



Gang-gang

MAY 2020

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

MAY MEETING

Wednesday 13 May 2020—no meeting

There will be no meeting in May.

Due to the COVID-19 crisis the COG Committee has agreed to take a precautionary approach and to implement preventive strategies aimed at minimising viral transmission through our activities. Among others the following measure has been put in place:

Monthly COG meetings will be cancelled. There will be no May meeting this year or subsequent meetings until further notice.

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Everyone welcome

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

When I sent last month's column to the Gang-gang editors I wondered whether there would be much to report on for April, fully expecting there would be a complete COVID-19 lockdown preventing us from going out to birdwatch while exercising. This did not occur and, together with continuing milder conditions with more average temperatures as well as rainfall (though it did dry out in the second half of April), it has meant that there is much to report on, including some very interesting observations, from the COG area of Interest (AoI) for the 5 week period from 25 March. This includes a number of significant breeding records, as well as many species staying longer than usual.

Firstly, some very interesting bush-fire related observations. On 29 March Libby Keen, who lives at Harold's Cross on the very edge of the southern extent of the Black Range fire, just a kilometre from the Water Wheel reserve and Lowden Rd area destroyed during the fire, posted that their usual

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Red-capped Robin

Sandra Henderson

Summary/analysis of the past month and what to watch out for this month — continued from Page 1

species were back in abundance, including juveniles. In addition, in the last couple of weeks they had heard and seen a pair of **Eastern Whipbirds** for the first time in twenty years on their property. Even more exciting on 13 April she informed me a **Powerful Owl** had spent the day in a conifer in their garden, clutching the remains of a Greater Glider. She noted that the prey looked as big as the bird, and that it was heartening to see evidence for both these species' survival in the area.

In respect of the Orroral Valley fire, on the week of 23-27 March Brian Hawkins was working on Apollo Road near Honeysuckle Creek in Namadgi, and reported there were good numbers of migrating **Yellow-faced** and **White-naped Honeyeaters** passing through the burnt area, seemingly enjoying foraging in the really quite vigorous epicormic growth there. Despite the early start on 17 March, the first (of the three) big days for the honeyeater migration was not until 31 March, with Lindsay Hansch reporting a lot of honeyeaters passing through his place in Jerrabomberra with some quite large flocks, being harassed from time to time by a very persistent **Australian Hobby**.

Reasonable numbers were also reported migrating the next morning, but probably due to the often overcast and windy conditions, only relatively small flocks were then reported until Easter Sunday 12 April, the first really cold (near 0°C) and clear morning. From 10:15 am Lindsay Hansch spent an hour outside with his camera and estimated 7-8000 birds passed over, mostly flocks of 70-80, with the largest being 350. He scanned 120 photos that he took and could find only 18 **White-naped (WNHE)**, the remainder being **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters (YFHE)**. He could find no **White-naped** when he did the same on 31 March. Jean Casburn reported an underestimate of 3000 **YFHE** from 8.30 to 11.30 am over her GBS site in Duffy, with flocks ranging from loose groups of 300 down to individuals. They were passing in a fairly narrow pathway over her house down towards the lower slopes of Mount Taylor.

That day Michael Robbins reported close to 5000 birds passing over the west end of Urambi Village and the Murrumbidgee Golf Course, with slightly further south Sandra Henderson guesstimating close to 1000 in the 20 minutes she was at Tuggeranong Marsh to the south-west of the South Point Shopping Centre. Ann Eldridge was at Red Rocks Gorge and was not able to count how many honeyeaters were flying up the river, there were just so many - an amazing sight! Interestingly these were all southside observations but from 9 to 10 am the next morning Timothee Bonnet counted a minimum of 1060 **YFHE** above the Shepherds Lookout parking area, where they appeared to funnel as they followed the narrowing woodland.

Despite some good conditions following, numbers reported migrating were again smaller, though on 15 April Brian Hawkins reported small parties of both species coming over in 2 hours at Rendezvous Creek in Namadgi. They were migrating through the badly burnt valley and ridges which were now completely green. On 18 April Lindsay again reported a good day for honeyeaters over Jerrabomberra, with lots going past throughout the day. He again took his camera and photographed under the flyway for about 45 minutes. Scanning the photos showed the smaller flocks were, in the main, **YFHE**, but the larger flocks comprised a high percentage of **WNHE**, some as high as 85%, but in the main around 50%. He noted this was consistent with what should be expected by that stage in a migration, but it had happened suddenly rather than gradually. This was good news as he was beginning to be concerned that **White-naped Honeyeaters** may have taken a heavy hit in the bushfires.

Despite some ideal migrating conditions on subsequent days, Lindsay then reported only very low numbers except for 27 April when he had several flocks, three of about 80 birds. As previously, the smaller flocks seemed to be all **YFHE** while the larger flocks were predominantly **WNHE**. That same day Michael Robbins reported a flock of over 100 **WNHE** flying east over the west end of Urambi Village, and late morning the next day Liam Manderson had 600 **YFHE** and 200 **WNHE** over his place in Macarthur.

So while it is still continuing by the time this Gang-gang issue reaches you early in May, I expect the migration season will largely be over. It has been a comparatively prolonged season of over 6 weeks spanning from the relatively early start on 17 March to at least 28 April, with 3 distinct and well-spaced out peak migration days (31 March, and 12 and 18 April – only Lindsay Hansch seems to have reported the last).

