

# Thinking with Regent Honeyeaters: On homes and futures for a critically endangered species

## Acknowledgement

We begin by acknowledging the Gadigal of the Eora Nation and the Wangal of the Dharug, upon whose ancestral lands we work, as well as the Cammeraigal of Gai-mariagal Country where this fieldwork occurs. We pay our respect to the Elders both past and present, acknowledging them as the traditional custodians of knowledge and storytelling for these lands.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Our ongoing Precarious Birds project gives form to accelerated and irrevocable losses in the Sixth Extinction, and draws out stories of seeming resurrection, hopeful recovery and opportunities for adaptation and action (Sadokierski & Rissanen, *Tracey* 1). In *Precarious Birds* we ask, how can we as designers and design researchers address the shifting baseline syndrome of avian (or any) extinctions? The extinction crisis is endlessly complex; how can we as designers make sense of the complexity to provide others entry points into the crisis? This article outlines one aspect of the project: our approaches to ‘communicating’ with and about the captive Regent Honeyeaters at Taronga Zoo (Sydney), through a series of monthly visits over eighteen months, and interviews with people who study and care for the birds. We report on our mixed-method approach that includes interviews with people and on-site conversations with the birds. We ask a range of questions in relation to a nomadic species going extinct due to habitat loss, focusing on concepts of home and futures. We conclude by thinking-with our interviewees about what it means to have hope in relation to conservation and extinction, and point to where the project will go next.

The Regent Honeyeater is a critically endangered Australian bird (Crates et al, *Ibis* 2; Heinsohn et al. 2), and Taronga Conservation Society leads breeding and habitat restoration programs to prevent the species’ imminent extinction (Tripovich et al. 2). The Regent Honeyeater is promoted as a ‘flagship’ species for the conservation of box-ironbark forests of Victoria and NSW, which the nomadic species both depends on and is a key pollinator for (Taronga Conservation Society). These forests, and many species that depend on them, including the Swift Parrot, Superb Parrot, Brush-tailed Phascogale, Squirrel Glider and Painted Honeyeater, are currently threatened by land-clearing and development. The plight of the charismatic Regent Honeyeater in the wild has helped draw attention to the urgent need to conserve the greater ecosystem they belong to.

Breeding and habitat restoration programs are important conservation work, and offer the general public hope that human interventions can mitigate against species extinctions. Taronga promotes these narratives of hope on their website via information pages, video talks with conservation scientists and invitations to participate in

conservation projects. Visitors to Sydney's Taronga Zoo may encounter the distinctive black and yellow Regent Honeyeater via photographs on entry tickets and decorative hoardings, through anecdotes about threats to the species and recovery efforts told in the live bird show (with an appeal to donate upon exiting the theatre), on multiple illustrated signs leading to the Blue Mountains Bushwalk exhibit – where eight or more birds, depending on the phase of the breeding program, zip about among small flocks of other species from the Blue Mountains area of NSW.<sup>1</sup> Visitors may leave feeling hopeful that the future of these birds is being fought for by the Taronga Conservation Society staff and teams of dedicated volunteers – perhaps even feeling part of the recovery program themselves through a money donation or signing up to a tree-planting field trip.

However, the complexity of conservation programs – including the difficulty of securing long-term funding necessary to maintain conservation projects out over multiple decades, and working in areas which are concurrently receiving funding for habitat restoration projects and habitat clearing for infrastructure and development projects, as well as the catastrophic impact of anthropogenic climate change – such as the devastating 2019-20 bushfires that impacted almost half of the birds' known breeding sites (Birdlife Australia) – mean that the future for these birds and other at-risk species is far from secure.

