



Gang-gang

MARCH 2016

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

MARCH MEETING

Wednesday 9 March 2016

7.30 pm.

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

There will be only the single presentation this month, by **Jerry Olsen**, a member of the Institute for Applied Ecology at the University of Canberra, on **ACT Raptors**

Fourteen raptor species breed in or near the relatively small confines of the Australian Capital Territory. Many breed in the city? How do these 14 raptor species divide up different habitats, and mammal, bird, fish, reptile and invertebrate prey so there isn't too much overlap in prey species taken? Why do some ACT raptors catch prey species said not to exist in the ACT? Why are Powerful Owls different from other ACT raptors? This talk is a slightly revised version of a talk given in October 2015 at the Australian National Botanic Gardens.

Jerry has presented to COG many times. He has authored or co-authored about 100 research papers and six books on Australian raptors. *Australian High Country Owls* and *Australian High Country Raptors* (2011 and 2014, CSIRO Publishing) are about ACT raptors.

Summary/analysis of the past month and what to watch out for this month

In the month since Australia Day it was very wet for the last week of January, but then has been very dry in February, which is possibly responsible for a noticeable drop off in reporting, at least on the COG chat line, for the last fortnight of this month's report. In this time there has again been a new species added to the ACT bird list, the **Square-tailed Kite** seen for a few minutes over Steve Holliday's house in Ainslie at the end of January. A report of 3 birds over Scrivener Dam in December 1967 is listed in Steve Wilson's book *Birds of the ACT: Two Centuries of Change*, but is noted to most probably have been immature forms of the Black Kite, as this species is typically seen alone.

As far as I'm aware only Steve and his partner Prue saw it, but the description given and the image posted leave no doubt on this occasion. While the distribution maps show that it ranges well inland, the most likely place to see it is on the South Coast where it seems to be increasingly observed. It's a bit of a mystery to me as to why it has not been reported from the COG area of interest



Buff-banded Rail with 4 chicks

Julie Clark

Everyone welcome

News from the Committee

Jenny Bounds has given advice to Parks and Conservation Service about the Jaramlee offset site in West McGregor. She is also updating the bird brochure for Mulligans Flat, prior to reprint by TAMS.

COG has sent a letter to Minister Mick Gentleman about his approval of the Williamsdale Solar Farm. COG has raised concerns about the cumulative impact of development on mature eucalypts.

Bill Graham

What to watch out for this month—*continued from Page 1*

(Aol) before [there is no entry for it in the Annual Bird Report (ABR)]. So if you see a large raptor gliding just above the tree tops (Steve noted that it didn't flap its wings during the time that they could see it) on long upswept paddle-shaped wings, please look at it very carefully.

Another unusual observation was that of a **Barking Owl** seen by Milburn on the power lines behind their house in O'Connor. This species does have an entry in the ABR with the 2013-2014 report noting it is a very occasional visitor to woodlands and suburbs, with the last endorsed record being at Shepherd's Lookout in 2011. Interestingly this record is quite close to the **Powerful Owl's** roosting spot in Turner, where the latter has now been present for well over 15 months. The **White-cheeked Honeyeater** turned up at the Jerrabomberra wetlands again about 2 months after its first reports for the ACT, this time it stayed longer and seems to have been present for about a fortnight.

Michael Robbins has alerted me to some further reports (at least two, possibly three) of the **Channel-billed Cuckoo** from Tuggeranong towards the end of November. Adding the earlier one from Kathy Walter/John Goldie noted in my December column with those in my previous one makes it at least 17 records for the 2015-2016 season, more than double the previous maximum of 7 sightings in 2012.

Christine D also alerted me to a sighting of the **White-browed Woodswallow** she made in mid January about 100 metres or so the other side of the Hall TSR. A male was carrying food, but while she watched it for several minutes she could not find where it took it to. She was not sure if the other bird she photographed was the other half of the pair or was coincidentally there, or whether it was a **Masked Woodswallow** or a hybrid. The photo, together with one of a similar bird Christine had taken at Campbell Park in October 2013, was shown to Leo Joseph, who concluded both were

likely hybrids, the recent one possibly a female but the 2013 one definitely a male. I find this fascinating as the species are known to be morphologically very distinct but genetically very similar. This is also the only record of these two species I'm aware of for 2016.

There seems to have been no further records of the **Red-backed Kingfisher** and **Black-eared Cuckoo** since last month's column. This is also the case for the **Horsfield's Bushlark** and **Brown Songlark**, so I expect both species, which only visit in small numbers, have already left. In contrast the **White-winged Triller** and the **Rufous Songlark** were still being reported past the middle of the month, with the former also observed still feeding dependent young at Campbell Park early in February. So keep an eye out for the last remaining birds of these two species which are much quieter after breeding and thus harder to observe, with the former's male possibly being in an eclipse plumage and the latter often skulking around in the bushes and most readily identified by its rufous rump on another wise very plain bird.

The last **Brush Cuckoo** has also usually gone by now, with the last report being 20 February. Lots of **Dollarbirds** have been reported in February (including 8 on the COG boat trip – see the report elsewhere in this issue), and it seems to have been a good year for them. So please keep an eye/ear out for this species, as the last usually depart by about the end of the first week of March. Usually leaving slightly later is the **Rainbow Bee-eater**, for which there seems to have been very few reports, so keep an eye/ear out for them, particularly as they migrate overhead when their characteristic "pirr pirr" call and orange wings allow them to be readily identified. Usually leaving slightly later still is the **Sacred Kingfisher**, again a species to look out for as it often visits gardens (including my front deck a couple of weeks ago) post-breeding.



White-winged Chough nest building

Con Boekel

Despite the dry hot conditions in February the good breeding season has continued. Again my thanks to all those who have posted breeding records on the chat line, as well as my apologies that I have not been able to include many of them in the write up below, which contains only some highlights.

