LANDSCAPE SOUTH AUSTRALIA MURRAYLANDS AND RIVERLAND



Regent parrot



Scientific name:	*Polytelis anthopeplus monarchoides*
Common name:	regent parrot (eastern subspecies)
Status:	Vulnerable

The regent parrot is a vibrant bird, found only in Australia and nationally listed as vulnerable.

Regent parrots play an important role in keeping our river corridor and Mallee ecosystems healthy – but their numbers have been declining, with fewer than 400 breeding pairs remaining in South Australia.

Regent parrots are often mistaken for rosellas, but they have distinct features that set them apart. The male regent parrot is strikingly colourful, with a bright yellow head, neck and body. It's blue-black wings and tail are accented by red wing patches and a bright red beak – making it one of the more vibrant birds in the region.

The female regent parrot and juveniles (young birds) have similar patterns to males but are more of an olive-green colour around the head and body.

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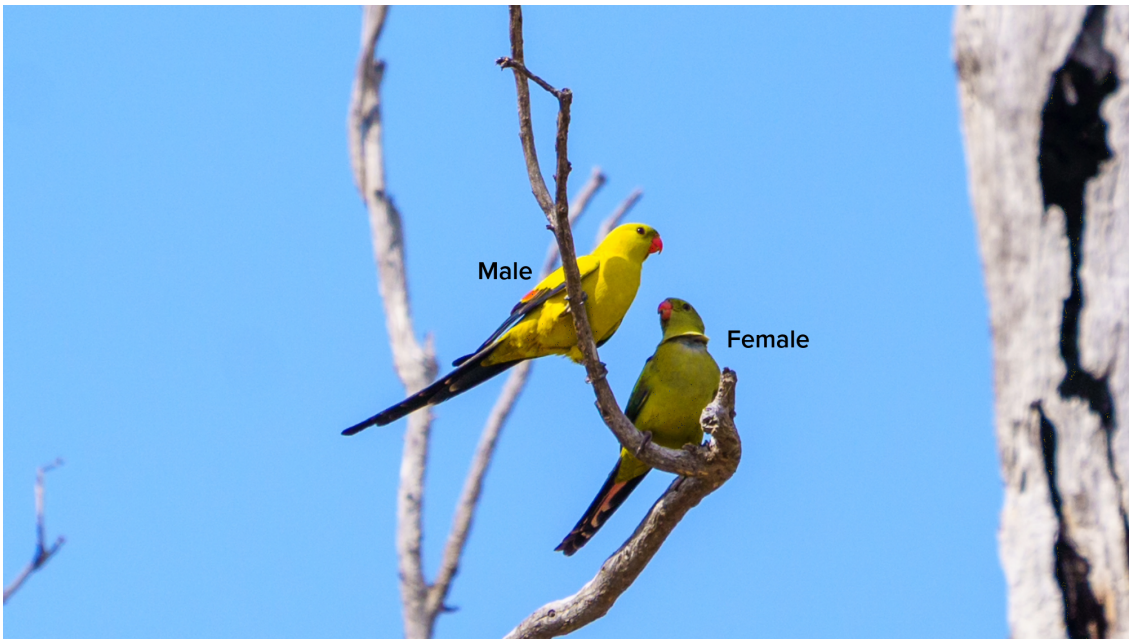


Image: Alan Pettigrew

Regent parrots are slender birds, measuring between 37-42 cm in length. They're often seen in river red gum forests, floodplains, woodlands, and surrounding mallee habitat. They forage in pairs or small groups, both on the ground and in trees, feeding on a varied diet that includes seeds, buds, flowers, insect larvae, psyllids, and lerps.

Breeding occurs in deep hollows predominantly in large river red gum trees. Regent parrots start searching for nesting sites in mid to late July and begin breeding by mid-August. The female lays 3 to 6 eggs, incubating them for 21 days. During this time, the male forages in the mallee woodlands and returns to feed the brooding female by regurgitating food. After hatching, both parents forage and feed the chicks. At around 5 weeks of age, the chicks fledge.

They are highly social, often seen in pairs or small flocks. Their flight is swift and usually low to the ground, weaving through tree-lined corridors for protection. They're known for their loud distinctive 'carrack-carrack' call, as well as softer twittering sounds.

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Regent parrots breed in deep hollows predominantly in large river red gums. Image: Alan Pettigrew

Where do regent parrots live?

Regent parrots occur in 2 separate populations. The eastern subspecies (*Polytelis anthopeplus monarchoides)* are found across parts of south-eastern New South Wales, north-west Victoria and the Murray Mallee and Riverland region in South Australia – mainly along the River Murray between Chowilla and Swan Reach. The other subspecies (*Polytelis anthopeplus anthopeplus)* are found in Western Australia.

Regent parrots rely on a mix of connected habitats, including river red gum and black box woodlands, floodplains and nearby Mallee. These different habitat connections are essential for feeding, breeding and safe movement across the landscape.

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Regent parrots rely on a mix of connected habitats; river red gum and black box woodlands, floodplains and nearby Mallee. Image: Alan Pettigrew

Why are regent parrots threatened?

