**Episode 3 Transcript – Community flocking together**

Narrator/Interviewer: Mary-Anne Scully (MS)

Ty Bates (TB)

Kirrily Anderson (KA)

Jane Roots (JR)

Karen Berrysmith (KB)

Matt Williams (MW)

Natalie Ord (NO)

Neville Bartlett (NB)

00:00 [upbeat music playing]

00:16 Mary-Anne Scully: The discovery of gold at Ballarat in 1851 sparked Victoria’s famous gold rush. An estimated 6000 miners arrived each week seeking their fortune. Many hopeful prospectors flocked to places like Chiltern in Victoria’s north east. Fast forward to 2020 and people continue to flock to Chiltern in search of hidden treasure. Only this time it's gold and black.

00:43 Ty Bates: So, they're just a cute little bird, but they're like a Richmond supporter, you know, black and yellow, you know, they're only quite little.

00:52 MS: That was Ty Bates, owner of the Lake Anderson Caravan Park in Chiltern describing the regent honeyeater. A bird once commonly seen along Australia’s east coast, stretching from Brisbane to Adelaide. Now Australia's most threatened songbird, regent honeyeaters are only found in small numbers in Victoria and New South Wales. With an estimated 400 birds in the wild. In this series, we are exploring the challenges this bird faces, meeting people who are striving to bring the species back from the brink of extinction and exploring Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park, a biodiversity hotspot in north east Victoria that is feeding and breeding ground for the regent honeyeater. In this episode we are meeting members of the Chiltern community who are flying high to protect and celebrate this special bird.

01:47 [upbeat music playing]

01:53 MS: An impressive mural at Chiltern park recreation reserve, catches the spirit of Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park and the way many people feel about their local community. The mural is titled 'Reverence'. Local artist, Kirrily Anderson, was commissioned to design the mural by the Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water, and Planning.

02:15 Kirrily Anderson: I've been selected as an artist to design and paint a mural depicting a scene that represents a wide variety of native flora and fauna that exist here in the Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park.

02:29 MS: The mammoth nine metre by 12 metre mural, located only a few minutes off the Hume Freeway, depicts rare and threatened species that live within the Box-Ironbark Forest which surrounds Chiltern. Kirrily and her team bought it to life over 25 days.

02:47 KA: I think there's about 27 species that are included in the mural which is pretty cool. There is a wide variety of different things ranging from our well known and loved regent honeyeater to a barking owl to various types of fungus. A spider orchid, which is also a rare orchid that can be found here and not in many other places. So, and of course the box-ironbark’s as well.

03:14 MS: The mural is a wider program designed to promote, protect and conserve Victoria’s threatened species including the regent honeyeater. Let's find out more from Jane Roots.

03:25 Jane Roots: I've been in Australia 24 years. My partner, Neil Ward, and I moved back to Chiltern in 2005. He had a property here that he had purchased before that. We were living down in Adelaide. We decided to come back here because it's an awful lot greener up here then it was in Adelaide and we love the north east.

03:49 MS: Like many people in rural communities, Jane wears different hats. She's a proud Chiltern local, president of Chiltern Landcare and works alongside a threatened species team within the Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. As Jane explains, the idea for the mural started some time ago.

04:08 JR: A number of people had similar ideas, but I think it was about 2009 or 2010 we had a ‘Regents and Reds’ evening in the community hall in Chiltern. A winery donated some local red wine, and we had nibbles and things. Glen Johnson from DELWP and Birdlife, think it was Dean who was up. They did a show about regents. We had a quiz and all sorts of things. And we talked about wouldn't it be great to have some kind of lasting show piece in Chiltern to say what an amazing effort and what an amazing bird. We didn't want to do a giant regent [laugh], we talked about a mural then. Thinking in those early days it was something that Landcare could sponsor was putting some information at even the truck stops on the highway at the two rest areas and using some of those blank walls. Once I got the job with DELWP as Program Manager, helping manage the threatened species programs in the region, it just seemed like a natural fit. So, when there was money available, I said let's explore what this could look like.

05:15 MS: The mural fits neatly into one of department's goal for its biodiversity plan - to engage people in nature.