Taking into account the long period, my impression is that **Yellow-faced Honeyeater** numbers were not lower than normal. It is more difficult, however, to conclude this for the **White-naped Honeyeater** with, except for the two examples mentioned above, only Lindsay Hansch reporting large numbers, and on one day only. It could be that people have seen significant numbers but haven't posted them on the COG chatline. The eBird map shows reports of them at around 60

locations east of the Murrumbidgee River in the past month, increasing towards the end, about half the number for the **YFHE**. There is not an obvious reason for the possibly lower numbers, as you could expect quite a few **WNHE** to have spent the summer in the unburnt areas to the west of the ACT.

Very few **Fuscous Honeyeaters**, which in the past have been seen migrating with the above, have been reported, from just 10 locations in and around Canberra, all in the second half of April. On 24 April David Cook posted that they had just had a small flock in some eucalypts at his place in Wamboin, 4 in total, possibly more. They were feeding on lerps in the company of travelling **Yellow-faced** and a single **White-naped Honeyeater**. It was many years since they had them seen there, which reflects my and other subscribers' GBS site experiences. From the end of March, many more **Red Wattlebirds**, whose numbers had been down compared with usual, were reported. Most were just hanging about though quite vocal, and few seemed to be on the move until the second half of April when pure flocks (as they often are) of up to 50 birds were reported migrating.

Of the late-staying usually earlier departing summer migrants noted in my previous column, there have been no further reports of **Horsfield's Bushlark**, **Rufous Songlark** or **Dollarbird**. A **White-winged Triller** was last reported by Alastair Smith at Bibaringa on 26 March, a very late record for this species. On 22 April Con Boekel observed a juvenile **Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo** in Black Mountain NR, noting that it fed within 5 m for around 10 minutes, with good ventral, dorsal and lateral views obtained in good light and with binoculars. Again this is a very late record for this species, and also a possible late local breeding one, noting the comments in my previous column. There has also been a late report, the first since 21 February, for the **Shining Bronze-Cuckoo** by David Dedenczuk at Sherwood Forest on 5 April. However, there have been reports of **Fan-tailed Cuckoos** from 10 locations, as may be expected for this later-leaving cuckoo. The last records of the **Eastern Koel** are the juveniles which left on 3 April as noted under breeding below.



Dusky Woodswallow

Danny McCreadie



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Good birding, good food

Tours that are cancelled in 2020 due to Covid-19 will be run in similar timeframes in 2021.

The Pilbara birding tour (NW WA)

13 to 22 July 2020

Karratha, Karijini NP, Tom Price, Newman

The Pilbara birding tour (NW WA)

24 July to 2 August 2020

Karratha, Karijini NP, Tom Price, Newman

Alice Springs, West MacDonnell Ranges, Marla & Yulara

7 to 17 August 2020

Adelaide to Nullarbor Plain

5 to 20 September 2020

Plains-wanderer Weekends 2020

24 & 25 October 2020

14 & 15 November 2020

28 & 29 November 2020

Top End birding tour

May 2021

Darwin, Kakadu, Katherine, Kununurra, Mitchell Plateau.

Atherton Tablelands

& Iron Range NP June 2021

Plains-wanderer Weekends 2021

16 & 17 October 2021

30 & 31 October 2021

6 & 7 November 2021

27 & 28 November 2021

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Five **Rainbow Bee-eaters** were last reported at the Uriarra Loop on 28 March by Sarah Fieg, and a **Sacred Kingfisher** was last reported by Alastair Smith at Kelly Swamp on 15 April, with previously regular reports from there and nearby locations. Again both are late departures, as has been the **Tree Martin** which has still been reported from 6 locations at least up to 26 April. The **Australian Reed-Warbler** has been reported from 4 locations during the period, last at Jerrabomberra Wetlands NR on 22 April. In contrast, there have been no reports of the **Fairy Martin** since 16 March, or of the **Latham's Snipe** since 24 March.

There have been a surprising number of **Flycatcher** reports, particularly in the first 12 days of April. Checking the BIRD INFO information on the COG website shows it is rather late for them (particularly for the **Satin**) still to be present/coming through at that time. The eBird map shows the **Satin Flycatcher** reported from a remarkable (compared with the only 2 earlier in 2020) 7 locations in April, the most recent, a female with a slate-blue back and contrasting brown wing coverts being observed at The Pinnacle NR by Viv Rolland on 18 April. The male observed at the Ingelara Biodynamic Farm, and the female at the Gungoandra TSR near Scottsdale, both by Sue Lashko on 9 April, are particularly noteworthy, as both were from the south-eastern edges of the Orroral Valley fire, and may well have migrated through the extensive burnt area. **Leaden Flycatchers** have also been reported from 9 locations, the most recent by Tonya Haff on Mt Ainslie on 8 April.

Another passage migrant, the **Rufous Fantail**, has also stayed longer than usual, and has been reported from 9 urban or peri-urban locations over the 5-week period, including as recently as 25 April at The Pinnacle NR and 26 April on Tuggeranong Hill. This further suggests there has been enough unburnt habitat to the west of Canberra for this species to have survived.

