

## **Orange-bellied Parrot (OBP) Recovery Program News**

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The annual Orange-bellied Parrot (OBP) census took place on 15 December 2025, with 86 individuals counted at the Melaleuca breeding grounds. Since then, two additional birds have been confirmed, bringing the total tally up to 88 returns for the 2026-2026 season (55 males, 33 females).

### **JUVENILE RELEASES**

Captive-bred juvenile OBPs were released at Melaleuca in three groups across February and March 2026 to join the wild flock. A total of 51 juveniles (25 males, 26 females) were released across three cohorts.

These birds were bred at three institutions: the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania (NRE Tas)'s Five Mile Beach, Moonlit Sanctuary Wildlife Conservation Park, and Healesville Sanctuary. From the Five Mile Beach holding facilities, birds were transferred to Melaleuca by light aircraft. Purpose-built on-site aviaries housed them for three-four nights prior to release. These "soft-release" aviaries were left open with food and water maintained for approximately two weeks post-release, allowing free access for the juveniles while they adjusted to their new surroundings.



*Image 1. Juvenile Orange-bellied Parrot at Melaleuca, Tasmania. Photo by Kerri Duncan 2024.*

## WILD BREEDING SEASON

NRE Tas staff refreshed 121 nest boxes with hardwood shavings around the Melaleuca breeding site in September and October 2025. Nest boxes that had previously been occupied by Green Rosellas were replaced under precautionary advice from the Veterinary Technical Reference Group (VTRG).

Volunteers arrived for live-in shifts of two-to-four weeks from late September 2025, with the final volunteers finishing up at the end of April 2026.

Staff and volunteers noted that breeding started later than usual for the 2025-2026 season. The resulting breeding output at Melaleuca was lower than in recent years, with a minimum of 46 fledglings recorded from 23 wild nesting attempts. Despite this, clutch size, hatching success, and fledging success remained within the range observed in recent seasons.

It is expected that the lower level of wild breeding output in 2025-26 will influence return numbers for the 2026–27 season. Data collected over the next few seasons will help determine whether 2025-26 was an anomalous year or indicative of an underlying issue that may require further analysis and management.

## CAPTIVE BREEDING SEASON

Construction for HPAI preparedness and additional aviaries occurred at NRE Tas's Five Mile Beach, Priam Psittaculture Centre and Adelaide Zoo in late 2025. Associated disturbance may have temporarily impacted breeding success at these sites. However, total fledglings produced across all five participating sites reached 172 this season, up from last season's total of 135.

Of the 149 females identified to be suitable for potential breeding, 105 participated in nesting (70%). This is slightly lower than previous seasons, and investigations are being undertaken for possible methods to improve participation. The fledgling rate of chicks hatched, however, was 89% - one of the highest rates to date.



*Image 2. A flock of 109 Blue-winged Parrots observed by volunteers at Woolnorth, Tas. Photo by Rory Burton 2026.*

## MIGRATION FLOCK

In April 2025, the OBPRT's Strategy and Coordination Group (SACG) endorsed a pause on spring releases of adult birds for the 2025-26 season. This was based on increasing evidence suggesting the relative benefits of these releases have declined as the wild population has grown. It was the first pause of this management method since it began in 2012.

A small, female-only spring release is being considered for the 2026-27 season, primarily to balance the wild male-bias sex ratio observed.

A total of 165 OBPs are estimated to have departed Melaleuca for the 2026 northern winter migration.

## MIGRATION TRACKING PROJECT

The OBP Tracking Project, led by NRE Tas in collaboration with Zoos Victoria, has begun its third year in 2026. A total of 49 birds were fitted with lightweight VHF transmitters early in the year to monitor their upcoming migration patterns. Specially placed fixed receiver stations are maintained across Tasmania, Victoria and South Australia to detect the transmitters.

The 2025 tracking report is due to be released in the coming months.

## TASMANIAN MIGRATION SURVEYS



*Image 3. Volunteers during the May survey weekend at the Western Treatment Plant, Victoria. Photo by Ryan Kilgower 2026.*

Surveys along the Tasmanian migration route were coordinated by the Friends of the OBP through Wildcare Tasmania in March-April 2026. Sites included Strahan, Arthur River, Woolnorth, Sisters Beach, and several sites across King Island.

