

Landcare UpHunter

Spring 2016

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Regent Honeyeater Restoration Project

In the early 1900's, from Brisbane to Adelaide, flocks of a thousand or more Regent honeyeaters were recorded. By the 1980's it was rare to see even a 100 of these native birds together. Today the total population in Australia is around 350-400 and mainly found in selected areas of Victoria and New South Wales.

It is now listed as "Critically Endangered" by Federal and State governments.

The Regent honeyeater has a black head, neck and upper breast contrasting with lemon-yellow back and lower breast, black tail and yellow edging feathers. An adult is 20– 24cms. long with a 30cm. wing span and weighs up to 50 grams.

It feeds on nectar-producing, blossoming trees and is reliant on Eucalypts such as Yellow box (*Eucalyptus melliodora*) and Blakeley's red gum (*Eucalyptus blakelyi*) that occur in dry, box ironbark open forest and woodland areas along the Great Dividing Range (the Great Eastern Ranges). Whilst it feeds on a small number of eucalypt species, it provides pollination for many flowering plants.

Land clearing, diminishing food sources and competition from other honeyeaters contributed to its sharp decline. It leads a mainly nomadic life searching for food.

The Great Dividing Range is Australia's longest mountain range covers over 3,600 kilometres from south-east Victoria to far north Queensland. The Hunter region is ecologically unique due to a natural gap in the Great Eastern Ranges, creating a pinch-point in this landscape. Movement corridors between the east and west as well as those to the north and south are important for connectivity. The western slopes of the Ranges also provide important Regent honeyeater habitat, one of its few migration and nesting areas.

Hunter Bird Observers Club and BirdLife Australia volunteers keep watch for this Critically Endangered bird and in Spring they particularly observe known breeding sites in both the Upper and Lower parts of the Valley.

This November two, separate, adult pairs of Regent honeyeaters have been observed in the Upper Hunter (Goulburn River NP) and an adult pair and a fledgling seen feeding on Silky Oak trees in the Lower Hunter (Cessnock area). It is thought the fledgling was no more than a couple of weeks out of its nest. Whilst Regent honeyeater nests have been seen in the Lower Hunter in recent years this is the first confirmed sighting of a fledgling since 2008. Wow!

The Hunter Great Eastern Ranges (or HGER for short) has a partnership with John Holland Rail (on behalf of Transport for NSW) and the Taronga Conservation Society Australia, helping us to deliver a Regent Honeyeater Restoration Project along the disused rail corridor from Merriwa to Sandy Hollow. It focusses on increasing community education of native wildlife, restoring habitat connectivity and increasing biodiversity in non-operational rail corridors.

As part of this project, over 2,000 grassy box woodland tube stock have been planted this year to improve habitat for the Regent honeyeater and many other native plants and animals in the area.

With ongoing partnership funding from Transport for NSW more schools and communities will be engaged in this process, helping support Regent honeyeater survival outcomes in the Hunter.

Jaci Tebb

Regent Honeyeater (*Anthochaera phrygia*)
Observed feeding on Silky Oak trees in the Lower Hunter,
November 2016

Photo: Shelly Zvingulis



Life's a Zoo - and more

As part of its Regent Honeyeater Restoration project, staff from the Hunter Great Eastern Ranges, John Holland and Taronga Zoo, held a one-day workshop for primary school students from Merriwa Central and Sandy Hollow. The workshop aimed to develop students understanding of locally occurring, threatened native species and to increase their commitment to the protection of the natural environment.

Completing general bird surveys, learning about seed identification and propagation, planting trees in school grounds, working on environmental plans to present at school, families and community were all part of this very hands-on day.

Imagine everyone's delight when the Taronga Zoomobile arrived. What a really 'wild' drawcard! Students got up close and personal with native fauna like echidna, ring-tailed possum, frogs and shingleback lizard (teachers loved it too).