- A **Rufous Fantail** family seen by Steve Wallace on Lyrebird Trail at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve early in February. Two dependent young (still with some down) were seen with the adults. Steve noted that there are only 10 breeding records for this species in the COG database between 1982 and 2014.

- Christine D found a **Satin Flycatcher** family with three fledglings being fed by their parents in Namadgi at the end of January. She found the (expected) female's plumage very strange as it had a black band below the orange-buff of the throat. While Christine saw it feed the fledglings, both experts Leo Joseph (who checked the Australian National Wildlife Collection specimens which contained nothing like it) and Graeme Chapman identified it as most like an immature male plumage, which is interesting as HANZAB doesn't seem to mention co-operative breeding/helpers at the nest.

- It seems to have been a good breeding season for cuckoos, at least compared with the previous few, with a number of reports of juvenile **Pallid Cuckoos** in the past month. Also on the chat line has been a discussion of adult cuckoos associating/interacting with young of their species, which is what I have now observed for the third consecutive breeding season for the **Eastern Koel**.

- Despite my prediction of the next wave of Koel fledglings in my last column, I'm aware of only 6 more reported in the past month, with the most recent one again coming after a gap of nearly a fortnight. This makes the tally of 20 fledglings so far this breeding season, which is less than the previous one. It certainly seems to have been a different season with fledglings observed much earlier than in the previous few years. Barbara Allan tells me she's only had the single fledgling compared with around 8 last year. About a month ago she saw a horde of Red



White-winged Chough nest building

Con Boeckel



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Good birding, good food ...

2016 tours

Tasmania birds & mammals

30 January – 6 February 2016
includes Melaleuca flight & pelagic

Alice Springs & the West

MacDonnell Ranges tour
25 April – 2 May 2016

Top End tour

22 May – 6 June 2016
Darwin, Kakadu NP, Katherine &
Kununurra. Mitchell Plateau optional

Queensland's Gulf Country tour

22 June – 9 July 2016
Two days added for Rusty Grasswren

Iron Range & Atherton

Tablelands tour
12 – 25 July 2016 (Tablelands optional)

New Caledonia birding tour

14-21 August 2016

Strzelecki Track Outback tour

2 – 21 September 2016
37th tour! Covering 4 states &
5 species of grasswren

Plains-wanderer Weekends 2016

15 & 16 October 2016
12 & 13 November 2016
26 & 27 November 2016

Please see itineraries, checklists and
latest news on our website

www.philipmaher.com

Wattlebirds descend onto a female koel, so perhaps they're getting less naive, at least around her place!

Other interesting breeding records include a number of **Magpie-larks** and **White-winged Choughs** still either on or feeding young in the nest, a female **Satin Bowerbird** feeding two dependent young, a male **Gang Gang Cockatoo** feeding a juvenile male, **Purple Swamphens** mating/gathering nest material, and a late report of the second brood for the season at Forde Pond of a **Buff-banded Rail** family with 4 chicks estimated as about 2 weeks old.

So please keep an eye/ear out for any further late summer/early autumn breeding, including for the **Eastern Koel** which usually departs by the end of March. Any further Koel fledglings should be reported to the COG chat line and to Virginia Abernathy on Virginia.abernathy@anu.edu.au.

Other birds that mostly leave by the end of March/early April include the **Leaden Flycatcher**, the **Latham's Snipe**, the **Australian Reed-Warbler** (often very quiet this month), and **Tree** and **Fairy Martins**, the **Pallid Cuckoo** and **Horsfield's** and **Shining Bronze-Cuckoos**. Also continue to keep an eye out for the **White-throated Needletail** and the related **Fork-tailed Swift** on their return migration, a few of these were reported around the time of the wetter weather in late January/early March, but very few since it became much drier.

Some species will be seen in Canberra during March as "passage migrants" as they move north from their breeding sites in the mountains. These include the **Satin Flycatcher**, **Rufous Fantail**, and rarely, the **Cicadabird**. Look out also for the first migrating **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters**, this movement usually starts in the last week of March. Other species move from the mountains but will stay here, so look out for the first altitudinal migrants, the **Scarlet Robin**, **Golden Whistler** and **White-eared Honeyeater** in Canberra's suburbs and peri-urban areas in March.

Finally there have already been a number of reports of that autumn phenomenon the Mixed Feeding Flock (MFF), including several seen in my garden. These can have unusual or unexpected compositions, so watch out for them, as I've mentioned many times nothing in bird watching gives me a bigger thrill than a MFF and looking out for the unexpected species lurking quietly in amongst all that activity.

Once again my sincere thanks to everyone who has contributed to my two main data sources, postings on the COG E-mail Discussion List ("COG chat line") and the Eremaea eBird web site, as well as some direct correspondence to me. Without this information it would not be possible to put this column together.

March is the first of the two months when significant bird movement begins. So please keep up the reports for the last records of the spring/summer migrants that leave the COG Aol during this month, those species that come down

from the mountains into Canberra to spend autumn/winter here, and for any further breeding. As usual please ensure that all significant observations are properly reported and end up on the COG database.

Jack Holland

COG Volunteers sought for Jerrabomberra Wetlands 'Birds and Brunch' tours

The Woodlands and Wetlands Trust is developing the Jerrabomberra Wetlands as an outstanding conservation reserve, and has started a program of community engagement activities and tours to raise community interest and support.

These are paid activities to help the Trust become financially sustainable. 'Birds and Brunch' takes small groups of visitors (max. 12 people) on a 1.5 hour walk around Kelly's Swamp, with a healthy breakfast afterwards; tours run from 8.30am, usually once a month on weekends.

The tours have a Ranger or Trust staff member as leader, with a bird expert from COG assisting. Several COG members are now involved in this program doing an occasional tour, but we want to increase the number of COG volunteers. Names go on an email list and the program manager at the wetlands then circulates the dates of tours needing volunteers.

