

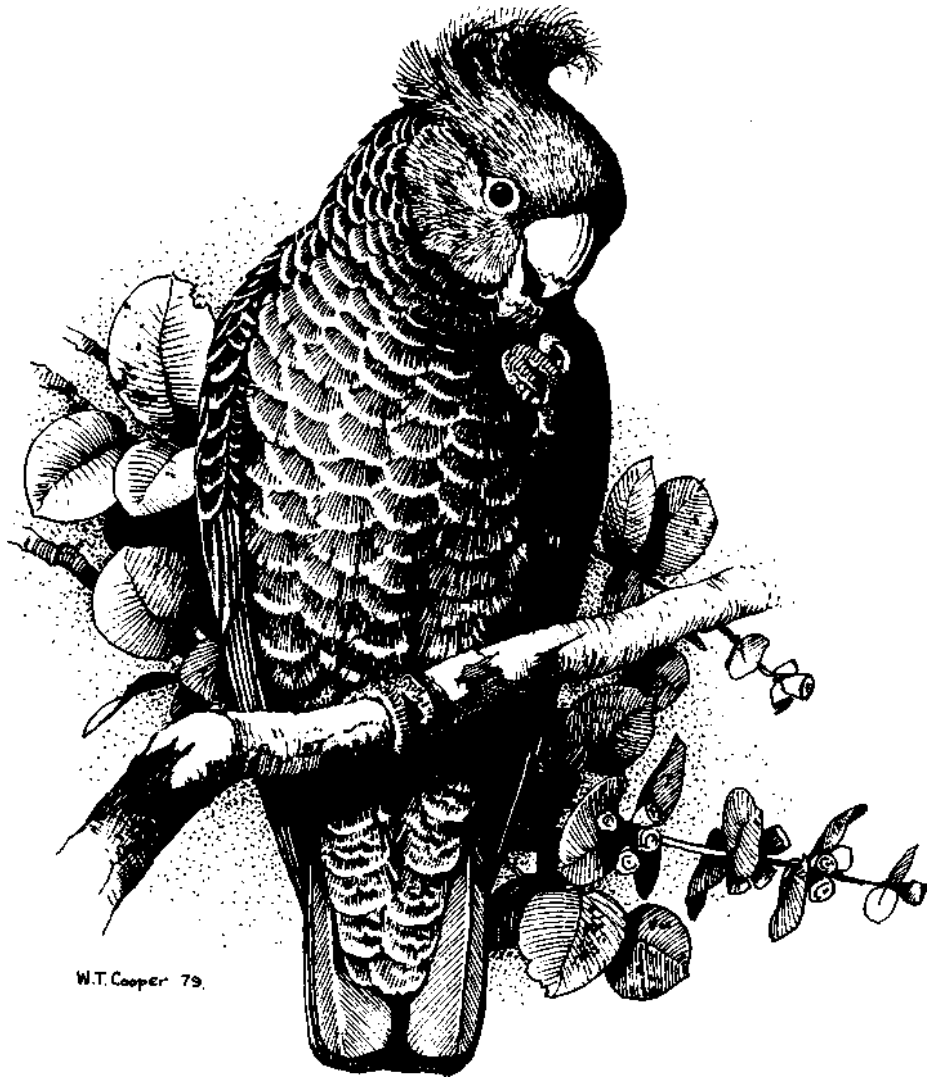
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# CANBERRA BIRD NOTES

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**CANBERRA ORNITHOLOGISTS GROUP INC.**

P.O. Box 301, Civic Square, ACT 2608

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(1995)**

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(Continued inside back cover)

## SULPHUR-CRESTED COCKATOO BITES BLACK SNAKE

*Ian Anderson*

Sulphur-crested Cockatoos *Cacatua galerita* have been breeding in the southern end of the Burra Valley, NSW (c. 25 km S. Queanbeyan) for a long time. Three pairs appear to be nesting this year within calling distance of each other. All are nesting in hollows in Candle Bark *Eucalyptus rubida*.

During a wind storm in 1993, one of the Candle Barks in which Sulphur-crested Cockatoos had nested each year, lost its top half, including the nest entrance which the birds usually used. It was uncertain whether the remaining portion of the tree contained suitably sized hollows in which the birds could nest. In 1993 they did not breed in this tree.

In 1994, Sulphur-crested Cockatoos were again breeding in this tree judging by the furtive flights to and from it by two adults which I first noticed towards the end of September.

On Sunday 9 October 1994, when I drove near the tree, the nest probably contained eggs. The tree is a few metres from a dam which had been reduced to two large pools as a result of the drought. The nesting hollow is 4-5 m above the ground.

The time was noon on a sunny day with the temperature in the mid-20s. To my surprise, I noticed a Sulphur-crested Cockatoo on the edge of the dam bank calling loudly with its wings held out away from its body and its crest raised. The object of its attention was a Red-bellied Black Snake *Pseudechis porphyriacus* which was more than a metre long lying on the bank. The cockatoo, which was immediately behind the snake, bent its head and bit the snake on the tail. It held the tail for several seconds while the snake tried to turn around and bite the bird. But because its tail was held down, it could not do so. I remained in the car and observed the interaction through my binoculars. The cockatoo then lifted its head and the snake began to move away from the dam and nesting tree. When I first saw the snake it was about 15 m from the tree. At one stage the snake showed signs of turning its head to try and bite the bird, but the cockatoo jumped off the ground and backwards about 20 cm but remained facing the snake.

About this time the bird's partner appeared from the nesting hollow, flew to a nearby tree and watched the proceedings. Slowly the snake moved away into some long grass with the cockatoo walking behind it and every now and then giving it a nip on the tail with its beak. About 10 minutes later, and after the snake had travelled about 20 m, another five cockatoos appeared, apparently in response to the calls of the pursuing bird. One flew into another tree while the others flew onto the ground to join

the pursuing bird. They followed the snake for another 10 minutes or so until it found refuge by going down a rabbit burrow. For about five minutes the birds walked around the spot where the snake had disappeared, they then all flew to a nearby tree. They did not fly off and about fifteen minutes later the snake reappeared from the burrow. The parent bird immediately flew back to the ground behind the snake which set off once more with the cockatoo again lunging at the snake's tail. Soon several of the other birds also flew to the ground. They moved the snake another 10 m or so to a rabbit-proof fence. It found a way through the fence with one of the cockatoos watching it from a fence post. The cockatoos continued to follow the snake almost halfway up the next hill, about 150 m from the nest tree, waiting there on the ground for a further ten minutes or so to ensure that the snake did not return. Then, as in response to a signal, all flew off. The breeding bird flew back near its partner in the tree near the nest tree. The others kept going and disappeared down the valley.

