

3. What do Regent parrots eat?

The importance of farmlands as feeding habitat for the Regent parrot has never been investigated. This research aimed at collecting information on the feeding ecology of Regent parrot in the Wemen-Robinvale area of north-west Victoria.

Data on the behaviour of three distinct age-related (identified by characteristics of bird's plumage) cohorts (adults, sub-adults and young) were systematically collected in the field. These data are used to answer questions such as: what food resources Regent parrots require? Where and when do they forage for food?



Diet

Young and sub-adult individuals may prefer easily digestible high energy (sugar and protein rich) foods: nectar and pollen (e.g. from eucalypt flowers) and invertebrates (e.g. psyllidis) to almonds fruits.

Use of almond plantations by breeding birds varies during the breeding season. Data suggest that adult birds forage on almonds before hatching, but adults may occasionally fly long distances to forage on highly nutritional food (e.g. mallee and hopbush flowers) when nestlings are being fed, despite more easily accessible food items, including cereal and almonds, are available.



Regent parrots forage on unharvested almonds, particularly those remaining on the ground through the non breeding season providing important ecosystem services to farmers.



Native versus agricultural food



Food source

Wattles
 Emu bush
Eucalyptus gracilis
Eucalyptus socialis
Eucalyptus costata
 Hop bush
 Blue bush
 Chenopods
 Copper burrs
 Saltbush
 Cereals (wheat, barley, oats) crops
 Almonds

 Grapes
 Paddy melons

Food items

Immature seeds
 Nectar
 Nectar
 Nectar
 Nectar
 Immature seeds
 Immature seeds, fleshy fruits
 Immature seeds, fleshy fruits
 Immature seeds, fleshy fruits
 Immature seeds, fleshy fruits
 Immature seeds
 Immature and mature seeds

 Fleshy fruits
 Immature and mature seeds

Period

November - January
 September - December
 April - October
 September - March
 September - March
 November - December
 May - September
 March - October
 October - January
 September - December
 October- December
 September- October and
 December - March
 February - May
 May - September



Regent parrots eat a wide diversity of food resources. Our data suggest that Regent Parrots **choose** among different **foods depending on the nutritional content** of the food items as well as their **availability** and **accessibility** across the landscape. **Almonds** contribute to the diet of Regent parrots in the study areas but their **use is likely to be balanced against the availability of other potential resources within the foraging range** of Regent parrots. Almonds, being palatable and available because of irrigation, are likely to become more important in the Regent parrots diet during years of low rainfall that fail to generate productivity in non irrigated landscape and native vegetation.



Almonds are not the primary food resource for Regent parrots. Many other food resources are exploited even when almonds are easily accessible and available.