

Orange-bellied Parrot (OBP) Recovery Program News, December 2020

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The OBP Recovery Team is celebrating the largest number of wild OBPs to have returned to Melaleuca for the breeding season in over a decade.

During the annual OBP census, DPIPWE staff and volunteers recorded 51 OBPs – 24 males and 27 females – returning to Melaleuca. Ten of these are older wild-bred birds that have returned in previous years and 15 are young wild-bred birds making their first full migration. Also making their first full migration, are five wild-bred birds that were head-started (held in captivity over their first winter) and released in 2019. Another three are captive-bred birds released as adults in 2019, including one released at New Harbour and then re-released at Melaleuca in the same breeding season. The remaining 18 returning OBPs are captive-bred birds released as juveniles at the end of the breeding season in either 2019 (3) or 2020 (15).

Our colleagues, volunteers and supporters contributing to the Mainland Release Trial and Winter Surveys, will be excited to know (as we are) that of the nine identified OBPs seen at various sites on the mainland this winter, seven are among the OBPs that have returned to Melaleuca. More specifically, these were three OBPs spotted in Peterborough, Swan Bay and the Bellarine Peninsula in Victoria and four OBPs that flocked with released OBPs at the Spit Reserve/Western Treatment Plant site.

The returned OBPs are not the only ones in Melaleuca though; DPIPWE has also released three groups of captive-bred adult OBPs to increase the breeding population and balance its sex ratio. These OBPs were raised at Adelaide Zoo, DPIPWE's Five Mile Beach breeding facility, Healesville Sanctuary, Moonlit Sanctuary and Werribee Open Range Zoo. So, there are presently 76 OBPs – 38 males and 38 females (another record in recent years) – getting to know each other at Melaleuca. DPIPWE staff and volunteers have been observing widespread nest preparation and incubation behaviour among the population for the last few weeks.

Captive OBPs are currently breeding as well; with broods of eggs and nestlings for many pairs already at Adelaide Zoo, DPIPWE's Five Mile Beach breeding facility, Moonlit Sanctuary and Priam Psittaculture Centre.

In recent years, careful management of the captive and wild populations by Recovery Team partner organisations has enabled both populations to produce and recruit large numbers of young. In turn, this has enabled the release of a large number of captive-bred juveniles at Melaleuca, a large number of OBPs migrating north in this autumn and now a large number of OBPs migrating south in this spring. The Recovery Team's decision to begin releasing large numbers of juveniles at the end of breeding seasons was supported by comparable survival rates between wild- and captive-bred juveniles in past years and expert elicitation of the most beneficial and cost-effective strategies for the recovery of OBPs. We are more than pleased that this strategy has benefitted OBPs this year.

The record number of OBPs returning and participating in breeding this year attracted considerable attention by the media, including national newspapers and local radio stations. Also, Roger Jaensch, Tasmania's Minister for Environment and Parks, congratulated our ongoing efforts and those of our partner organisations to ensure the survival of OBPs for the future.

This year was tough for many people, including some of our colleagues, volunteers and supporters. We hope that the good news that we share here provides some hopefulness for the future.

Fast Facts:

- OBPs 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. OBPs only breed in the south-west of Tasmania within 5 km of the coast. They migrate via western Tasmania, the Hunter Island Group and King Island in autumn and spring; and winter on the south-eastern coast of Australia. Each year, OBPs fly at least 640 km across land and sea.
- OBPs are classified as Critically Endangered on the IUCN's Red List and under the Commonwealth's EPBC Act 1999 because of their extremely small wild population, single breeding location and recent rapid decline. There is some uncertainty about the cause of the species' decline; however, habitat loss and degradation, as well as introduced predators and competitors, have likely been responsible historically, and, presently, OBPs face numerous interacting threats, including the genetic, health and social impacts of a very small wild population.
- The OBP Recovery Team is comprised of 30 members representing 23 government and non-government organisations as well as community groups and individuals. The role of the Team is to coordinate recovery activities, provide advice to conservation managers, and review the progress of Recovery Plan implementation to maximise the effectiveness of the recovery program.
- Volunteers contribute significantly to the conservation actions of the OBP Recovery Program, including collecting data on the species in the breeding and non-breeding locations, assisting in the care of the OBP captive population, contributing to public awareness, and raising funds for recovery actions.
- The actions of the OBP Recovery Team are funded by the organisations within the partnership as well as through government and non-government grants, fund-raising activities, and individual and corporate donations.