

OBP Mainland Release Trial Program Update – October, 2017

The first year of the DELWP and Zoos Victoria led Orange-bellied Parrot Mainland Release Trial program has had a promising start in 2017. The trial aims to test whether releasing captive-bred birds on the mainland is an effective strategy to increase the number of Orange-bellied Parrots (OBPs) in the wild, and whether naturally migrating juveniles can be attracted to suitable mainland habitats by establishing a flock of OBPs at a particular location.

In April this year 11 Orange-bellied Parrots were released at the Western Treatment Plant, Werribee. All of our targets for success that can be measured so far have been met, including:

- High survivorship of the release birds following their release (73% known to be alive 2 months after release).
- That a stable flock of greater than 10 birds has been established at or near the release site.
- This flock is made up of a mix of release birds and older wild adults previously familiar with the habitat at the release site.
- Naturally migrating juveniles new to the area have also found and joined our established flock.

Close monitoring of the birds in the field by radio tracking, camera monitoring, and old-fashioned observation of birds in their natural habitat, has continued to energise the project team. The release birds have continued to reveal the extent of their adaptability to life in the wild and from day one have been completely self-reliant, choosing wild foods over the supplementary food that was offered, and natural shelters over the security of their aviaries.

Regular observations have confirmed their use of a wide variety of wild food plants, flying at height, flying in cohesive group formations, and covering large and varied distances multiple times a day. They appear to have learnt predator avoidance behaviour and are gathering and socialising in various mixed social group formations. In short, they are displaying many of the critical wild behaviours needed for success.

Their next and biggest test yet, will be whether they can successfully migrate to the breeding area in south-west Tasmania. As the released birds have successfully adapted to life in their autumn and winter range, we hope they will have every success. There will be a lot of fingers being crossed in the weeks ahead.

In early October, we are no longer detecting most of the released birds or their wild companions at the WTP. We hope this is a promising start! Birdwatchers and volunteers have spotted a couple of released birds still on site, looking a little scruffy. We have sought veterinary advice on these birds, and are continuing to monitor their health status. To help us monitor these and any other birds remaining on site, we ask that any birdwatchers at the WTP please report any sightings promptly to Kristy Penrose on kpenrose@zoo.org.au.

Thank you,

The Mainland Release Team

The OBP Mainland Release Trial is being delivered by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Zoos Victoria, BirdLife Australia, Melbourne Water, Moonlit Sanctuary, Parks Victoria and the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and the Environment.



Two of the released males. Photo: Paul Rushworth, Zoos Victoria



An adult female that found her own way to the site this year. Photo: Andrew Silcocks, BirdLife Australia