

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

Since the last Orange-bellied Parrot Recovery Program (OBPRP) news release, an additional three OBPs have been sighted on mainland Australia. This brings the running total up to 18 confirmed birds.

- Thirteen have been identified on several occasions around Victoria's Western Treatment Plant, including all volunteer survey weekends conducted so far.
- Three were spotted on South Australia's Narrung Peninsula during the May survey weekend.
- Two were sighted in south-western Victoria in late June.

Hazardous weather conditions interfered with some planned July surveys on the Bellarine Peninsula. An additional weekend may therefore be scheduled in August.



Images 1, 2. Orange-bellied Parrots spotted (left) and survey volunteers (right) during the July weekend surveys at the Western Treatment Plant. Photos by Sarah Butler (left) and Ryan Kilgower (right).

RECOVERY TEAM MEETING

The Orange-bellied Parrot Recovery Team (OBPRT) held its primary annual meeting at Melbourne Zoo in late March, hosted by Zoos Victoria. The hybrid event included 23 team members and three guests, both in-person and online.

The meeting began with a collaborative exercise to reflect on the long-running program's progress and challenges. The team then set priority goals for the next 12 to 24 months, reviewing and allocating organisation specific action responsibilities.

WORKING GROUP MEETINGS

In addition to full recovery team meetings, smaller specialty groups of the OBPRT meet more frequently to focus on specific directives. The Strategy and Coordination Group is the primary strategic, advisory and coordination body within the RT. The group met in January, April and July this year, and plan to meet again in October. The Veterinary Technical Reference Group, Captive Management Group, Population Planning Group and Windfarm Working Group continue to meet at least twice per year.



Images 3,4. An OBP spotted during the July survey weekend at the Western Treatment Plant. Photos by Sarah Butler.

SPRING RELEASE PAUSE

Following a comprehensive review by the OBPRT, the decision has been made to temporarily pause spring releases of captive-bred adult OBPs.

Population density at the Melaleuca breeding grounds has increased in recent years as a result of multiple successful interventions. Spring releases played a critical role in this program by preventing short-term extinction and balancing sex ratios ahead of the breeding season. However, an in-depth evaluation of the current strategy shows that, as the population has grown, the relative benefits of spring releases have diminished. Recent data show that survival rates among spring-released birds have declined, prompting a reassessment of the need for spring releases at this stage of the recovery program.

The recovery program will focus on continuing to release juveniles before the northern migration. This release method has proven to be a very valuable tool for helping the wild population grow. Released juveniles have similar migration survival to their wild-born counterparts, and in recent years, the overall survival rates for migrating juveniles have started to improve.

The OBPRT remains committed to adaptive, evidence-based management. This means continuously refining its strategies in response to changes in the population, or new learnings. Ongoing monitoring will ensure that the spring release program can be efficiently reinstated if it is again needed to support OBP recovery.

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).

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.

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 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](#). Outside of surveys, public sightings can be reported to regional coordinators or by filling out the sighting form on the [BirdLife Australia website](#).

2025 Remaining Survey Dates:

9-10 August (Bellarine Peninsula only–TBC)

13-14 September



Image 5. Volunteers searching for OBPs during the July survey weekend. Photo by Ryan Kilgower.

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.

