

Orange-bellied Parrot (OBP) Recovery Program News, October 2022

Prepared by Toby Galligan, OBP Recovery Program Coordinator, on behalf of the OBP Recovery Team.

I was one of thirty-odd South Australians that attended this year's *Neophema* identification workshop on Hindmarsh Island. Our Regional Coordinator for the OBP Winter Surveys, Bob Green (BirdLife Australia), has been running these workshops and another in the southeast of South Australia for years. We were the largest crowd he had had for some time. The repeated sightings of two OBPs in South Australia last year – the first records of the species in the state since 2013 – likely enticed some participants to come along. Indeed, it was at the Hindmarsh Island workshop last year that these OBPs were first seen. We were not so lucky this year, but Bob's thorough presentation, identify-the-*Neophema*-in-these-photos quiz, and field excursion – where we saw elegant and rock parrots – prepared us well for the surveys to come.

Many people who attended the workshop joined existing volunteers to take part in the state's OBP Winter Surveys from the mouth of the Murray to the border with Victoria. Bob sent me to Tolderol Game Reserve, where I spent quiet weekends wandering about and looking for *Neophema* parrots. I enjoyed identifying several blue-winged parrots, but found no OBPs among them. Alas, despite considerable effort, no one saw an OBP in South Australia this year.

OBP Winter Surveys occurred in Victoria this year, too, after being cancelled in 2020 and all but cancelled in 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. We divide Victoria into several regions for the OBP Winter Surveys. Craig Morley (BirdLife Australia), Regional Coordinator for the Bellarine Peninsula, ran online *Neophema* identification workshops for Victoria, SE South Australia, and western Tasmania to reach as many potential volunteers across the non-breeding range. Jess Bouchier (Nature Glenelg Trust), Regional Coordinator for South-west Victoria, teamed up with Craig to do the same in South-west Victoria. On the survey weekends, our die-hard Victorian volunteers put in a lot of effort to find OBPs, but they found no new ones. I say "new ones" because the Mainland Release Team recorded seven wild OBPs joining the OBPs released at Lake Connewarre this year (see last News). Forty volunteers joined Craig searching for OBPs on the Bellarine Peninsula this year, carrying out a total 67 surveys and donating about 670 hours of their time across the season.

In Tasmania, the Friends of the OBP ran Winter Surveys or, more accurately, Non-breeding Season Surveys, coordinated by Marianne Gee. Over seven weekends between mid-March and mid-September, they surveyed the Strahan and Arthur River areas. While some volunteers were local to these areas, many drove vast distances to help (for example, 10 volunteers drove a combined 84 hours to and from Arthur River one particular weekend). Also, the weather was sometimes very wet and windy. The group spotted OBPs in the Arthur River area last year, but, despite seeing ground parrots and other wonderful birds this year, they found no OBPs.

No matter the outcome, the Recovery Team truly appreciates the time and effort volunteers provide to these surveys. Last year, was an exciting one, with OBPs seen at the Murray mouth, north Western Port Bay, and Arthur River during the non-breeding season; and these records are important data. This year was not an exciting one, but the data is just as important.

More volunteers, this time NRE Tas' volunteers working at Melaleuca confirmed the first OBP to return for this breeding season. She is a captive-fledged individual from Moonlit Sanctuary and NRE Tas

released at Melaleuca as a juvenile in 2019. Interestingly, she was also the first OBP to have returned last breeding season, touching down in late September in both years. She was not one of the OBPs seen at Lake Connewarre nor elsewhere on the mainland this winter though. On hearing this news, Craig spoke for all of us by saying: “Which raises the question: where has this bird, along with many others, been on the mainland in intervening months?”

Presently, eighteen OBPs have arrived at Melaleuca for the 2022/23 breeding season and more are expected. Also, NRE Tas are in the midst of their annual Spring Releases of captive-fledged adult OBPs to bolster the breeding population. This month, ten male and ten female OBPs, raised at Moonlit Sanctuary and NRE Tas’ Five Mile Beach OBP breeding facility, have been released. Another group of OBPs from Zoos Vic’s Healesville Sanctuary and Five Mile Beach will be released in early November. To keep up to date with wild OBPs arriving at Melaleuca and captive OBPs being released there, follow the Orange-bellied Parrot Tasmanian Project Facebook page

<https://www.facebook.com/TasmanianOrangebelliedParrot>



Volunteers searching for Orange-bellied Parrots (OBPs) at Strahan, Tasmania, as part of the Friends of the OBP’s non-breeding season surveys by Sally Simco.



A female OBP spotted by NRE Tas volunteers and staff in Melaleuca, Tasmania, filling up at a feed table after migrating across 300 km of sea and land by Clare Lawrence.

Fast Facts:

OBPs (*Neophema chrysogaster*) are small ground-feeding parrots. 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.

There is some uncertainty about the cause of the species' decline. Habitat loss and degradation plus introduced predators and competitors likely drove past declines. Today, several interacting threats impact OBPs.

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

Volunteers 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 extra financial support.