



# Gang-gang

**FEBRUARY 2014**

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

## **FEBRUARY MEETING**

**Wednesday 12 February 2014**

**7.30 pm.**

**Canberra Girls Grammar School, Multi-media centre, corner Gawler Cres and Melbourne Ave, Deakin.**

As part of the COG 50th Anniversary celebrations in 2014, the committee has resolved that the short presentations at the monthly meetings should be a series of talks related to COG's history and main activities over the years. As an introduction to these presentations Vice-President **Neil Hermes**, the main organiser for the celebrations, will give a **scene setting talk for the COG 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary generally** and for the rest of the talks that will follow.

The main presentation will be by **Professor Andrew Cockburn**, Division of Evolution, Ecology and Genetics, Australian National University, entitled **"Go forth young girl: why do female fairy-wrens always leave home?"**

In most mammals, with our own species an obvious exception, baby boys wander off to discover the world while baby girls

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## **What to watch out for this month**

My prediction in my December column that, after all the excitement of November and particularly in October, bird activity would be comparatively quiet in December and January, proved to be completely wrong. In fact, with the continuing dry inland it's been a bumper time as there have been many unusuals here over the past two months, some of them rarely recorded in the ACT before. One of the reasons for this I suspect from my experience is that Canberra provides a refuge for many inland bird species early in a drought, but when it too dries out birds move away and the longer the dry lasts the fewer the species that seem to be attracted to here. One feature has been how co-operative and obliging these species have been,

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**Black Honeyeater**

*Photo: Lindsay Hansch*

**Everyone welcome**

stay near the area in which they were born. Birds are starkly different - it is the girls that usually leave home (unless you are a duck). Although this is one of the most famous patterns in animal behaviour, it still defies a clean explanation. One of the most compelling but poorly tested ideas is that having one sex move earlier and further prevents close relatives from mating with each other. In this talk Andrew will explain how his long-term study of cooperation and infidelity in Superb Fairy-wrens in the Australian National Botanic Gardens is poised to crack this problem. However, he will also show that to make further advances we need the help of enthusiastic bird-watchers to participate in a 'Citizen Science' project, and he will sketch a way that COG could help with that goal.

## Committee News

A group led by David McDonald is working on producing a new Annotated List of ACT birds.

Plans for COG's 50<sup>th</sup> year are well advanced, under the guidance of Neil Hermes. Pages 12—16 of this Newsletter contain further information about COG's 50<sup>th</sup> year events.

COG has donated a small amount to the aviary at Calvary Hospital.

The new COG website is nearing completion.

The Committee met with Andrew Robinson, who is working on an app called Questabird. He is using data from the Atlas of Living Australia for an adventure game based on birds in a local area. Page 9 has more information.

Sandra Henderson

staying put in an area over a period of at least days so that many members were able to observe them.

Since there have been so many good sightings over the past 2 months, this column will only deal with what to me were the highlights, and what else might still be expected during February. The first species was the **Black Honeyeater**; after the couple of sightings mentioned in my November column six were seen (and photographed) at Kama NR, followed closely by reports of up to 4 birds at Jaramlee Ponds in Dunlop where they stayed for at least a week. A month later a bird was seen in the company of a **Singing Honeyeater** at the West Belconnen Ponds. The latter had been reported earlier in December round the AIS and had proven, at least initially, to be very elusive, but was then observed for several days at both spots. While both birds are inland dry country species, they present an interesting contrast with the former much more nomadic than the latter, which is relatively sedentary and in my experience can still be found inland during the driest times and in the driest spots, possibly explaining why there are so few previous records in the ACT.

Next to turn up in mid-December were up to four **Purple-crowned Lorikeets** in Cook, attracted to the flowering ironbarks there, and again obligingly staying for a few days so that many could observe them (they turned up again just as this column went to the editors). Unlike the above two species, these have very much a southern distribution (mainly west of Melbourne across to SW WA) where the drought has been less severe, and it is unclear why what appears to be a significant range extension (based on the Birds Australia Atlas) of these wild birds (at least one of the two previous ACT records has been explained as escapees) has occurred. They were accompanied by both **Rainbow** and **Musk Lorikeets**, the latter again an uncommon record for the ACT and both with an eastern coastal distribution, as has the **Little Lorikeet** (though further inland as well) reported from Duffy a few days earlier.

As things dried out the attention turned more towards more waterbirds. Already at the end of

## What to watch out for this month—continued from Page 2

November a **Painted Snipe** was reported from Kelly Swamp. This male proved to be remarkably “stay put” (and stationary) and was very well observed for at least 6 weeks. However, the species doesn’t seem to have been as widespread as it was last year, and more exciting was the report of an **Australasian Bittern** at Rose Lagoon NE of Collector by Harvey Perkins on 17 December. There were more follow up sightings over the next 3 weeks culminating in Geoffrey Dabb posting on the chatline both photos of the two birds as well as an explanation of both the habitat and what the birds were doing there. Again this is a very rare record of this endangered species in the COG area of interest (AOI).

Early in January Kym Bradley posted a photo on the chatline of two **Caspian Terns** at Kelly Swamp which again stayed for several days, unlike the up to 18 **Red-necked Avocets** which only seemed to stay for an afternoon across the road at the Fyshwick Sewage Ponds. Finally towards the end of January a **Lewin’s Rail** was recorded at the pond south of the Namadgi Visitors Centre.

These were the highlights amongst many waders/waterbird species reported over the past two months, many of which would have probably been considered worthy of comment in other years. These include a likely second **Pectoral Sandpiper** and many reports of **Sharp-tailed Sandpipers** (over 50 at Rose Lagoon) and **Latham’s Snipe** (up to 31 at Kelly Swamp). **Freckled** and in particular large numbers of **Pink-eared Duck** continue to be reported, as are **Red-kneed Dotterel** and there have been further reports of a single **Black-winged Stilt**. High numbers of **Plumed Whistling Ducks** and **Australian Shelduck** continue to be reported at their usual spots near Bungendore.

