

Orange-bellied Parrot (OBP) Recovery Program News

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

MELALEUCA RETURNS

As of the census date of 15 December 2025, the National Orange-bellied Parrot Recovery Team (OBPRT) can confirm 86 Orange-bellied Parrots have returned to the Melaleuca breeding site in south-western Tasmania.

A count of 53 males and 33 females were recorded by The Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania (NRE Tas) staff and volunteers. The sex of two birds has been revised from female to male since these data were first published. Of the returned birds, 66 were wild-born, 32 of which were born in the 2024-25 season. Twenty were captive-bred and released in previous seasons as juveniles.

While slightly below last year's record of 91, this is the second-highest total return count since reliable monitoring began. The OBPRT suspects the Melaleuca site may be approaching its ecological carrying capacity, with observed population growth in the immediate area expected to plateau as a result. The team are developing plans to support population growth beyond the current limited breeding range.

DEC 2019	DEC 2020	DEC 2021	DEC 2022	DEC 2023	DEC 2024	DEC 2025
23	51	70	77	82	91	86



Image 1. Orange-bellied Parrots at Melaleuca. Photo by Marianne Gee, December 2025.

CAPTIVE BREEDING

Breeding season is well underway at the five participating captive-breeding facilities: NRE Tas's Five Mile Beach Wildlife Management Facility, Zoos Victoria's Healesville Sanctuary, Moonlit Sanctuary Wildlife Conservation Park, Priam Psittaculture Centre and Zoos SA's Adelaide Zoo.

More than 70 fledglings were welcomed into the captive Orange-bellied Parrot population in the new year of 2026, with numbers expected to continue rising over the coming month. Fledglings can be easily recognised in aviaries by their pale orange bills, which gradually darken to a greyish-black/brown as the birds mature.

The captive population typically begins breeding earlier than the wild population, with the first egg of this current season laid in early October 2025. Breeding numbers are being closely monitored as preparations begin for upcoming juvenile release selections.



Image 2. A fledgling Orange-bellied Parrot at the Five Mile Beach Wildlife Management Facility. Photo by NRE Tas, December 2025.

MIGRATION TRACKING PROJECT

The Orange-bellied Parrot (OBP) Tracking Project being led by NRE Tas, in collaboration with Zoos Victoria, has completed its second year. Thirty-nine OBPs fitted with lightweight VHF transmitters were tracked during their northern migration in 2025 using 25 specially placed fixed receiver stations. Seven of these receivers are located along the coast of Victoria between Gippsland and the SA border, while the remaining 18 are distributed across Tasmania.

The project hopes to shed further light on the birds' migration habits and routes, including preferred

stop-over sites and feeding grounds.

The second annual report, including details about all detections, will be released by NRE Tas in early 2026. Tracking will be extended into a third year with VHF transmitters fitted at the end of the breeding season prior to the 2026 northern migration.

GPS TRACKING TRIALS

Leading on from the successful VHF tracking trials, NRE Tas has commenced the trialling of archival GPS tracking units on captive OBPs at the Five Mile Beach Wildlife Management Facility.

Recent developments in GPS technology have brought the weight of units to within an acceptable range for use on OBPs (approximately 1g and 3% body weight). Captive trials are first required to ensure the devices do not have adverse effects on welfare, condition or survival, before being closely monitored on wild birds and then approved for migration studies.

Stage 1 of the captive trials was completed in early 2025, which involved determining the most effective attachment methods for the devices. Stage 2 will expand on the most suitable design, and is planned for early 2026.

GPS tracking is capable of yielding more precise information about OBP locations and potentially flight height data, which is not possible from VHF tracking methods alone.

BIRD FLU PREPAREDNESS

The OBPRT continues to monitor and prepare for the potential arrival of Bird Flu (Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza virus; HPAI H5N1 2.3.4.4b).

Several captive institutions involved with the OBP Recovery Program received federal grant funding to boost their preparedness efforts. Facilitated through the Zoo and Aquarium Association Australasia (ZAA), these funds have allowed for enhanced biosecurity measures to be established, such as the building of additional quarantine structures. Recipients have included NRE Tas's Five Mile Beach, Healesville Sanctuary, Werribee Open Plains Zoo, Priam Psittaculture Centre, Moonlit Sanctuary, Adelaide Zoo, and Cleland Wildlife Park.

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. Remember, for your own safety, avoid contact with sick or dead wildlife.

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

From January, NRE Tas staff will begin monitoring nest boxes across Melaleuca to gather data on wild reproductive success for the 2025-2026 breeding season.

Migration surveys will occur in Tasmania in March, April and October, while mainland winter surveys are booked in for May, July and September. Specific dates are listed below:

Tasmania:

- 14-15 & 21-22 March – Strahan, Trial Harbour and Granville Harbour
- 28-29 March – Arthur River
- 11-12 April – Woolnorth and Sisters Beach
- 23-30 April – King Island (funded by a grant from the Tasmanian Nature Conservation Fund)
- 10-11 October – Woolnorth
- 17-18 October – Arthur River

Mainland (SA and Vic sites):

- 16-17 May
- 25-26 July
- 12-13 September

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 3. Orange-bellied Parrots at Melaleuca. Photo by Marianne Gee, December 2025.

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.

