



## Orange-bellied Parrot (OBP) Recovery Program News, October 2024

Prepared by Kerri Duncan, OBP Recovery Program Coordinator, on behalf of the OBP Recovery Team.

The OBP Recovery Team has continued to prepare for the possibility that a high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) outbreak may occur in Australia. HPAI is a type of bird flu, an infectious disease that causes severe illness and death in poultry and wild birds. HPAI can also cause disease in mammals, including rare cases in people. Since 2021, a new strain of HPAI (H5N1 2.3.4.4b) has caused significant illness and deaths in poultry, wild birds and wild mammals in all geographical regions except Oceania (which includes Australia and New Zealand). To date, HPAI strain 2.3.4.4b has not been detected in Australia in any species.

The Recovery Team is continuing to work with partners across multiple jurisdictions to try to reduce the risk of a possible HPAI outbreak for both wild and captive OBPs. Up-to-date information about avian influenza can be found on the Wildlife Health Australia (WHA) website:

<https://wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au/Incidents/Incident-Information/high-pathogenicity-avian-influenza-information>.

Anyone who sees sick or dead wildlife and suspects avian influenza must report it to the 24-hour Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on **1800 675 888**. Further information on how to recognise and respond to HPAI is listed in the following WHA document: [HPAI Advice for people who encounter sick or dead wild birds](#).

Meanwhile, preparations for captive breeding are well underway, including transfers of individuals among the five breeding institutions to optimise genetic diversity for the next generation. Extensive selection criteria are applied to each bird to ensure the resulting pairs have the highest chance of producing healthy, resilient offspring.

It is particularly exciting when offspring are spotted living out and about in the wild. The September mainland surveys held over the weekend of the 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> revealed two new South Australian sightings: a 2022 captive-bred male and a 2020 wild-born male. These two are in addition to the 2021 wild-born male seen in the same area (Narrung Peninsula) earlier in the year, bringing the total sightings for SA this season to three. This is encouraging news, considering South Australia had zero confirmed sightings between 2013 and 2021, and only a couple over the past few years.

In Victoria, volunteers on the Bellarine Peninsula enjoyed spotting a flock of seven birds, consisting of five adults and two juveniles, on more than one occasion. Four of these were identifiable via leg bands, while the remaining three were unbanded – an adult female and two juveniles distinguished from one

another by their distinct frontal band plumage. Combined with the male previously seen in the area in April, this makes a total of eight birds recorded on the Bellarine for 2024.

Three new birds were also spotted at the Western Treatment Plant in September: one captive-bred and two wild-born juveniles. Adding to the previous tally of seven, this makes a total of ten individuals for the popular site this year. Surveys coordinated across South-West Victoria, South and West Gippsland, and Western Port/Bass Coast revealed no further Victorian sightings this time around, despite valiant efforts by volunteers and staff.

Later in the month, on the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of September, surveys took place in north-western Tasmania. The Friends of the OBP led volunteers around the Arthur River area, hoping to spot migrating individuals on their way south to Melaleuca, but had no luck on this occasion.

This brings the total number of non-Melaleuca OBP sightings this non-breeding season to 21, which is the highest number of confirmed individuals for a decade!

In addition to visual sightings, some birds that had VHF nanotags attached earlier in the year were successfully detected by our receiver towers. Receiver station data are being processed and analysed, and results will be communicated once this is completed. It is hoped these detections will provide further insight into the OBP's elusive migration habits and other landscape-scale movements.

For now, it's time to hand over the monitoring reins to the NRE Tas Melaleuca volunteers as they prepare to identify, report and support incoming OBPs arriving for the next breeding season.

Keep up to date with arrival numbers as they're announced by following the Orange-bellied Parrot Tasmanian Project Facebook page: [facebook.com/TasmanianOrangebelliedParrot](https://facebook.com/TasmanianOrangebelliedParrot).



**Above image:** Two OBPs spotted in South Australia in September 2024. Image by Bob Green.

***Fast Facts:***

OBPs (*Neophema chrysogaster*) are small parrots that primarily feed on seeds on the ground or low vegetation. 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.

Many threatening factors have contributed to the decline of the OBP in the wild. Habitat loss and degradation plus introduced predators and competitors likely drove past declines. Today, several interacting threats impact the ongoing survival of wild OBPs.

The Recovery Team comprises 30 government, non-government, and community group representatives. It develops, coordinates, and reviews the OBP Recovery Plan, and preserves expertise

and advice in OBP biology, ecology, and conservation.

Volunteers greatly 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 additional financial support.

[www.obprecoveryteam.org](http://www.obprecoveryteam.org)