This is why we, two design scholars, have engaged in practice-based research about the species since 2021. Positive stories of hope and recovery are necessary for conservation organisations to secure funding, and to engage visitors to the Zoo. A particular challenge for Taronga (and all zoos) is striking the right balance in messaging; bombarding people who have come for a day out with reports that only 350-400 Regent Honeyeaters remain in the wild (optimistically: that estimate predates the 2019-20 fires), can exhaust their care. Focusing primarily on uplifting 'wow' stories at the Zoo aims to keep conservation and environmental stewardship as a public priority. It is not the responsibility of conservation scientists, or science communicators at the Zoo, to publicly address the systemic complexity of conservation projects. Furthermore, it works against their interests to criticise the way funding is allocated, or to promote the failures and barriers to successful conservation projects to the general public. However, documenting the complexity and often disappointing reality of such projects is important to maintain useful cultural and historical records for generations to come, and also to persuade the general public of the ongoing and urgent need for conservation action now.

Addressing the cultural dimensions of the climate and extinction crises is the responsibility of those involved in the humanities, arts and social sciences. In *Extinction Studies*, the editors describe their conviction that “our present time [of mass extinctions] demands considered, lively and creative responses from the humanities”, responses which are distinctly interdisciplinary and reach beyond the academy. (Bird Rose et al. 2) Their approach uses “detailed case studies of complex processes of loss, exploring the ‘entangled significance’ of extinction” to demonstrate that “there is no singular phenomenon of extinction; rather, extinction is experienced, resisted, measured, enunciated, performed, and narrated in a variety of ways to which we must attend.” (2-3)

Social researcher Rebecca Huntley surveyed scientists and scholars as well as diverse groups of Australians about their attitudes to climate change. She writes that in order to have effective conversations about climate affected but still liveable futures, we need to find ways to tell our own stories : “How do you feel? How has that changed over time? What people, places and practices have made you engage with the issues? [...] Hopefully it will elicit empathy and understanding from the person you're talking to, getting them to open up about their own story.”

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<sup>1</sup> Taronga's Western Plains Zoo also participates in the breeding and recovery programs, and spotlights the species on site, however due to travel restrictions over the past two years we have not made a site visit.

(Huntley 245) Although coming from different fields and addressing different audiences, both approaches argue for the importance of *storying* extinction and the climate crisis in many and diverse ways, beyond scientific reporting.

We position our research within this interdisciplinary zone; our project aims to apply our expertise in systems level thinking about sustainability and narrative-driven approaches to communicating complexity to non-expert audiences to recording the plight of the endangered Regent Honeyeaters and the complex system of people, organisations and things involved in their conservation. Our primary aim is to open new spaces for having difficult conversations about the changing climate and extinction, in order to contribute to the collection of stories helping inspire action for sustainable futures.

Next, we discuss the importance of dedicating time to regularly visit the birds, documenting our encounters with field notes, sketches and audio-visual recording as an ethnographic method, and frame this as a practice of 'watching closely' (after Nippert-Eng 5-18) and staying with the (human) trouble (Bird Rose G55-56, after Haraway 99-104). We report on an evolving series of questions we pose to help us foster empathy with the birds. In particular, what is a home to a nomadic bird and what might 'future' mean to a captive bird? We bring diverse perspectives and voices into the project by interviewing conservation scientists and other researchers who study and care for the Regent Honeyeaters, both at Taronga and in the wild. The following section of the paper reports on insights drawn from interviews with some of these experts over 18 months, in which we pose variations of our questions to the birds to the humans who study and care for them. Dr Ben Pitcher, Dr Monique Van Sluys, Michael Shiels and Kerry Staker are all Taronga Conservation Society employees.. We came across Dr Ross Crates and Vicky Powys through their writing, and contacted them to participate. Finally, we propose that through our process of attempting to communicate with and about the birds, we open a reflective space for valuing slow observation processes, plurality of voices and more-than-human perspectives as we engage with the extinction crisis.

## 2. Field Observations: thinking-with birds to reflect on concepts of 'home' and 'futures'

### 2.1 Methods for thinking-with birds

We first visited the captive Regent Honeyeaters at Taronga Zoo (Sydney) on 11 January 2021, to begin our observational studies of the birds. With the exception of some gaps due to stay-at-home rules during the Covid-19 pandemic in June-October 2021, we have continued to make monthly visits since.