05:24 JR: One of the key aims of the mural is to raise awareness about the flora and fauna of the area, of the national park, and using the regent honeyeater as a drawcard for that. And say that 'yes the regent honeyeater is here but there are all these other animals and this unique environment. Come and see it.' A key message in the signage that goes along with the mural is 'get out and look for those things yourself'. That’s because we know from lots of research is that getting out in the bush is really good for you. it's healthy, it's good for mental health, it's good for your physical health but it's also good for the community. Chiltern is in such a unique place; nestled in the national park and surrounded by beautiful bush, we could be a really healthy community [laugh]. You know, that's a long projection of what this mural could do but hopefully it'll bring more people to town to come see it. If we can get on that silo trail, ideally more people would get out into the park too.

06:29 [low bass music playing]

06:36 MS: It seems that people are listening to this message because lots of people are getting out into nature and loving it. Let's catch up again with Ty Bates who we met a little earlier. As a youngster, Ty kicked the football on the oval at the Chiltern recreation reserve. He later hit the road, working in mines at Port Hedland, managing the croc tent at Cape York and transforming a pub in Mt Morgan. Ty and his wife returned to Chiltern in 2015, after a tip from his parents.

07:07 TB: They said 'oh, the Chiltern Caravan Park is for sale.' We've done our fair share of travelling and we like the idea of caravan parks so we come and had a look. Like we'd sort of been here, we'd played footy just here, you know, as kids and Astrid played netball. When we drove in to come have a look at it, we drove passed the lake. We didn't even know there was a lake there and it just had this hunch of 'wow', you know, this is just beautiful.

07:33 MS: Ty quickly discovered that Chiltern is one of the premier birdwatching areas in southern Australia, a hotspot for researchers and twitchers worldwide.

07:42 TB: We get the real important guys from Birdlife Australia. Dean Ingwersen is one of those people. He said to me, that the number one activity in Australia that involves the most people is fishing. And everyone goes, 'yer', they shake their head, they nod their head, 'yer I can understand that', but the number two activity in Australia that involves the most people is birdwatching.

08:04 [low bass music playing]

08:11 TB: And they come from the four corners of the globe. They come from all over the world. It's like there's a list. They're here to tick things off that list. It is unbelievable, when we bought the place, the owner said 'oh yer, you'll get a lot of birdwatchers' and we thought 'yer, righto. How many can that be?' and then we started seeing it. They're the best guests. They're gone when the sun comes up and they're home when the sun goes down. They're all day in the national park.

08:40 MS: Widespread interest in the regent honeyeater is also great news for the Chiltern economy. Karen Berrysmith from Chiltern Tourism says the town is history, art and nature.

08:51 Karen Berrysmith: It really is a pleasant little vision of the past. There is no high-powered glitzy neon lights, there is everything here that you would require for a holiday but the fact we've got this massive park and it's such an amazing resource that's right on our doorstep and free and easily accessible by bike, walking or car, I just think 'come and see for yourself’.

09:14 MS: It's not just visitors that enjoy the wonders of Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park. Locals also love getting out into it. Finding it a great place to connect with nature, meet friends, escape or reset. The Chiltern Box-Ironbark Forest is an ecological wonderland with an array of native flora and fauna, wildflowers, wetlands and more. Spend time in the forest and you will likely come across kangaroos, wallabies and echidnas. Just ask Matt Williams, he manages the Chiltern Post Office and is an avid mountain bike rider.

09:50 Matt Williams: You can be out there on your bike and see a different range of animals, birds, flora, in all the different areas and certainly throughout the different times of year, different seasons, you're always on the look for different things that are happening. This particular season and this year the orchids are absolutely fantastic out there. It's like a show, a garden out there. There's also a good chance pedalling around you'll see groups of kangaroos. Great to just be riding through and you've got a mob of 10-15 kangaroos just scooting through the forest following you or alongside. F=So, it’s fantastic.

10:29 [chimes playing]

10:32 MS: A walk in the park is a daily ritual for Natalie Ord who has lived at Chiltern for 16 years. Nat is a professional photographer who previously worked as a firefighter in Victorian parks.