It was time for lunch.

*Ian Anderson, 12 Wylly Place, HUGHES ACT 2605*

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## **DARK-MORPH WHITE-BELLIED CUCKOO-SHRIKE IN NARRABUNDAH**

*Geoffrey Dabb*

On 23 February 1995, at 7.15 to 7.30 a.m., I observed a single dark-morph White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina papuensis* in the rear garden of my house. The weather was fine, overcast, very still, and about 12 °C, following a noisy thunderstorm the previous evening which had produced little precipitation.

The bird was on, and actively feeding from, the powerlines at the rear of the garden, plunging on and into the outer foliage of shrubs *Buddleia* sp. and trees *Eucalyptus cinerea* to take insects. The usual morning line-up of Common Blackbirds *Turdus merula* and Common Mynas *Acridotheres* was also on the wires, and the bird was hardly bigger than these, thus, from this comparison, seeming smaller than the Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike *C. novaehollandiae*.

I observed it over a period of several minutes in a range of attitudes, including head down and full frontal, from as close as 10 m through a pair of close-focussing 7x35 binoculars.

Immediately after this viewing I again consulted the article on the dark-morph White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike seen in Melba by David and Shirley Purchase (1989. *Canberra Bird Notes* 14: 92-94). The bird was very similar to the sketch therein, except:

- The black extended further down, particularly on the breast.
- The barring was lower down - I would have said on the belly - and, although clearly visible, was more delicate with some scalloping as in the illustration in the Slaters' field guide (1986. *The Slater Field Guide to Australian Birds* Rigby: Sydney) but also a few distinct narrow wavy black lines against a very pale grey, almost white, background.
- I would describe the paleness on top of the head, of which I took particular notice, differently. I would describe the head - including the crown when seen full-on - as black but with a few scattered pale grey feathers about the "eyebrows" and crown. One or two of these pale feathers were conspicuous from certain angles and when the head was seen in profile might have given the impression that the crown had a solid pale patch, but this was not in fact so.

The bird was readily distinguishable from a Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike because it had: (1) extensive black over the head and neck, which at the back extended down to the "shoulders"; and (2) black markings in the form of scalloping and barring down to the belly. Other features were the more conspicuous white tips in the wing feathering, and (possibly due to the state of the plumage) the bird had a crisp pearly look from the contrast of its grey/white and black parts.

The same or a very similar bird was present at the same location early (before 7 a.m.) on 13 March. Two Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes (an adult and semi-dependent immature) were also in the area in the intervening period.

*Geoffrey Dabb, 24 Brockman Street, NARRABUNDAH ACT 2604*

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**ACT BIRD WATCHERS HOTLINE**

**Telephone 247 5530**

An up-to-date five minute recorded message with interesting news such as returning migrants, rarities, meetings, outings, and bargains for bird watchers in Canberra. Twenty-four hour service, regularly up-dated.

## ATTEMPTED PREDATION OF COLLARED SPARROWHAWK'S NEST BY LACE MONITOR

*Harriett Swift*

It is a mixed blessing having Collared Sparrowhawks *Accipiter cirrhocephalus* nesting at your front door.

In 1994, for the fourth summer in a row, we watched a pair build their nest in a large clump of mistletoe about 20 m above the ground in the old Coastal Grey Box at the front of our house in the mountains near Bega. They are handsome birds which often remind us about the importance of predators in the ecosystem. A few months of nest-building, incubation and rearing chicks takes a heavy toll on the small bird population in the vicinity.

The pellets collected under the nest are hard to decipher, but clearly many of the prey species have yellow feathers. Eastern Yellow Robins *Eopsaltria australis*, Golden Whistlers *Pachycephala pectoralis* and New Holland Honeyeaters *Phylidonyris novaehollandiae* inhabit the nearby forest and it is hard to remain detached about the likelihood of so many of these beautiful little birds ending up as meals for the sparrowhawks.

So, it was with mixed feelings that I witnessed the following drama.

One of the local Lace Monitors *Varanus varius*, about 1.6 m long, climbed the grey box, clearly in pursuit of the chicks, which could be heard from the ground. As the monitor climbed inexorably higher, the parent sparrowhawks attacked it, swooping savagely. The same monitor was seen the day before with slashes across its back, indicating that this may not have been its first assault on the nest.

In the event, the monitor climbed onto the wrong clump of mistletoe and while it was considering the situation the adult sparrowhawks evicted their three chicks from the nest. All managed to fly off, two onto the grey box and the third onto a Hickory Wattle about 60 m away.

The monitor gave up, but the sparrowhawks' troubles were not over. Two of the chicks were eventually coaxed back to the nest, but the third spent the night on the wattle.

The following day the adults grew increasingly frantic, attacking any bird which came by. Unfortunately, these included two adult and one juvenile Glossy Black-Cockatoos *Calyptrorhynchus lathamii*. They stopped to rest on a tall Yellow Stringybark next to the grey box and were immediately attacked by the sparrowhawks.

The two adult glossies managed to get away, but the juvenile did not. It spent the entire day bailed up by the sparrowhawks. unable to feed. Every time it tried to move on. they attacked it.

The Glossy Black-Cockatoo is twice the size of the Collared Sparrowhawk, but it is a slow unwieldy flyer and it was only at dusk that the juvenile cockatoo managed to escape. It was at about this time. too. that the young sparrowhawk finally returned to its nest.

The following day a Red-browed Finch *Neochmia temporalis* flew into the house with a sparrowhawk in hot pursuit. It escaped, but many others do not.

