

Orange-bellied Parrot (OBP) Recovery Program News

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

MAINLAND SIGHTINGS

The National Orange-bellied Parrot Recovery Team (OBPRT) is pleased to report an increase in confirmed winter mainland sightings this year to between 32-34 individuals.

This represents a notable rise from last year's total of 21 confirmed sightings, and includes five individuals that were detected and identified via VHF tracking towers but not observed.



*Image 1. Wild-born, first year Orange-bellied Parrot on the Bellarine Peninsula.
Photo by Karyn Brown, September 2025.*

Of the 29 observed individuals:

- Twelve were spotted repeatedly around Victoria's Western Treatment Plant
- Three were seen on South Australia's Narrung Peninsula during the May survey weekend
- Two were identified in south-western Victoria in late June, and
- Twelve were seen around the Bellarine Peninsula in September.

Many of the OBPs have now begun their journey across the Bass Strait for the upcoming breeding season at Melaleuca. The Friends of the OBP group, part of Wildcare Tasmania, conducted surveys at Woolnorth on October 11-12, hoping to sight the birds during their southern migration. The volunteers battled wild weather and saw large flocks of Blue-winged Parrots (*Neophema chrysostoma*), which can often be mistaken for OBPs. Another survey is planned in Arthur River on October 18-19.

Visit the OBPR website at obprecoveryteam.org for more survey information.

MELALEUCA RETURNS

Several OBPs have already arrived at the Melaleuca breeding grounds. Volunteers with the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania (NRE Tas)'s Orange-bellied Parrot Tasmanian Program have confirmed ten returns: nine wild-born and one captive-born OBP. One of the wild-born birds is a six-year-old female.

NRE Tas staff have begun replacing nest boxes and refreshing nest box material around the site ready for the upcoming breeding season. Weekly return updates will be posted on the [Orange-bellied Parrot Tasmanian Program Facebook page](#).

TRACKING PROJECT UPDATES

The second year of the Migration Tracking Project, led by NRE Tas in collaboration with Zoos Victoria, is progressing on schedule. In autumn 2025, VHF transmitters were attached to two adult and 40 juvenile (10 captive, 30 wild) OBPs at Melaleuca prior to migrating north.

A total of 18 receivers were in operation across Tasmania this year, with tracking coverage as far east as Sisters Beach. In Victoria, seven receivers were deployed along the coast between Gippsland and the SA border. Data collation and analysis is underway, with reporting of results expected around the end of 2025, including further details about all detections.

NEW CAPTIVE SITES

A new flight aviary has been purpose-built at Adelaide Zoo to expand their flock of OBPs. Around 40 captive birds not suitable for release to the wild will make their home here, while another eight females

will move into an existing mixed-species walkthrough aviary at Cleland Wildlife Park.

The captive population plays multiple vital roles in the Recovery Program; a large one being acting as an insurance population against extinction. As wild and captive OBPs are considered one metapopulation, careful genetic management is required to ensure birds allocated for breeding and release have the highest chances of contributing positively to the long-term recovery of the species.

Captive OBPs also support important research projects, helping to better understand OBP ecology and inform effective management practises. Birds on display additionally serve as ambassadors, raising public awareness about the species and broader environmental issues, inspiring ongoing action for their conservation.



Image 2. Captive-bred juvenile OBPs in a soft-release enclosure prior to release at Melaleuca. Photo by Kerri Duncan, 2024.

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 have 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.](#)

EX SITU POPULATION VIABILITY ANALYSIS

Members of the OBPRT, in collaboration with independent facilitators from the IUCN Conservation Planning Specialist Group, are conducting a new *ex situ* (captive population) OBP population viability analysis (PVA). This project aims to model the ideal structure of the current captive population to simultaneously:

- Provide sufficient release birds to support ongoing wild recovery, and
- Maintain the genetic and demographic health of the captive population.

The PVA will predict outcomes under various possible future scenarios, forming recommendations to guide management. As it aims to be compatible with existing *in situ* (wild population) PVAs, it will further support future modelling as needed by the Recovery Team.

TRAIT HERITABILITY PROJECT

Another project in progress is studying the genetic heritability of certain traits in OBPs. Specialists at Monash University are helping to conduct pedigree analyses to estimate heritability, using a model which accounts for multiple fixed and random effects. The project aims to further improve understanding of heritable factors to inform ongoing adaptive management.

WINDFARM STATEMENT OF INFORMATION

The OBPRT's Windfarm Working Group has updated its Windfarms Statement of Information (SOI), incorporating data from the NRE Tas interim tracking report. This document provides general, evidence-based information about what is known, suspected, or highly uncertain about relevant aspects of OBP ecology, and the potential risks of windfarms to the species.

A copy of the SOI can be requested by directly [contacting the Recovery Team](#). Contact details of all copy holders will be documented to enable efficient distribution of future updates.

BARBARA WILLSON

The OBP Recovery Team was saddened by the recent passing of Barbara Willson, a long-time ally of the OBPs and the OBP Recovery Program. The Willsons were one of two families who held historical tin mining leases in the Melaleuca area. Barbara supported OBPs in various ways, including collecting valuable data and allowing her house at Melaleuca to be used as a home base for OBP volunteers.

The OBPRT is grateful to Barbara and her family for their support over many years.

2026 SURVEYS

The dates for next year's surveys have now been determined, and are ready to be pencilled into your calendars:

Mainland (SA and Vic sites):

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

Tasmania:

- 14-15 & 21-22 March – Strahan, Trial Harbour and Granville Harbour
- 28-29 March – Arthur River
- 11-12 April – Woolnorth
- 23-30 April – King Island (pending grant approval)
- 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 3. Volunteers conducting surveys in the Coorong, SA. Photo by Kerri Duncan, September 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 OBPRT is coordinated by the Zoo and Aquarium Association Australasia (ZAA), funded by the Australian Government's Saving Native Species Recovery Action Coordination grant.