Our 'fieldwork' involves studying ourselves as much as the birds; a process of thinking-with, or in the presence of, another species. Our expertise is not in ecology or conservation studies, but in how issues of species decline and extinction could be brought to the attention of the general public, in order to foster a more nuanced understanding of the more-than-human world . To structure our field trips, we turned to Nippert-Eng's framework of conducting observational fieldwork using a combination of 'less structured, more softly focused' open observation sessions with more 'mission-driven' sessions that focus on specific concepts. As design researchers, we appreciate Nippert-Eng's encouragement of capturing anecdotes (41) and experimenting with visual ways of capturing and presenting data (48) as part of a deliberately creative and ambitious approach to fieldwork.

To train ethnographers who will eventually observe humans, Nippert-Eng gives students exercises to observe zoo animals. In this research we have brought her techniques back to the zoo, observing the Regent Honeyeaters. Nippert-Eng's (61-80) exercise focusing on open observation has framed several of the visits. The exercise requires researchers to observe a group of individuals (in our case, any Regent Honeyeaters we see) for an hour. We take notes on what we observe, in whatever way makes sense. Usually this includes writing and sketching, and sometimes also photographing and filming, and recording our reflections on the fieldwork experience as we depart from the Zoo. A field report of two to five pages is then written, with a reader other than the researcher in mind. Reflecting on the various reports as well as the original field notes informs much of the writing of this article.

Figure (to come): A range of our field notes.

Concurrent with the open observation, for the first visit in January 2021 we developed a set of questions to the birds to guide our time with them, aligning more closely with Nippert-Eng's second, concept-driven approach to fieldwork (36-38). In addition, Fletcher's interview of River Dean guides us in how to engage with a more-than-human stakeholder (Fletcher 961). Fletcher arrives at the river bank with a set of interview questions, and after 90 minutes of observing herself with the river and its inhabitants, she departs with new ones. We have designed a set of questions to ground us in the birds' space, and to generate and bring empathy into the space. In posing questions to the birds, the intention is not to personify or anthropomorphize them, but to 'decentre' ourselves in our practice of noticing (Biggs et al. 4). While we do not ask the questions verbally, repeating them to ourselves helps orient us towards being in the aviary with the birds, which in itself is often an overwhelming experience. The last three questions are directed more at ourselves as well as the audience for this project. We are curious about what a 'home' might be to a captive nomadic bird and what a 'future' might mean to a captive bird. The first encounter is captured in a visual essay for Fernando do Campo's *To Companion a Companion: Reader* (Sadokierski and Rissanen, *To Companion a Companion*). The questions we bring with us to the zoo visits include:

- how are you today?
- how is your family?
- what do you worry about?
- what brings you joy?
- what are you singing about?
  
- what is the lesson today?
- **what is a home?**
- **what is a future?**

Below, we share selected field notes taken at the zoo (FN) and summary notes, written together and independently after our visits (SN). We emphasise that our field note taking is not intended as a scientific record, but a practice designed to manage our own slowing down and being with the birds when we're with them, and to provide prompts for later conversations and further research. The notes below have been selected to provide readers with an understanding of the kind of data and insights our method produces. They are clustered under the two 'concept based' questions we are focusing on in this article: what is a home, and what is a future?

## 2.2 What is a home: reflecting on our experience as visitors in the captive birds' 'home'

Visiting the birds in their natural habitat is difficult; their habitat is in decline and the nomadic species is difficult to reliably locate. Therefore, for now we make do by visiting them at the Zoo. In the Blue Mountains enclosure, by sitting quietly for long durations, we aim to suspend our awareness of this as a captive environment, in order to encounter the birds in as close to a 'natural' environment as we can.