Reports of the **White-throated Needletail** were from 6 locations, again all in small numbers, with the most recent being a single bird reported at Macarthur by Liam Manderson on 8 April, but there have been no reports of the usually less numerous **Fork-tailed Swift** since 16 February.

Of the species which usually leave during April, the **Noisy Friarbird** was still reported from around 20 locations in April, and was still present at the time of writing, which is certainly later than in recent seasons. This also applies to the **Western** and **White-throated Gerygone**, reported from 10 and around 20 locations, respectively, and present up to at least 20 April. Likewise **Rufous Whistlers** were still reported from over 50 locations, the **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike** from well over 70 locations, and **Grey Fantails** from well over 120 locations. These last three species, some of which will stay over winter, are also more widely present later than usual. The **Superb Parrot**, which is also increasingly staying over winter, has been reported from around 35 locations, in contrast to the **Mistletoebird** which has been reported from only 6 locations, most recently on 20 April.

So please look out for any remaining of the above summer migrant species, as well as the **Dusky Woodswallow** and **Olive-backed Oriole**, which are usually the last species to leave (though some also stay), and were still reported from over 50 and 20 locations, respectively, during April.



Rose Robin

David Cook

Of the altitudinal migrants, species that move from the mountains to stay here over winter, particularly over the past fortnight the **Scarlet Robin** has now clearly moved into urban and peri-urban locations in Canberra, having been recorded from close to 50 such locations. As is usually the case the **Flame Robin** has been slower to do so, only reported from around 10 such locations so far. The **Rose Robin**, considered to be at least a partial passage migrant, has been reported from around 11 locations, a very high number for this species, but so far for 2020 there have been no reports in the COG AoI of the **Pink Robin**.

On 29 March Lindell Emerton posted a photo of a male **Crescent Honeyeater** which had been hanging out in the Callistemon and Grevillea in her back yard in Mawson for a few days. This was a very early urban arrival, as they usually do not do so until late April/early May, as shown by only 2 other urban reports, again by Lindell on 24 April

(possibly the same male as in my experience they do hang around) and 4 birds, an unusual number together, by Liam Manderson in Macarthur on 28 April. The only **Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters** reported for the period have been 2 birds on the Kambah Pool-Red Rocks Gorge Track by Zachary D on 14 April and one at Sherwood Forest by David Dedenczuk on 27 April.

There have been 3 reports of the **Swift Parrot** so far, one of a swiftly moving bird through Cook by Nicki Taws on 12 April, then 3 at Mulligans Flat NR by Liam Manderson on 19 April, and finally by a member of the public living on the Bywong escarpment who had found and photographed a dead one believed to have broken its neck on chicken wire surrounding the vegetable patch. The correspondent noted that birds use the escarpment as a flight path during migration. Please keep an eye out for this species which may roam more widely than usual as much of its usual winter feeding areas have been burnt, including on the South Coast.



Glossy Black-Cockatoo

Geoffrey Dabb

A **Bassian Thrush**, another altitudinal migrant, was found by Nicki Taws in her Cook garden on the morning of 13 April. Unfortunately she became aware of it when it had hit the window and died (possibly on its way to the ANBG from where it is mostly reported in winter). So please keep an eye out for these winter visitors, as well as for the **Restless Flycatcher**, for which there has been only the single report by Zachary D at One Tree Hill on 17 April.

Many “unusual” species seem to have been reported over the 5-week period. Providing the greatest interest were the three **Glossy Black-Cockatoos**, an adult male and female and a begging dependent young (dy) feeding in the casuarinas at the foot of Mount Jerrabomberra, and first reported on 3 April. The recently published 2018-2019 Annual Bird Report (ABR) notes it as a rare, breeding visitor, for which the most recent endorsed record was in 2017-2018. There was clearly sufficient food there as they were still present there as late as 24 April, having been seen by many observers.

This wasn't the case for the male **Scarlet Honeyeater** photographed by Liam Manderson, also feeding in casuarinas at the Stony Creek Nature Reserve on 13 April. Liam also reported an **Australasian Figbird** around his home in Macarthur on 11 April. While there have been some recent summer sightings of this species, it is not listed in the above ABR, though it is contained in the November 2017 edition of COG's Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Australian Capital Territory as a rare vagrant requiring the submission of an Unusual Bird Report form. This also pertains to the **Lewin's Honeyeater**, noted as a rare non-breeding vagrant in the Annotated Checklist, reported from the Namadgi Visitors Centre by Peter Morris on 3 April.

On 5 April Jonathon Miller reported a **Blue-faced Honeyeater (BFHE)** in Curtin for the day before, while on 22 April Brian Hawkins posted that he had been hearing their quink calls overhead in Curtin occasionally for over a month. He had seen a single bird flying over on Good Friday, but that day he saw 2 birds clearly identifiable by a combination of calls, large honeyeater flight and shape, and white belly. He noted he was very familiar with this species from the North Coast. Brian then reported that on 23 April he had recorded them by making a sound recording at the site, on which **BFHE** calls are audible, flying over at Mt Tennant.

It seems to have been a good month for the rarer honeyeaters as a **White-cheeked Honeyeater** was first reported on 9 April by Steve Holliday at the Jerrabomberra Wetlands NR. He noted that the head markings looked typical White-cheeked, the eye was dark, and there was nothing to indicate the bird was a hybrid which has been reported from here in recent years. A number of observers subsequently confirmed this observation.

