*
Yes that red dot in the Pacific is correct!

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

On Your Afternoon with Jane Longhurst.

“Houdini”

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Freedom!
birds are in our nature
Swift Parrot mainland monitoring – *a change is the air*

- In conjunction with ANU
- ± 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 Glen Sweeney, The Conversation

Increased logging in NSW could affect threatened species. Credit: Nativesrule,...
‘Warm’ off the press - Regent Honeyeater booklet
Plenty of materials available – booklets, magnets etc
To report Regent Honeyeaters (or Swift Parrots)

Freecall 1800 621 056 / 0421 761237 / mick.roderick@birdlife.org.au

Or woodlandbirds@birdlife.org.au

National survey weekends – 3rd weekend in May + 1st 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