

## **OBP Mainland Release Trial Program 2019**

### **Four Week Update – 21 May 2019**

It's now been just over four weeks since the first Orange-bellied Parrots (OBPs) were released at three sites for the 2019 Mainland Release Trial. Since the last update two weeks ago, we have been monitoring birds regularly and collecting data on their movement patterns, habitat use, foraging behaviours and social groupings. We have also been on the lookout for any wild OBPs arriving from Tasmania.

Seven birds, from Healesville and Moonlit sanctuaries, were released at the northern end of the Spit Nature Conservation Reserve. Of these, five have largely remained in the immediate area and have been seen quite regularly. The other two individuals have not been seen since the day of release.



*Orange-bellied Parrots from the Western Treatment Plant release group. Photo: Sarah Agterhuis.*

The situation is similar for the second group of birds that were released at the Western Treatment Plant. This group included five aided migrants and three Healesville Sanctuary-bred birds. Five of these birds continue to be sighted regularly in the area surrounding the release site and are often seen in a cohesive group. As noted in the 2-week report, one of the aided migrants was found deceased, and this was confirmed to have resulted from acute Aspergillosis, while the two other birds have not been sighted since soon after the release.

Excitingly, we have also spotted the first wild migrant arriving from Tasmania this season. This is an adult male (Blue Orange C), who has been a regular visitor to the WTP since 2013. He has joined up with the WTP release group and has been observed foraging with them (see image below). Rather surprisingly, the three mainland-released males that over-summered in the area have not been seen since March, but we hope they remain in the area and will join this group before long.



*Above: Recently released Orange-bellied Parrot preening at the WTP. Photo: Sarah Agterhuis.*

*Left: Wild Orange-bellied Parrot (Blue Orange C) foraging with five birds from the WTP release group on 15 May. Photo: Steve Davidson.*

The third and final group were released at the Avalon Coastal Reserve and included captive-bred birds from Moonlit Sanctuary and Adelaide Zoo. As noted previously, the remains of one bird were found (assumed taken by a predator), and there have been few detections of the rest of this group. However, transmitter signals indicate that some of these birds are still in the area, and we hope to sight them in the near future.

To maximise the chance of locating missing birds we are continuing to search new areas around all three release sites, while also scanning areas previously searched. Recently, radio tracking was also conducted on the Bellarine Peninsula, in conjunction with the May OBP survey weekend. We are also investigating the option of using drones to perform radio tracking, which may greatly increase search efficiency and improve our chances of detecting missing birds.

The Mainland Release is a partnership between DELWP, Zoos Victoria, BirdLife Australia, Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria, Moonlit Sanctuary, Adelaide Zoo and the Tasmanian OBP Program. We are grateful to the many volunteers who are assisting us to care for, and monitor, these special birds.

We are encouraging all public sightings of OBPs in the area to be reported to [OBP.Release@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:OBP.Release@delwp.vic.gov.au)

We are posting fortnightly updates about the project on Facebook.