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Lewin’s Rail

*Photo: Roger Williams*



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### 2014 tours

Special Plains-wanderer Weekend  
in conjunction with NSW Parks  
Week 8 — 9 March

19 — 26 April  
Alice Springs and  
West MacDonnell Ranges

25 May — 8 June  
Top End including  
Mitchell Plateau/black grasswren option

12 — 27 June  
Queensland’s Gulf of Carpentaria  
& Atherton Tablelands

3 — 10 August  
New Caledonia

6 — 25 September  
Strzelecki Track 35<sup>th</sup> tour  
The four states outback expedition

30 September — 8 October  
NSW Central Coast. Gloucester Tops NP,  
Barren Grounds NR, Tapin Tops NP.

10 — 19 December  
SW Western Australia

**Plains-wanderer Weekends 2014**  
25 & 26 October 2014  
6 & 7 December 2014

Please see itineraries, checklists and  
latest news on our website

[www.philipmaher.com](http://www.philipmaher.com)



Also reported have been **Yellow-billed** and **Royal Spoonbills**, **White-necked Herons**, **Nankeen Night-Herons**, **Glossy Ibis**, 3 crane species and **Buff-banded Rail**. With further hot weather and drying conditions forecast for the end of January/beginning of February one wonders how much longer this will last with many water features including Kelly Swamp and probably Rose Lagoon already having dried up.

Likewise there have been many sightings of other summer migrants, including a further sighting of a **Channel-billed Cuckoo**, as well as one of a **Red-backed Kingfisher**, and later in January a couple of reports of a **Black Kite** and a **White-bellied Cuckoo-Shrike**. The almost overlooked (like many other species it became ho-hum after a while) **Painted Honeyeaters** reported at Stoney Creek Nature Reserve were last seen early in January; unfortunately none of the several nests seems to have been successful. More successful has been the **White-browed Woodswallows** both close to Canberra but more so to the east and NE of Canberra where the bulk of the birds seemed to have moved to in the first half of December; for example, Jude Hopwood reported an inundation with so many sitting on the road to Goulburn from her place at Currawang NE of the ACT she had to travel quite slowly to avoid running them over. A month later they had nested in all the available spots around her house, including some very precarious ones. Interestingly I can find no records of the related **Masked Woodswallow** being amongst them, with the last sightings in mid-November.

The **Eastern/Pacific Koel** also seems to have had a very successful breeding season, with a number of posts on the chatline of up to five males interacting with up to two females and then the first report of a fledgling on 18 December, as far as I can tell about 2 weeks earlier than previously reported. Soon after a nestling was reported, followed by a total of 8 fledglings close to the end of January, all hosted by Red Wattlebirds. So please keep an eye and especially an ear out for further fledglings; the two round my GBS site in Chapman have been making a very persistent begging call somewhat reminiscent of a Little Friarbird, so they are very hard to ignore.

Despite the drying conditions it seems to have been a good breeding season with other highlights including a **Painted Button-quail** with chicks in tow, many begging young **Superb Parrots**, more dependent young

**Grey Butcherbirds**, a small **Buff-banded Rail** chick with parent, a **Restless Flycatcher** nest with 3 young which later became dependent young, 2 pairs of **Little Eagles** each raising one young, and last but certainly not least two **Australian Owlet-nightjar** chicks being raised in a nest box in Jerrabomberra. **White-winged Trillers** also seem to have had a good breeding season, but this is less clear for the **Rufous Songlark** which as a ground nester proves much harder to confirm breeding. These last two and the **White-browed Woodswallows** really only come to the ACT to breed, and as I noted in my last column, few if any will remain past the end of January.

This also applies to the **Brown Songlark** last reported as far as my sources indicate on Uriarra Road early in January, as was the **Horsfield's Bushlark** at this same spot. So watch out for these species (as well as the **Brush Cuckoo** which also doesn't seem to have been recorded since this time) in February or any further unusual species in this month, as well as further breeding activity. Watch out also for **White-throated Needleetails** and the less common **Fork-tailed Swifts** which are most often sighted in February and March on their return migration. While there were a couple of sightings of the former in December the lack of any rain or storm fronts since seems to have resulted in no further observations. As usual always please ensure that all significant observations end up on the COG database.

*Jack Holland*



**Singing Honeyeater**

*Photo: Peter Cowper*

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# Field Trip Reports

## Sunday, 1 December - ACT Nudist Club and Kowen Forest

Four COG members attended this unusual outing. We were welcomed to the 4 hectare property by the present President and his wife, plus the previous President, who had assisted the leader on Bird Blitzes in the past.

This site was originally used by Telecom as a dump, when it was offered to the ACTNC. The members worked incredibly hard to clear away rubbish and effect large plantings of native trees and shrubs. Now it is pleasantly wooded, with grassy areas. Considering the lack of topsoil and the rocky base, it has regenerated very well. It now provides a substantial link for migrating birds. Olive-backed Orioles and Scarlet Honeyeaters have been seen in the past.

In the morning, we made two circuits of the property, broken by morning tea by the heated swimming pool with the club offering us homemade Xmas cake. After a late night for Xmas celebrations in the club house, members gradually emerged to join us by the pool and our group was made most welcome.

The overcast morning cleared to a sunny day and we began to see many species. We had the usual species of Crimson and Eastern Rosella, Kookaburra, Sacred Kingfisher, Striated and Spotted Pardalotes, Red Wattlebird, Noisy Friarbird and Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike. The highlight was the lengthy observation of three Leaden Flycatchers. A Shining Bronze-Cuckoo was also heard.