The young sparrowhawk chicks have voracious appetites. As they learn to hunt they will attack improbably large birds such as Australian Wood Ducks *Chenonetta jubata* on their way to the dam. So it is not just the small birds which are affected by their presence.

After the chicks had permanently left the nest, the sparrowhawks remained in the vicinity of the nest tree for a few weeks. The five birds left the area at about the same time towards the end of February. After their departure the small bird population seemed to miraculously increase.

*Harriett Swift, 2113 Lane-Poole Place, YARRALUMLA ACT 2600*

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### **OBSERVATIONS OF A PAIR OF RED-CAPPED ROBINS NESTING AT SOUTHWELLS CROSSING, ACT.**

*Ellen Tulip and Richard Tulip*

The Red-capped Robin *Petroica multicolor* is a rare species in the Canberra region (Canberra Ornithologists Group 1993). In recent years there have been a number of reports of them having been seen in the vicinity of Southwells Crossing (e.g. Anon. 1992. 1993). We first observed a Red-capped Robin there on 15 August 1993 (Anon. 1994) and have since seen a pair there on many occasions.

In view of their rarity, local breeding records of Red-capped Robins are of interest. Recently details were published of a pair that nested near Macgregor in 1992 (Price 1994). In her paper, Joan Price also makes reference to a pair that bred in 1990

near the Charnwood Playing Fields (see also Anon. 1991). The following is an account of the nesting of the pair at Southwells Crossing.

30 August 1994 At 3. 40 p.m. we found the pair together on the south west side on the path that intersects Deeks Drive, near a small dam, just within the mature pine plantation. The female was very active, hawking up to 20 m into the air for flying insects, and also feeding on the ground. She then flew with some nesting material to one of the large Monterey Pines *Pinus radiata*. A partly completed nest was discovered in the pine, built into a horizontal fork of a branch about 10 m above the ground. Another branch, about 50 cm above, sheltered the nest. Views of the nest were obtained from higher up the slope on which the pine was growing. The female made another trip to the nest carrying more nesting material and poking into the nest. The male meanwhile was close by, calling and engaging an Eastern Yellow Robin *Eopsaltria australis* which was acting aggressively and which chased it before flying off. The pair of Red-capped Robins later resumed feeding in the grass by the path near the mature pines.

The height at which this nest was built is of interest. Schodde and Tiedemann (1986) indicate that the nest of a Red-capped Robin may be built up to 10 m above the ground, whereas locally they are described as being built low in a tree or bush at a height of 4 m or below (Canberra Ornithologists Group 1993). The nests of those near Macgregor and Charnwood were about 2 m above the ground in an *Acacia* sp. and a *Eucalyptus* sp. (Price pers. comm.).

2 September At 3. 30 p.m. we observed the pair beside the small dam. They were perching in bare deciduous shrubs, flying down to the ground or hawking into the air. The sides of the nest had been built higher and, judging from its size and proportions, seemed to be near completion. The male flew to the nest and sat inside, shuffling around slightly as if to shape it. He did not carry any nesting material to the nest and spent about a minute in the nest before flying to perch on a nearby twig. The female then flew up with nesting material which she poked into the nest. She sat inside the nest, shuffling around and rearranging things with little pokes and prods. She spent a longer time at the nest and was more active there than the male. We watched the pair for about 30 minutes.

7 September Both male and female were observed feeding. The female was not sitting on the nest which now looked fully formed\_

11 September The female was on the nest. The male was hunting and feeding in the nearby paddock where there are newly planted pines. He returned to the nest with food for the female while we were watching. The female never left the nest.

18 September Female still sitting on the nest.



7 October We had been away from Canberra since 21 September, and during that time there had been about 7 cm of rain and, on 6 October, very strong winds. We went in search of the robins at about 4.30 p.m. We found that the nest had gone from the branch and we did not see any robins. Looking on the grass beneath the tree we discovered the nest lying immediately under the branch. It was empty and there was no sign of damage, remnants of eggshell or dead nestlings.

9 October We found the male once more, about 4 p.m. He was on the fence posts by the side of the road near the nest tree, feeding by fluttering down to the ground and returning to a fence post. We did not hear him call and did not see the female. He flew off down a small gully in the field which is choked with dead branches, Blackberries *Rubus fruticosus* and other small shrubs.

19 October We found both robins in the usual location, perching and flying down to the ground for insects. The male was accompanied by the female for the first 20 minutes before we lost sight of her. The male continued feeding and we heard him calling. About 20 minutes later he flew quickly and directly about 200 m across the paddock containing the newly planted pines, and into the stand of mature pines where the old nest had been built. We could not see where he had gone, but about 3 minutes later he flew out of the stand. It seemed possible that there might be a new nest, and we spent 20 minutes unsuccessfully searching for one.

24 October In the late afternoon we observed the female robin in the usual location near the small dam perched on a little pine sapling. She flew down to the ground and scuffled around for a short time, probably searching for insects, then flew purposefully into the mature pines where we lost sight of her.

13 November We had not seen the robins on our usual walks since 24 October. This day we walked about 11 a.m. As we came to the small dam we observed a Red-capped Robin in the pine trees for about 15 minutes. This robin was a male with a prominent red cap, but did not appear to be the usual male (unless it was in heavy body moult) as the breast had much less red on it and the sides were pale and spotty.

Commitments have prevented us from regularly visiting the area since 13 November. However, we visited the area twice this year, in February and March, but did not see any robins.

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*Ellen and Richard Tulip, 6 Mara Place, WARAMANGA ACT 2611*

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY OF BIRDS OF THE CANBERRA REGION - PART VI

*Brendan J. Lepschi*

### Introduction

This bibliography supplements parts one to five (Prendergast 1984, 1987, Lepschi 1988, 1989, 1993). Methods and abbreviations used here are the same as those in the previous parts.

This bibliography is necessarily shorter than its predecessors as an interstate move means I am no longer able to update them. Earlier parts which I compiled have been produced approximately every five years (the last was completed in 1992) and generally cover 100 or so references. This part covers material to hand at the end of 1994.

It is hoped that another member of Canberra Ornithologists Group will continue to update the bibliography.