If you are a confident birder at the wetlands who can engage people in discussion about the birds, their lifestyles, etc, and are interested in going on the volunteers list, please email COG:

cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au



Great Cormorant

Bill Hall

Field Trip Reports

Sunday 17 January – Uriarra

The Uriarra Homestead Dam was again the starting point for our annual excursion (the 26th I believe, since 1990) and this year with 25 attendees, spectacularly fine weather and the generosity of the leaseholders who allowed us onto the property, we again set a new species record of 44 for the location. Notables included **Latham's Snipe**, **Nankeen Night-Heron**, **Black-fronted Dotterel**, **Restless Flycatcher**, 8 species of cockatoos and parrots, and **Hoary-headed Grebe**, **Eurasian Coot** and **Willie Wagtail** all with dependent young.

At Uriarra Crossing West and along Fairlight Road we recorded 32 species, including **Collared Sparrowhawk**, a **Wedge-tailed Eagle** pair, **Leaden Flycatcher**, **Rufous Whistler**, and **Willie Wagtail** with 3 dependent young. Missing, unfortunately this year, from the feathery-leaved wattles on the Murrumbidgee banks along Fairlight Road were **Yellow Thornbills**.

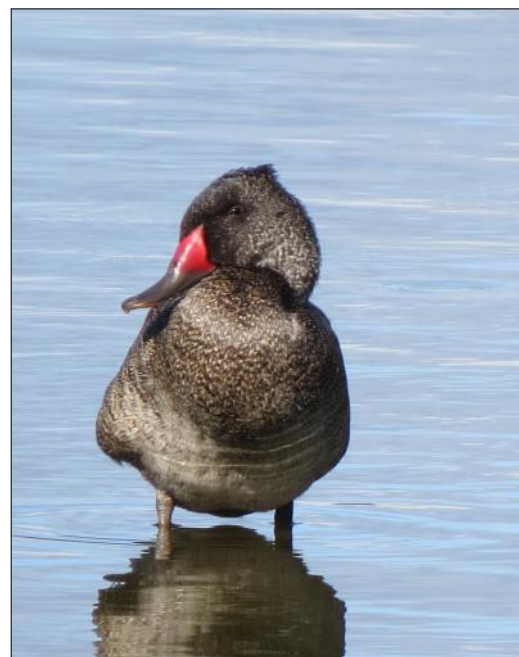
Our third stop for the day was at Uriarra East but, apart from a pair of noisy **Collared Sparrowhawks**, one with prey in its talons, the birds were very quiet and some of the expected species were nowhere to be seen. It was, after all, close to midday and rather warm. More than 30 **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos** were sitting silently in the shady Casuarinas and two **Mistletoebirds** called softly, but there was no sign of **Dollarbirds** or even **Red-rumped Parrots**. A raptor seen in a distant tree from our previous stop, and not positively identified, obligingly flew low over the paddocks with the deep rowing action of a **Brown Falcon** before climbing high and soaring above our heads. We recorded 21 species before enjoying lunch in the shade.

Bruce Lindenmayer and Sue Lashko

Sunday 31 January – Jerrabomberra Wetlands

No doubt due to the torrential rain and high winds at bedtime the night before, only 7 souls appeared for the 7.30am start to the annual walk to celebrate World Wetlands Day. The morning was initially misty but cleared to give perfect light for birding. Participants ranged from very experienced to absolute newcomers but everyone was able to enjoy excellent scope views of an **Intermediate Egret**, **Freckled** and **Pink-eared Duck** and **Australian Shoveler**, as well as the usual ducks and waterhens. Of the three **Freckled Ducks** seen, one male had a particularly striking red base to the bill. Only one **Latham's Snipe** was seen and by one person only, but most had a good view of a **Baillon's Crane** sitting still in the sun on a bent reed. The **Australian Reed-Warblers** took a while to dry out and warm up, initially from the tops of casuarinas and eucalypts, but soon they were clamouring away from the reeds and flying to and fro. We had good views of **Golden-headed Cisticolas** which were calling from every patch of tall grass, and we heard at least two **Little Grassbirds**. One or more members of a family of **Dollarbirds** did frequent flybys, and female **Australian Darters** soared overhead. A **Nankeen Night-Heron** flushed from casuarinas near the river. A very pleasant morning's birding yielded 59 species.

Sue Lashko



Freckled Duck

Sandra Henderson

Sunday 14 February - Molonglo Reach Boat Trip

Under very warm but partly cloudy conditions 21 members and guests joined me for what was my seventeenth time since we started in 2003 for this now annual trip to view the darter and cormorant nesting on Molonglo Reach. We again left from Kingston Harbour on the electric boat, the EL Gull, and first explored Jerrabomberra Creek for the short distance now possible before it is blocked by a silt curtain. We then travelled along the E bank of East Basin and into the Reach and along the S bank to the site of the new bridge before tracing our route back.

Lake levels were high from the good rainfall particularly in the last week of January, and with it still dry out west I had hoped this would have triggered some breeding activity. However, we saw only one male **Australasian Darter** near a nest, and while it stayed there it was clearly an older and no longer occupied nest (Jim the skipper confirmed he had seen chicks in it earlier in the season). This was the only nest seen, and altogether only 8 darters were observed on the day, in scattered positions throughout the trip. Several of these were adult males though none of them had a significant amount of red on the neck signifying breeding plumage, and the rest seemed to be females with none of them were identified as immature birds by their dirtier and lighter plumage.

These numbers were half of last year's estimate when numbers were already at an historical low, less than half the previous year's low count, with for the first time no actual breeding observed in 14 years of leading these outings. The reasons for this are unclear, if due to the complete clearing of the trees on the N bank in May 2008, the effect has been very slow compared with the cormorants which completely abandoned breeding on the Reach within a few years. The building of the new bridge on Dairy Flat road is also an unlikely reason as ironically the one nest was within a few hundred metres from there. The increased canoe and paddle board traffic remains a possible factor.