After lunch by the pool, two COG members left for another appointment. The remaining two of us drove into the nearby Kowen Forest, using Millpost Lane. We saw an Australian Kestrel, White faced-Heron and most of the bush birds seen at the nudist club. Mountain bikers have cut tracks through many areas of this pine forest, but fortunately not many of them explore this area.

On the return to Queanbeyan, we explored a mountain bike track on Sparrow Hill Road, delighted by two Mistletoebirds, bursting out of a patch of mistletoe.

Shirley Kral

## Wednesday 15 January – Stoney Creek Nature Reserve

Fourteen members and guests assembled at Uriarra East at 8:30, when it was already about 28 degrees. While signing on happened we were entertained by the calls and flights of up to 5 Dollarbirds. A flight of White-winged Choughs passed by, possibly heading to a nest site further down the carpark.

Large numbers of small bush birds were moving along in the vegetation, making accurate counting very difficult. It was easier to count the birds in or above the Murrumbidgee. These included a Collared Sparrowhawk carrying prey (and being encouraged to leave the premises by a Willie Wagtail), 2 White-faced Herons, 6 Australian Wood Ducks and 5 Black-fronted Dotterels.

Once in the vicinity of the Casuarinas Mistletoebirds were common. Two Rainbow Bee-eaters posed nicely, with one seemingly stuck in position while it sorted out how to handle a large insect. Counting problems again reared their head when a very large flock of Little Ravens went overhead: estimates ranged from 75 to 'a bit over 100'.

After about 90 minutes of ambling the temperature was rising and the birds appeared to have gone for siesta, so we returned, arriving back at the cars by 10:45. The external thermometer in my car was reading 34 degrees (1 over the total number of species seen) so definitely time to head for air conditioning.

Martin Butterfield

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## Sunday 19 January – Uriarra

Following four heatwave days, January 19 provided some relief, attracting 16 birders and a trip bird species count of 60.

The Uriarra Homestead dam and surroundings (plus a nearby smaller dam) provided a species list of 38, thus breaking by 5 last year's record and yielding the highest count in 23 years of these January outings to the site. Highlights included Latham's Snipe, Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo, Nankeen Night-Heron, Pink-eared Duck, Australasian Shoveler, Restless Flycatcher and Black-fronted Dotterel with dependant young.

At Uriarra Crossing West, we were surprised by an overhead flock of about 200 Little Ravens, possibly including birds from a slightly smaller flock seen on the previous Wednesday's COG outing to nearby Stoney Creek Reserve. Other notables were Rainbow Bee-eater, Wedge-tailed Eagle, and breeding records for Yellow-rumped and Buff-rumped Thornbill, Willie Wagtail and White-throated Treecreeper.

Around the splendid picnic spot at Uriarra East we were entertained by a juvenile Collared Sparrowhawk enjoying his lunch of a smaller bird (Bruce saw this bird again on Australia Day – ed!). Additional treats for the birders included Dollarbird, Dusky Woodswallow and Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike all with dependent young, and a White-winged Chough on a nest.

Bruce Lindenmayer



**Black Fronted Dotterel and her eggs.** She has scraped her nest in the blue metal verge of a driveway at Sutton Park, which is a rural residential estate just off the Federal Highway near Sutton. Bricks had to be placed close by the nest to ensure visitors do not drive over it.

*Photo: Robert Luton*

### DEUA TIN HUTS (Via Braidwood)

Comfortable accommodation on the door-step of the Deua National Park at Krawarree via Braidwood NSW. Three cosy huts accommodating up to 14 people.

A short walk into the Deua National Park, the Big Hole and Marble Arch, walks in the beautiful Shoal haven Valley. Reasonable rates, hampers on request..

Group booking discounts.

Email [enquiry@deuatinhuts.com](mailto:enquiry@deuatinhuts.com)

[www.deuatinhuts.com](http://www.deuatinhuts.com)

Ph 02 4847 1248

### MUDBRICK COTTAGE—MALLACOOTA

Our mudbrick cottage (Blue Wren Cottage) is available for rental. It is set amongst the trees in Mallacoota, Victoria (approximately 4 hours drive from Canberra). 10 minutes walk to the beach, 5 minutes walk to the golf course and about 15 minutes walk to town. It sleeps 4-6 upstairs and there is a sofa bed downstairs. It is fully self-contained with a kitchen and laundry.

**Contact:** Barbara de Bruine (02) 6258 3531, or [barbdebruine@hotmail.com](mailto:barbdebruine@hotmail.com)

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## Future Field Trips

**At the start of each trip, and before proceeding on the trip, each participant must sign a COG Field Trip Registration Form , which acknowledges the participant's responsibilities. The form reads as follows:**

**I declare I am capable of undertaking this trip having: discussed with the Trip Leader any limitations I have (e.g. medications, physical), assessed the risks to myself and my property, and ensured I am adequately equipped.**

**I will follow the instructions of the Field Trip Leader, and advise them before moving away from the group.**

**Changes to trips are notified on the trips page of the COG website <http://canberrabirds.org.au/> and on the COG chat-line at :<http://bioacoustics.cse.unsw.edu.au/archives/html/canberrabirds/2012-03/index.html>**

**A reminder that COG has a long-standing policy to give **preference to members** for field trips that can accommodate only a limited number of people.**

### Sunday 16 February - East Basin/Molonglo Reach Electric boat cruise

This will be the outing/cruise for 2014 on the upper parts of Lake Burley Griffin (East Basin) and the adjacent Molonglo River Reach, where late summer or early autumn is the peak time for nesting, with darters as well as three species of cormorant known to breed there. The area is also rich in other waterbirds, and a variety of land birds can be seen on the banks.