Another interesting observation has been of a white morph **Grey Goshawk** reported from North Lyneham, Kaleen, Giralang and Cook between 9 and 14 April, so possibly the same bird. A grey morph **Grey Goshawk** was then reported from the Jerrabomberra Wetlands NR on 18 April, and from Mt Majura on 21 April, again possibly the same bird. Single **Black Kites** were reported from Bluetts Block on 5 April and Hindmarsh Drive Red Hill on 16 April. The male **Musk Duck** at Yerrabi Pond, and the female at the Tuggeranong Marsh, continued to be reported throughout April. A further **Cockatiel** was reported by 2

different observers from Macarthur on 6 April, while **Scaly-breasted Lorikeets** were reported from 4 locations and **Musk Lorikeets** from 3 locations in April.

Finally, having now seen photos of the area where the **Eastern Curlew** was photographed on 19 March, it resembled much more a coastal mud flat compared with the normally flooded paddock I had in mind. So it may have actually been feeding to fatten up **before** migrating, given the bush fire run off debris on some the South Coast beaches/mud flats would have prevented feeding there. However, its long curved bill is designed to take things under the surface – and I’m not sure there would be much there in the flooded Mt Clear paddock.

Despite it being mid-autumn, there has still been an increase in breeding activity reported (note also **Glossy Black-Cockatoo** above), much of it likely to be related to the rain which has fallen from early February:

- Clearly related is the reporting of 4 duck species with very young ducklings since 8 April. Most interesting was the posting by Julie Clark on 22 April that the week before she saw a brood of seven very young **Pink-eared Duck** ducklings and that day saw a second brood, possibly younger than the other, of two ducklings, both at the Big Dam at Mulligans Flat NR. The map on the BIRD INFO part of the COG website shows they have been recorded breeding only here and (more often) at one other nearby northside spot, but with only 1 previous record of dependent young (dy) in April, though there have been 5 such records for March.
- Many COG chatline subscribers enjoyed Alice McGlashan’s (who was to be our main speaker for the 13 May meeting) video of the **Australian Wood Duck** ducklings dropping to the ground from their nest box, the link to which David McDonald posted on 8 April. This was the first of a further 8 broods of these ducklings reported for the month. Most interesting was Mariko Buszynski who at the Federal Golf Course on 10 April saw 23 such ducklings escorted by an adult pair. There were many other Wood Ducks lounging about but they showed no interest, and she presumed the ducklings did not belong to them. She asked is it possible that all 23 belong to the one pair? I’ve always assumed this was “creching”, but David McDonald responded that it was conspecific brood parasitism, also called “dump nesting” or



Pink-eared Duck

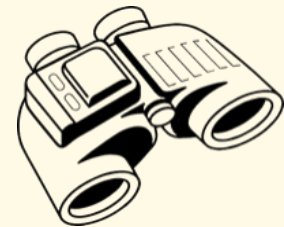
Julie Clark

Nature Lodge Optics

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“egg dumping”, which is not uncommon in waterfowl. One or more other females have laid their eggs in the nest, a good strategy for a female who has not got a nest for some reason, or that uses it to get out two lots of her offspring. He noted there were about 26 eggs in the nest box in the video mentioned above. He also noted HANZAB gives the average clutch size as 10.5 for the **Australian Wood Duck**, while noting that the likelihood of egg dumping would impact on that average. Beruldsen’s book, ‘Australian Birds their Nests and Eggs’, indicates the clutch size is nine to twelve, sometimes as many as thirteen or fourteen, and sometimes more.

- Four sets of **Grey Teal** ducklings have also been reported, but surprisingly only one **Pacific Black Duck** brood. Also reported have been at least two **Black Swan** nests (this species is known to breed all year round), and three broods of very young **Purple Swamphens**. On 13 April Jean Casburn and Sandra Henderson (as well as Rod Mackay on 20 April) reported continuing and possibly undiminished **Australasian Darter/Cormorant** breeding along the Molonglo River west of the Tuggeranong Parkway overpass, except that **Little Black Cormorants** were no longer doing so.
- On 20 April Con Boekel reported a **Spotted Dove** egg-hatching event that morning as he had observed a bird remove half an eggshell. He noted that breeding records for **Spotted Dove** in the ACT were rather scarce, which the BIRD INFO data confirms, importantly the latest in the season being a nest with young in February.
- On 25 April David Cook posted that they had a pair of **Common Bronzewing**s nesting about 4 metres up in a Eucalypt in their Wamboin backyard. He had recorded them as ON for the last 3 GBS weeks, and NB in the week before that. This is another remarkable breeding event, as the BIRD INFO data shows no **Common Bronzewing** breeding of any kind between March and July (inclusive), and only a single each of on/leaving nest and nest with young for February.
- On 1 April near the East West Rd/Brindabella Rd intersection Sandra Henderson found three **Red-capped Robins**, including a youngster still with yellow gape. Again this is a very important breeding record since the BIRD INFO data shows dy for this species only as late as January.
- On 24 April Julie Clark photographed a female **Magpie-lark** sitting on a nest near the Big Dam at Mulligans Flat. Interestingly the previous afternoon I too had found a female **Magpie-lark** on a nest in Chapman. I had first found a bird taking mud to the spot, later a half-completed, and then a complete nest. The BIRD INFO data on the COG website shows only 1 case of nest building and nest with young for the **Magpie-lark** over the many years of data collection to 2017. It also shows one case of a nest with young in May, and 1 case of dy in both April and May, but 2 cases in June. Interestingly the current nest is only around 400 m from the one in the Chapman horse paddocks I recorded in 1989 with a very similar timing during the ACT Atlas period and is mentioned in the resulting publication, and thus probably one of the records in the BIRD INFO data.
- Last, but certainly not least, on 1 April a good friend of Terry Munro’s sent him a photo taken that day of a juvenile **Eastern Koel** (identified by Geoffrey Dabb as a female) in his Campbell fig tree. It had been there for a few days and left on 3 April, about the same time as Julie Clark’s fledgling in Amaroo, which had been in her garden for 77 days. This is easily a record to my knowledge, though the latest juvenile reported still present I’m aware of was on 6 April 2011.