Regent parrots are nationally listed as vulnerable, state listed as endangered in New South Wales and vulnerable in Victoria and South Australia. Since 2003, South Australia's regent parrot population has declined with approximately 400 breeding pairs remaining.

A range of threats are reducing their population, including:

- Loss of nesting trees due to land clearing and habitat degradation
- Decline in native food sources and safe foraging areas
- Competition and nest disturbance from other bird species
- Nest predation and vehicle collisions
- Limited understanding of breeding success

What is being done to help the regent parrot?

A passionate team of organisations are working together to help these colourful and charismatic parrots.

Through dedicated projects, the Regional Regent Parrot Recovery Team, Murraylands and Riverland Landscape Board, Department of Environment and Water, Mid Murray Landcare, Banrock Station, Nature Foundation, Zoos SA, Trees for Life, Australian National University (ANU) and the Difficult Bird Group have joined forces to better understand and protect this vulnerable species.

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- **Counting parrots:** The 2021 regent parrot census surveyed nesting sites along the River Murray and found fewer than 400 breeding pairs in South Australia. The survey highlighted key recovery actions, including protecting nesting trees and reducing human disturbance.
- **Radio tracking:** Using radio tracking, the team has been able to follow regent parrot movements across the landscape – learning how and where they travel to feed, breed and roost. This research is already helping us identify important habitat areas that need protecting, pinpoint the best places for revegetation and understand how environmental watering can support breeding success.
- **Environmental watering:** Regent parrots depend on healthy river red gums and understory vegetation for nesting and food. During dry years, environmental watering supports these habitats. By delivering water to key wetlands and floodplains, vital food and shelter are maintained for regent parrots and other wildlife, helping ecosystems recover and thrive long-term.
- **Decoy crops:** In the Riverland, regent parrots play a surprising role in helping almond farmers by eating leftover “mummy nuts” that can cause crop disease. However, sometimes they can eat the healthy almonds too. To address this, decoy crops have been trialled where regent parrots are most likely to forage. This innovative approach supports both regent parrot conservation and sustainable almond farming.
- **Understanding breeding success:** Understanding regent parrot breeding success is vital to their recovery. In 2022, the Murraylands and Riverland Landscape Board began a pilot study with researchers from the Australian National University (ANU) to use monitoring cameras to monitor nests, assess chick health and explore impacts from predators, habitat loss and competition. Working alongside skilled and experienced researchers from ANU and collaborating with interstate partners, the Murraylands and Riverland Landscape Board have continued to track nesting success in regent parrots.
- **Trees for life:** Regent parrots are highly-selective nesters, relying on old, large river red gums with deep, well-formed holes – which can take centuries to develop. Connectivity between their nest sites and quality foraging habitat is essential to regent parrot survival. Due to this revegetation efforts are being undertaken in the Riverland by Trees for Life and partners. This involves creating native vegetation corridors that provide foraging plants and connect nesting trees along the River Murray to mallee feeding grounds.
- **Engaging young people:** The Murraylands and Riverland Landscape Board are engaging young people though delivering hands-on school sessions and involving students and the River Murray Youth Council in revegetation activities that support regent parrot conservation. In addition to this, the book *Papltata and Pangku* (https://littleaustralianstories.com/product/papaltata-and-pangku/) blends regent parrot conservation with First Nations culture and language. Proceeds from the book support habitat restoration through Trees For Life.

Help save the regent parrot

Small actions that can help save the regent parrot include:

- **Donate to Trees for Life:** Trees for Habitat Program to support regent parrot habitat: Regent Parrot Project - Trees For Life (https://treesforlife.org.au/TFLWeb/regent-parrot-project)
- **Learn about Regent parrots by purchasing an educational children’s book** *Papltata and Pangku* (https://littleaustralianstories.com/product/papaltata-and-pangku/). All proceeds go to Trees for Life.
- **Join a Local Landcare or environmental group:** Community involvement amplifies the impact. Being part of a group dedicated to environmental stewardship means that you're not

only helping the regent parrots but contributing to broader conservation efforts.

- **Become familiar with regent parrot-friendly plants:** Knowing what plants attract regent parrots (https://cdn.environment.sa.gov.au/landscape/docs/mr/2023-regent-parrot_PP_generic_FINAL.pdf) and providing them with the nutrients they need helps you make informed choices when landscaping or restoring areas of their habitat in your garden or property.
- **Drive slowly around grain spills**: Regent parrots are often drawn to grain spills on roads, so driving cautiously can help prevent accidents, protecting these birds from harm.
- **Log sightings on Polly Tell Us:** Recording regent parrot sightings helps researchers and conservationists track the population and distribution of these birds, which is crucial for developing effective conservation strategies: Polly Tell Us (https://biocollect.ala.org.au/acsa/project/index/06b823b6-f259-4e80-9441-84e7c68cc09d)



Image: Alan Pettigrew

For more information on the regent parrot, what we're doing to help and how you can play your part, head to our regent parrot project page (https://www.landscape.sa.gov.au/mr/projects/native-species-projects/regent-parrot-project).

This project is jointly funded by the Australian Government Natural Heritage Trust and the Murraylands and Riverland Landscape Board, a member of the Commonwealth Regional Delivery Partners panel.

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