We also arranged to visit the breeding enclosure, 'back of house'. Here, the birds have generous cuttings of appropriate trees, feed supply and space to move. But the large, metal cages are clearly not designed for public display; unlike the Blue Mountains enclosure which is carefully landscaped to mimic their natural habitat, these breeding and recovery areas reveal the human intervention – with noble intentions – into the welfare of this critically endangered species. Moving between the two spaces – the public and 'back of house' enclosures – is unsettling. This led us to reflect on the differences between the work Taronga's Conservation scientists are doing, and how Taronga Zoo presents itself as an institution for educational entertainment.

We continually reflect on what 'home' might mean for a captive bird. We recognise that as human animals, we can never know whether another species has a sense of what a home is. We hesitate to refer to the Zoo as a home, even for birds who are born and die there, for we know it is an artificial environment. Many of our more lengthy field notes deal with the ways we feel within the space, noticing our humanness in an aviary, questioning our motivation and subjective experiences and developing a sense of belonging to place.

ZS (FN, 22 April 2021): Suddenly, a show, less than half a metre away, clicking and warbling. A few perfect minutes. I feel sure it's the same bird as last time, who watched me watching. Of course, it may not be, but I believe it is, because I want the perceived familiarity to be true.

ZS (FN, 22 Oct 2021): How much do I feel the 'kinship' connection with these birds and how much do I imagine it, willing myself to feel it? T is sitting, observing on the bench. I am squatting, sketching John Travolta [the masked lapwing]<sup>2</sup> when a RH flits to a rock between us, then perches on the tree opposite, with the precariously nesting peaceful dove. In the loud din, I can make out the call so distinctly, having listened to [the birds here] and played recordings so many times now. T and I exchange glances but no words."

TR (SN): I find shared visits more complex as there is a need to be with another human as well as be with the birds, so it is important to schedule solo visits alongside the shared visits. Both types of visits are critical to the project. The shared experiences have been invaluable, as have the conversations that have followed – while the solo visits afford a different way to be with the birds. It's almost like to be with the birds fully (as much as a non-avian being can) requires not speaking in human language. Often during visits we are utterly silent for long periods of time, to make space for being with the birds.

We have not yet encountered other repeat human visitors, but we strike many conversations with zookeepers at feeding times, and volunteers who move through the space somewhat nomadically – they are assigned to different areas rather than having a single 'haunt'.

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<sup>2</sup> We are informed by Zoo staff that all the Masked Lapwings are named 'John' regardless of sex, and all the peacocks 'George'.

ZS (FN, 28 Jan 2022) Talking to the volunteer, her affection for this place, for the birds she clearly thinks of as unique characters, I have a real sense of community right here, in this space that I often think of as ours – T and mine – and it expands my empathy and sense of affection for it.

### **2.3 What is a future: reflecting on the precarious future for a critically endangered species**

The language of conservation can be misleading in how we perceive birds. The Regent Honeyeater is designated ‘critically endangered’ by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) (Birdlife International), which implies fragility. Yet observing the birds makes clear these are no feeble weaklings: they are robust, vivacious, gregarious. If they know they are on the precipice of extinction, it does not show.

TR (FN): On this visit I note the flash of gold in the sun: the birds are like fireworks when they fly in the sun. It also strikes me that they are robust. As a species, because we have pushed them to the brink of extinction, they are precarious. But each of these birds is energetic, strong, full of vitality. We ought to give these avian fireworks a chance.

TR (FN): The regent honeyeater is a beautiful bird. Not always photogenic: sometimes all you see in photos is a warty-faced honeyeater. In flight, however, when the sun hits the bird, he is the most magnificent explosion of gold.

ZS (FN): 4 settle in a branch in front of me, making a call I haven’t heard before. Flickers of yellow in the canopy. Aircraft noise, construction noise. One picks up a length of red plastic – a rubber band – in the tree. Another dive bombs for it.

ZS (FN, 22 Oct 2022): We watch the RH bathing in the middle pond. Explosions of contact with water.