**The boat trip will last about 2 hours from 8 am and will cost \$20, payable in cash on boarding.** This year we will again be travelling in the electric boat "MV Gull" which can carry well over 20 people. The boat will allow both a quiet approach as well as access to areas difficult to get to from the land. As Kingston Harbour is now open and operational, the point of departure will be from there. Participants will need to leave their cars in the Glass Works carpark and walk across and down Trevillian Quay where the boats will be readily visible. Alternatively there is street parking with various time limits on Eastlake Parade, including free all day parking on weekends along the way in.

Registration for this field trip is essential. Please book your place on the boat with Jack Holland (on 6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on [jack.holland@environment.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@environment.gov.au)). Bookings are popular already, so please make contact early if you want to be assured of a place.

### Wednesday 19 February - Queanbeyan Sewage Ponds

Meet at 8:30am on Mountain Rd (off Railway St between the suburbs of Beard and Oaks Estate). Final details will be circulated to the chatline following discussion with Works management.

### Friday 21 to Sunday 23 February – Guthega birds & flowers

Accommodation for 16 people will be in comfortable Kyilla Lodge, Mount Tate Road in Guthega. This trip is now full but if you would like to go on a waiting list in case of late cancellations, contact Jean Casburn at [casburnj@bigpond.com](mailto:casburnj@bigpond.com). Leaders are Sue Lashko and Jean Casburn.

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## Future Field Trips—continued from Page 7

### Saturday 8 to Monday 10 March - Ben Boyd National Park (Canberra Day long weekend)

This trip focuses on birdwatching in the southern end of Ben Boyd National Park. We will camp at the Bittangabee camp ground (fees apply). Be aware that the road to Bittangabee is gravel and can be a bit rough.

We hope to find a variety of birds in various habitats including the heathland and the coastal areas. Possible highlights include **Southern Emu-wren**, **Tawny-crowned Honeyeater** and a chance of **Striated Fieldwren**. We will also spend some time trying for **Ground Parrot** and studying the sea birds off Green Cape. At night we will spotlight for mammals and owls with a chance of Wombat and Long-nosed Bandicoot.

Please book a place on this outing with Kathy Walter or John Goldie on 6241 7639 or email [walter.goldie@optusnet.com.au](mailto:walter.goldie@optusnet.com.au). The trip will be restricted to 20 participants and filled on a first reply basis. More detailed information will be provided closer to the day.

### Sunday 16 March – Gungahlin Wetlands

This outing is a late celebration of World Wetlands Day which was on Feb 2. Our usual Kelly Swamp outing was cancelled due to lack of water. Currently this outing is still in the planning stage as Gungahlin residents send in information about good ponds to visit. Meeting time will be 8.00am. Meeting place and further details will appear in the March Gang-gang and on the website.

Sue Lashko, John Harris and Bill Graham

### Sunday 23 March – Narrabundah Hill, Duffy

Narrabundah Hill is a former pine forest area which supports a range of species. Last year in March and April, we saw **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** in migration, thornbills of various types, **Double-barred Finch**, **Southern Whiteface**, **Scarlet Robin** and **Speckled Warbler**, to name a few of the birds present.

Meet at the gate entrance near the Hindmarsh/Eucumbene Drive corner of Duffy. The tank that supplies water for Duffy is in view of the gate. We will probably be out for several hours, so please bring a hat, water and comfortable walking shoes and maybe a snack.

There is no need to book – just turn up by 8am to get an early start.

Leaders will be Jack Holland (6288 7840) and Jean Casburn (02 62883929)

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## COG's Bird Blitz 2013 – a follow-up

At the December 2013 COG meeting, there was a brief run-down on Blitz 9, held on 26-27 October 2013, and the presentation of prizes. At that stage over 350 datasheets had been submitted. A few more have trickled in and one observer's records have still not been received, so these results are still not final.

There were 116 named participants, and probably 20 more whose names were not provided – an excellent participation rate, probably achieved in part by the encouragement provided by Michael Robbins' team who ran training courses for new blitzers.

We recorded 169 bird species, including two new for the blitz: a **Pectoral Sandpiper** and a **Spotted Harrier**. Unusually for the blitz, we recorded good numbers of crakes and rails; also trillers and songlarks were recorded in abundance. Eighty species were recorded breeding. A detailed report will be published in the next available *Canberra Bird Notes*.

The following prizes were awarded by lucky draw from amongst the contenders:

- for participation in every COG blitz to date: Ian Anderson, who won *Australian Bird Names*, kindly donated by co-author Jeannie Gray

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### COG's Bird Blitz 2013—a follow up —*continued from Page 8*

- for a significant blitzing effort in 2013 (>10 datasheets or >10 hours): Jenny Bounds, who won a bottle of Mt Majura wine, kindly donated by Stuart Harris
- for “best bird” (**Spotted Harrier**): Geoff Larmour, who won a bottle of wine kindly donated by Dr Dick Schodde
- the vulnerable species prize (**Little Eagle “ON”**): Roger Curnow, who won a bottle of wine kindly donated by Julie Crawford and Paul Davies.

#### Special commendations:

- for successful night-time birding: Kathy Walter and John Goldie, who won a bottle of wine kindly donated by Alison Russell-French
- for escorting a beginner: Geoffrey Dabb, who won *Flocks of Colour*, kindly donated by author Dr Penny Olsen
- The Geoffrey Dabb award for the “most doubtful tick” went to Martin Butterfield, for three White-bellied **Cuckoo-shrike** at The Pound, Kowen Forest. (He meant **Black-faced**).
- The Geoffrey Dabb special award went to John Brown, for the team mist-netting effort at Warks Rd which resulted in 41 wet forest records, including one gravid **Shining Bronze-Cuckoo**.

Twenty-five lucky participants shared in the circulating book collection, while all first-time blitzers present at the meeting received a pack of gift cards, kindly donated by Steve Stephenson.

Many thanks to all participants and prize-givers. Without you, the Blitz wouldn't be half as useful, or half as much fun. Please note in your diaries the date of Blitz 10 – 25-26 October 2014, and give some thought as to where you'd like to survey. Sign up as soon as you'd like!