Children learnt about the behaviours of these native animals, their habitats and how they are cared for in the Zoo. They learnt that whilst it is most important to see these animals surviving in the wild, the Zoo provides the opportunity to help educate many more boys and girls just like them about the animals and how to protect them in the wild.

The spikes of the Echidna required a careful pat in the right direction whilst the rough scales of the Shingle-back lizard had many a Childs' face screwed up but eager to touch this animal out of fascination. The Green tree frogs' bright colours were a real hit too. No doubt many children went home wishing they too could be a zookeeper one day.

After all the excitement of a day in school learning about their local wildlife, the children were ecstatic to participate in an excursion a week later, at the two-hectare restoration site along the disused rail corridor at Gungal. Students planted over 300 trees at the site helping to create Regent Honeyeater habitat. Blakely's red gum, Rough-barked apple and Yellow box were some of the blossoming trees planted. Located between the Goulburn River National Park and Manobalai Nature Reserve this site creates a 'stepping stone' for improving wildlife movement in the area.

We had an awesome morning, with a barbecue back at Sandy Hollow school to feed appetites after all the hard work.

In 2017, more schools in the Upper Hunter will be given the opportunity to participate in Regent Honeyeater workshops and planting days to increase the food sources and habitat for the Regent honeyeater and other animals.

Jaci Tebb



Feeding & Nesting

We have more than 60 different types of honeyeaters in Australia. They come in different sizes, shapes and colours. How many species of honeyeaters do you know and how many can you find in books, on the internet or on an app?

Honeyeaters look for soft material to line their nest. Some are happy to use flowers or feathers but the White-eared honeyeater picks fur from other wildlife—possums, wallabies, kangaroos or koalas even while they are sleeping.

Have you seen birds picking fur from animals? If you get the chance (especially in Spring or Summer) watch the next kangaroo you see sound asleep. You might see a honeyeater filling its beak with fur before flying off to line their nest.

A honeyeater has a beak and tongue specially designed to get nectar from plants. Nectar is a sweet liquid in a flower that gives honeyeaters energy to help it grow and survive. Their tongue is brush-tipped so that they can scoop up the nectar from inside a flower. Regent honeyeaters live mainly on nectar but occasionally eat insects or even spiders but the White-eared honeyeater eats insects mostly but also takes sap (liquid) from trees already damaged by insects.

What are the differences between a White-throated honeyeater, a Black-chinned honeyeater and a Brown-headed honeyeater? Can they all be found in the Hunter Valley? Have a look on the birdlife.org.au website for some answers.

Ruth Hardy

Murrurundi Landcare Group

For over 20 years Murrurundi Landcare Group have been working to restore native on-ground and riparian habitat around their town. On the 1st and 3rd Sunday of each month our Pages River Warriors volunteers meet at Wilson Memorial Oval to clear weeds and scrub, trim trees and plant native tube stock along the Pages River and the Oval.

Removing Privet has been a long-term endeavour and one we are finally seeing is showing significant results. We cut the Privet at above ground level, paint the stump and wait until it is fairly easy and ready to remove stump and roots.

This year we have been able to plant in some of the old, cleared Privet areas. Natives like Hickory Wattle (*Acacia implexa*), Forest redgum (*Eucalyptus tereticornis*) and other *Acacia* and *Eucalypt* species have gone in the ground. Along the riverbank, by the Oval, Spiny mat rush tube stock (*Lomandra longifolia*) have been planted to increase the native vegetation cover, provide stabilisation to this section of the Pages River and to decrease soil erosion.

