



## Regent Honeyeater, Whiplash

Jeongwoo Park

Report 1 of 3



## Report 1

### 1.1. Theoretical Background (mainly citing Birdlife International, 2018)

Meliphagidae, honeyeaters and allies is one of the most successful groups of Australopacific, southern-Wallace line oscine radiation, with 195 species in 51 genera described according to Clements Checklist (Clements et al., 2024). These small to middle size birds are primarily nectarivores feed on wide range of plant nectars, and some of them feature handful of interesting ethological characteristics like colonial breeding and social hierarchy.

Regent Honeyeater (*Anthochaera phrygia*) is a middle-size honeyeater with a black and golden plumage pattern. Based on distinctive plumage character, this species once classified as monotypic *Zanthomiza* [Entomology: yellow+sucker] but recent genetic study revealed that they're a member of the wattlebird genus *Anthochaera*.

Currently, Regent Honeyeater is threatened and classified as "Critically Endangered" by IUCN Redlist with declining population of 350-400 mature individuals.

Their context of threat is not very unique. One single biggest threat is habitat degradation and fragmentation. After British colonization, their habitat, Eucalyptus forests was cleared by 75% for agriculture and housing (Birdlife International, 2018). Their range used to be fetched as far as Adelaide South Australia, but now they are observed in extremely patchy distribution only ranging from North East Victoria, Central and Eastern New South Wales, and Southern Queensland (Birdlife International, 2018). Besides of the habitat degradation and fragmentation, Aggressive competitors like Noisy Miner (*Manorina melanocephala*) were recruited due to the edge effect, deterring Regent honeyeaters from their range. Moreover, Egg and Nestling predation from exotic and native species like House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), Australian Magpie (*Cracticus tibicen*) and Pied Currawong (*Strepera graculina*), and extreme weather events like drought partially contributed to the extinction vortex (Birdlife International, 2018). For instance, the last recorded major population decline happened in recent 12-years reduced rainfall period.

This species, like other species in the family, is primarily a nectar feeder of the Eucalyptus, mainly Spotted Gum (*Corymbia maculata*) (Birdlife International, 2018). Because of the availability of the flower and nectar, their specific need of environment is the availability of high, mature trees, which makes them not only appropriate flagship species but also umbrella species, i.e. by saving this species, we can save other important aspects of the ecological functions.

On the other hand, this species is a nomadic one with a fairly long flying distance, according to the availability of the blooming flower surge. This aspect also fits to the criteria for "Focal Species" or "Landscape Species", meaning the conservation of the species needs an ecoregional perspective dealing with a range bigger than single or several locals. Moreover, this nomadic nature could have a function in maintaining genetic diversity & integrity, population and ecosystem cohesion/connectivity of mature Eucalyptus dominated forests.

Also, like other species of honeyeaters, this species used to be flocking species which aid fitness benefits of sharing information about blooming flower patches, avoiding from predators, and synchronize their breeding events.

### 1.2. Overview to Behind-the-scene

In this program, formally or informally, I had chances to visit more-wild National Parks and semi-natural areas within or without Sydney and observe not only the landscape & vegetation but also some wildlife fauna.

Although I was not fortunate enough to spot the bird of interest, several observations may fit the background mentioned above. In the edge, semi-natural parks, Noisy Miner were everywhere and mobbing all other kinds of birds like Laughing Kookaburra (*Dacelo novaeguineae*), Grey Butcherbird (*Cracticus torquatus*) Channel-billed Cuckoo (*Scythrops novaehollandiae*). Honeyeater species other than Noisy Miners were all

observed in forested National Park area, for instance Red Wattlebird (*Anthochaera carunculata*), one of the sister species of the regent honeyeater, at the Blue Mountains Natural Parks and New Holland Honeyeater (*Phylidonyris novaehollandiae*) at the same place, and Eastern Spinebill (*Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*) at the Ku-ring-gai Chase. For the field notes, please check the eBird account of the leader (<https://ebird.org/profile/MTQ40DA30Q>).



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