TR (FN): There were moments I felt surrounded by the regent honeyeaters. Other times I could not locate a single one. It’s as if they exist and they don’t. That’s perhaps true of their lives in the wild, being nomadic. I can imagine them, once upon a time, being abundant at a time of a woodland bloom, and then, gone once the flowering is done.

Over the 18-months of field trips, desk research and interviews, we become increasingly less certain about the possibilities of the species’ survival.

TR (SN): The first visit left me with a deeper sense of the birds’ precarity. The captive breeding program will not save the birds unless we address the systemic issues that have led to the loss of the species’ habitat. Releasing captive-bred birds and planting trees do not stop logging. Tree planting does not replace old-growth forest. There is more research ... to do to understand what habitat loss looks like currently and what drives it, and if its root causes are something we can as designers influence.

This dawning realisation leads to discussions with the conservation scientists and other researchers about maintaining hope, discussed below. Why continue conservation efforts for a bird that is almost certainly going to disappear in our lifetimes? Returning to the question we ask of the birds and of ourselves as design researchers, what is a future, when the physical and cultural conditions required for survival are removed? Ramia Mazé claims

that “political dimensions of futurity can include ... how present and future phenomena can be known, and what difference our conceptions, knowledges and choices make.” (24-5) We note, as does Mazé, that ‘future’ is not a universally understood concept; some cultures and languages barely have a conception of future though many have deep and rich ideas about time. The same may be possible for the more-than-human. Yet it is scarcely possible for us as (Western) researchers to be in the presence of Regent Honeyeaters and not be concerned with futures, given that a possible future without Regent Honeyeaters is so palpably present throughout the project.

In January 2021 as part of this research we attended ‘Requiem: An Endangered Menagerie’, a panel of philosophers, writers, and scientists focusing on the extinction crisis. One speaker, Sophie Chao, reflects on the panellists’ use of refrain and repetition as stylistic devices for imaginative modes for storytelling extinction:

“As a temporary return to the familiar – the words we have already heard, and the names we have come to know – the refrain offers us a moment of pause, respite, and potential restoration, if only for an instant. [...] the refrain invites us to consider how we might hold back – literally, refrain – from perpetuating paradigms and practices of mastery and domination over the non-human world that have been instrumental to that world’s demise. Instead, we might learn to co-exist in and with this world through an ethos of restraint, care, caution, and respect.” (Chao)

After the event, we reflected that our return visits to the Zoo are a kind of experiential refrain. Turning up to the now familiar Blue Mountain enclosure, repeating the same questions of ourselves, we often experience a kind of respite. Even if the restorative afterglow only lasts a few hours, the experience drives us to stay with the process. There is something to this dedication, and the space we have created for ourselves to think about and with the birds that would not be possible in any other place or process.

Deborah Bird Rose calls for us to stay with *human* trouble of the environmental crises we are living through, to work on expanding our narratives beyond human centralism and exceptionalism, to include accounts of the cruelty and damage that are the ongoing consequences of human interventions in the natural world; Bird Rose calls on us to “bear witness and offer care”(G55-56). We stay with the trouble of the Regent Honeyeaters because as humans, we are part of the cause and must find ways to be part of the solutions – if not for this species, for the others who still stand a chance of survival on our “damaged planet”.

### 3. Interviews: thinking-with scientists to reflect on concepts of 'home' for us, and the birds

#### 3.1 Method for thinking with people

During this research we have interviewed the following:



Figure 2: Interviewees in this iteration of the research project, with the Regent Honeyeater ‘centralised’.

As part of a semi-structured interview process, we asked all interviewees some questions related to our questions thinking-with the birds: What is home to you; how do you describe or define a home? We used their answers to reflect back on our understanding of ‘home’ and ‘future’ in relation to the Regent Honeyeaters.