Barbara Allan, Blitz coordinator



#### Questabird

'Questabird is a fun new adventure app for mobile devices that gets kids (and adults too!) outdoors and experiencing the environment. Players join quests to photograph birds, earn gold, buy supplies, gain levels, build their collection and become Australia's highest-rated adventurers. The game uses real bird data, with all the known Australian species, along with GPS location tagging. Verified sightings are submitted to the Atlas of Living Australia to help protect our biodiversity.

As part of the COG's 50th anniversary, Questabird will include a special COG-sponsored "Gang-gang Cockatoo Quest" for the Canberra region, with special prizes, bonus gold, and the sightings coming directly to COG for follow-up.

To find out more log onto <http://www.questabird.com/>

Note: The game is currently available only on Android devices, with an iPhone version expected soon.'

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## THE JOY OF PELAGICS



**Buller's Albatross**

*Photo: Tobias Hayashi*

Pelagics present a unique aspect to birding. The way of birding and the skills required are completely different in many ways to 'bush' birding. For me, it was a life-changing moment (as far as birding goes anyway) when I hitched a ride with Dan Mantle for my first ever pelagic. It opened up a whole new world of birding, and since then I have done some 40 or 50 boat trips. This is a ramble about my pelagic experiences, told in the form of a progression of mental states.

**Before the first pelagic.** The mind games start well before you get out onto the open ocean. Generally, this manifests itself in some form of nervous excitement, heightened by the 6am alarm, lack of breakfast because you didn't feel hungry, and everyone talking about the rare seabirds seen the other week just up the coast. This excitement comes to a pinnacle when you actually clamber on the boat! You're on a boat! This may also be the part where those doubts about seasickness that you had pushed to the back of your mind really start to come to the fore. However, when the boat starts motoring and you feel the wind in your hair, the doubts are (hopefully) replaced by exhilaration.

**All is new!** This state of mind is specially reserved for those making their first few pelagics. Every tiny black dot on the horizon is a potentially exciting bird and the urge to attempt to identify everything is strong! It's annoying when the regulars on board tell you not to worry, "We'll see plenty more of those later on..." The hype surrounding the first albatross is very real, and most people will remember the first time they saw a Wandering Albatross arcing in towards the boat. This excitement tends to help with warding off seasickness, but those who succumb do not usually go on another pelagic for at least several years. Those who are photographically minded can often be spotted at the back of the boat, wide-eyed and clinging on to the nearest railing, snapping away furiously at everything that moves.

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**Getting a handle on things.** It can be quite frustrating taking those first few steps towards being able to identify seabirds. If you ask the knowledgeable person next to you what the difference is between a Very Blackish Shearwater and a Slightly Less Blackish Shearwater; they might tell you to look for the white chin which is only present on some birds, or for the slightly lighter underwings (but beware the lighting conditions which change everything!). However, once you get a handle on the “jizz” of the birds flying around, you can begin to vaguely comprehend how the regular seabirders can tell dots on the horizon apart from each other (“jizz” is the buzz word on pelagics, and roughly equates to the shape of the bird, the proportions of body parts, the way it flies, and what you're feeling like on the day). Just when you start feeling comfortable and spotting a few birds of your own, you start getting yourself confused by the clock system (regulars on pelagics tend to use a clock system to identify where a bird is approaching from; i.e. the bow is 12 o'clock and the stern is 6).

**Chasing rare birds.** Once you can identify the common birds as specks on the horizons, you may start feeling happy with yourself. This feeling, however, is quickly replaced by a need to see rare birds. For birders, being able to pick out the common birds makes it much easier to see rare birds when they arrive. For photographers, being able to pick out the common birds makes it easier to focus your photography on a particular species. Usually, rare birds are spotted by one of the regulars, who then shouts at everyone else until the whole boat is looking at where everyone else's binoculars are pointed. On the very rare occasions when a real vagrant turns up, complete pandemonium reigns and even the seemingly unflappable regulars start jumping up and down and shouting indecipherable words. In such a situation, you need to rely on the tone of their voice to tell you how rare the bird in question is.

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White-faced Storm-Petrel, off Port Macdonnell, SA Photo: Tobias Hayashi

## The Joys of Pelagics—continued from Page 11

**Being a pro.** These guys have seen all there is to be seen. They can occasionally be seen sleeping on the boat all the way to the edge of the continental shelf, where the birding is the best. You'd think this might backfire one day and a really, really rare bird might fly past when they are asleep or chatting, but it never seems to happen.

For most people, getting back to shore is a chance to rest your tired, aching body. If you're lucky, it won't feel like the ground is moving too much. No matter how many times you go on a pelagic though, it is always worth it. A day on the water is always interesting because the ocean never fails to surprise.

**Tobias Hayashi**



Fairy Prion, off Eden

*Photo: Tobias Hayashi*



### Canberra Ornithologists Group 50<sup>th</sup> year

**2014 is the year that COG celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. The Group has come a long way from a small group of professional wildlife biologists and keen amateurs with a wish to document Canberra birds to the multifaceted organisation it is today.**

**During the year the Group has plans for a range of year long activities including**

- ❖ Bird of the Year - Gang-gang Cockatoo
- ❖ Media promotions
- ❖ A public Bird Forum
- ❖ A new guide map to Canberra birds
- ❖ Talks at monthly meeting nights on COG's evolution
- ❖ Bird surveys of National Sites in Canberra

and culminating in a Gala Night of events at Gold Creek Homestead on

**Saturday 22 November 2014**

Watch this space



## 2014 COG 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Calendar of Events

February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November
Short Talk on COG History at Members Meeting	Short Talk on COG History at Members Meeting	Short Talk on COG History at Members Meeting	Short Talk on COG History at Members Meeting	Short Talk on COG History at Members Meeting	Short Talk on COG History at Members Meeting	Short Talk on COG History at Members Meeting	Short Talk on COG History at Members Meeting	Short Talk on COG History at Members Meeting	Short Talk on COG History at Members Meeting
		BIGNET Meeting							
				COG Forum					
				First Meeting 3 June 1964					Sat 22 Gala Night Gold Creek Special Guest Bob Brown
Bird of the Year Gang-gang Cockatoo									
A range of media promotions are planned									

During the year a number of Special Iconic Location Bird surveys will be conducted including at New Parliament House. Watch this space for locations.

