

# Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater Update from May 2017 surveys

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Once again, we would like to thank all of our volunteers and volunteer coordinators for all your hard work during the May 2017 surveys. We are especially thankful for your enthusiasm, even when these elusive species can be so difficult to find. Thus far, 2017 has been an interesting year; it seems that a good spread of flowering trees, especially across NSW and Victoria, has dispersed individuals of both species across wider areas. However, there have been a few 'hotspots', particularly in the Hunter Valley (for both Swift Parrots and Regent Honeyeaters; read more below) and the forests around Ingalba Nature Reserve (near Temora) in NSW, with a recent record of well over 100 Swift Parrots. We anticipate another exciting **August survey weekend** on the **5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup>**, which, like last year, will hopefully yield more birds than the May surveys. With your help, we will cover as much ground as possible to locate Swift Parrots and Regent Honeyeaters, to add to our long-term database and provide valuable information on these Critically Endangered species. If you would like to participate in the August survey weekend, see below for more details or contact [woodlandbirds@birdlife.org.au](mailto:woodlandbirds@birdlife.org.au).

## Swift Parrot



### *Victoria*

During the May 2017 survey weekend (including a week either side) there were 22 positive records of Swift Parrots across Victoria, which was more than May 2016 (18 positive records). Similar to last year, a large proportion of records (including recent incidental sightings) were in central and north-west Victoria (see map below), including regular haunts such as Talbot, Amherst, St Arnaud, Muckleford, Heathcote and Eaglehawk (near Bendigo). Swift Parrots may have been attracted to flowering Yellow Gum and Ironbark trees throughout the goldfields area. Records were widespread across this area and group sizes were small (1 – 24), which may be due to widespread food resources.

There were fewer records on the south-west coast compared to previous years, but Swift Parrots were recorded at their old stomping ground in Yellow Gum Estate at Ocean Grove. There was also a recent sighting of 10 birds at nearby Bannockburn Bushland Reserve. In the north-east there were records (six separate records over the past few months) of small groups of Swift Parrots at Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park, and the species was also recorded at Boweya. There were a few records in far west Victoria, including Warrnambool (at the Deakin University campus) and Hamilton. There was

only one record for Gippsland, in the town of Seaspray, despite pockets of flowering in East Gippsland in the hills behind Bairnsdale and Maffra.

Compared to May last year there were more records in Melbourne, which included Greensborough (near the Plenty River, in a similar location to previous years) in the north-east of Melbourne, Parkville (Royal Park), Coburg, Newport and Altona close to the city, and in the south-east suburbs of Knox, Clayton and Kilsyth South.

Overall, groups sizes were small across all of Victoria, with an average group size of 5.7 (range 1 – 50). This is comparable to recent years, but historic records have demonstrated groups of up to 200 within Victoria. The largest group (around 50 birds) recorded this year was in Boweya in north-east Victoria.

An interesting finding this year was the early arrival of Swift Parrots, with a small group of birds recorded at Clunes in central Victoria in January. This has been the earliest record of Swift Parrots for a number of years.



**A Swift Parrot in a roadside Yellow Gum near Bacchus Marsh, Victoria (taken by Bernie McRitchie).**

#### *NSW, ACT & QLD*

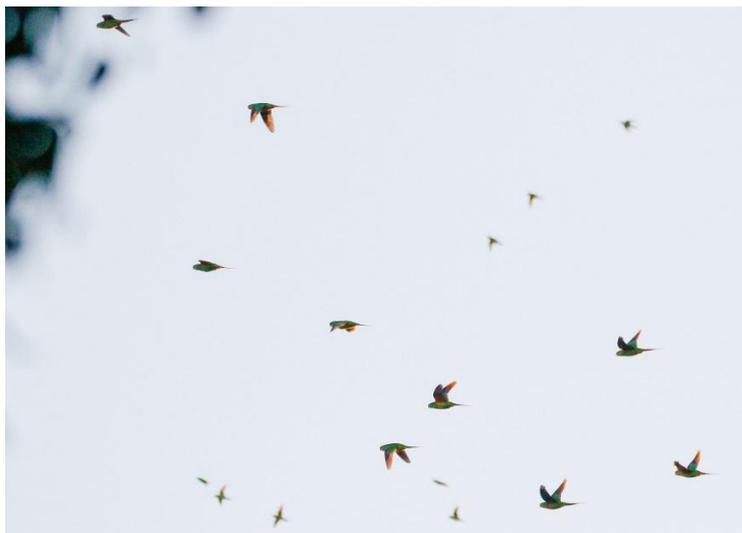
In NSW there have only been scattered reports of Swift Parrots except for two areas where >100 birds have been accounted for; the Lower Hunter Valley and the forests in the Temora area (Ingalba Nature Reserve). In the Lower Hunter, up to 200 Swift Parrots have been found in the Ellalong-Pelton area, south of Cessnock. These birds were seen feeding on Spotted Gum blossom (which is notably barely flowering on the NSW South Coast this season). It is an interesting situation in the Lower Hunter, because many Spotted Gum trees flowered in 2016 (with good numbers of Swift Parrots present) and this species rarely flowers in consecutive years. It is easily explained by the fact that