Vicky Powys, a sound recordist who has made many of the existing recordings of Regent Honeyeater song, describes home as “a safe place ... for at least one night or perhaps for decades.” The Regent Honeyeater does not have and has not had for decades such a safe place, leading to its near extinction. Every square metre of land clearing will displace someone/s, denying them a home. The Regent Honeyeater is among the most visible casualties of the massive land clearing that has occurred in Eastern Australia. Can we even begin to fathom the loss of insects, fungi, moss, lichen, and all else that have vanished with the forests?

In discussing habitat loss through land clearing, behavioural ecologist Ben Pitcher notes the complexity of the Regent Honeyeater’s home and how seemingly unrelated decisions are all connected and impact Regent Honeyeater’s survival: “Death by a thousand cuts is a real risk here, but it also makes the recovery a lot harder too. If we're successful in rebuilding the population the birds are going to need more habitat than what is available now, so we need to both preserve what's left and rebuild more.”



Pitcher describes home as a relationship with place. We reflect that this is a powerful idea in shedding light on how poorly we seem to understand the Regent Honeyeater's home, or the home of any nomadic or migratory species. How do we restore a home for another species when its home is almost beyond human capacity to perceive and understand? We may understand it scientifically, but home is more: it is an emotional construct and experience. It would be unwise to assume that nonhuman species do not have emotional experiences of home. When we clear land, for a coal mine or a sheep paddock or a wind farm, we may have little understanding of how that area of land is an essential part of the home of another species, essential both in terms of physical survival, and emotionally and spiritually. In 1938-1944 the Singer Tract forest in Louisiana, USA, the last known home of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, was clearcut. Artist Don Eckelberry saw a single female in 1944, in one of the last confirmed sightings of the bird, clinging onto life and the ruins of her lost home (Gallagher 16). When another species loses its home as a result of our actions, it leaves us spiritually impoverished. Haraway (99-104) calls on us to make kin with our more-than-human planetary companions. We ought to make kin with the woodpecker, extinct or not, to expand our understanding of home and of ourselves.

Home may be an intergenerational, cultural concept for birds. The oldest documented wild Regent Honeyeater lived to at least 11 years (Ingwersen et al. 6); knowledge of good breeding sites lasts a decade, and may not keep up with the pace of land clearing. Crates et al (*Proceedings* 8) highlight issues relating to generational transmission of song when population numbers are critically low, with more to be learned about how the bird understands place, and indeed 'home'. Ross Crates describes the Regent Honeyeater home: "they are nomadic and they move around so much [that] you could consider the whole species range to be their home because they're living in it continually, but they're just living in different parts of it." This comment, expanded by Crates' analogue of the habitat range like a floorplan of a house, where different rooms (particular areas of woodland and forest) are used for different purposes (eating, breeding) shifts our understanding of home for a nomadic species in a profound way. Our human understanding of a home is of a clearly defined space or set of spaces at small scale – this smallness in our concept of home blinds us to the scale of the home required by the Regent Honeyeater. Crates finishes this conversation: "You could almost say that these birds are actually homeless as well, to some extent, because they've lost so much of their habitat."

### **3.2 On hope, regarding diminishing homes and uncertain futures**

Facing the possibility of a future without Regent Honeyeaters, a sense of hopelessness emerges. Yet, holding space for the possibility of recovery is necessary for conservation organisations in securing funding and in maintaining the drive for the work. Our questions to others working on and with Regent Honeyeaters includes one about hope. How do we individually and collectively stay hopeful and continue with the work? (The assumption is that to accept hopelessness as a permanent state is to also abandon any work to prevent the Regent Honeyeater's extinction.)

Several interviewees speak of young people giving them hope; as educators, we often feel similarly. More broadly this is evident in the way young climate change activists like Vanessa Nakate and Greta Thunberg are spoken of as a source of hope. Youth may appear a seductive source of hope but focusing hope on youth does not absolve those of us with power and privilege of the responsibility to act. The time to halt and reverse the clearing of the remaining Regent Honeyeater habitat is now, and the responsibility is collectively all of ours. Ben Pitcher brings up the strength of the collective – everyone working on Regent Honeyeater conservation – as a source of hope, and that collective ought to drive us. Pitcher also finds hope in the birds themselves: "They're fairly robust little birds." This reflects our experience, too.

