

Vulnerable Victorians

DSE's threatened species recovery projects

February 2006

Helmeted Honeyeater

The Helmeted Honeyeater is Victoria's bird emblem and sadly, is in danger of extinction.

Helmeted Honeyeaters live in narrow bands of swamp or creek vegetation within the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve, 50 km east of Melbourne.

The removal of native vegetation and drainage of swamps have destroyed large areas of their habitat causing the decline of the species. Another threat is a native bird, the Bell Miner, which aggressively excludes Helmeted Honeyeaters from areas of habitat.

The campaign to save the Helmeted Honeyeater from the threat of extinction began back in the 1960s, leading to the creation of the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve, and it remains a symbol of how people can come together to recognise environmental threats and take action to prevent them.

Among the groups which have joined DSE and played a huge part are the Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater, Birds Australia, Trust for Nature and the Bird Observers Club of Australia, as well as hundreds of other volunteers.

Then there are organisations like Parks Victoria and Zoos Victoria, Melbourne Water and more, sharing their knowledge and expertise.

In 2005 they celebrated the 10th anniversary of the hatching of the first Helmeted Honeyeater born in the wild from captive parents.

Back in 1995 a pair of Helmeted Honeyeaters were taken from Healesville Sanctuary to an aviary along Woori Yallock Creek in Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve.

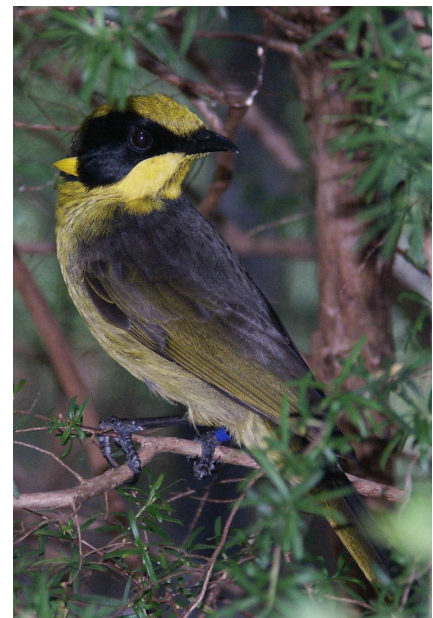
The pair built a nest in the aviary and a chick was hatched. A week later the chick's parents were released into the wild, as so many have been over the past decade, in an effort to rescue the species from extinction.

This project has also brought together a huge range of scientists: from ornithologists to botanists, geneticists and vets, population modellers, pest plant & animal controllers, plant propagators and more..... all working toward the same noble aim.

Other conservation efforts include control of populations of Bell Miners at strategic sites in Yellingbo and the purchase of properties that contain habitat critical to the survival of the Helmeted Honeyeater.

The population has begun to recover from a critical low of about 50 individuals (including only 15 breeding pairs) in 1990.

At last count there were over 100 individuals in the wild and 35 birds in captivity.



Picture: Iain Stych

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FACT SHEET

HELMETED HONEYEATER (*Lichenostomus melanops cassidix*)

STATUS: Critically endangered in Victoria, endangered nationally

DESCRIPTION: The largest and most brightly coloured of the Yellow-tufted Honeyeater subspecies, about 20-22cm in total length. The upperparts of the body are olive-grey with the outer wing and tail feathers greenish-yellow. Underparts are yellowish-green. The sides of the head are glossy black with golden ear-tufts and a yellow throat. Crown and forehead are golden yellow, the latter with a 'helmet' or crest of feathers. Feeds on blossom-nectar, lerps, honeydew, saps such as manna, insects, and berries.

LOCATION: Formally the Upper-Yarra and Westernport Catchments of southern Victoria. The last naturally occurring population occurs in Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve 50km east of Melbourne. This subspecies is being reintroduced into Bunyip State Park southeast of Yellingbo, via the release of captive-bred birds. Captive groups of birds occur at Healesville Sanctuary, near Yellingbo and Taronga Zoo in Sydney.

HABITAT: Swamp and streamside habitat with eucalypts such as Manna Gum, Mountain Swamp Gum, and Swamp Gum, with a dense shrub and sedge understorey. Habitats adjacent to the swamps and creeks are also used.

THREATS: Habitat degradation, including removal of swamp and streamside vegetation, swamp drainage, and weed invasions. Predation by introduced predators. Competition from other species with similar habitat requirements, including native species such as the Bell Miner. A small, remnant population such as that of the Helmeted Honeyeater is susceptible to natural disasters such as wildfire, drought, disease.

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