More mixed feeding flocks (MFFs) have come to my attention, with a number of people sharing my experience of the birding being very quiet until you run into one of these. Please also look out for single species flocks starting to form. **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos** were again widely reported from over 100 locations, but it seems only in small flocks with none of these coalescing into the very large ones sometimes seen. This also applies to the **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos**, despite numbers associated with their Weston Creek roost sites having risen significantly to around 650 birds in April.

So please watch out for the last of the spring/summer migrants mentioned above, for the remaining arriving altitudinal migrants, for MFFs and single species flocks, for roost sites and flights, and for any further breeding activity. As usual please ensure that all significant sightings are properly reported and end up on the COG database.

Once again my sincere thanks to everyone who has contributed to my two main data sources, posting on the COG e-mail Discussion List (“COG chatline”) and the eBird Australia database, as well as direct correspondence with me. As always I am very grateful to all involved for publishing this information without which it would not be possible to put this column together.

Finally, to all readers please remain safe and remember to maintain your social distancing during the continuing COVID-19 crisis when still birding under these restrictions.

Jack Holland

Song of the Crest-fallen Pigeon

Suzanne Edgar

The pigeon on my window-sill
adores a bird of wood
that gazes from this other side
as if she understood.

Brought here from America,
she wears a perky crest,
feathers brown with a hint of pink
adorn her lovely breast.

The pigeon on the outer ledge
believes he woos a dove
and cannot comprehend the glass
that keeps him from his love.

If only I could speak with him
of love's elusive flame
I'd cure his sad obsession with
the bird he cannot claim.

All day he paces up and down
and pecks upon the pane
his doting morse-code plea for sex
like any featherbrain.

Bird-themed flu face mask

Jenny Bounds



Thinking up useful activities for self-isolation, I downloaded a flu face mask pattern from the internet, and got out my 50+ year old sewing machine. I used a new tea towel as fabric for the outer layer (a dense material including denim will do), and managed to find various scraps for lining, elastic, etc in the old sewing box. The prototype looks pretty good.

The link to the pattern which has video on how to make it is: <https://kdcq.com/flu-mask-pattern-and-instructional-video/>

I made my pattern slightly larger, about 5-7 mm. This pattern has a pocket for a P2 filter which I don't have, so I cannibalised a (new) soft P2 mask I had for the bushfire smoke. From what I've read, double fabric/felt type material as the insert could do the job.

(The advice from Dr Norman Swan is that cloth face masks should be washed daily – ed!)



Jigsaw

Lia Battisson



Geoffrey Dabb

The Phantom Log of Kelly Swamp

Geoffrey Dabb

If you are a long-time observer at Kelly Swamp, you will know that of all the logs there, this is the one with most character. It is roughly in the middle of this shallow but much-visited water body, and was once easily seen from Cygnus hide before that hide ever got a name. From that vantage point, the Log is 70m away, and just beyond and to the right of the now rather scruffy willow (of the 'Tortured Willow' variety, I believe) that was once home to nesting spoonbills.

The Log was often a roost for large birds, like the 2 egrets shown on it in January 2004, in the early years of digital photography (photo 1). Photo 2 in January 2009 recalls the famous spoonbill breeding event, and here there is an actual young spoonbill using the Log for its main purpose. Part of the distinctive arch of the Log is visible here together with the two raised prongs, and a kind of supplementary log on which a couple of ducks are standing.