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# WE NEED YOUR HELP

## to shed light on the activities of the Gang-gang Cockatoo

The Gang-gang holds special significance for the Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG) and the ACT. It is the logo of COG and of the ACT Parks and Conservation Service. Despite this, little is known about the ecology of the Gang-gang within the ACT region, about its abundance, movements or what affects movement patterns, about its food preferences or seasonal distribution, or the frequency or success of breeding events.

As part of celebrating 50 years of activity in the ACT and region, COG will run a project over the next 12 months to learn more about Gang-gangs, starting in February 2014.

Members can greatly help this project by recording any sightings of the Gang-gang within the COG area of interest; see map at <http://canberrabirds.org.au/Maps/MapCOGAol.pdf>

Any notes on the location, date and time of the following would be important:

- Numbers in a group
- Ages and sexes of birds
- Feeding sites
- Nest sites
- Fledged young

Observations can be entered in two ways:

- on a specifically designed data sheet which should be returned to COG for analysis. A sheet is included within the newsletter (see below), is available for downloading from the COG website <http://canberrabirds.org.au/> (see 'Gang-gang Project' at ribbon at bottom of Home page) and will also be available at COG monthly meetings, or
- preferably, observations can be entered online via a portal specifically designed for the project by Atlas of Living Australia and can be found at <http://root.ala.org.au/bdrs-core/cog/home.htm>

To gain additional information, a mini Garden Bird Survey (GBS) will be conducted to determine the presence or absence of Gang-gangs ONLY. This mini survey will be run for a week during February (GBS week # 8), May (GBS week # 21), August (GBS week # 34) and November (GBS week # 47). The aim of the survey will be to:

- find out where Gang-gangs are NOT seen, so please fill in the survey sheet even though you have not recorded any Gang-gangs
- find out those area where Gang-gangs are seen occasionally
- find out those areas where Gang-gangs are seen frequently

A Garden Bird Survey (GBS) run by COG has been running for 32 years. The aim of the survey is to record the maximum number of each species seen within a 100m radius of your house or workplace at any one time within the week. For the Gang-gang survey, we would like to follow the protocol set out for the GBS but in this case record the maximum number of Gang-gangs seen each day. DO NOT RECORD OTHER SPECIES. Cross out the day if you were away from the site for the day.

The data sheet for the mini GBS survey is below and can also be obtained from the COG website (see 'Gang-gang Project' on ribbon at bottom of Home page) and will be available at COG meetings. There is no online data entry for the mini GBS survey.

Photos of male, female and young Gang-gang Cockatoos can be found at <http://photogallery.canberrabirds.org.au/cockatoos.htm>

For any queries about the project please email to [ggquery@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:ggquery@canberrabirds.org.au)

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## Gang- gang Data Sheet

Queries - please email [ggquery@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:ggquery@canberrabirds.org.au) .

Post completed sheets to - Gang-gang Survey PO Box 301, Civic Square, ACT 2608

*Please fill in separate sheet for each different start time/date*

Date:  Time started:  Time spent observing:

Location:

And if possible the GPS co-ordinates

Lat: Decimal (degrees)

Long: Decimal degrees

### OBSERVER – CONTACT DETAILS

Name:

Telephone  Mobile

Email address

Were Gang-gangs ☐ seen or ☐ heard

NUMBER OF BIRDS in total  and if possible

Males:  Females:  Young:  Undetermined:

### BEHAVIOUR (tick if observed)

Flying ☐ Perching ☐ Feeding ☐ Begging ☐ Courtship ☐ Enter/inspecting hollow ☐

Feeding (describe vegetation if possible, whether feeding on flower, seeds, introduced/native plant)

Interaction with other bird species (describe)

Other observations/comments

Data sheets can be placed in red box at Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG) meetings. For details of meetings see <http://canberrabirds.org.au/> and click on 'Meetings'

For map of study area see <http://canberrabirds.org.au/Maps/MapCOGAol.pdf>

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## Gang-gang GBS survey

Survey to follow protocol set out for the COG Garden Bird Survey

Name of Observer

Address of observations

Telephone No

Email address

February 2014

		males	females	young	not determined	total
Wednesday	19					
Thursday	20					
Friday	21					
Saturday	22					
Sunday	23					
Monday	24					
Tuesday	25					

Place form in the Red Box at the COG monthly meetings or return form to:

Gang-gang Survey  
PO Box 301  
Civic Square, ACT 2608



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# Woodland Surveys Report

## Mulligans Flat

Jenny Bounds and a large team did the survey on Sunday 1 December in good weather conditions, most reporting reasonable numbers of birds at sites, with a pretty good total of 68 species. Most notable records were at least 2 **Brush Cuckoos** in the woodland between sites 11, 12 and 18 (this is a good spot for **Leaden Flycatchers** with tall trees so maybe the cuckoos were looking for flycatcher nests to lay in), and a pair of **Jacky Winters** (only occasionally recorded), on the eastern side of the quartz ridge. There were good numbers of waterbirds on the large dam, both **Hoary-headed** and **Australasian Grebes**, a **Whistling Kite** and **Black-fronted** and **Red-kneed Dotterel**. **Australasian Grebes** had one young in a nest at the small dam near the Woolshed. **Superb Parrots** were heard near the edge of Forde and a couple of sightings of **Varied Sittella** were made, one a group of 7 birds. **Horsfield's** and **Shining Bronze-Cuckoos**, several **Scarlet Robins** including an immature-plumaged bird, a few **Yellow-faced** and **White-naped Honeyeaters**, and quite a few **White-throated Gerygones** added interest to the morning. There were a few breeding records including **White-winged Choughs** with young, **Noisy Friarbirds** at a nest, **Pied Currawongs** with young, and **Weebills** with dependent young.