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### NOTICE TO CONTRIBUTORS

Please note that the names of birds in *Canberra Bird Notes* will now conform to those used in:

**The Taxonomy and Species of Birds of Australia and its Territories** by Leslie Christidis and Walter E. Boles (1994). Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union Monograph 2. RAOU: Melbourne.

## ODD OBS

### WHITE-BELLIED SEA-EAGLE TAKES SHEARWATER FROM SEA

*John Leonard*

At midday on 3 November 1994, off Green Cape, near Eden, I observed a flock of "dark" shearwaters *Puffinus* sp. which were circling around and landing on the ocean about 200 m offshore. The flock also contained a few Fluttering Shearwaters *P. gavia* and Crested Terns *Sterna bergii*. Suddenly an immature White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* appeared and began to fly at the shearwaters floating on the ocean. Panic ensued as the birds scattered. The sea-eagle swooped and seemed to strike one of the dark shearwaters, rose, then swooped again on the same bird, this time carrying it off in its talons towards land. A pair of mature sea-eagles were flying together nearby when the immature bird arrived, but appeared to take no notice of it as it flew off with its prey.

Marchant and Higgins (1993, *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds* (Volume 2) Oxford: Melbourne) describe a similar feeding tactic used by White-bellied Sea-Eagles when hunting flocks of waterbirds (e.g. Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*).

*John Leonard, PO Box 243, WODEN ACT 2606*

### A CRIMSON ROSELLA SNEEZING

*John Leonard*

On 8 March 1995 I was walking up the Molonglo Gorge, ACT, when I observed a party of Crimson Rosellas *Platycercus elegans* feeding on seeds in low bushes. I approached to within 3 m of the birds, which were at the height of my chest, and was near enough to hear the little noises they make to each other when feeding. As I watched the nearest bird to me feeding, it raised its head, and as it did so the leaves of a branch appeared to irritate its upper mandible. It then shook its head very quickly and emitted a sound exactly like that of a cat sneezing, that is, a sharp "pfff", the noise of air rapidly exhaled through the nostrils. I assume the anatomy of a parrot allows it to sneeze.

*John Leonard, PO Box 243, WODEN ACT 2606*

## PEACOCK IN NARRABUNDAH

*Geoffrey Dabb*

On 15 March 1995 I observed an Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* in Brockman Street, Narrabundah. The bird was a male, lacking most of its train. It was seen roosting in a eucalypt just on dusk, alert, but apparently settling for the night. I was told the bird had been about for the previous few days, and had been seen on a house roof and obstructing the roadway at different times. For the next three weeks the bird made its daytime base in the back garden of 26 Brockman Street, but roosted each night in the same tree.

The bird is not the one which has haunted Green Street, Narrabundah, for several months. That bird is in the verified "escapee" category as it belongs in the yard of Marymead Children's Centre, Goyder Street, Narrabundah, to which it has been returned more than once, but from which it seems to have no difficulty in escaping. It is reputed to cadge food at doorways and move on when the welcome wears out as the guano builds up.

*Geoffrey Dabb, 24 Brockman Street, NARRABUNDAH ACT 2604*

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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT - 1994

This has been my second year as President and although it takes up a large slice of my time, it does I think get easier, by the end of the second year you feel you have it under reasonable control most of the time, but by the end of the third year I expect I will want a break. Anyway, the next will be my third and last year as President, although I intend to serve COG in other capacities when that role ends.

The last few years have seen an increase in our membership. It is a challenge to meet the needs of this large and diverse membership, ranging from those with a scientific/study interest in birds and an increasing number of new members with what I call a "recreational" interest in bird watching. The committee has tried particularly to develop a more varied field trips program and to ensure that meetings are interesting as well as educational for all members. The committee has also had to look at ways to supplement COG's income, for example by way of grants and fundraising.

Thank you to all who have contributed to COG in 1994, from committee members to those in the background who fold and dispatch the newsletter each month or help out occasionally.

### **Administration and Finance**

In 1994 the COG Committee continued to have short monthly meetings, with a break from December to January. The committee has continued to keep a close watch on finances. Committee members have put in a lot of time and effort in what are often difficult and thankless tasks. Robin Smith has been a particularly good Secretary and has given me great support. Noel Luff has put in a difficult year as Treasurer and has now handed over the reins to John Avery. Bruce Lindenmayer has continued his valuable work as Conservation Officer including representing COG on a number of ACT Government committees concerned with the environment. Paul Fennell has contributed greatly as Vice-President. Ann McKenzie and Pat Muller have been very active in exhibitions and education and John Avery has provided a big support role as Field Trips Manager. Barbara Allan has put in another year in the important roles of meetings speakers organiser and editor of *Gang-gang*. Dick Schodde has also given valuable assistance and expertise when required. Ann McKenzie has continued to coordinate the enveloping and dispatching of *Gang-gang* and *Canberra Bird Notes* and her efforts in 1994 in merchandising the COG T-shirt have been very successful.

### **Meetings**

In 1994, COG continued to meet at the Canberra School of Art, with a great variety of top quality speakers, including a very successful members night in a new format with an interval and various displays. We were fortunate to be able to hold our Xmas party at the CSIRO museum at "Gungahlin", courtesy of Dick Schodde. At the beginning of 1995, after consultation with members, COG moved its meetings venue to Forestry House in Yarralumla, a venue with less security problems and a more social atmosphere.

### **Field Trips Program**

This year, the field trips program was enhanced in several ways to give more variety to members. There was the usual program of walks in and around Canberra, A successful bus trip (bus provided by Emu Tours) was arranged to the Mittagong Tram Track with the Cumberland BOC. and Cumberland members joined us at Kioloa for the June long weekend. A whale and seabird watching trip to Eden in October was an outstanding success and Mark Clayton led an interesting campout to Round Hill Nature Reserve. COG also joined the Newcastle BOC at the Easter campout at Munghorn Gap National Park near Mudgee.

John Avery has done a very efficient job in managing the day trips program and some long weekend activities. David McDonald has provided valuable assistance with planning. Thank you to everyone who has led a walk this year.

In 1995 and beyond, we will be organising more bus trips, including long-weekend and extended tours.

