

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

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

Presently, the Mainland Release Team\* are monitoring 20 captive-released OBPs around Lake Connewarre on the Bellarine Peninsula, Victoria. NRE Tas' Five Mile Beach breeding facility and Adelaide Zoo raised the OBPs released on the mainland this year. Each OBP has a tiny (0.7g) VHF transmitter mounted on the base of its tail, and, besides roving field workers with handheld receivers, five fixed receiver stations positioned around the lake are collecting location and movement data. Using receiver stations is relatively new for the team and will enhance their understanding of the behaviour and survival of released OBPs. During the first weekend of the OBP Winter Surveys, field workers observed three recently released OBPs with six wild OBPs feeding on native food plants at Lake Connewarre – a highlight for them so far.

In other news, the RT met online in April to review current recovery activities and discuss future activities. Below, I have provided some interesting information reported to the RT by partners carrying out recovery actions.

The partners who took part in the 2021/22 breeding season (Healesville Sanctuary, Moonlit Sanctuary, NRE Tas' Five Mile Beach, and Priam Psittaculture Centre), reported, uncannily, the same high combined rate for female participation, egg hatching, and chick fledging – that is, 86%. Egg fertility rate was lower (61%), but similar to the five-year average (59%). The average number of fledglings per female, which can compare breeding success across years with different numbers of females participating, was 2.4 and similar to the six-year average of 2.3. These stable rates produced 148 fledglings, 50 of which were successfully released (0% release mortality) at Melaleuca.

NRE Tas reported reassuring metrics for wild breeding at Melaleuca, too. All five metrics – clutch size, hatching success, fledging success, breeding success (the number of fledglings divided by the number of eggs laid), and the average number of fledglings per nest (or female) – were similar to and, in the case of breeding success, greater than the historic averages (i.e., 1987-2009). The average number of fledglings per female was 3.3 in 2021/22, which is the same as the historic average. Also, 42% of nestlings (20 individuals) noninvasively examined once for crop content had native seeds in addition to feed table seeds.

The RT was thrilled to have Laura Bussolini present an outline for her PhD thesis at the meeting. Laura has just started her PhD in the ANU's Difficult Bird Research Group, under the supervision of Dejan Stojanovic, an RT member. She will examine captive breeding as a tool for conservation. The OBP captive breeding and release program will be the focus of her research and, as a result, her findings will be very valuable to the OBP recovery program.

The major discussion at the RT meeting this year prepared us for writing the new OBP Recovery Plan (see OBPRP News June 2021). We pondered the question "What could recovery look like?" and

generated ideas on how we would define recovery, how we would measure it, and what we would need to do to reach it. These ideas will grow into our goals, objectives, and actions for the new recovery plan.

To wrap up, if you or friend would like to take part in the Winter Surveys on the mainland, the upcoming dates are the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of July and the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of September. Go to the BirdLife Australia OBP webpages to learn more and connect with one of our Regional Coordinators in Victoria or South Australia (<https://birdlife.org.au/projects/orange-bellied-parrot-recovery/volunteer-in-the-winter-surveys>).

For our Tasmanian supporters, Friends of the OBP (FoOBP) will conduct surveys at Strahan on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of July, and at Arthur River on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of August and 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of September. If you would like to be involved, go to the relevant dates on the Wildcare Tasmania event calendar and click on the event to learn more and connect with FoOBP (<https://wildcaretas.org.au/events>).

*\* DELWP (Victorian Government), Zoos Victoria, Moonlit Sanctuary, BirdLife Australia, Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria, Corangamite Catchment Management Authority, NRE Tas (Tasmanian Government), and Adelaide Zoo.*



*A volunteer having a well-deserved break during the Friends of OBP survey for OBPs around Arthur River, Tasmania (Photographer: Karen Dick).*

*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.

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