

Regent Honeyeaters released to go wild

Captive-bred Critically Endangered Regent Honeyeaters are being released into the Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park as part of a national recovery program to curb the species' decline. Forty-four birds will be released into the park wearing coloured leg bands for monitoring, twenty-five of which will also be fitted with radio transmitters. "Across Australia we estimate there are now less than 1000 birds in the wild, with only 100 of these remaining in Victoria," Birds Australia's (BirdLife Partner) National Regent Honeyeater Recovery Coordinator, Dean Ingwersen said. "Recent surveys suggest that the number of Regent Honeyeaters has continued to decline during the past five years. We believe this is due to pressure from the continuing effect of historic land clearing, food scarcity due to drought, and competition from more aggressive species which out compete them in their favoured woodland habitat," Mr Ingwersen said. The release of the captive-bred birds, which were bred at Taronga Zoo in Sydney and Adelaide Zoo, follows on from the success of the first large-scale trial release program in May 2008. Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) Biodiversity Officer, Sarah Kelly, said in the first trial 27 birds were released into the wild, with all but seven monitored daily by radio-tracking and visual observation for nearly two months after the release date. "The results of the first trial were very positive and exceeded our expectations," she said. "Thanks to the support of volunteers we were able to determine the survivorship of the captive-bred birds in the wild, while also tracking their movement and interaction with wild birds. "The hope is that the captive-bred birds will mate with the wild birds, increasing the population base of the species." Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park was selected as the preferred release site as wild birds often utilise this habitat and it would appear to provide the best chance for survival of the birds. Ms Kelly said a monitoring team, which includes specially trained community volunteers, will drive post-release surveys for about 12 weeks after the release. "The community's involvement in the monitoring is a vital part of the project's success," Ms Kelly said. The project is the largest captive-bred release of its kind in Victoria, and is funded through Birds Australia, Taronga Zoo and the DSE as part of the Regent Honeyeater recovery program. *Photo credit: Dean Ingwersen*