### **Education and Exhibitions**

This year has been a big one in education and exhibitions. As well as COG's usual participation in various events such as Heritage Week, COG organised a poster competition for school children for Bird Week in October. This was an excellent community awareness raising event. Over 200 entries were received and prizes were presented to the winners at the Spring Fling in the Australian National Botanic Gardens in October by Senator Margaret Reid. The posters were also exhibited at libraries around Canberra and at the Natural History Centre. COG also ran a stall and a computer demonstration of the ACT Bird Finder and the Simpson and Day CD ROM of the Birds of Australia, at the Spring Fling, and a public walks program during Bird Week in the last week of October. Myself, Paul Fennell, Shirley Kral, Ann McKenzie, and Pat Muller with a team of helpers were involved in the organisation of the poster competition and the Bird Week events.

A successful photographic competition was run for members in 1994, coordinated by Barbara Allan. Prizes were generously donated by Emu Tours, Gipsy Point Lodge, Barren Grounds Nature Reserve and the RAOU.

### **Projects and Surveys**

In 1994, COG's regular surveys of Lakes Bathurst and George continued. COG provided its expertise/volunteers in a large-scale survey of birds of the Queanbeyan escarpment and other local projects. COG became involved in the RAOU's Regent Honeyeater Recovery Project in the Capertee Valley, providing volunteers for the regular surveys and sponsoring a team in the RAOU Twitchathon to raise funds for that project. COG also assisted with volunteers for the RAOU's Hooded Plover survey on south coast beaches.

In 1994, COG announced that it would commence in 1995 a long term survey of Mulligan's Flat Nature Reserve, to record the abundance, distribution and breeding of birds, with a view to assessing the effects of urban development on bird populations as Gungahlin develops. This study which I will be coordinating will run initially for five years, but is likely to be continued for a longer period.

## **Bird Interest Groups Network (BIGNET)**

In 1992, the various bird clubs and related interest groups in NSW/ACT began meeting for the first time and meetings have continued on a regular twice yearly basis. These have been valuable for exchanging information and networking, establishing joint projects. etc. In 1994. COG attended two BIGNET meetings held at Barren Grounds Nature Reserve and Newcastle. COG will be hosting the meeting of the network in March 1995.

## **Hotline**

Ian Fraser has managed the Hotline this year, with Phil Hansboro relieving at times, providing very interesting reports and commentary for the regular users of the Hotline.

## **Natural History Centre (NHC)**

The NHC which COG established as an office and public outlet has now been operating for two years. Gwen Hartican and Wally Brown have done a valuable job in managing its daily operations, although volunteers to staff the Centre are always in short supply. The NHC continues to serve a useful purpose as a convenient contact point for members and for public promotional purposes. The centre is financed by COG with the assistance of a small government grant and contributions from the Field Naturalists Association and ACT Herpetological Association. Thank you to all the volunteers who have worked in the NHC this year.

## **Records and Database Management**

Malcolm Fyfe has continued as COG's Records Officer. In 1995 we would like to encourage members to provide more records of their bird observations. The preparation of the Annual Bird Report for 1991-92 has unfortunately been delayed but it is now well under way.

During 1994, COG decided to develop a new bird database, with user friendly software. to facilitate data recording for the Mulligan's Flat survey, and also for the future preparation of annual bird reports and for other surveys. The development of this was largely completed by the end of 1994. A number of people have put in a lot of time in the database redevelopment project, Cedric Bear who liaised with the contractor, Reid McLachlan, Tony Harding, Grahame Clark and David McDonald.

The COG Rarities Panel has continued its important work behind the scenes, vetting and endorsing rare and unusual bird records, and ensuring the endorsed lists are published in *Canberra Bird Notes*. Thank you to the panel members for their work in 1994.



## Conservation

COG has continued to focus its conservation activities on local issues, particularly habitat preservation. Bruce Lindenmayer with assistance from others on our Conservation Subcommittee has been involved in the following:

- Mulligan's Flat Nature Reserve - ongoing consultation to improve conservation status of the adjoining area of NSW.
- Urambi Hills - submission supporting extension of Urambi Hills area of Canberra Nature Park, providing a link to the Murrumbidgee corridor - extension agreed by ACT Government.
- Federal Highway Duplication - joint COG/Conservation Council submission to NSW Road Transport Authority supporting duplication of highway alongside Lake George as the least environmentally damaging option; broadly endorsed RTA's plans.
- Lake George Region Crown Land - a consultant's report recommended 190 sq km of Crown Lands become Nature Reserves; joint submission with Conservation Council endorsed proposed reversion, recommended Ramsar Classification for the lake and a similar study of Lake Bathurst.
- Stirling Ridge - site of a new Prime Minister's lodge in woodland remnant - ongoing interest.
- Lake Burley Griffin Management Plan - submission promoting conservation and minimal disturbance of bird habitat areas and a long term strategy for more native vegetation around the lake.
- ACT Threatened Species Bill 1993 - COG submission argued that the government should guarantee the viability of all species (not only those currently in trouble) and concentrate more on the study and protection of ecological communities; COG's views incorporated in the 1994 redraft of this Bill.
- NSW Bushfire legislation - COG sent submissions to 15 NSW parliamentarians, protesting at the great haste and lack of caution in the new legislation, and drew attention to likely detrimental effects of hazard reduction burning on some bird species and habitats.
- ACT State of the Environment Report (ACTSER) 1994 - Two COG members were on the ACTSER Biology Reference Group (Bruce Lindenmayer and Dick Schodde). The 1994 ACTSER strongly reflects ACT bird conservation issues especially for woodland birds.
- Assisting the Conservation Council. COG provided advice on a development proposal within the Yarralumla Shire which had possible impact on Superb Parrot habitat.
- COG provided written comments on the National ALP Conservation Policy and the ACT Government's Environment Strategy.

## Publications

In 1994, Barbara Allan continued to edit the newsletter *Gang-gang*, maintaining high quality standards. She has now retired as editor and we thank her for her many years in this valuable role. David Purchase and Grahame Clark continued their good work as editors of COG's Journal, *Canberra Bird Notes*. Tony Lawson retired as Publications Officer after a significant contribution of many years in the job, and Noel Luff took over the role temporarily.