many trees (for whatever reason) held their bud over from 2016 into 2017 and have flowered well this year. The Swift Parrots (and Regent Honeyeaters) sure seem to appreciate it! Around Temora (Ingalba Nature Reserve) the birds have been feeding mainly on lerp in Mugga Ironbark and (Inland) Grey Box, but there has been some Mugga Ironbark blossom also present.

Apart from these areas, good numbers have again arrived at a property at Frogmore, near Boorowa in NSW. This has been a consistent site for them, as they arrive to feed on flowering ironbark as they have again done this year. From there, it is all about small numbers of birds from places such as the Illawarra, Western Sydney and the Southern Highlands. Of some excitement though, we did receive our first Swift Parrot report from Queensland since 2014, with 5 birds found in an outer suburb of Brisbane (Kenmore). No further reports have been received from the Sunshine State.

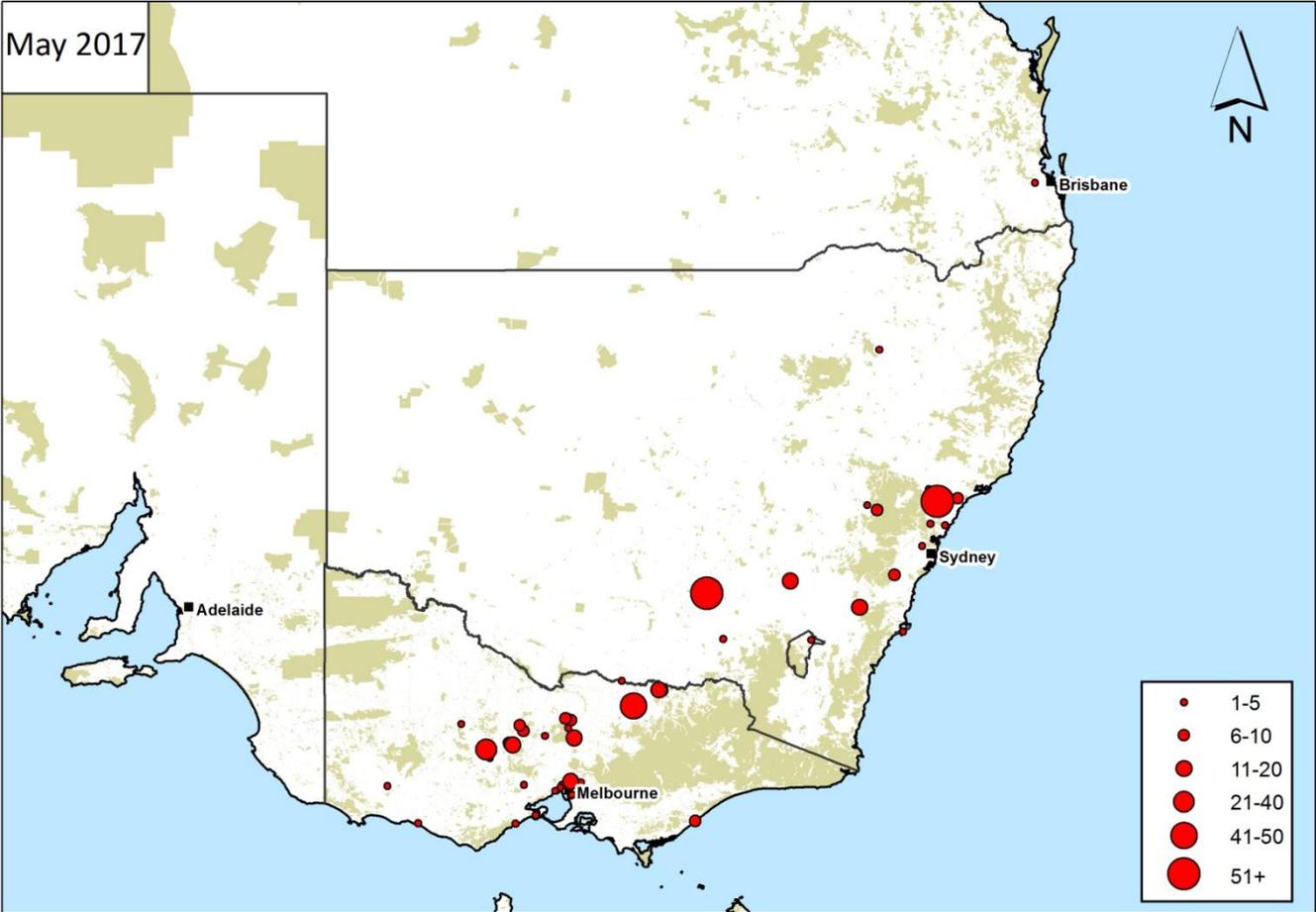


**A Swift Parrot feeding on Spotted Gum blossom near Ellalong in the Lower Hunter Valley (Mick Roderick).**



**A flock of Swift Parrots flying in the early morning sun in Werakata State Conservation Area near Pelton in the Lower Hunter Valley (Mick Roderick).**

As mentioned above there is very little Spotted Gum flowering on the south coast of NSW this year but the Lower Hunter is holding the fort on that one. Mugga Ironbark has been reported flowering in the Mugga belt around West Wylong, Parkes and Dubbo, and also around Tarcutta and Gundagai. White Box blossom has been noted in abundance in some places, such as around Timor and north of Merriwa, perhaps explaining influxes of Grey-headed Flying-foxes in some of these areas. There has been some very good Swamp Mahogany in flower around Lake Macquarie and the Central Coast though this seems to be tailing off now.



Swift Parrot records from the May 2017 survey weekend and incidental sightings from Jan – July 2017.

## Regent Honeyeater



The start of the year was typically slow on the Regent Honeyeater front, with only a handful of records across the range. These included a single bird heard near Chiltern in late January, while another bird was seen close to Mansfield in February. The Mansfield bird was visiting Callistemon in a private property, again highlighting the value of native gardens to this species at times. Single sightings also occurred across NSW. In the lead up to the May survey weekend two separate sightings of 'wild' Regent Honeyeaters were made in Chiltern-Mt Pilot NP in north-east Victoria, with two males seen during monitoring for the captive release. Around the same time another bird was located at Beechworth by a visiting birder, but it was only seen the once with follow up visits failing to re-find the bird (perhaps it was moving through on the way to Chiltern).