A total of 129 surveys were conducted by 37 volunteers. One OBP bearing a transmitter was detected using a handheld tracker flying from Woolnorth to Robbins Island. Large flocks of the closely related

Blue-winged Parrot were observed on several occasions around Woolnorth.

## MAINLAND SIGHTINGS

Mainland surveys are organised by OBPRT regional coordinators supported by several partner organisations, including BirdLife Australia, Zoos Victoria, Phillip Island Nature Park, Limestone Coast Landscape Board and Corangamite CMA.

Multiple migrant OBPs have already been observed on the mainland this year. The first confirmed sighting at Victoria's Western Treatment Plant was a wild-born female juvenile on 19 April 2026. As of 4 June 2026, eleven sightings have been confirmed:

- Ten in the Port Phillip region, Victoria
- One on the Narrung Peninsula, South Australia

There have been two reports of a bird/birds spotted passing through Williamstown and Newport, Victoria, but as no leg bands could be identified it cannot be confirmed if these had already been counted. This was the first time an OBP has been recorded in the area since 1988.

## RECOVERY TEAM MEETING

OBPRT members and ten invited guests (totalling 34 participants) attended a primarily in-person meeting in May 2026. Hosted by NRE Tas in Hobart, Tasmania, this full day meeting focussed on reviewing progress, problem-solving challenges and agreeing on priorities for the coming year. The OBPRT SACG also held a separate in-person meeting, with Chairs of major subgroups and project leads sharing updates and recommending strategic pathways.

## NEXT STEPS

The 2026 mainland counts are well underway, with successful surveys conducted across Victoria and South Australia on the weekend of the 16-17 May. Remaining mainland surveys are scheduled for:

- 25-26 July
- 12-13 September

Surveys along the next southern migratory route will take place in Tasmania on:

- 10-11 October – Woolnorth
- 17-18 October – Arthur River

To get involved, contact your regional survey coordinator. Details are listed on the [OBP Recovery Team website](#). Outside of surveys, public sightings can be reported to regional coordinators or by filling out the sighting form on the [BirdLife Australia website](#).



*Image 4. An Orange-bellied Parrot in the rain. Photo by Marianne Gee.*

## **Fast Facts:**

OBPs (*Neophema chrysogaster*) are small parrots that primarily feed on seeds on the ground or low vegetation. Males are bright green, yellow, and blue with a prominent orange belly. The colours of females and juveniles are subdued, and they have less prominent orange bellies.

In the summer, OBPs breed in southwestern Tasmania within 5km of the coast. In autumn and spring, they migrate via western Tasmania, the Hunter Island Group, and King Island. OBPs winter in coastal habitats in southeastern Australia. Each year, OBPs migrate at least 600 km over land and sea.

The IUCN Red List and the Australian EPBC Act 1999 classify the OBP as Critically Endangered. The species persists as a tiny wild population, breeding at a single location, after a recent rapid decline.

Many threatening factors have contributed to the decline of the OBP in the wild. Habitat loss and degradation plus introduced predators and competitors likely drove past declines. Today, several interacting threats impact the ongoing survival of wild OBPs, including ongoing habitat degradation, reduced genetic diversity, disease, stochastic environmental events, climate change, and barriers to migration.

The Recovery Team comprises 28 government, non-government, and community group representatives. It develops, coordinates, and reviews the OBP Recovery Plan, and preserves expertise and advice in OBP biology, ecology, and conservation.

Volunteers greatly contribute to the actions of the OBP Recovery Program. They assist by collecting data on OBPs in the field and captive institutions. They also raise public awareness and funds for recovery actions.

The organisations within the Recovery Team fund recovery actions. Government and non-government grants, and individual and corporate donations, provide additional financial support.

*The OBPR is coordinated by the Zoo and Aquarium Association Australasia (ZAA), funded by the Australian Government's Saving Native Species Recovery Action Coordination grant.*