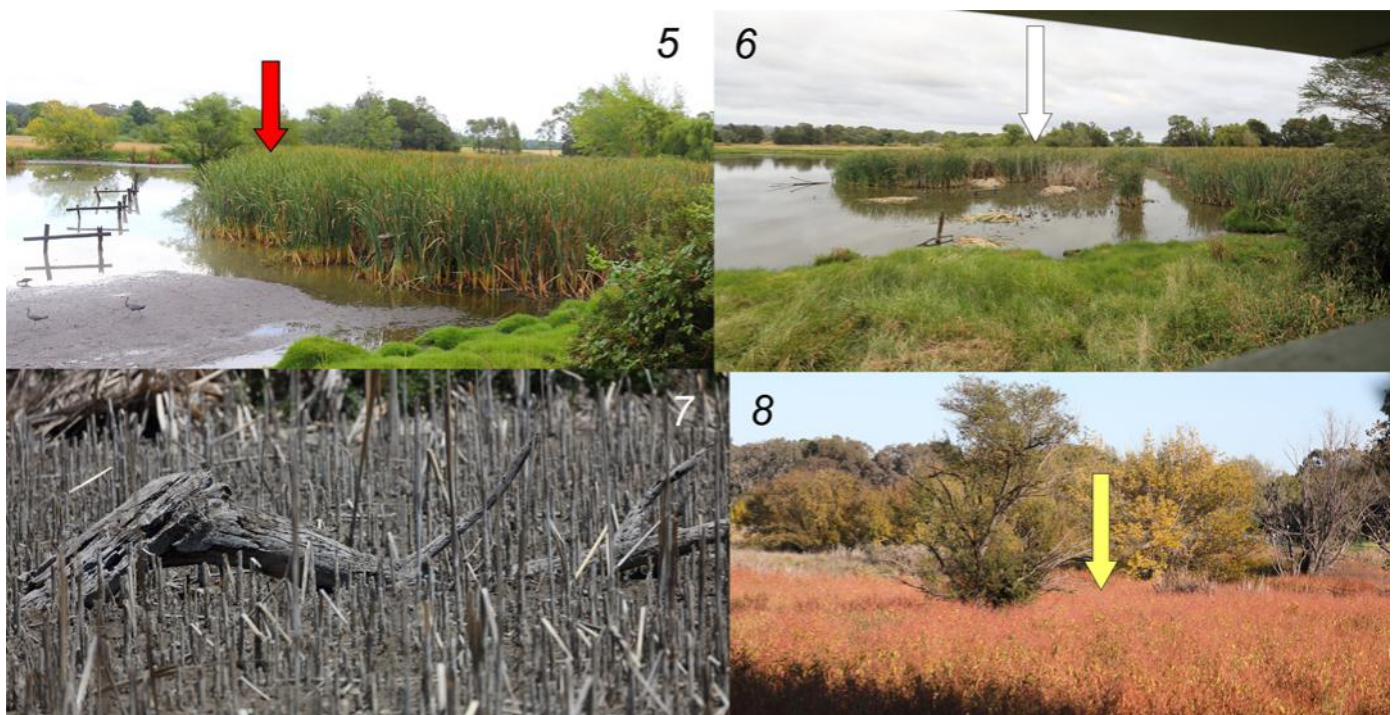
Photo 3 marks the Advance of the Typha, an important part of the recent story of Kelly Swamp. Photos 3 and 4 were both taken in 2011, only a few weeks apart. A wider view from Cygnus hide is shown in photo 5 (2013), where it is necessary to resort to an arrow to show the location of the now invisible Log. An even wider view appears in photo 6, from January 2018 when a frequent topic of conversation among hide-users was whether the typha (or 'cattails' or 'cumbungi') would completely over-run the swamp, leaving no view of anything but typha.

(If you are interested in changing vegetation, and the changing landscape generally, you can get a good idea of it by using the historic imagery available on Google Earth. This generally offers an updated view for each year, and is at a resolution where the vegetation pattern at Kelly Swamp can be seen. There is better resolution in some years rather than others, for some reason, some old views being better than recent ones.)



Then came the beginning of the drying. Either because of that, or clever typha management, the view, during 2019, began to improve. In spring, the usual regrowth did not occur. By the smoky days of December 2019 the drying was complete, and the whole of the Log was visible through an expanse of dead stalks (photo 7).

However, the cycle of nature gives, and also takes away. My most recent photo (8) on 17 April shows that a kind of dense weedy growth has sprung up to dominate the view, to the frustration of the logwatcher (as well as the birdwatcher). No doubt this will subside as the water level rises, and we shall have a different outlook again. In all probability the decaying vegetation will draw an influx of waterbirds, the numbers and composition depending, as usual, on conditions elsewhere.



I have one more image to offer. Photo 9 is from last September. In the later days of the visit of the **Northern Shoveler** it was often to be found (when it could be found at all) with other ducks resting in the middle of the cryptic expanse of mud and dead stalks in front of Cygnus hide. There was still just enough water there for ducks to come and go. In this photo you might be able to see the famous visitor – with the emergent Log beyond, part submerged, still showing the top of the arch and those prongs. Overall, it seems to have sunk a little lower, given the low water level in September.