*Jenny Bounds, 19 April 1995*

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## OUT AND ABOUT

*G. Tibicen*

*The views expressed in "Out and About" do not necessarily reflect the views or policy of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.*

A recent issue of *Australian Natural History* contained an article by Tim Low who discussed the spread of certain aggressive bird species into suburbia and the affect this has on less aggressive species. In particular he talked about the Noisy Miner *Manorina melanocephala* and the way it has expanded into Brisbane, and how it was probably a more serious threat to native species than cats. Wherever colonies of miners have established themselves, they have driven away other birds. A visit to the Brisbane Botanic Gardens can show you how successful they have been.

Tim suggests that suburban conditions are helping the spread. Under these conditions the bush has been cleared and trees have been planted interspersed with lawn - the perfect environment for Noisy Miners. His suggestion is for people to plant fewer trees and lawns, and more shrubs to provide cover for other species of birds.

Although we do not suffer a plague of Noisy Miners in Canberra (we are developing a Common Myna plague instead) the issues he raises could equally apply to Pied Currawongs *Strepera graculina* in Canberra. So perhaps we could help defeat the currawong scrooge by decreasing the amount of lawn and planting more shrubs. But don't plant shrubs bearing berries that will provide the currawongs with food.

The exhibition of The Queen's Pictures at the National Gallery has an interesting link with Australian ornithology. One of the pictures is *The Nubian Giraffe*. It is of a giraffe which belonged to George IV and was painted in 1827 by Jacques-Laurent Agasse. The connection with Australian ornithology is that when the giraffe died in 1829 it was stuffed by the taxidermists Gould and Tomkins. Gould was John Gould whose involvement in Australian ornithology is well-known. He was born in Lyme Regis, Dorset, on 14 September 1804 and by the age of 14 he was working under his father who was a foreman gardener at Windsor Castle. John acquired a knowledge of the birdlife around Windsor Castle and began a hobby of bird-stuffing. This provided him with a foundation for his future ornithological activities. After six years he became a gardener at Ripley Castle, Yorkshire and eighteen months later, in 1824, established a taxidermist practice in London. In 1827 he was appointed as "Curator and Preserver" at the newly established museum of the Zoological Society of London.

The NSW Field Ornithologists Club has recently published a supplement to its journal that is dedicated to the large forest owls of New South Wales. It contains articles on the Powerful Owl *Ninox strenua*, Sooty Owl *Tyto tenebricosa* and Masked Owl *T. novaehollandiae*. My reason for mentioning this is that in the articles on the Sooty Owl and Powerful Owl the author, Stephen Debus, mentions that people are regularly "twitching" owls at known sites. This may well disturb established pairs, especially if the broadcasting of taped calls is used to "twitch" the owls.

This is another example of how the overseas habit of "twitching" or "ticking" is catching on in this country to the detriment of the birds themselves. Concern about the possible harmful effects of using taped calls was also expressed some years ago by Don Fletcher and Neil Reckord in an article on Powerful Owls in *Canberra Birds Notes* (1989, 14: 21-24).

Stephen made the positive suggestion that it would be more useful in terms of the conservation of these owls if bird-watchers searched for them in suitable habitat in wood-production forests and other areas under threat where they had not been previously reported.

There is an interesting point here that we should all bear in mind if we want to help birds survive. Why, when we go bird-watching, do we always go back to the same place? Perhaps we should sometimes investigate alternative places and record what we see there. An occasional visit to an unknown spot will increase our knowledge of bird distribution and may turn up something unusual for those who need that sort of "fix".

For those who have missed the advertisements throughout the ornithological press I would like to bring to your attention the Southern Hemisphere Ornithological Conference. This international conference is to be organised in Albany, Western Australia, by the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union from 5 to 9 October 1996. The major theme of the conference will be the ecology, conservation and management of Southern Hemisphere birds. Further details can be obtained from Brian Collins, Curtin University of Technology, GPO Box U 1987, Perth, W.A. 6001 - Tel. 619 351 7041, Fax. 619 351 2495, Email [B.Collins@info.curtin.edu.au](mailto:B.Collins@info.curtin.edu.au). (Note that even this column has to leave the 19th century occasionally and enter the world of INTERNET.)

By the way, if you are going to Western Australia, don't forget to visit the two bird observatories. The original one at Eyre in the mallee on the coastal edge of the Nullarbor and the most recent one at Broome.

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## REVIEW

**The Taxonomy and Species of Birds of Australia and its Territories** by Leslie Christidis and Walter E. Boles (1994). Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union Monograph 2. RAOU: Melbourne. Pp. 112 + iv. 245 mm x 185 mm, softcover. \$18.

In the last 20 years or so the science of avian taxonomy has advanced rapidly. This is due largely to the work of C.G. Sibley and his colleague J.E. Ahlquist who, in 1975, pioneered the use of DNA-DNA hybridisation in the study of evolutionary relationships of birds. The technique is succinctly described by Simpson and Day (1993, *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia* (4th edition) Viking O'Neil: Melbourne): "DNA-DNA hybridisation is a recent molecular biology technique where the chromosomes - which are made of DNA - of different species are compared. The extent of the differences between the DNAs is mathematically equivalent to the time that has elapsed since the species had common DNA, that is, since they belonged to the same, prehistoric species. A picture can be built up on how and when each species diverged from a common stock by studying the differences between their DNAs."

*The Taxonomy and Species of Birds of Australia and its Territories* shows how the work of Sibley and Ahlquist has resulted in the revision of many previously held beliefs concerning the relationship of bird species.

Since 1978 the basic arbiter of names of Australian birds has been the "Recommended English Names for Australian Birds" (*Emu* 77 (supplement): 245-313) and has been used by most publications, including those produced by COG. *The Taxonomy and Species of Birds of Australia and its Territories*, which provides a list of the birds of Australia and its territories, aims to present the current state of taxonomic thinking as regards this list. It does not purport to be a checklist, which would deal with all synonyms and subspecies, but no doubt its conclusions will be reflected in forthcoming editions of the three main field guides and other publications. The authors have taken a conservative approach, adopting those changes backed by published scientific work, but not those founded on inadequate or continuing research (e.g. the Little Wattlebird in Western Australia is not regarded as a species). Repeatedly the authors comment on the need for further research in regard to particular families, etc. It follows that with an on-going science like taxonomy, this will not be the final word.