Sandy Archibold



Resources

Frog & Tadpole Study Group of NSW - you can access their website for information at <http://www.fats.org.au/>

LandSmart app for sustainable property management: Information for landholders/managers (particularly city-based landholders with rural properties - smart management practices, looking after land sustainably and responsibly. Access expert advice, resources, information from your smartphone. <http://landsmart.ils.nsw.gov.au/>

National standards for ecological restoration: Society for Ecological Restoration Australasia has published national standards to increase the likelihood of successful restoration. Relevant for minimally resourced community projects to large-scale industry and government projects. <http://www.seraustralasia.com/standards/contents.html>

National Biosecurity Act 2016: This has replaced the Quarantine Act 1908. Co-administered by Ministers of Agriculture, Water Resources and Health. <http://agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity/legislation/new-biosecurity-legislation>

Teabag decomposition research: The EU Soil Data Centre is seeking citizen scientists around the world to bury teabags as part of its research to measure rates of plant decomposition globally. Find out about how you can participate at <http://esdac.jrc.ec.europa.eu/networkcooperations/tea-bag-index>

Climate Smart Agriculture Guide: Provides detailed guidance on planning/finance and worldwide case studies. Website developed by the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security with contributions from World Bank experts, CGIAR and many other institutions work on these issues <http://csa.guide>

Key to drought resistant trees: US study that found trees most resistant to drought are those that are better at withstanding stress to the water transport system carrying water from roots to the crown. Water inches up the xylem to replace water evaporating from the leaf surface. When water is scarce, trees have to pull much harder on the water in the xylem, which allows air bubbles to infiltrate. Bubbles cause blockages, or embolisms, that clog the pipes the way a blood clot blocks flow through an artery. Go to <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/04/160418161353.htm>

Funding

Farming Together—\$14.9 million initiative for primary producers and processors to collaborate and claim marketplace power, building financial and social sustainability. Provides farmers with free one-on-one consultation, opportunity to create collaborative groups and product research and development assistance. Go to www.farmingtogether.com.au

The Community Grants Hub (on behalf of the Department of Social Services) - Volunteer Grants Program to support the efforts of Australia's volunteers. Small grants \$1,000 to 5,000 including for equipment, volunteer training, general operating and fuel costs. Applications close 20th December. Go to <https://www.communitygrants.gov.au/grants/volunteer-grants-2016>

Events for your Diary

Landcare UpHunter stall - farming, environment, Landcare, education resources, plants/herbs. Visit us at:

Bloom Markets at Scone Public School, Liverpool St, Scone on Saturday 3rd of December from 9.00am to 2.00pm

Merriwa Landcare Group activities: Christmas BBQ & Native Tree Workshop Expo at Merriwa CWA Rooms, Golden Highway, Merriwa on Tuesday 13th December between 4.00pm-7.00pm

Learn about Merriwa Landcare Tree Planting & Biodiversity Project or Native Tree Seed Collection, Identification & Propagation series for 2017. Contact Jenny Lee on 0429 337 557 for more information.

Quad Bike Safety training in 2017 - for farmers & farm workers.

Live in the Upper Hunter Shire & interested in a one-day subsidised Quad Bike Safety training course in your local area?

Call Ruth on 0407 232 539 or email landcareuphunter@gmail.com for information or register your interest.

Glenbawn Catchment Landcare Group. Contact Gavin MacCallum glenbawncatchment@outlook.com

Merriwa Landcare Group. Contact Jenny Lee on 0429 337 557

Murrurundi Landcare Group just Email Sandy@boydscreek.com.au

Pages River Warriors Working Bee Wilson Memorial Oval, Murrurundi 1st & 3rd Sunday monthly (morning) Email Sandy@boydscreek.com.au