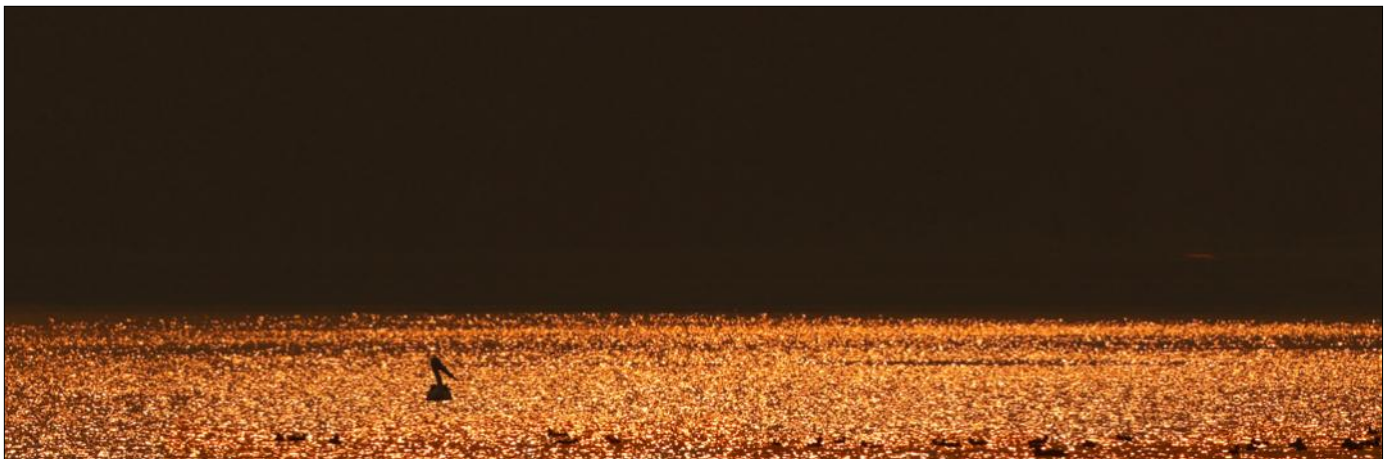
January 2009. The arch of the Log with an **Australian White Ibis** holding a courting stick.

Geoffrey Dabb

Fires

Con Boeke

This image was captured at 7.32 am on 29 December 2019.



The ACT had just recorded its hottest ever December temperature, we were beset by drought, bushfires were lurking at the periphery, we were often shrouded in smoke and we recorded some of the most toxic air quality readings in the world. Little did we realise what was to follow.

This image was one of a series of attempts to demonstrate our embattled status. It was captured from Black Mountain Peninsula well after sunrise. Parliament House is hidden in the darkness at the top left hand side of the image. The sky is smoke dark and the sunlight was turned a golden colour as it made its way through the smoke to reflect off the water. A sole **Australian Pelican** represents what remains after the reported 90% decline in Murray-Darling Basin waterfowl.

New Places: April 2020

Sandra Henderson

Sherwood Forest

Where is it: Access is via the cavaletti about 1.5km along Mountain Creek Rd from its intersection with Uriarra Road.

When eBird lists started appearing for visits to Sherwood Forest, I (and many others) wondered “*How have I never heard of this place?*” I was on the COG walk to the old Sherwood Homestead site (from Blue Range hut) last year, and now know the forest was part of the property named Sherwood by Henry and Eliza Phillips who are buried, with their infant son, near the homestead site.

I have been to Sherwood Forest three times this month – the first time with no real idea of where to go, apart from some clues from Alastair whom I met on the track as he was leaving. I now know I didn’t go quite far enough on that first visit. The next visit, with Lia, was on a dreadful day, with steady drizzle and strong winds. My third visit, with Jean, was on a very pleasant morning, and we managed to find a male **Rose Robin** and a **Spotted Quail-thrush**. There are obviously more birds to find, and I also want to try the walk to the homestead site.

Bullock Paddock Road

Where is it: Just before the intersection of Brindabella Road and East West Road, there is a turnoff to the left onto Bullock Paddock Road.

Like many COG members, I had driven past the turnoff many times, and it seems to simply lead to pine forest. I parked a little way along the track, at an obvious layby on the left, and walked 1.5km to the intersection with Bracks Hole Road. Along the majority of the walk there is native vegetation, although there are a lot of blackberries. The first interesting find was an adult female and fledgling **Red-capped Robin** (see photo page 1), part of a mixed flock with other small birds at the side of the road. At the Bracks Hole Road intersection, about a kilometre further along, was another female **Red-capped Robin**, giving its distinctive “telephone” call. A loose group of five **White-throated Needletails** flew over (one of several groups I saw over a couple of days between East West Road and Condor Creek). There was a constant stream of **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** over the road – with an estimated 1000 for the time I was there. Near Bracks Hole Road, I saw an **Australian Hobby** in a dead tree, but it took off before I could get a photo. Two minutes later it returned, clutching a small bird (possibly one of the honeyeaters), which it proceeded to dismember.

<https://ebird.org/australia/checklist/S66463859>

The road continues on well past where I stopped, so that’s another walk for the future.

Bracks Hole Road

Where is it: Runs off Bullock Paddock Rd (above) about 2km off Brindabella Road. There is a locked gate 100m down the road, and it was the “No Fishing” sign on the gate that attracted me to walk in. If I’d consulted a map more carefully, I’d have noticed the road leads to the far reaches of the Cotter Dam. I did the walk with Jean C, on a very pleasant morning. The roadsides have an interesting mix of vegetation, which ranger Darren Broso confirmed subsequently had all been planted (apart from the widespread blackberries).

When we reached the dam we could see two **Australasian Darter** nests, one with three youngsters perched nearby, the other with at least one young still in the nest. Adults were busy feeding the youngsters. It was an interesting walk, just over 1km each way. <https://ebird.org/australia/checklist/S676105835>

Moore's Hill

Where is it: in Stony Creek Reserve, starting at the end of the Cotter Bridge, opposite the Cotter Pumping Station. We parked at Cotter Bend and walked through the Cotter Campground, although there is space for one or two cars to park near the locked gate at the end of the bridge.