Jacky Winter

*Photo: Stuart Harris*

## Goorooyarroo NR (north)

Nicki Taws surveyed on the morning of 8 December, a beautiful mild and still morning. Many of the Blakely's Red Gum were severely lerp'd, but groundcover was still quite green.

A total of 49 species was recorded. Highlights were **Red-capped Robin**, several **Scarlet Robins**, **Superb Parrot**, 2 **Diamond Firetail** (not recorded in the survey for years) and a small flock of **White-browed Woodswallows** (first survey record there). **Leaden Flycatchers** were very vocal (at 5 of the sites), as were both species of gerygone. The **Brown Goshawk** was nesting in the same tree it (or another individual) has claimed for the last 15 years. Other breeding records included **Weebill**, **Mistletoebird** and **Buff-rumped Thornbill**.

## Goorooyarroo NR (south)

Steve Holliday, Prue Buckley and Dave and Kathy Cook, had nice conditions for the final woodland survey of the year. A total of 54 species was recorded, 43 of these during the 10 minute surveys. Main highlights included a **Rufous Fantail** in a well vegetated gully, **Rainbow Lorikeet** (a first for this survey) and **White-browed Woodswallow**. The latter was also a new species for the survey; further investigation revealed at least 20 birds in the paddock near the carpark on Horse Park Drive, with one pair seen nest-building. There were also many, very vocal **White-winged Trillers** in this area, and a pair of **Diamond Firetails**. **Speckled Warblers** were recorded at 2 sites, a **White-eared Honeyeater** at site 5, **Mistletoebirds** at 5 sites and **Superb Parrots** at site 3. Incidental records included a displaying **Wedge-tailed Eagle** and a Brown Falcon carrying prey. Breeding records included dependent young **Red-rumped Parrots** and Magpies, and a **Leaden Flycatcher** nest with young.

*Continued Page 18*

### Mt Majura NR

Kathy Walter and John Goldie surveyed over a number of days in late November/early December with 27 species recorded. Notable records were three **Rainbow Lorikeets** in the site near the tank at Hackett and one **Superb Parrot** in another site. **Leaden Flycatcher** was recorded at two sites. Smaller birds were again noticeably absent with only one **Speckled Warbler** recorded at one site and another one seen in between sites.

#### Majura Field Firing Range

Paul Fennell surveyed on 6 December, a fine late spring morning. There were plenty of birds about, and between the sites a pair of **Wedge-tailed Eagles**, a **Common Bronzewing**, and **Pallid** and **Fantail Cuckoos** were observed, as well as the more usual **Eastern** and **Crimson Rosellas**. Birds observed at different sites included 4 **Rufous Songlarks** and a **White-winged Triller**, as well as the usual inhabitants such as **Noisy Miners** and **Red-rumped Parrots** at the Grenade Range. More than one site produced sightings of **Leaden Flycatchers**, **White-throated Gerygones**, **Rufous Whistlers**, **Shining Bronze-Cuckoos** and **Brown-headed Honeyeaters**. The most prolific site was at the dam at the northern end of the range, which has varied considerably over the last few surveys in the number of species; 17 species were noted within the 10 minute survey period, including **Grey Teal**, **Hardhead**, **Pacific Black Duck**, **Eurasian Coot** and **Australasian Grebe**, as well as **Brown-headed Honeyeaters**, **Shining Bronze-Cuckoo** and **Rufous Whistler**. There were 8 **Striated Thornbills** with dependent young. Other species observed included **Olive-backed Orioles**, **Superb Fairy-wrens**, **Grey Shrike-thrush**, **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes**, **Grey Fantails** and a single **White-eared Honeyeater**. Campbell Park/Mt Ainslie NR

On 29 November, Michael Lenz with Nick Nichols carried out the survey on the eastern lower slopes of Mt Ainslie. Weather conditions were overcast and relatively cool. At 7 out of the 9 sites the Blakely's Red Gums (from saplings to mature trees) were under heavy stress and often quite bare, but even some mature Yellow Box trees were similarly affected. They noted 31 species at sites with only an additional 6 species between sites. The most widespread species (recorded at 6 sites) was the **Weebill**. **Grey Fantail**, **Rufous Whistler**, **Superb Fairy-wren**, **Noisy Miner**, **Striated Pardalote** and **Crimson Rosella** were each recorded at 5 sites. There were only a few more notable species: 1 **Shining Bronze-Cuckoo**, 1 **Sacred Kingfisher**, 1 pair of **Speckled Warblers**, just 1 **Western Gerygone** (but several **White-throated Gerygones**), **Varied Sittellas** building a nest near the horse gate (it may have been a replacement nest of the one observed at the recent COG nest workshop), 6 singing **White-winged Trillers** for the whole area, 1 **Jacky Winter**, 2 **Olive-backed Orioles** and 1 **Brown-headed Honeyeater**.