Community Education Officer at Taronga, Kerry Staker takes groups of 13-19 year-olds on tree planting trips to the Capertee Valley twice a year, as part of the Youth At The Zoo program. She reports the youth consider the Regent Honeyeater as 'their' bird, recognising it in the aviary and championing the birds to their communities. Kerry doesn't cite youth as her source of hope, but people of all ages determined make change: "From politicians changing things on the biggest scale, to kindergarteners who marvel at the world and know it can be better when they learn they can recycle and put rubbish in a safer place than an animal's home." Hope resides in community and in action.

For field philosopher Thom van Dooren, hope resides in our ability to 'story' the natural world: "That creative people might find ways of storying the richness of the world so that we all cannot help but feel implicated and at stake in one another's lives and futures." This draws us back to Huntley's assertion that finding ways to tell our own stories is critical for imagining liveable futures.

To reimagine southeastern Australia once more habitable for the Regent Honeyeater is a deliberately hopeful futuring act. This may, however, be a project taking 50-100 years, beyond any individual research career or grant. A single tree planting event does not secure a future for the bird when a nearby habitat is being destroyed<sup>3</sup>. Such events alone are not sufficient; they need to be part of systemic restoration planned on a timescale of decades. Yet for the individuals participating in such an event the power of a collective may be present, and participants may find hope in solidarity. Ultimately we need to restore more than habitat: we must restore the Regent Honeyeater's right to exist as much as a sheep farm, or a coal mine, or a dam has a right to exist in our collective and political discourses. Perhaps in doing so we also restore a deeper sense of care in ourselves as a species.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Nippert-Eng's open observation and concept-driven observation approaches informed our methods, reported in this article. Taking an open approach to observing the captive birds – spending time thinking with each other, and alone, in their presence – allowed us to focus our research aims and questions. This slow, iterative process informed our later concept-driven sessions interviewing scientists and other fieldworkers; an example of what Nippert-Eng describes as the field forming "a feedback loop through which we can increase the specificity of our agenda and the intensity of our focus." (34) This process aligns with a Research Through Design methodology, which we also use in our broader research practices, which recognises that research questions and aims can emerge through initially unfocussed, instinctively-driven creative activities. (Sadokierski 3)

For Nippert-Eng, such creative, multi-method approaches to observation and the communication of data is the future of fieldwork: "Science depends on creativity, in fact and if we allow space for the different ways different kinds of people have for exploring, understanding, and re-presenting the world, better science will follow. [...] The future of fieldwork as well as our disciplines depends on us embracing this more thoroughly." (44)

At the time of writing, we plan to venture into the remaining habitat in spring 2022 with Crates, in hope of observing wild birds. The captive birds at Taronga Zoo and any wild birds we encounter may represent the last

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<sup>3</sup>Between 2000 and 2017, despite the species Critically Endangered status and national nature protection laws, 9242 hectares of Regent Honeyeater habitat (Australian Conservation Foundation 17)

generations of the species. The last of the species, its endling, may have already hatched. This project is part of a collective bearing witness of one species' struggle to exist and of our own species' struggle to accept authentically that another species has a right to exist. Encountering the captive birds and the human individuals entangled around them in various acts of care evokes humility. Whatever happens to the Regent Honeyeater – and of course we fervently hope it flourishes for millennia – this research will continue to expand our understanding of ourselves in relation to our more-than-human relatives. In addition to visiting the birds in their wild home, the next phase of the project involves translating the 'entangled significance' our conversations with and about the Regent Honeyeater have revealed into compelling stories for broad audiences, in order to contribute to the collection of stories helping inspire action for sustainable futures.

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