10:46 Natalie Ord: What I love about walking is, even if I'm taking the same path each day there's something different and just noticing the changes and whether that's through the really obvious ones of flowers or, um, just different birds coming through, different temperature each day, it's really quite dynamic. Even though on the surface it looks the same, there's always these little treasures to be finding on my walk.

11:13 MS: who do you come across when you’re in the park?

11:16 NO: Two-legs or wings or four-legs? Open question?

11:19 MS: Open question.

11:20 NO: Hmm... well of the two-leg variety I'm seeing, this year especially, people I've never seen before and a lot more people. It's been a bit of a highway up here which part of me is like 'umm this is my park... go away' [laugh] 'this is my peaceful thing'. Seriously it is lovely that other people are coming up here and sharing that space and getting whatever it is out of the park. This year just observing what birds are here and noticing patterns, because like I said, I'm walking that roughly the same track each time. This year I found a bowerbird bower. I know because I'd been watching those for little while, thinking it must be around here somewhere, then I found that. I mean, it's not a rare bird but that’s exciting for me. And just noticing, um, like I found a little pardalote’s nest, and then all the antechinus that are around, and there's heaps of roos and there is also wallabies and all these other creatures that are sharing the space with us.

12:20 [upbeat music playing]

12:29 Neville Bartlett: I wanted to see turquoise parrots. So, I got in touch with a lady at Chiltern, by the name of Eileen Collins who is the guru of everything Chiltern whose been an absolute passionate environmentalist ever since she retired from teaching. She directed me down there and I started to get hooked on Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park.

12:54 MS: That's the voice of Neville Bartlett, an avid birdwatcher, photographer, and also president of the friends of Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park group.

13:03 NB: And once you get involved down at Chiltern, you discover that it doesn't look anything special because it's just a place with lots trees, an open woodland, but if you're looking for birds or animals or flowers it gets you hooked because there are literally hundreds of different species of plants and so on. Bird species there's over 200 species recorded there, so you find that people come from overseas and it's right at the top of their list to come have a look.

13:38 [captive bred regent honeyeater call]

13:44 MS: At the start of this series, we met scientists and ecologists who specialise in threatened species recovery and learnt about a captive breeding program which is helping to stave off extinction of the regent honeyeater. In part two, we chatted with volunteers who have come together to support regent honeyeater releases in Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park using radio-tracking and a smart phone app to monitor and log the movements of 307 released since 2008. Today we met Chiltern locals who share a love of this special bird and the national park it calls home.

14:24 [upbeat music playing]

14:28 MS: The love of regent honeyeater continues to grow, and you can be part of this wonderful journey. If you're travelling the Hume Highway near Chiltern, take a break, see the mammoth ‘Reverence’ mural and check out another mural featuring the regent honeyeater located near the Chiltern Information Centre. You can also explore some walks in the nearby Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park. Maybe even see a banded regent honeyeater. If you do, you can record your sighting using the VBA Go app and say hello to a few friendly locals along the way. Who knows? They might be out looking for a regent honeyeater too.

15:09 MS: Kirrily, have you seen a regent honeyeater?

15:11 KA: No, I haven't. Sad to say, I keep saying I'm gunna have a dedicated day and go and take a chair and sit all day and wait and watch and hope to see one.

15:21 MS: So Karen, have you seen a regent honeyeater?

15:24 KB: Nope, no, at the moment I've got about 10 turquoise-faced honeyeaters, I believe nesting on our property somewhere. But then I've also got kookaburras and king parrots, and the little blue-wrens and things. So, I could recognise one, I hope, if I saw one but no, there's just the elusive. Almost like the gold in then there hills, we [laughter] you know, they've taken the gold and now they're gonna inspect the ah, the bright yellow honeyeaters. We'll see, one day I might see one.

15:52 MS: We leave the final word to Ches Patetl, a local landholder who seeks to combine his love of the land and this small bright bird that with the help of the community is coming back from the brink.

16:05 MS: So, you've done quite a lot of work with Glen and with other organisations to care for and protect birdlife. What is it that motivates you to do that?

16:14 Ches Patetl: Just the love of birds. I love cats but I'll never have another cat because I love birds more and ah, I like watching them, I like listening to them and it's a great habitat.

16:28 [upbeat music playing]