We saw a total of 7 **Great Cormorants**, generally resting on bare branches close to the water in the Reach, several with white flanks indicative of breeding plumage. There were about 10 **Little Black Cormorants** and only one **Little Pied Cormorant** seen on the day, and no **Pied Cormorants** this time, though I understand up to 7 have now been counted on Jerrabomberra wetlands surveys.

Very limited darter/cormorant breeding has come to my attention this summer. Mark Lintermans has confirmed that cormorants are breeding on the new Cotter Dam, as far as he can tell they are nearly all **Little Pied Cormorants**, with the odd **Australasian Darter** nesting as well. He noted that it's all occurring near the upstream end of the dam, and is not really visible other than by boat. In previous years Jean Casburn has recorded breeding on the northern side of the Molonglo River downstream (W) of the Tuggeranong Parkway. I checked there on 17 February and found around 6 **Little Pied Cormorants**, but access is poor and I couldn't rule out other species being present and/or breeding. Some must be occurring noting that Sandra Henderson posted nearly 30 **Great Cormorants**, quite a number in breeding plumage (as they were above), at Lake Tuggeranong on the morning of 12 February.



Great Cormorant

Lach Read

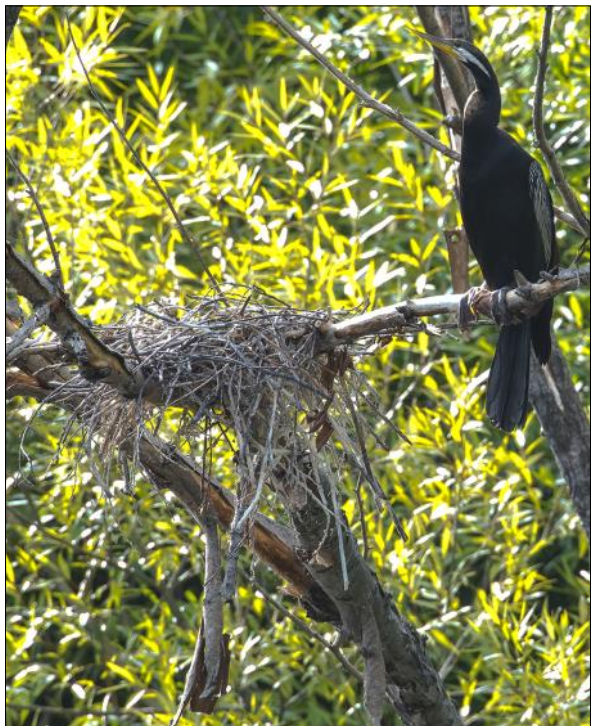


Chestnut Teal

Ryu Callaway

Other waterbird activity on the creek, river and East Basin consisted mainly of common species seen on the open water and on the banks, with the highlight being a pair of **Chestnut Teal** which we nearly overlooked because the male was in its much duller non-breeding plumage. This is only the third time we have observed this species more associated with brackish waters/coastal lagoons etc, with a similarly rather dull male seen a year ago and a pair in January 2006. A **Latham's Snipe** was seen by just a few on the bank of East Basin and 3 **Greylag Geese** were seen in the water close to where they were seen on the previous 3 trips. Land birds also consisted of mainly common species with the highlights being a total of 8 **Dollarbirds**, often in pairs along the route (certainly the most we've ever seen on this trip), and 4 **Sacred Kingfishers**.

At 48 the total number of species was similar to previous years, but with this time the species total



Darter

Bill Hall

duck and the three common cormorants (plus two **Darters**).

The flowering *Casuarina cunninghamiana* on the Western shore had attracted a good number of small bush birds including **Yellow-rumped**, **Brown**, **Striated** and **Yellow Thornbills**. The last-named species were originally identified by call but were difficult to in the glass. It is hoped most members of the group ended up with a tickable view.

Breeding was observed for **Magpie-lark**, with at least 2 well developed chicks in a nest near the Town Centre, and **Little Corella** with dependent young closer towards the dam wall.

We ended with 48 species. There were a few surprising omissions (including **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike**, **Noisy Friarbird**, **Red-browed Finch** and **Common Blackbird**).

A copy of the checklist for the outing is at <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=S27638162>

Martin Butterfield

from Molonglo Reach much the same as those from Jerrabomberra Creek and the East Bank. Despite the lack of darters/cormorants breeding participants again enjoyed the trip which remains a popular late summer outing, and I propose to run it again at the same time in 2017. Who knows the darter/cormorant breeding may come back, or at least it will further confirm that the 10 years or so of significant breeding on Molonglo Reach is now over.

Jack Holland

17 February—Lake Tuggeranong

26 Members and guests, including 2 visitors from Cambridge UK gathered at 8:30 on the Eastern shores of Lake Tuggeranong.

Before moving off there was already badinage regarding the number of **Little Corellas** visible and audible on the far bank. By the end of the walk one member had counted 61 and this was agreed to be the exact number. In the intervening water quite a lot of **Eurasian Coots** were visible. Due to their high level of activity – and the distance covered in the walk – it wasn't realistic to come up with a precise count and 100 was taken as a realistic estimate. Fair numbers too of the other two common 'hens', **Australian Swamphen** and **Dusky Moorhens**.

We also observed reasonable numbers of the commoner species of



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Discover our Natural Treasures

Heritage Festival April 2016

The Conservation Council ACT Region is once again showcasing the natural treasures of the ACT Region at the Canberra Heritage Festival. This year's theme is "Discovery" and our events explore some of the lesser known and newest reserves in the ACT as well as new aspects of some old favourites. Be one of the few to have truly explored Kama and Kinlyside or rekindle your passion for Mulligan's Flat and Red Hill. Follow the links to find out more about these unique events and reserve your place today!

Discover Kama, 5 April 7:30am, Kama Nature Reserve

Get up with the birds and explore one of Canberra's newest reserves with local experts from Friends of Grasslands and the Canberra Ornithologists Group.

