

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

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

The OBP Recovery Team is excited to share this update, the first for 2022. Last spring, 70 OBPs returned to Melaleuca. This is the largest number to return for at least 15 years. It is also 20% more returnees than we recorded in 2020, which was the previous best year for returns. This is fantastic, given that only five years ago, 17 OBPs returned to Melaleuca and only three were females.

NRE Tas* staff and volunteers undertook the annual OBP census at Melaleuca in December 2021. They recorded 34 male and 36 female returnees. Of these, two-thirds (48) had fledged in the wild and one-third (22) had fledged in captivity. Divided another way, a little more than half (39) returned for the first time, while a little less than half (31) were veterans of migration being two- or more-year-olds.

Following the release of this census, Tasmania's Minister of the Environment Roger Jaensch kindly thanked us for our dedication and professionalism to the recovery of OBPs.

Among the returnees, was the OBP spotted in South Australia last winter. As well as four OBPs that wintered at the Spit-Western Treatment Plant (Victoria) release site; and three OBPs that wintered at our Lake Connewarre (Victoria) release site. In 2021, 10 natural migrants joined our mainland released OBPs at three sites in Victoria. Of those, over two-thirds (70%) returned to Melaleuca for this breeding season.

NRE Tas increased the breeding pool at Melaleuca with the release of captive-bred adults last spring. NRE Tas' Five Mile Beach breeding facility and Moonlit sanctuary provided these OBPs. The census counted 14 such OBPs, which brought the total number of OBPs to 84 as of the 15th of December 2021. With this many potential breeders, we predict the most productive breeding season at Melaleuca in recent years. Breeding is underway as I write.

Breeding has also begun in the captive institutes, involving over 60 pairs across four captive institutes: Five Mile Beach, Healesville Sanctuary, Priam Psittaculture Centre, and Moonlit Sanctuary. Captive breeding is not occurring in Adelaide Zoo this season because their breeding aviaries are being renovated. Presently, pairs are feeding nestlings.

Late last year, NRE Tas hosted a visit by the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment Sussan Ley and the Acting Threatened Species Commissioner Dr Fiona Fraser. Minister Ley and Dr Fraser spent time at Five Mile Beach and Melaleuca, talking to staff and volunteers, learning about the recovery program, and seeing OBPs.

We are expecting another good breeding season for both the wild and captive populations. NRE Tas' field team will be busier than ever monitoring nests and banding nestlings this season. Breeding in captivity is on target to maintain the insurance population size and provide individuals for release. NRE Tas plans to release 50 of the captive-fledged juveniles at Melaleuca this summer from across the captive institutions. This will further bolster the wild population as it departs from Melaleuca in autumn.

I will write another news piece detailing breeding outcomes once the OBPs are on their way north.

**NRE Tas is Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania, a Department of the Tasmanian Government, formerly known as the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE).*

Fast Facts:

- OBPs (*Neophema chrysogaster*) are small ground-feeding parrots. Males are bright green, yellow and blue with a prominent orange belly. Females and juveniles are duller with 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 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 has undergone a recent rapid decline. It persists as a tiny wild population, breeding at a single location. 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 30 government, non-government, and community groups. It develops, coordinates, and reviews the OBP Recovery Plan. It 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 the recovery actions. Government and non-government grants and individual and corporate donations provide extra financial support.