### Newline

Sue Lashko surveyed on 30 November, a calm and mild morning. Three male **White-winged Trillers** were the noisiest birds in the front paddock and one of them put on a very impressive display, although there were no females about. Other migrants included **Dollarbird** at two sites, **Western** and **White-throated Gerygone** and **Dusky Woodswallows**. The most productive site, beyond the concrete dump, is also the most weedy, but with enough eucalypts and acacia to support a mixed feeding flock which included **Rufous Whistler**, **Striated** and **Yellow-rumped Thornbill**, **Weebill**, **Silvereye**, **Yellow-faced Honeyeater**, **White-winged Triller**, and **Red-browed** and **Double-barred Finch**. The **Rainbow Lorikeet** pair were in their usual site, feeding a dependent young. Breeding was also recorded for **Eastern Rosella**, **Common Starling**, **Common Myna**, **Sulphur-crested Cockatoo**, **Australian Magpie**, **Magpie-lark**, **Superb Fairy-wren**, **Striated Pardalote** and **White-plumed Honeyeater**. A perched **Little Eagle** gave excellent views and a **Whistling Kite** was the only other raptor seen. A total of 47 species was recorded, the highest figure for the 2013 surveys.

### Callum Brae NR (Symonston sites)

Sandra Henderson did the summer survey in good conditions. Woodswallows and trillers were absent, and some other noticeable absences included **Red-browed Finches**, **Brown Goshawk** and **White-throated**

*Continued Page 19*

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## Woodland Surveys Report—continued from Page 18

**Treecreepers.** 44 species were seen in total, 42 of those within survey sites. A group of three **Speckled Warblers** seemed more agitated than usual, but a nest could not be located. **Pallid, Horsfield's** and **Shining Bronze-Cuckoos** were all calling, as were several **Leaden Flycatchers**. **Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrikes, Australian Magpies** and **Noisy Miners** had dependent young, **Crimson Rosellas** were copulating, and a pair of **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos** were entering and leaving a hollow from which little cocky noises could be heard. The only raptors in evidence were several **Nankeen Kestrels** sitting on the tops of trees.

### Jerrabomberra West NR

Jenny Bounds and Alison Russell-French recorded 44 species of birds on 3 December which was reasonable for this time of year. A highlight was an **Australian Hobby** being mobbed by Noisy Miners and Ravens. Small birds were reasonably prominent, especially **White-throated Gerygones** calling and a nest with young being fed. **White-winged Trillers** were around sites 1 and 6, but not as many as recorded in December 2012. Other notable birds recorded included **Horsfield's** and **Shining Bronze-Cuckoos, Speckled Warbler, Western Gerygone, King Parrot** (not common there), 3 **Wedge-tailed Eagles** (probably the ones resident on nearby Mt Mugga Mugga), **Leaden Flycatcher** (but not as many as usual), a flock of 9 **Little Ravens** at site 2 near the grasslands, and a pair of **Little Corellas** flying over. Reasonable numbers of small birds like **Buff-rumped** and **Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Grey Fantail, Superb Fairy-wren** and **Weebills** were at the most wooded sites. Notable migrant absentees included **Dollarbirds, Tree Martins** and **Dusky Woodswallows**, and there were not many large cockatoos around and no Brown Goshawks nesting there this year. Over the grasslands area, **Australasian Pipits** and **Eurasian Skylark** were recorded.



Weebill

Photo: David Cook

### Tuggeranong Hill NR

Lia Battisson surveyed on a warm, sunny and still morning. It was an interesting survey with several of the sites having surprise species. Site 3 was the busiest site again, with 13 species observed there. Highlights were **Sacred Kingfisher, Common Bronzewing, White-throated Gerygone, Noisy Friarbird** and **Olive-backed Oriole**. Cuckoos were represented by **Eastern Koel** and **Fan-tailed**. Breeding species included a **Red Wattlebird** carrying food, **Common Starling** and **Rainbow Lorikeet** entering hollows, and **Australian Magpie** with dependant young. In all, 36 species were observed on the Hill.

### Rural leasehold near Tharwa

David McDonald reported on the survey on 30 November, in good weather conditions. The woodland looked healthy after the November rains, with very few weeds (unlike some earlier years). Blakely's Red Gum was in full flower, but attracted very few birds. In all, 34 bird species were observed, 30 of them on the survey sites. The most abundant species was **White-browed Woodswallow**, followed by **Superb Fairy-wren** and **Rufous Whistler**. Some popular migrants were back, including **Olive-backed Oriole, White-winged Triller, Rufous Songlark, Sacred Kingfisher, Dusky Woodswallow** and **White-browed Woodswallow**. Across the whole site there were scores of **White-browed Woodswallows** but no cuckoos and very few honeyeaters or small bush birds. Seeing the **Common Blackbird** on three sites was very unusual for this area. It was great to see **Brown Treecreeper** holding its own, although **Speckled Warbler** was missing. The highlight on the rarities front was hearing a **Painted Honeyeater** (sadly well outside the survey sites).

Jenny Bounds

## Canberra Birds Conservation Fund

Donations to this fund are tax deductible. Funds are used to support projects that protect and enhance native birds and the environments that sustain them.

## COG membership

2013-2014 memberships:

- Individuals, families and institutions: \$35
- school students (under 18): \$17.50.

## New members

COG welcomes the following new members:

E Wynen, Flynn  
P Edmondson, Rivett  
P Horne, Eden, NSW  
E Lebedinsky, Spence  
K Strangwidge, Sutton, NSW

## NEXT NEWSLETTER

**Deadline for March 2014 edition**

**Wednesday 26 February 2014**

**Please send articles, advertisements, updates etc. to the Editors at:**

[gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au) Or

**c/- The Secretary COG, PO Box 301 Civic Square, ACT 2608**

Articles should be less than 500 words (300 for reports of 1-day field trips) except by prior arrangement with the editor.

Photographs (prints or electronic) with or without articles are encouraged.

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## COG website

[www.canberrabirds.org.au](http://www.canberrabirds.org.au)

### COG library

For all enquiries or access to COG's library  
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## COG E-mail Discussion List

COG has an email discussion list for members and friends: 'Canberra Birds'.

Join the list by following the links on the COG website or by sending an empty email message to;

[canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au)

The subject is 'subscribe' (without the quotation marks).

### Canberra Bird Notes

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