<http://conservationcouncil.org.au/civicrm/?page=CiviCRM&q=civicrm/event/info&reset=1&id=58>

Tell Your Story, 9 April 10:00am, Mulligans Flat Nature Reserve

Become a part of your local history and share your stories about this beautiful reserve.

<http://conservationcouncil.org.au/CiviCRM/?page=CiviCRM&q=civicrm/event/info&reset=1&id=56>

Sneak Peek at Kinlyside, 14 April 10:00am, Kinlyside Nature Reserve

Don't miss this rare opportunity as we unlock a unique combination of working farm and conservation area.

<http://conservationcouncil.org.au/civicrm/?page=CiviCRM&q=civicrm/event/info&reset=1&id=57>

Red Hill Heritage Walk, 17 April 10:00am, Red Hill Nature Reserve

Brush up on the history of this intriguing reserve while its future is being decided.

<https://conservationcouncil.org.au/events/red-hill-heritage-walk/>



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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

COG 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 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.

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LATEST UPDATES AND CHANGES TO TRIPS are notified on the trips page of the COG website:

canberrabirds.org.au/
then select 'Our Activities' and 'Field Trips'.

and on the COG chat-line at:

bioacoustics.cse.unsw.edu.au/archives/html/canberrabirds/2015-08/

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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.

Future Field Trips

Sunday 6 March – Crace Wetlands

Meet at 9.00am near the children's playground on Narden Street Crace - parking is available on Narden Street. Likely species include the usual common water birds, plus **Grey Teal** and **Hardhead**, grebes, **Black-fronted Dotterel**, **Little Grassbirds**, **Australian Reed-Warblers**, and possibly **Golden-headed Cisticola**. There are a few coffee shops close by which people may want to go to afterwards.

Fleur Leary

Tuesday 8 - Friday 11 March – Wonga at Bawley Point

We have again obtained special permission to bring a group of about 15 people to this delightful bush/coastal location of 50 acres with abundant bird life, previously visited by COG in August 2015. The two comfortable, well-equipped cottages contain three bedrooms with double beds, plus additional singles and trundles with a possible maximum capacity of 10 persons. For COG, approval has been granted for limited camping and, for the sake of convenience and avoidance of congestion, we shall provide our own long-drop toilet facility. Some of the Illawarra region birds we expect to see are **Scarlet** and **Lewin's Honeyeater**, **Black-faced Monarch**, **Bassian Thrush** and of course **Hooded Plover**. As the accommodation arrangements are flexible, subject to personal preferences of participants, it is recommended that you secure places early to avoid disappointment. Further enquiries to the leader at terrybellbird@gmail.com or 61619093 or mobile 0427292298.

Terry Bell

Sunday 13 March – Mulligans Flat North

Meet Bill Graham (m. 0466 874 723) at North Mulligans carpark at 0800h. Turn off Horse Park Drive at Mulligans Flat Rd. and go 2km north to the carpark. Allow 3 hours for the boundary track walk of about 5km. There is a steep section so bring sturdy walking boots, water and morning tea. There are great views north into New South Wales and south over the city. This is dry woodland, mainly Red Stringybark, with 106 species reported. Highlights include **Brown Goshawk**, **Little Eagle**, **Diamond Firetail** and **Speckled Warbler**.

Bill Graham

Sunday 20 March – Eden pelagic

In 2016 COG will run its usual September pelagics, and is also running a single March pelagic. The outing will leave from Eden Harbour at 7am, and return mid-afternoon. The boat can accommodate 12 people, and the cost per person per trip will be \$100.

Organising travel and accommodation will be each individual's responsibility but there may be opportunities for car-pooling and an informal get-together for dinner/drinks in Eden on the Saturday evening.

Bookings will be confirmed only when full payment is received. Payment must be made by February 15. These trips need to be fully subscribed to ensure COG does not make a loss, and as is the case with all paid trips, preference is given to COG members. Once you've booked and paid, no refunds can be given unless a

replacement can be found. No places will be made available to non-members unless the trips are not fully subscribed by COG members by mid-February.

As with all boating activities the trip will be weather dependent and rough seas could lead to the cancellation or postponement of the trip.

Please book with Sandra Henderson (shirmax2931@gmail.com). Payment by direct deposit to COG's bank account is preferred – details will be sent to those who express interest. These trips often fill up fast, so if interested please book early.

Sandra Henderson

Easter Saturday 26 March – Narrabundah Hill

Those members who will be staying at home this Easter and/or will have visiting birder friends are welcome to join this outing to the Narrabundah Hill reserve. This is a repeat of the April 2015 walk but about a week earlier. Hopefully it will be third time lucky and this time we'll be able to see the honeyeaters migrating, with the northern fence line one of the few currently known local migration routes. We will walk along this boundary as well as along most of the western border and either return by the same or a different path, looking for other autumn birds such as the **Scarlet Robin** and mixed feeding flocks, or late departing summer migrants such as gerygones.

Meet Jack Holland (62887840 or jandaholland@bigpond.com) at 8:30 am at the parking area and stile at the NE end of the reserve, at the corner of Warragamba Avenue and Eucumbene Drive, Duffy. **Please note that the entry to this parking area is a little tricky, and is in fact about 25 metres past (on the Mount Stromlo side) the T-junction with Warragamba Avenue, and for those driving along Eucumbene Drive from Duffy involves a quite tricky 180 degrees turn, so please take care.**

There is no need to book but an indication of your intentions would be appreciated to get a rough idea of numbers. Please bring your morning tea to have on the track.

Jack Holland

Friday 25 to Monday 28 March – Easter campout at Willandra NP

*I've shore at Burrabogie, and I've shore at Toganmain,
I've shore at Big Willandra and upon the old Coleraine...*

Like 'Flash Jack from Gundagai' we are about to explore Big Willandra Station! While this trip focuses on birdwatching in the wetland, woodlands, saltbush plains and open grasslands, Willandra has a rich history with plenty to interest people from the early wool industry and station life in the early 1900s.