The book has four main sections; General Introduction, Species List, Discussion, and References.

The General Introduction of five pages provides reasons why it was necessary to produce the list, the basis on which decisions were made, and a summary of the changes made to English names. The changes to English names are divided into four categories: 17 were to conform to international usage (e.g. the Feral Pigeon is now the Rock Dove); 32 as a result of changes in taxonomic status (e.g. the Red-browed Firetail is now the Red-browed Finch); 16 unpopular names are abandoned as a result of a survey conducted in 1993 by the RAOU (e.g. the Australian Kestrel is now the Nankeen Kestrel); and the addition of those species which are new to the Australian list. Of interest is the abandonment of the use of some scientific generic names as the English name, e.g. the *Origma* again becomes the Rockwarbler, the *Hylacolas* revert to being Heathwrens, and the *Calamanthus* to Fieldwrens.

The Species List, which also shows the orders, families, and genera, includes all extant and recently extinct native species, and introduced species that have become established and continue to survive in the wild. It gives the accepted scientific name and recommended English name, and occupies 22 pages. To most readers this would be the most important part.

The Discussion details the reasons for the changes. It also provides reasons for including or excluding the findings of other workers. When reading this section most bird watchers will probably have a finger in the appropriate place in the Species List as it uses only scientific names.

The References occupy 18 pages and provide details of the 567 publications cited in the book.

The most noticeable feature of the book is the changes in sequence of orders and families to accord with the latest taxonomic thinking. If used in the field guides these changes will make reference to the index a frequent occurrence by bird watchers. There are quite a few changes in the non-passerines, but one will quickly adjust to these. It is among the passerines that major changes occur and of the 34 passerine families, only three remain in the same sequence as they were in the "Recommended English Names for Australian Birds". There are also changes in the make-up of families, a major one being the break-up of the Muscicapidae. This family previously included the thrushes, robins, whistlers, shrike-thrushes, and all the flycatchers. These have now been spread among the Petroicidae (robins), Pachycephalidae (whistlers and shrike-thrushes), Dicruridae (flycatchers), and a much reduced Muscicapidae (thrushes). These families do not occur consecutively, but have others in between.

The idea that the three mud-nesters were somewhat related (they were placed in two consecutive families) has been abandoned. The Magpie-lark is now in the family Dicruridae together with the monarchs, flycatchers, fantails, and Spangled Drongo. The White-winged Chough and Apostlebird remain together in the Corcoracidae.

The new sequence will contain few surprises for those who read fairly widely in the bird literature. To those who use only the field guides, the changes will be dramatic. However, it is worth noting that Simpson and Day (op. cit.) used and discussed the new sequence in the Handbook section of the fourth edition of their field guide.

The book is clearly written and well presented, and even the scientific "Discussion" can be easily understood. Some ornithologists query the need for such a book as this, arguing that the material is available in the literature and the authors of field guides should gather their information from all world sources. On the other hand this book is a compilation of information from all such sources and is likely to be used as the standard for the nomenclature used in bird watchers' literature until, inevitably, further research leads to more changes in the years to come. Just as the "Recommended English Names for Australian Birds" has been the standard for nearly 25 years this will be the standard work for quite a while and is therefore of the utmost importance. It is strongly recommended.

*Steve Wilson*

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## OBITUARY

Dr Gerard Frederick (Jerry) van Tets

Jerry, who was well known to many members of the Canberra Ornithologists Group, died in Canberra on 14 January 1995. He was born in England on 19 January 1929, but after two years his parents moved back to Holland. Early in his life Jerry came under the influence of his grandfather, Gerard van Tets van Goidschalxoord, who was president of the Dutch Horticultural Society. This was probably the start of his love of nature. For the duration of the war Jerry's family lived in Holland. His parents divorced in the middle of the war and Jerry, together with his mother and siblings, moved to a coastal town. For most of the last year of the war, Jerry was forced to hide to avoid conscription by the Germans. This, coupled with the constant house-moving because of the allied invasion, caused his schooling to suffer.

After the war he spent a short period in a Quaker boarding school and then went to England intending to work as a factory hand. His English was poor and his schooling negligible, but he did not want to live in Holland any longer. His grandmother, who was then living in England, heard of his plans and arranged for him to work as a gardener in a boarding school for Jewish refugees at Hazelmere. In return for gardening Jerry received lessons and gained sufficient grades to attend university. Prior to university he did his national service as a sapper with the Royal Engineers. The majority of Jerry's service was with a railway unit in the army of occupation in Austria.

Jerry left Europe to attend university in Toronto, Canada, working in lumber camps in summer to pay for his tuition. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in biology, **and** went to Vancouver where he completed his masters degree. After this, as part of his doctoral studies, Jerry returned to Holland to work on the behaviour of apes at the University of Amsterdam. He also worked for a year in Toronto and for a year in Louisiana and Belize, a small English-speaking country in the Caribbean. During his doctoral studies he met Pat Johnston who was doing her masters degree at the University of British Columbia.

When Jerry finished his doctorate, he and Pat married and sailed for Australia where Jerry had been invited to take up a position in Canberra as a Research Scientist with the CSIRO Division of Wildlife Research. His task was to develop methods which could be used to reduce the number of birds on airfields, thereby reducing the likelihood of collisions between these birds and aircraft. He was involved in this project, which was undertaken on behalf of the then Department of Aviation, from July 1963 through to June 1971. In 1968 he also began to do some work on cormorants, which from 1971 to 1981 became a full-time study.

When he had worked in Louisiana, Jerry had had access to a reference collection of bird skeletons and felt that CSIRO would benefit from a similar collection. He started collecting bones while working on birds on airfields and gradually built up a reference collection from almost every species of Australian birds plus a wide range of other vertebrates. Jerry could never let an opportunity pass to add to his collection and those of us who worked with him can recall many odoriferous journeys home from field trips sharing a vehicle with Jerry and garbage bags containing the remains of dead animals in various stages of decay. His work on skeletons led to an interest in Australian palaeontology and in 1980 he began to work full-time in this field. One result being *Kadimakara - Extinct Vertebrates of Australia* which he edited with Dr P.V. Rich in 1985.

