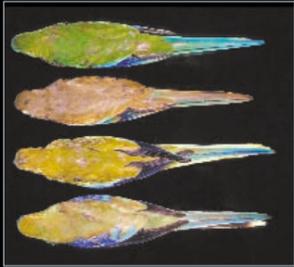


Plumage colour comparison

The images below illustrate the general colour differences between the coastal *Neophema* species. The museum skins depicted are adult males of each species.



Upperparts (from top to bottom): Orange-bellied Parrot, Rock Parrot, Elegant Parrot, Blue-winged Parrot. © Chris Tzaros



Underparts (from top to bottom): Orange-bellied Parrot, Rock Parrot, Elegant Parrot, Blue-winged Parrot. © Chris Tzaros

On the mainland, the Blue-winged Parrot is the most common *Neophema* to associate with the Orange-bellied Parrot. The brighter overall green colour of the Orange-bellied Parrot contrasts strongly with the olive tone of the Blue-winged Parrot, even in juvenile plumage.



Two Orange-bellied Parrots (arrowed) amongst a flock of Blue-winged Parrots. © Bob McPherson



Colour-banded Orange-bellied Parrots

It is extremely important to check for leg bands on any Orange-bellied Parrot. Over half the wild population is banded with a coloured band on each of its legs. Please observe the bands as closely as possible, recording both the colour of each band and the letter which will be on either the left or right band, varying between individual birds. Band reading is challenging but can readily be achieved with the aid of a spotting scope and a little patience!



Colour-banded juvenile Orange-bellied Parrot (green left, blue N). © Bob McPherson



Identifying the Orange-bellied Parrot



Adult male Orange-bellied Parrot. © Chris Tzaros

If you see an Orange-bellied Parrot

Please report the sighting immediately to **Chris Tzaros, mobile phone 0409 235 263, email: c.tzaros@birdsaustralia.com.au.**

Ideally, please record the exact location of the bird(s) either by marking the site (e.g. with flagging tape), taking a GPS reading, photographing the site or marking a detailed map.

Further information: Birds Australia.
www.birdsaustralia.com.au/projects/obp/index.html

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A guide to assist in the field identification of this critically endangered species.

Introducing the coastal *Neophema* parrots

The genus *Neophema* consists of six species of small, predominantly green/yellow, ground-feeding parrots found in southern Australia. Of these, four occur in coastal or near-coastal habitats in the south-east – the Orange-bellied, Blue-winged, Elegant and Rock Parrot. Among this closely-related group, there are strong similarities in appearance, habitat use, calls and general behaviour.

During autumn-winter, at favoured sites along the coast from Corner Inlet, Victoria to Gulf St Vincent in South Australia, it is possible to see flocks of *Neophema* parrots comprising two, three or even four species. For these reasons, coupled with the subtle variations in appearance caused by sex, age, moult and individual variation, identifying these parrots requires careful observation.

This brochure summarises the main field characteristics useful in identifying, sexing and ageing the four coastal species, with particular emphasis on the Orange-bellied Parrot.

Key distinguishing characteristics of the Orange-bellied Parrot

Plumage

Green plumage is brightest of coastal *Neophemas* – a rich grass-green in comparison with olive Blue-winged, yellowish-olive Elegant and dull olive Rock Parrot. **Face** is greenish-yellow and lacks the more obvious yellow patch between eye and bill present on Blue-winged and Elegant, or pale blue present on Rock Parrot. **Wing pattern distinctive** – shoulder bright green with uniform dark blue leading edge of wing, compared with all-blue shoulder of Blue-winged and two-toned blue of Elegant and Rock Parrot.

Orange belly patch always present but not always visible. Some male Blue-winged and Elegant Parrots also develop rather bright orange belly patches.

Call

Alarm call is diagnostically harsh and buzzing, compared with the twittering alarm calls of Blue-winged and Rock Parrot and the slightly harsh zitting of Elegant Parrot.

Habitat use

Orange-bellied Parrots are primarily coastal-dwelling during autumn-winter. They prefer saltmarsh areas, often small islands and narrow spits, though they also inhabit coastal dunes and swales, coastal weedy pastures, some crops, golf courses and various water treatment sites. Blue-winged and Elegant Parrots also occur in the coastal fringe during this time, however they do range further inland. Rock Parrots are strictly coastal inhabitants year-round.

What to look for when identifying a *Neophema* parrot

It is important to observe closely as many of the following features as possible:

Colour of bill:

For ageing purposes, is bill dark grey-black, or slightly orange?

Colour of face:

Is this bright yellow, yellowish-green or pale blue?