There is a campground as well as accommodation in the shearers' quarters and Willandra cottage. The campground doesn't take bookings. If you want accommodation, make your own bookings through the Griffith National Parks office on (02) 6966 8100.



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Possible highlights include: **Inland Dotterel, Banded Lapwing, Ground Cuckooshrike, Black Falcon and Barn Owl.**

Note:

The road into Willandra can quickly become impassable during wet weather. If they get rain before the trip there is a chance we will need to relocate or cancel.

Shops and service stations may well be closed on Good Friday and fruit and vegetables can't be carried from Canberra into the fruit-fly restriction zone.

Please book a place on this outing with Kathy Walter or John Goldie on 6241 7639 or email walter.goldie@gmail.com. The trip will be restricted to 20 participants and filled on a first reply basis. More detailed information will be provided to participants.

Sunday 10 April – K2C Surveys

COG will continue with the K2C surveys that have been running since April 2010. The surveyed properties have healthy populations of many of the rarer woodland birds such as **Diamond Firetail, Hooded Robin and Speckled Warbler**. We will be visiting the same sites to continue the monitoring and see if we can add to the property lists. The surveys will be undertaken in 'blitz' fashion; that is, observers in small groups will visit a number of sites on one or more properties before regrouping for lunch and a sharing of the survey's findings. Less experienced observers are welcome to join in the survey as each team will have at least one experienced observer. Anyone interested in participating is asked to contact Nicki Taws by **Wednesday 6 April**. Email: ntaws@bigpond.com or ph.0408 210736.

Sunday 17 April - Warks Road - Blundells Creek Road

Meet at 7:30am at the Stromlo Forest Park car park. From there we will car pool, with a preference for vehicles with 4WD or AWD. Suggested contribution from each passenger to drivers: \$8. Please bring lunch, water, a raincoat and some warm clothes. We are likely to hear and see a variety of interesting birds, including **Pilotbird** and **Eastern Whipbird**. Numbers will be limited to the first 16. Contact David Dedenczuk on 0417 222 154 or email ddedentz@bigpond.net.au

Sunday 1 May – Micalong Swamp Flora Reserve

The Micalong Swamp Flora Reserve is one of the two Wetlands of National Importance in the Canberra region. (The other is Yaouk Swamp.) See <http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/wetlands/report.pl> On this visit we will combine birding, botany and bushwalking.

Micalong Swamp is some 80 km west of Canberra, two-thirds of which is a dirt road (the Brindabella Road), so it will be best if we use 4WD/SUV-type vehicles. We will do a 12 km loop walk around the Swamp, observing the birds that use the Swamp and its margins. The track is flat, with no hills.

As this will be a full day trip, please bring morning tea, lunch and water. There are no toilets at the venue. Rendezvous for carpooling in the carpark of the

Nature Lodge Optics

Nature Lodge Optics, a family owned business based in Huskisson, Jervis Bay, has been supplying quality binoculars to customers in the Canberra region since 2007.

Originally established in the UK in 1946, the owners established a branch in Australia several years ago and have become the region's leading independent binocular store.

Open 7 Days, the store always has over 100 pairs of binoculars in stock with a particular emphasis on Birdwatching products.

Major brands such as Steiner, Zeiss,



Bushnell, Nikon & Pentax are represented together with smaller hi-tech brands like Weaver, Vortex, Forest Optics, Visionary and Vanguard.

A selection of Spotting Scopes, Night Vision & Tripods are always available.

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The helpful and informative website www.binoculars4u.com.au is regularly updated but is no substitute for personal service and recommendation which is always on hand.

We welcome customers new and old to call us on 02 4441 7770

Stromlo Forest Park at 7:30 am. We expect to arrive back in Canberra at around 4:30 pm. Suggested contribution from each passenger to drivers: \$10.

Registration is essential. For further information and to register please contact the trip leader, David McDonald, at phone 6238 3706 or 0416 231 890, or email micalong2016@canberrabirds.org.au.

David McDonald

Saturday 7 May – Australian National Botanic Gardens – beginners' outing

This morning walk will be the first for 2016 aimed specifically to help beginners and new members identify birds and to learn about their behaviour and calls. The Botanic Gardens are especially suitable for such an outing, as they allow the opportunity to observe a range of local bush birds in a variety of habitats. Due to the available food supply they are also a relative haven for birds during late autumn/winter. Anthony Overs will lead this outing, which will consist of a stroll through this lovely part of Canberra for a couple of hours. Meet at 9.15am at the ANBG bus shelter. Registration is essential. Please book your place with Anthony (0419202155, or anthony.overs@gmail.com), who will be happy to discuss whether this outing is suitable for you. Please make sure to bring your binoculars and field guide.

Anthony Overs

My Patch—Part 2

While **Leaden Flycatchers** were the show-offs of Aranda Bushland last spring (see February Gang-gang), by contrast, the behaviour of two **Olive-backed Oriole** pairs that I observed nesting was much more cryptic. They did, though, both build in very open positions, one 4 metres above a fire trail within the bushland (hence named the bushland orioles) and the other about 10 metres above the cyclepath beside the bushland (named the cyclepath orioles). (The bushland pair had built an earlier nest about 50 metres from the second but abandoned it during the construction phase after several days of very heavy rain.) The nest somewhat resembles that of a **Noisy Friarbird** but is neater and has a greater content of strips of bark, but includes dried grass and leaves. Some of the bark strips are wound around a horizontal branch and the nest is then suspended below the branch. The last four days of construction appeared to me to be a case of getting the finer details just right, with a leaf added here and a strip of bark there, followed by test sits inside the nest and a good deal of shuffling to make it as comfortable as possible. This is a deep nest and the adult's body disappears within, with just a beak and tail tip showing.