Of particular note though, is that during May and June a total of four of the 2015 captive release cohort in Chiltern have returned to the park. In all cases they have been found associating with birds released this year (more details below), but they now bring the total number of birds from the 2015 release resighted to 10. The highlight has undoubtedly been 'Yellow Yellow', a male which was seen in Outtrim in South Gippsland in November last year. With his return to the park he has travelled at least 540km since his release two years ago and he now holds the record for the second longest movement ever recorded in the species.



**'Yellow Yellow', a male bird released in Chiltern-Mt Pilot NP in 2015, seen back in the park this year after visiting Outtrim in Sth Gippsland in 2016 – a 540km journey (Dean Ingwersen).**

The May Regent Honeyeater surveys themselves got off to a great start with six birds reported on a property south of Cessnock in the Lower Hunter Valley. A few days later BirdLife Australia's Mick Roderick visited the site and found at least 14 birds present, with up to 12 in a single tree (see [video](#) here). By the following week at least 20 birds had been accounted for and BirdLife Australia's Birds in Backyards (BIBY) TV crew came out to film the birds, one of which had been banded in the Capertee Valley in September 2015 (see [video](#) here). The birds have been feeding on the nectar of flowering Spotted Gum trees on the private property; a regularly monitored site by BirdLife Australia and one which has had a conservation agreement placed on it thanks to a combined effort of BirdLife Australia staff, volunteers and the Nature Conservation Trust of NSW. Up to 50 birds were recorded at the same site in 2012, the last time wild Regent Honeyeaters were seen in such numbers anywhere. Just prior to the May surveys a single Regent Honeyeater was seen at another regularly monitored site in the Hunter Economic Zone (HEZ). These records further highlight the importance of the Cessnock area, which is listed internationally as a [Key Biodiversity Area](#), and of Spotted Gum forests, which are an important resource for feeding over winter, as well as breeding sites over spring.