Frontal band:

Note colour, width and pattern of band. Is it uniformly coloured or two-toned? If two-toned, is the dark blue edged above, or both above and below, with pale blue? Does band extend over and slightly beyond eye, or stop short of eye?

Colour of upperparts:

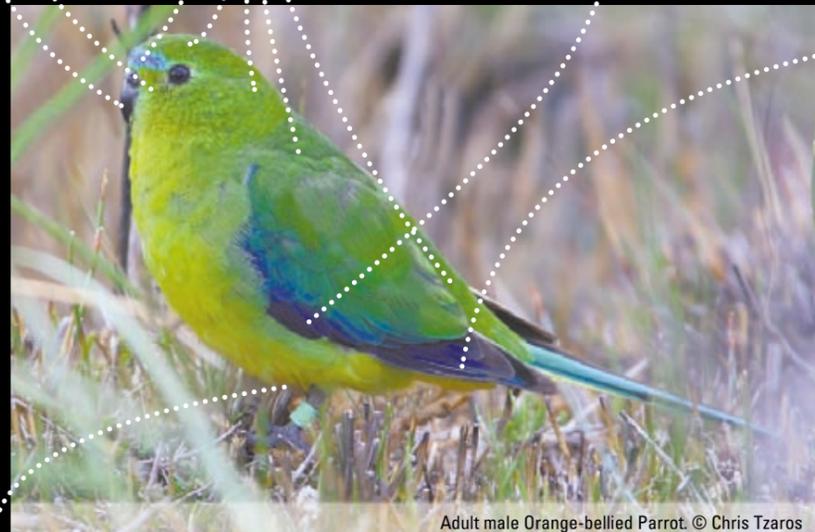
Shade of green of upperparts (top of head, neck, back, rump) is a vital clue that holds true regardless of age or sex.

Blue shoulder patch:

How many shades of blue are there on leading edge of wing, and what is their extent? On birds with mostly green shoulders, does blue of leading edge gradually merge into green or does it contrast with lighter blue to give two-tone appearance? When assessing extent of blue, beware that ruffled back and breast feathers may conceal true extent of blue.

Colour of primaries:

Are they generally black, dark blue or bright blue?



Adult male Orange-bellied Parrot. © Chris Tzaros

Belly patch:

Is belly just a brighter yellow than rest of underbody, or is it distinctly orange? If orange, how dark is the orange and how big is the patch? This feature is of limited value because there is much variation between species, ages and sexes, and the belly is often very difficult to see.

Alarm call:

Diagnostic for each species, usually given as birds are flushed. Is it a metallic tinkling, a harsher twitter or a distinct buzzing or zitting? Calls are available on the Birds Australia web site:

www.birdsaustralia.com.au/projects/obp/id.html

Coastal Neophema Parrots

Orange-bellied Parrot

Neophema chrysogaster

Adult male:

Head, neck, upperbody *bright grass-green*.
Face pale *greenish-yellow*.
Frontal band *two-toned*, dark blue *narrowly edged above and below with pale blue* (band does not extend over or beyond eye).
Foreneck and breast *yellowish-green* grading to bright yellow underbody.
Belly patch typically bright orange.
Wing coverts mostly *bright grass-green*.
Leading edge of wing *narrow single-toned dark blue* grading rapidly into green shoulder.
Primaries *rich dark blue* on outer edge.
Uppertail *vivid blue-green* with *bright yellow* sides.
Bill dark grey.

Adult female:

Very similar to male. Differs by:
Upperbody subtly *duller*.
Foreneck and breast *light yellowish-green*.
Underbody *duller yellow*.
Belly patch *paler and smaller*.
Frontal band *narrower and usually uniform light-blue* though sometimes two-toned.
Leading edge of wing dark blue but distinctly *narrower*.
Leading edge of primaries thinly edged *cream*.
Uppertail *blue tinged green* (*greener than male*).

Juvenile:

Sexes similar. Very similar to adult female but slightly duller overall. Differs also by:
Frontal band narrower and much less distinct, sometimes non-existent.
Usually show thin pale arc over eye and pale yellow triangle immediately behind eye.
Primaries have complete pale-yellow fringes.
Uppertail much *duller and greener*.
Bill orange at fledging, darkens with age, lower mandible dull orange till about six months old.

Calls:

When flushed, gives series of short rasping notes, repeated so rapidly as to produce distinctive buzzing *zi-zi-zi-zi-zi-zi...*, given until bird has reached some distance away. Contact call a single high-pitched *dszt* repeated every 2-3 seconds.