As with the **Leaden Flycatchers**, egg-laying by the two pairs occurred at a similar time, 22 and 25 November. From then on, despite the considerable amount of passing traffic of walkers, dogs and cyclists, the sitting birds stayed put, with the non-sitting bird generally giving a call before flying in to swap duties. The eggs hatched on 11 and 15 December respectively, so 19 to 20 days from hatching. The adults became more stealthy in their approaches to the nests with food once the chicks arrived. I didn't hear them call at all and they would fly to a vantage point such as a bare stick to survey the area, often stopping for about 5 minutes before flying into the nesting tree but some distance away from the nest, watching and waiting again before flying in to feed the chicks. After hatching, it was another 8 days before I could see how many chicks there were in the bushland nest as, until then, I had only ever glimpsed two beaks above the lip of the deep nest (Fig 1), when there were in fact 3 chicks. The nest above the cyclepath was much higher and it wasn't until the 12th day after hatching that I was able to see 2 chicks. The bushland nest contained a larger chick that could be seen checking out its surrounds



Fig 1. Olive-backed Oriole with nest

Sue Lashko



Fig 2. Olive-backed Oriole chick

Sue Lashko



Fig 3. Olive-backed Oriole chick Sue Lashko



Fig 4. Olive-backed Oriole fledglings Sue Lashko



Fig 5. Noisy Friarbird chicks Sue Lashko

when it thought no-one was around and then disappearing when walkers approached (Fig 2). (Much of my observation was done from inside an *Exocarpus* tree about 10 metres away with the feathery foliage giving excellent cover).

By 23 December, one bushland chick was sitting on the edge of the nest ready to face the outside world, while its siblings stayed firmly inside (Fig 3), but by the following day, 12 days after hatching, the nest was empty. From then on, I only ever observed one chick and only heard a chick calling on one occasion, in some distress when it was being repeatedly pecked around the rear end by an adult. There may have been more chicks as some days I saw an adult carrying food but could not follow it. I last saw one of the bushland orioles on 11 January, 18 days after fledging, carrying a large caterpillar, so I assume at least one of the chicks was still present. The cyclepath chicks fledged on 28 December but again I only ever saw one (Fig 4) and many days saw none, and I only heard a chick begging on one occasion, 10 days after fledging.

In addition to **Olive-backed Orioles** and **Leaden Flycatchers**, I recorded breeding activity in 25 other species in the western third of Aranda Bushland between November 2015 and January 2016. This included 4 **Red Wattlebird** nests, 2 of which fledged 2 chicks and the others just one chick. They were easy to keep track of as they are quite territorial and the chicks are very persistent with their begging calls. One particular chick was never sighted more than 70 metres from the nest tree, even 28 days after fledging.

Four **Noisy Friarbird** nests were also observed with 3, 3, 2 and 1 chick/s. The adults guarded the nests well, aggressively chasing off **Pied** and **Grey Currawongs**, a **Sacred Kingfisher** and **White-winged Choughs** that came too close. The fledged chicks, apart from the single one which may not have survived, grew remarkably quickly (Fig 5) and soon ranged over a much wider area than the **Red Wattlebird** fledglings. The three larger families still appeared intact up to 18 days after fledging and then became impossible to keep track of.

To me, the bird that wins the architectural prize for nest-building is the **Grey Fantail**. They are perfectionists and even when I thought the nest was complete, there was another 5 days of shaping the cup, weaving in some more grass, adding more cobwebs or lengthening the tail. The 4 eggs took 19 or 20 days to hatch and the chicks then grew very rapidly until it was a case of "stacks on the mill" with the biggest chick sitting on top of the rest (Fig 6). It appears that one of the chicks died in the few days before fledging, which was 10 days after hatching. The fledglings were very competent flyers right from the start, compared with the larger chicks of orioles, wattlebirds and friarbirds. This, and their manoeuvrability, may improve their chances of survival, with 2 chicks still present 46 days after fledging.

A highlight was finding a **Satin Bowerbird** nest in the first row of trees in the bushland behind the houses on the southern edge of Aranda and next to a fire trail. The stick nest was well hidden in a dense mistletoe about 5 metres above the ground. Unlike other species, the male plays no part in incubation or feeding chicks so the female has to leave the eggs unattended while she feeds herself. The eggs were laid on about 15 December and hatched on about 5 January, after 21 days. I was unable to see how many chicks there were but the female was observed carrying berries to the nest up until 18 January. I was then away for 8 days and the nest was empty upon my return, so hopefully the chicks fledged successfully.

Superb Fairy-wren nests are not easy to find unless you are prepared to sit quietly and wait. A female carrying food caught my eye on one such occasion and I watched her enter a clump of grass to feed her chicks. She did about 80% per cent of the feeding with no other females present, and with the male bringing insects occasionally. What was of particular interest was that she was banded. The following information from Professor Andrew Cockburn of the ANU tells the story of GGBw:

"This female was banded as a 7-day old baby in the Botanic Gardens in a nest at the top of the rockery. She fledged on the 15 December 2014, and left the Gardens on about 15 Feb 2015, and we have not seen her since. Young females fledged early enough in the breeding season usually move to spend the winter with a foreign group. They then compete for a vacancy the

following breeding season. The youngsters fledged later in the season overwinter in their natal territory and have a much harder time gaining a permanent vacancy.

Remarkably, one of GGBw's two nest-mates also undertook successful early dispersal, but within the Gardens. She overwintered by the back toilet block then picked up a vacancy near the glasshouses by the Red Centre. She has already fledged a couple of babies this year, which were sadly eaten shortly thereafter. Having two successful dispersals from one nest is a quite an achievement for their mother, OAA."

