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## An Orange-bellied Migrant

This activity identifies the migratory patterns and diet of the Orange-bellied Parrot and investigates the relationship between the environment and population numbers of this parrot.

### Background

The Orange-bellied Parrot (*Neophema chrysogaster*) is listed as an endangered species. Scientists estimate that about 200 of these parrots exist in the world today which suggests that it is critically endangered. The parrot exists only in Australia. It is migratory, moving annually from its summer breeding grounds in southern Tasmania to spend winter in Victoria and South Australia. The parrot's preferred habitat is coastal saltmarsh vegetation.

Some Orange-bellied Parrot food plants in Victoria:

- Beaded Glasswort (*Sarcocornia quinqueflora*);
- Sea Heath (*Frankenia pauciflora*);
- Austral Seablite (*Suaeda australis*);
- Shrubby Glasswort (*Sclerostegia arbuscula*).

### Advance Preparation

Copy the information sheet and activity instructions.

#### Saltmarsh Ecosystem

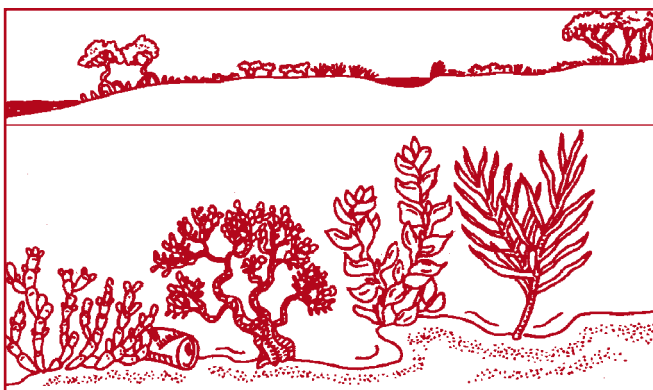


Table 1: Identification of Migratory Patterns and Diet.

Season	Location	Food Source	Major Activities
Summer			
Autumn			
Winter			
Spring			

### Materials

- Orange-bellied Parrot Information Sheet;
- Atlas/mapping tool;
- Table 1: Identification of Migratory Patterns and Diet;
- Teacher Reference: Orange-bellied Parrot Action Statement

### Activities

Distribute handouts and instructions to students.

1. Students read the information sheet and research additional information on the Orange-bellied Parrot to complete Table 1 and the following questions.
2. For each season provide details about where the parrot can be found, its food sources and its major activities.
3. Suggest reasons why the parrots migrate annually.
4. Describe the habitat and diet of the Orange-bellied Parrot. What is their link to saltmarsh areas?
5. Suggest any relationships that could exist between the number of birds and the available food plants.
6. In what ways could humans affect parrot population numbers and habitat? Be specific. Identify ways that humans could reduce their impact on the parrot population and habitat.
7. Create a distribution map of where the parrot occurs in different seasons. Compare this map to a map of human population (in an atlas) to compare the distribution of the human and parrot populations. Suggest implications that the distribution of the human population has on the habitat and population of the parrot. In which habitat areas are most and least numbers of individual birds likely to be found? Explain.

### Acknowledgement

- Josephine Lang.

### Additional References

- Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts website ([www.environment.gov.au](http://www.environment.gov.au))

# Activity #11 Orange-bellied Parrot Information Sheet

The Orange-bellied Parrot (*Neophema chrysogaster*) is listed as an endangered species. Although flocks of 'thousands' were recorded in the nineteenth century, scientists estimate that there are now about 200 Orange-bellied Parrots and only about 80 breeding pairs. With so few Orange-bellied Parrots left, this bird is vulnerable to extinction unless actions are taken to protect it and its habitat.

This small parrot exists only in Australia. The parrot's preferred winter habitat is coastal saltmarsh while in summer it is heath and sedgeland. Their food includes grass and sedge seed and the seeds of saltmarsh shrubs.

They breed only in south-western Tasmania where they nest in tree hollows on the edge of coastal plains. Adults pairs stay together for life.



**Orange-bellied Parrot.**

## Distribution

Orange-bellied Parrots are migratory birds. They breed in summer in south-west Tasmania and spend winter along the coasts of Victoria and the far south-east of South Australia. Many concentrate near Melbourne at The Spit Wildlife Reserve, Lake Connewarre State Game Reserve and Swan Island in Port Phillip Bay. On Swan Island, these rare parrots feed on introduced grasses on the fairways of the golf course!

Their autumn migration from Tasmania begins in March and they fly across the Hunter group of islands, to King Island, and from there on to the mainland. They return to Tasmania during spring.

Orange-bellied Parrots are in Victoria from March to October each year.

These small parrots face an arduous Bass Strait crossing twice a year. They need good food supplies to build up their strength for these long flights.

## Threats

- Loss of its winter habitat (coastal saltmarsh) through clearance and drainage.
- Degradation of its winter habitat through trampling by people and stock and grazing by rabbits of their preferred food plants.
- Predation by foxes and cats.
- Competition from introduced seed-eating birds (especially House Sparrows).
- Collection of birds for the aviary trade.

## Groups Helping to Protect this Species

The Orange-bellied Parrot Recovery Team has representatives from the federal and three state governments and bird conservation organisations:

- Department of Environment, Water Heritage and the Arts (formally Environment Australia);
- DSE;
- Parks and Wildlife Service, Tasmania;
- Department of Environment and Heritage (formally National Parks and Wildlife Service, S.A.);
- Healesville Sanctuary, Victoria;
- World Wildlife Fund;
- Birds Australia.

The aim of the Recovery Plan is to reverse the population decline. The focus is to improve the survival rate of young birds so that more will reach breeding age. This involves:

- Protecting Orange-bellied Parrot's habitat;
- Stocking their larder;
- Keeping their enemies away;
- Building up their numbers through a captive breeding program and releasing these captive-bred birds into the wild (by 1995, 50 aviary bred Orange-bellied Parrots had been released in S.W. Tasmania);
- Setting up nest boxes at their breeding location;
- Monitoring the populations each year to see how successful the breeding has been;
- Banding some of the young birds to study their survival rates and identify which sites they visit.

Each winter surveys are conducted in July to count the Orange-bellied Parrot population. During summer, volunteers help the monitoring program in Tasmania.