Jerry retired from CSIRO in January 1988, but continued to work on his skeletal collection as a Post-retirement Fellow. Shortly afterwards he started working with the ANU Prehistory Department identifying bones from archaeological sites.

Jerry's involvement with COG goes back a long time. He was an early member of the ACT Branch of the RAOU (the records show he attended its second meeting held on 8 July 1964). He became a committee member in 1966 and was elected Chairman on 11 June 1969. He was Chairman when the branch became the Canberra Ornithologists Group on 15 April 1970 and he continued in that position until 13 June 1973. He was editor of *Canberra Bird Notes* from April 1973 to January 1975.

From 1 June to 10 August 1970, Jerry ran a course in ornithology (ecology and behaviour) for the ANU Department of Continuing Education.

Jerry played an important role in Australian ornithology. His contribution to the scientific literature and his skeletal collection, which now forms an important part of the Australian Wildlife Collection, will be lasting memorials to him.

Jerry was diagnosed as having cancer in 1988 and it was due to his exceptional fitness that he survived so long. He was always a keen swimmer and, until his admission to hospital, continued to attend the local gym at 5.30 a.m. every day for swimming and gym work.

Jerry was a quiet and direct man and always prepared to provide practical assistance where he could. He was deeply involved with the Anglican church and served it in many capacities, particularly those connected with young people. He took part in the formation of Camp Pelican (a Christian youth camp) in which he played an active role, including as cook on their canoeing trips down the Murrumbidgee River.



Jerry is survived by Pat, and children Janet, Ian and Kit. Eight days before he died, an event which gave him great pleasure was to be able to see and hold his first grandchild, Benjamin, who was born on 6 January 1995. Not only his family, but also all who came under his influence, will be the poorer for his passing.

*David Purchase*

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#### RARITIES PANEL NEWS

Probably the two most interesting sightings recently were the Tawny-crowned Honeyeater *Phylidonyris melanops* and the White-throated Nightjar *Eurostopodus mystacalis*. Red-capped Robins *Petroica goodenovii* continue to be recorded around Canberra and there were two recent records of Little Friarbirds *Philemon citreogularis*. The two Marsh Sandpipers *Tringa stagnatilis* were seen at a place where they may not normally be expected, so have a good look at the edges of large farm dams, you may be surprised at what you may see. Two records over five years old - a Common Koel *Eudynamis scolopacea* and a Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus bracteatus* - show it is never too late to submit unusual sightings.

Finally, what can one say about an Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus*?

#### RARITIES PANEL ENDORSED LIST NO. 42

Intermediate Egret

1; 12 Nov 94; I. Fraser, Jerrabomberra Wetlands.

Black Kite

1; 29 Apr 94; I. Fraser, Williamsdale.

Grey Goshawk

1; 9 Feb 95; B. Wood; The Pinnacle Nature Park.

Black Falcon

1; 22 Mar 95; M. Fyfe; Woolcara Lane. near Hoskinstown.

Marsh Sandpiper

2; 17 Oct 94; I. Fraser, Dam near Mulligans Flat.

Diamond Dove

1; 22 Feb 95; P. Goddard; Pialligo Avenue.

Superb Parrot

2; 6 Dec 94; A. McLachlan; Murrumbateman.

c. 12; 9 Dec 94; K. Simpson; Murrumbateman.

8+1; 3 Jan 95; A. McLachlan; Murrumbateman.

Turquoise Parrot

1; 3 Nov 94; I. Fraser; Mt Ainslie.

Common Koel

1; 31 Oct and 1 Nov 89; L. Thorburn; Queanbeyan.

1; 9 Feb 94; A. Howarth; Isaacs Ridge.

White-throated Nightjar

1; 20 Dec 94; J. Leonard; Oakey Hill, Lyons.

White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike

1 (dark morph); 23 Feb 95; G. Dabb; Narrabundah.

Little Friarbird

1; 26 Jan 95; I. Fraser, Mulligans Flat.

2; 5 Feb 95; J. Leonard; Lyons.

Tawny-crowned Honeyeater

1; 24 Sep 94; W. Dossetor; near Burra.

Red-capped Robin

2; 28 Sep 93; D. Purchase; Ginninderra Creek, Melba.

1; 17 Sep 94; R. Allen; Southwells Crossing.

1; 25 Sep 94; D. Johnson; near Kambah Pool. 1; 11 Dec 94; I. McMahon; O'Connor Ridge. 1; 12 Jan 95;

D. Purchase; Ginninderra Creek, Melba.

Spangled Drongo

1; 21 Apr 90; M. Robbins; Urambi Village, Kambah.

Escapees:

Common Peafowl

1; 15 Mar 95; G. Dabb; Narrabundah.

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(Continued from inside from cover)

<i>Publications</i>	Carol Macleay		286 2624
<i>Records Officer</i>	Malcolm Fyfe		254 3310
<i>Shopfront Managers</i>	Wally Brown	--	
	Gwen Hartican		281 3622
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*Conservation Subcommittee:*

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*Projects Subcommittee:*

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*Rarities Panel:*

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*Records and Library Subcommittee:*

Malcolm Fyfe.

*Shopfront Management Subcommittee:*

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Production and distribution of *Canberra Bird Notes*:

**Camera ready Copy:** Cedric Bear

**Printing:** Lowes - Printer

**Distribution:** Ann McKenzie and helpers

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*Canberra Bird Notes* is published quarterly by the Canberra Ornithologists Group. Contributions are welcome. These should fit into one of the following categories: major articles (up to about 3000 words); short notes and "Odd Obs" (up to about 300 words); reviews of books and articles (up to about 500 words); and where to watch birds (up to about 800 words). The articles and notes should cover matters of the distribution, identification, and behaviour of birds occurring in the Australian Capital Territory and surrounding area (i.e. New South Wales coast north to Jervis Bay, and west to the Riverina). Contributions can be sent to the editors **C/O David Purchase**, 5 Orchard Place, Melba, ACT 2615 (Tel 258 2252).

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