**Nine of the Regent Honeyeaters found on a property south of Cessnock where 20 Regent Honeyeaters have been feeding on Spotted Gum this winter (Mick Roderick).**

Elsewhere, the only other record since May was a single bird captured by a lucky photographer on the boardwalk at Warriewood Wetlands, on Sydney's northern beaches. The bird was feeding in flowering Swamp Mahogany trees at the time (though it was not seen again). Also just prior to the May surveys a record of a bird in Durikai State Forest in southern Queensland was posted on Birdline (Central and Southern) Queensland. It is always exciting to receive reports of Regent Honeyeaters from the very north of their range, though this bird was not to be seen again either! There was Mugga Ironbark flowering in the area at the time.

## 2017 Regent Honeyeater Captive Release Program



Left: BirdLife Australia's Dean Ingwersen removing a captured Regent Honeyeater from a mist net at Chiltern-Mt Pilot NP (taken by Glen Johnson); Right: Colour-banded released Regent Honeyeater (David Hancock).

As part of the Regent Honeyeater Captive Release Program, 101 captive-bred birds (bred at Taronga Zoo) were released into Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park in north-east Victoria over two release days in April 2017. The Program is run by the Regent Honeyeater Recovery Team to help build up numbers of Regent Honeyeaters (the current wild population is approximately 400 individuals). This is the fifth release of Regent Honeyeaters at Chiltern (previous releases in 2008, 2010, 2013 and 2015) and the biggest so far.

For the monitoring component of the Captive Release Program, all birds were banded with unique colour-band combinations and a proportion of released birds (approximately 25%) were fitted with radio-transmitters (to help track movements of these birds and lead the research team to other captive released birds). Despite a few initial hurdles, including the unforeseen sub-optimal nectar flows at the time of the release, the monitoring of captive released birds is in full swing, with over 70 released birds recorded over June and July. Much of the monitoring is carried out by volunteers and the local community, who do an amazing job! Overall, the Captive Release Program has been hugely successful over the years and is helping to increase the number of Regent Honeyeaters in the wild.

During late June and early July birds were recaptured to put on more transmitters and allow for gross health assessments (weight, injury, etc). The use of some new, large mist net setups allowed the project to recapture 20 birds, as well as a wild bird and one of the 2015 returnees! (see photo above)

If you would like to **volunteer** and help monitor Regent Honeyeaters at Chiltern, contact [Elizabeth.Wemyss@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:Elizabeth.Wemyss@delwp.vic.gov.au) to register your interest. Monitoring is carried out every day except Tuesday and Saturday.

## Conservation Work – A Recent Success!

BirdLife Australia's Conservation team have been working hard, lobbying against the proposed clearing of critical Swift Parrot habitat in Tasmania. The proposed bill would have seen forests on Bruny Island and Wielangta (two of the most important breeding sites for Swift Parrots) opened up as production forests, which would have had devastating consequences for Swift Parrots.

However the bill was voted down by the Tasmanian Upper House, which was great news for the Swift Parrot! This win for Swift Parrots and Tasmanian forests was largely due to the Tasmanian community, who wrote letters and made phone calls to their elected representatives. BirdLife Australia's CEO, Paul Sullivan, also met with Upper House Members to brief them on the importance of this habitat for Swift Parrots. Additionally, BirdLife Australia's Key Biodiversity Area in Danger report was published in May 2017, which also emphasised the international importance of protecting critical habitat on Bruny Island.

## August 2017 Survey Weekend

The challenge is on again to locate Swift Parrots and Regent Honeyeaters over the upcoming August survey period. Given the nomadic nature and wide range of both species, we need to cover as much ground as possible, especially focusing on areas which contain flowering eucalypts for foraging or areas of heavy lerp and insect loads.

Help us find more Swift Parrots and Regent Honeyeaters during the **August 2017** survey weekend (**5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>**), and also contribute to critical long-term data of these two species. We are looking for volunteers to help survey Swift Parrots and Regent Honeyeaters across Victoria, ACT, NSW and Queensland. We are also happy for people to get out a week either side of this August survey weekend. Please note, if you are submitting records to Birdline and/or birding Facebook pages, please also send any sighting information to us.

For more information (including suggested survey locations) about the surveys see:

<http://birdlife.org.au/projects/woodland-birds-for-biodiversity> or contact Dean Ingwersen (Regent Honeyeaters), Mick Roderick (Swift Parrots NSW, ACT and Qld) or Caroline Wilson (Swift Parrots VIC) at [woodlandbirds@birdlife.org.au](mailto:woodlandbirds@birdlife.org.au)

Please let us know your email address if you would prefer to receive electronic copies of this report.