Even after a dead wattle was brought down by wind sending its branches in all directions, including on either side of the nest, the parents adapted quickly to find a new route to the nest and kept on feeding the chicks quite large insects. The following day there was no sign of GGBw and her chicks and I have never relocated her, even though I now carefully study the legs of all fairywrens looking for bands. According to Andrew Cockburn, they may have fledged and been secreted in a dense shrub within a 1 ha territory,

"or they have fledged and then been eaten. Unfortunately, this is the fate of lots of babies (the first two days are the most dangerous of their entire life). The fledglings of GGBw's sister succumbed at this time. Third, the nest was taken by a predator. This is also depressingly common – some of the Gardens' females are already on their fifth nest of the season. Things calm down a bit over the next couple of weeks as the principal predators (**Pied Currawongs**) fledge their own young, which they then feed on big insects like cicadas instead of baby birds. However, there are other predators which are only too happy to gorge on fairy-wren babies, including foxes, brushtails, rats, and brown snakes."

Other breeding species of note were **Dollarbirds** (Fig 7) and **Speckled Warblers**, both of which fledged two chicks. Whilst we know **Pied Currawongs** to be predators of eggs and chicks of other species, perhaps they are not very successful parents as the two pairs I observed each only managed to fledge one chick. One nest that came to nothing was that of a **Common Bronzewing** which was seen carrying sticks (Fig 8) and adding to an existing messy pile amid thick regrowth in a eucalypt, but eggs were never laid. Perhaps the neighbours were too noisy with 2 flycatcher nests, as well as one each of orioles and friarbirds within 20 metres.

Breeding activity was also observed for the following species: **Sulphur-crested Cockatoo** (Fig 9), **Crimson** and **Eastern Rosella**, **White-throated Treecreeper** (one family group with 3 dependent young), **White-browed Scrubwren**, **Buff-rumped** and **Brown Thornbill**, **Striated Pardalote**, **Brown-headed Honeyeater**, **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike**, **Dusky Woodswallow**, **Australian Magpie**, **Australian Raven**, **Magpie-lark**, **White-winged Chough** and **Common Starling**.

Once you spend time observing one nest by sitting quietly, you soon observe other birds behaving suspiciously and this leads you to more and more nests. So, next spring, find your own patch and see what is breeding there.

Sue Lashko



Fig 6. Grey Fantail feeding chicks

Sue Lashko



Fig 7. Dollarbird with fledglings

Sue Lashko



Fig 8. Common Bronzewing carrying sticks

Sue Lashko



Fig 9. Sulphur-crested Cockatoo

Sue Lashko

Bird Calendars for 2016

ON SALE!!



2016 Australia's Colourful Birds

\$5

size: A4, 210mm x 297mm

From parrots to finches, kingfishers to doves, of the most spectacular sights in Australian parks, gardens and bush are the brightly coloured birds. This calendar features some of the most striking.

2016 Australian Parrots and Cockatoos

\$5

size: A4, 210mm x 297mm

Frequently referred to as the Land of Parrots, Australia is famous for its abundant, diverse and splendid parrots and cockatoos. This calendar features a selection of some of the most interesting and beautiful, many of which can be seen in our region.

The Photographer

Martin Willis is a well-published wildlife photographer with a passion for the natural environment. With wife Sam, he is located in Malanda, Far North Queensland, an area known for its natural beauty and diverse fauna and flora.

Publications for sale

COG provides a range of birdwatching related publications for sale to members at discounted prices (around 10-30% off RRP).

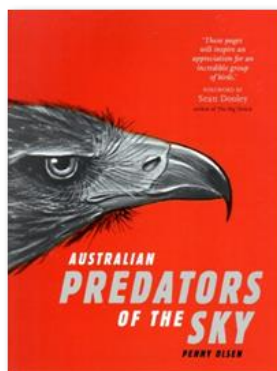
Below are highlighted a sample of popular publications available from the sales desk at COG meetings. We get new books in all the time and sometimes popular books sell out, but they can easily be re-ordered. If you are looking for a particular book, talk to the sales desk team at the meeting, as they can look at ordering it for you or contact Kathy on

sales@canberrabirds.org.au

NEW BOOKS IN STOCK

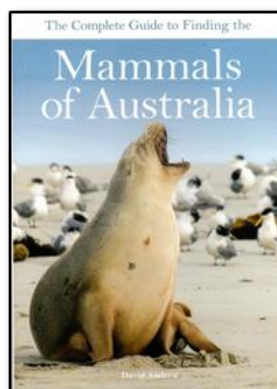
Australian Predators of the Sky

Penny Olsen



This new book from Olsen comprises over 200 striking paintings, lithographs and engravings of all 34 Australian species—25 diurnal birds of prey and nine owls. For each species, a distribution map is provided, as well as the origins of its scientific name. Several full-colour illustrations of the species by various artists are accompanied by intriguing notes about the bird.

Member's price \$28

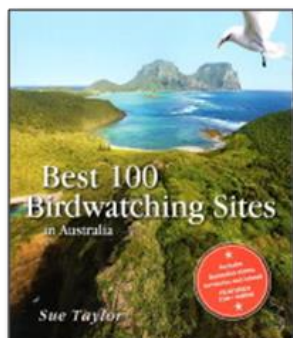


Finding mammals in Australia

David Andrew

For the first time ever, *The Complete Guide to Finding the Mammals of Australia* advises interested amateurs and professionals where to locate many of Australia's mammals. The book describes Australia's best mammal-watching sites state-by-state.

Member's price \$35



Best 100 Birdwatching Sites in Australia

Sue Taylor

Inside this illustrated guide you'll discover some of Australia's better birdwatching sites.

Member's price \$28 SALE PRICE \$24

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

2015-2016 memberships:

- Singles: \$40
- Family: \$45
- Institution: \$40
- School student (under 18) \$20

New members

COG welcomes the following new members:

M Strong
S Capararo
S Walter
R Parnell
R Summerell
G Jenkins
T Garr

NEXT NEWSLETTER

Deadline for April 2016 edition

Wednesday 30 March 2016

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

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 E-mail Discussion List
COG has an email discussion list for members and friends: 'CanberraBirds'.

Join (subscribe to) the list by following the links on the COG website or by sending an email message to canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au. The subject line and body of the email can be empty.

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Canberra Bird Notes

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