Rock Parrot

Neophema petrophila

Adult:

Head, neck, upperbody *olive*
Frontal band broad *dark blue narrowly edged above and below with lighter blue which, in males, extends through face to bill* (females have less blue on face)
Foreneck and breast *brownish-olive* grading to dull *mustard-yellow* underbody
Wing coverts *olive*
Leading edge of wing *dark blue* bordered on inner edge by *narrow band of light blue*, giving two-toned appearance, but less distinctive than Elegant Parrot
Primaries predominantly dark blue, generally bluer than Elegant and Blue-winged Parrot
Uppertail blue-green with broad yellow sides
Bill dark-grey

Juvenile:

Similar to adult female but slightly darker.
Differs also by:
Frontal band dull blue and much less distinct, lacking two-toned appearance
Primaries have complete yellow fringes
Bill orange soon after fledging but darkens with age

Calls:

Alarm call on flushing is a rapid series of high-pitched, double-syllable notes, *tsit-tset, tsit-tset...* given excitedly until bird has reached some distance away, when call rate then slows. Call is most similar to Blue-winged Parrot but higher-pitched, repeated faster and more twittering in effect. Contact call a thin whistling *tsleet* repeated every few seconds.



Adult male Orange-bellied Parrot. © Chris Tzaros



Adult female Orange-bellied Parrot. © Bob McPherson



Juvenile Orange-bellied Parrot. © www.peterfuller.com.au



Adult male Rock Parrot. © Len Robinson



Adult female Rock Parrot. © Len Robinson



Juvenile Rock Parrot. © Len Robinson



Adult male Blue-winged Parrot. © www.peterfuller.com.au



Adult female Blue-winged Parrot. © Len Robinson



Juvenile Blue-winged Parrot. © Chris Tzaros



Adult male Elegant Parrot. © Lynn Pedler



Adult male Elegant Parrot. © Chris Tzaros
Image of adult female unavailable.



Juvenile Elegant Parrot. © www.peterfuller.com.au

Blue-winged Parrot

Neophema chrysostoma

Adult:

Head, neck, upperbody *olive-green*, *brighter golden-olive on crown* (female slightly duller).
Face prominently *yellow* extending in thin arc over and behind eye.
Frontal band two-toned *dark blue narrowly bordered above with lighter blue* (band does not extend over or beyond eye).
Foreneck and breast *light powdery bluish-green* grading to yellow underbody.
Belly yellow. Some males have varying *pale orange* patch.
Wing coverts *bright dark-blue* overall (slightly paler and patchier on female).
Primaries black on males, dark grey with buff edges on females.
Uppertail blue-green with *narrow dark yellow sides* (tail greener on females).
Bill dark-grey.

Juvenile:

Similar to adult female but noticeably duller.
Differs also by:
Frontal band narrower and much less distinct, sometimes non-existent or appearing brownish.
Face and arc over eye paler yellow.
Primaries have complete pale-yellow fringes.
Uppertail *greener*.
Bill orange soon after fledging but darkens with age.

Calls:

When flushed, utters a burst of thin high-pitched staccato notes, *tsit-tsit-tsit-tsit-tsit...*, given until bird has flown some distance. Contact call a double-noted tinkling *tsleet-tsleet* repeated every 2-3 seconds.

Elegant Parrot

Neophema elegans

Adult:

Head, neck, upperbody *golden-olive* (female slightly duller).
Face prominently *bright yellow*, extends in thin arc over and behind eye in *some* females.
Frontal band two-toned *dark blue narrowly bordered above with contrasting lighter blue which, in males, extends over and just beyond eye*.
Foreneck and breast *bright yellowish-olive* grading to yellow underbody (female slightly darker and greener).
Belly yellow. Some males have small *pale orange patch on centre of belly*.
Wing coverts mostly *golden-olive*.
Leading edge of wing *dark blue* bordered on inner edge by *narrow light blue*, giving noticeable *two-toned appearance*.
Primaries blue-black on males, dark blue-grey with buff edges on females.
Uppertail blue-green with broad pale yellow sides (tail greener on female).
Bill dark-grey.

Juvenile:

Very similar to adult female but slightly duller and appears darker below. Differs also by:
Frontal band less distinct and with little or no two-toned effect.
Face and arc over eye paler yellow.
Primaries have complete pale-yellow fringes.
Bill orange soon after fledging but darkens with age.

Calls:

When flushed, utters a rapid burst of buzzing notes, *zit-zit-zit-zit-zit...*, harsher and more buzzing than alarm call of Blue-winged, though markedly less buzzing than Orange-bellied Parrot. Contact call a single high-pitched *tset* repeated every few seconds.