Regent Honeyeater

Anthochaera phrygia

Critically endangered in NSW

Critically endangered nationally



Photo © Peter Rowland

SIZE
About 23 cm; once called the Warty-faced Honeyeater

HOME
Box-ironbark woodlands and dry open forests

FOOD
Nectar from eucalypts and mistletoe, plus insects

IN THE WILD
Fewer than 300 birds left

Following the flowers

Regent Honeyeaters wander long distances, following flowering eucalypts and mistletoe. Once found from Adelaide to Rockhampton, they now breed mainly in the Hunter and Capertee valleys and north-east Victoria. In some years flocks visit coastal Spotted Gum and Swamp Mahogany forests, and birds occasionally reach the NSW South Coast.

The climate connection

Less than 15% of their original woodland habitat remains. Climate change makes what is left less reliable: drought and heat change when eucalypts flower, and in the 2019–20 drought much of the mistletoe they rely on for back-up food died.

The bird that forgot its song

Young males learn their song by listening to older males. With so few birds left, some never hear one. In 2021 scientists found about 12% of males could only copy other species' songs, and females avoid males singing the wrong tune. Zoo-bred birds now get singing lessons from recordings of wild birds.

Scan to hear it sing

WONDER QUESTION

If no one was left to teach you, how would you learn your own song?

Turn over for teacher notes

Teacher notes

Curriculum links (new NSW syllabuses, 2026 to 2027)

Stage	Outcome	Where the honeyeater fits
Early Stage 1	STe-SCI-01 (S&T K–6)	How living things get air, water and energy to survive
Stage 2	ST2-SCI-01 (S&T K–6)	Habitat and ecosystem; food chains from flower to honeyeater
Stage 3	ST3-SCI-01 (S&T K–6)	Behavioural adaptations (wandering, song learning); sustainable practices
Stage 4 (Year 8)	SC4-LIV-01 Living systems	Interactions in ecosystems: pollination and competition
Stage 5 (Year 9)	SC5-ENV-01 Environmental sustainability	Effects of climate change on ecosystems: drought, flowering and food supply
Year 11 to 12	BI-12-03 Biology 11–12	Biodiversity conservation: small populations, captive breeding and release

In the classroom

K–2

Nectar hunters

Look closely at the photo: what colours and patterns can you see? Then play a game: children are honeyeaters moving between "trees" around the room, and the teacher keeps changing which trees are in flower.

YEARS 3–6

Follow the flowers

Give groups a calendar showing when local eucalypts flower. Can they plan a year of food for a honeyeater? What happens to their plan if a drought stops two of the trees from flowering?

YEARS 7–12

Song school

Read about the 2021 song study and the zoo's singing lessons. Why might a small population lose a learned behaviour? Design an experiment to test whether singing lessons help released birds find mates.

Get outside

Join a BirdLife Australia survey or tree-planting day. Learn the bird and report any sighting to BirdLife, noting any coloured leg bands. Count birds in the schoolyard with Birds in Backyards.

First Nations perspectives

Hunter Valley releases happen on Wonnarua Country, on land owned by Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council, a recovery partner. Through your AECG or Land Council, invite local knowledge holders to share Dharawal or Yuin perspectives. *[Local story, added with permission]*

Hope and action

Nearly 500 zoo-bred Regent Honeyeaters have been released since the breeding program began, including a record 69 in 2025. Volunteers plant trees, guard nests and track the released birds. Small things students and schools can do:

- Plant local flowering eucalypts and shrubs
- Protect big old trees and woodland patches
- Report any Regent Honeyeater sighting to BirdLife
- Join a local tree-planting or Landcare day

Talking tip: lead with wonder and action rather than loss. Every tree planted and every sighting reported helps the recovery.

Scan for the full fact sheet and video: prpw.com.au/project/regent-honeyeater

Words and photos: Peter Rowland · *Wonder through nature* · Version 1.0, November 2026

Sources: Rowland, "On the Brink", Australian Geographic; BirdLife Australia (2025 release update); Crates et al. 2021 and 2022, Proceedings of the Royal Society B; NSW BioNet threatened species profile; Taronga Conservation Society. Check curriculum links at curriculum.nsw.edu.au.