Landcare UpHunter & Scone Landcare—refer details below



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Landcare UpHunter

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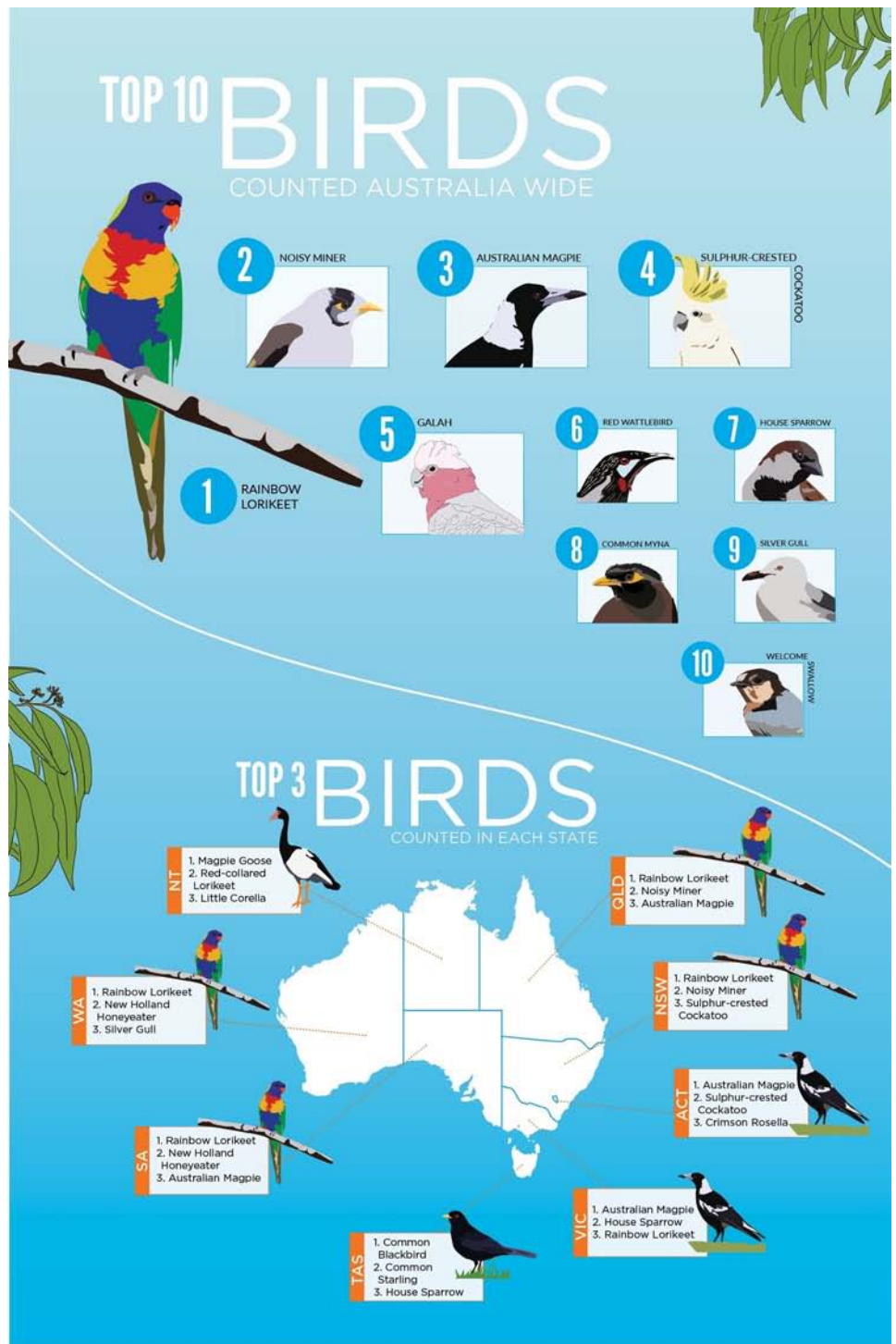
Contact: Ruth Hardy

Tel: 0407 232 539

Email: landcareuphunter@gmail.com

Aussie Backyard Bird Count—Results

BirdLife Australia's 2016 Aussie Backyard Bird Count resulted in 1,398,487 birds recorded and 583 different species. A total of 61,418 people across the country participated in this annual event with 489,210 birds counted in NSW.



Next year's Aussie Backyard Bird Count will be held from 23 - 29 OCTOBER 2017



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Visit us at www.landcare.nsw.gov.au/groups/scone-landcare-group