

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

Prepared by Kerri Duncan, OBP Recovery Program Coordinator (ZAA), on behalf of the OBP Recovery Team.

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The number of Orange-bellied Parrots (OBPs) to return to Melaleuca for the 2024/2025 breeding season has been revised to 91 (from 92), after further record validation revealed an individual had been mistakenly identified more than once. The flock was supplemented by the release of captive-bred adults in spring 2024, resulting in a total of 106 birds present for the 2024/2025 wild breeding season.

### **WILD BREEDING SEASON RESULTS**

The wild flock produced a minimum of 99 fledglings (97 banded, two unbanded) as of 2 April 2025, based on sightings at Melaleuca feed tables. Monitored by the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania (NRE Tas) staff and volunteers, the banded fledglings were raised in 27 nests out of 34 known nests attempted by breeding pairs. The two unbanded fledglings are assumed to have fledged from nest boxes that were not monitored this season. All of these pairs chose to use the artificial nest boxes that are mounted and maintained by NRE Tas (see Image 1). Metrics including clutch size, hatch rate, fledgling rate, and overall breeding success were calculated and documented against previous years to study trends and adjust management strategies accordingly.



**Image 1.** A wild pair of Orange-bellied Parrots using a custom-made nest box in Melaleuca, Tas.

Photograph by Huon Douglas.

## **CAPTIVE BREEDING SEASON RESULTS**

Despite the breeding season beginning later than usual, the captive breeding program produced a total of 132 successful fledglings—a similar number to the previous two seasons. Across the five participating institutions (NRE Tas's Five Mile Beach, Zoos Victoria's Healesville Sanctuary, Zoos SA's Adelaide Zoo, Moonlit Sanctuary and Priam Psittaculture Centre) the average clutch size was 4.56, with second clutches being slightly smaller than first clutches, as is generally expected.

Of the 115 females identified to be suitable for potential breeding, 88 participated in nesting (78%). Fertility and hatching rates were calculated to be slightly lower than the past few seasons; this will be a focus for improvement in the upcoming breeding season.

In terms of breeding facility updates, Moonlit Sanctuary saw extensive renovations leading up to this season, resulting in improved enclosures, better biosecurity and an enhanced environment for the OBPs. Adelaide Zoo began the process of constructing a large flight aviary to display conservation species, with OBPs high on their list as a potential focus once completed.

## **JUVENILE RELEASES**

Captive-bred juveniles were released to the wild at Melaleuca across three events in January, February and March. A total of 28 young birds were released, made up of nine from Healesville Sanctuary, four from Moonlit Sanctuary, three from Priam Psittaculture Centre and twelve from NRE Tas.

## **MIGRATION FLOCK**

With the breeding season now considered over, NRE Tas staff have assessed 172 OBPs to have survived the season to migrate north to the mainland for winter. This is a similar number to recent years, and reflects the combined total of surviving returned birds, surviving fledglings, and released juveniles.

## **MIGRATION TRACKING PROJECT**

NRE Tas's Migration Tracking Project is in its second year, after an interim report of 2024 results showed successful data collection from 12 tracked juveniles. Delivered in collaboration with Zoos Victoria, another group of OBPs have been fitted with VHF transmitters and will be tracked using specially built receiver towers along their expected migration route.

The 2024 report showed birds stopping on King Island and north-west Tasmania for up to several months before carrying on to Victoria. Other findings of note included an OBP that covered a distance of 320km in five and a half hours, and that most birds were detected undertaking long-distance flights at night.

## **MAINLAND SIGHTINGS**

At least one of the transmitter birds has already been spotted on the mainland, as part of two first-year juveniles seen at Victoria's Western Treatment Plant. A total of twelve OBPs have been identified at this site as of 21 May 2025.

A further three OBPs were confirmed on South Australia's Narrung Peninsula during the official May survey weekend, supported by the Limestone Coast Landscape Board. This brings total confirmed mainland sightings to 15 so far: a great start to the over wintering period.

Earlier in April, four surveys were conducted along the west coast of Tasmania and King Island in Bass Strait to spot OBPs along their expected migration route. During the six-day King Island survey (made possible through a grant from the Tasmanian Nature Conservation Fund), a wild-born banded OBP was identified feeding on samphire, accompanied by another bird of unknown band status. Additional sightings in the area have been reported but are yet to be confirmed. Fifteen volunteers completed training to allow them to conduct surveys on wind farms operated by Woolnorth Renewables over the next two years.



**Image 2.** Survey volunteers based at Currie on King Island, in the Bass Strait.

Photograph by Perry Cleland, April 2025.

## **BIRD FLU PREPAREDNESS**

Work has continued across the program to prepare for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza virus (HPAI H5N1 2.3.4.4b). This strain has caused significant illness and death in poultry, wild birds and wild mammals around the world, but has yet to be detected in Australia. Preparedness plans have been developed for the wild population as well as captive site-specific plans to help identify and mitigate the risk of an outbreak impacting OBPs.

As a nationally notifiable disease, the current advice is to continue reporting sick or dead wildlife suspected of avian influenza to the 24-hour Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888. Australian jurisdictions also require that all avian influenza virus detections are reported to the relevant Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO).



Further information on how to recognise and respond to HPAI is listed in the following Wildlife Health Australia (WHA) document: [HPAI Advice for people who encounter sick or dead wild birds.](#)

### **NEXT STEPS**

The remaining official mainland winter surveys will occur in late July and mid-September, relying heavily on volunteers to scout known and potential feeding grounds along the coastlines of Victoria and southeastern South Australia. To get involved, contact your regional survey coordinator; details are listed on the [OBP Recovery Team website.](#)

#### **2025 Survey Dates:**

17-18 May

26-27 July

13-14 September



**Image 3.** A wild Orange-bellied Parrot in flight in Melaleuca, Tas.

Photograph by Huon Douglas.

## **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 5 km of the coast. In autumn and spring, they migrate via western Tasmania, the HunterIsland 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.