The track up Moore's Hill in Stony Creek Reserve is a zig-zag up the hill. Jean and I walked 600m up the track before retracing our steps, and walked a short way along the river, but that track petered out. We listed 29 species, including **Superb Lyrebird** (heard), **Satin Bowerbird**, **Eastern Yellow Robin**, **Eastern Spinebill**, a flock of **Little Ravens**, and a **Fan-tailed Cuckoo** (heard).

<https://ebird.org/australia/checklist/S67222017>

eBird

Alastair Smith

Some notes about comments in eBird:

1. If you trip a filter based on high count or rarity, please add your comments, photographs and/or audio before you submit the record.
2. When providing comments on a species, restrict your comments to the bird (see 3 below). Simply describe what you saw or heard. This ensures the reviewer can make a judgement on your observation and should negate the need for a further exchange of emails.
3. Nothing beats a field guide to assist your deliberations!
4. Do not thank the original observer in the species' comments. This is a recent trend and has resulted in a number of complaints. eBird is not the place to do this. If you do wish to thank them, send an email or use the visit comments field; do not use the species' comments section.
5. For a count that triggers the filter, provide a comment on how you came up with that count. The following three descriptions work well in almost all circumstances:
 - an 'exact count' (generally a single flock where you have counted all individuals)
 - a 'cumulative count/total' (ie an exact count over time - all individuals counted or all individuals and individuals in a flock or several flocks counted)
 - an 'estimate' (please also provide counting method, eg counted by 5s, 10s, 100s, etc).

Filter changes

Due to a high frequency of misidentifications, the filters for both **Pied Butcherbird** and **Jacky Winter** have recently been set back to zero. This means you will be required to add a description for these two species.

eBird tools

Frustrated by the lack of eBird tools to help you analyse your records? US eBird reviewer, Kent Fiala, has developed a number of tools which may help eBirders make more sense of their data. Access the list of tools [here](#), and the tools are:

[Nearby notable eBird reports](#)

[Nearby eBird hotspots](#)

[Import eBird checklists into AviSys](#)

[Compile multiple eBird checklists into one spreadsheet](#)

[Share multiple eBird checklists at once](#)

[Set up a needs alert for a hotspot](#)

[Display a life, year, or month list for a location](#)

If you have a question about eBird please contact the reviewers.



Woodland Surveys- autumn 2020 survey round

compiled by Jenny Bounds

The autumn survey period in the last week of March coincided with the Covid 19 virus restrictions to only essential movements and strict social distancing, and the COG Committee's decision then to cancel all group field trips/activities. This impacted on the Mulligans Flat group survey which had been scheduled for Sunday 29 March, and had to be cancelled. Other woodland sites which are surveyed by one (or two) individuals were not affected, and most were surveyed before the essential movement restrictions applied.

Mulligans Flat NR

The surveys at Mulligans Flat were undertaken over 15 and 16 April, with assistance from ACT Parks and Conservation Service Environmental Offsets. A total of 43 species was recorded (on the lower end for an autumn survey number), with several of the spring migrants still around or moving through, in particular quite a few **Red Wattlebirds** and **Noisy Friarbirds**, several **Olive-backed Orioles**, and a small number of **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters**. **Rufous Whistlers**, **White-throated Gerygones** and **Grey Fantails** were amongst the late migrants. Interesting records included a **Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo** at site 18, and a **Red-capped Robin** at site 23; these sites are adjacent to the wooded, central north/south quartz ridge. **Scarlet Robins** were recorded at seven sites (a typical increase in this species in the reserve in autumn/winter). **White-eared Honeyeaters**, which also increase in numbers in autumn/winter, were at several sites. Four **Varied Sittellas** were recorded at site 8 on the western ridge, and a **Superb Parrot** around site 2 near the Woolshed. There was a large mixed flock of birds in and around site 4 north of the Woolshed, which has a large silver wattle patch fringed by eucalypts. No raptors were recorded and only a small number of water-based species: **Pacific Black Duck** and **Australian Wood Duck** (with 8 ducklings) on the first dam (near the Woolshed), and **Eurasian Coots** on the large dam.

Gooroo NR (south)

The autumn survey in the southern half of Goorooyarroo was done by Steve Holliday and Prue Buckley on Sunday 22 March in excellent conditions. The reserve was the greenest it had been for a long time, with all dams full and pools in some of the creeks. There were quite a few wildflowers out. A total of 51 bird species was recorded, a good total for autumn, with 41 of these noted during 10 minute counts at the nine sites. The big highlight was a **Black Falcon** that zipped over between sites, not the first for the reserve but a new record for the woodland surveys. The only other raptor was a pale **Brown Falcon** over site 5. A couple of overflying **Great Cormorants** were also new for the survey. In contrast to some recent visits, there was a good amount of small bird activity, particularly at some of the more heavily wooded sites in the south of the reserve. The most productive mixed flock was at site 7 which included **Grey Fantail** (8), **Golden Whistler** (10), many **Weebills**, **Buff-rumped Thornbills** and **Striated and Spotted Pardalotes**, and smaller numbers of species such as **Rufous Whistler**, **White-throated Gerygone**, **Yellow-faced**, **Brown-headed** and **White-eared Honeyeaters**, and a **Speckled Warbler**. **Scarlet Robins** were present at two sites, and a couple of **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos** were prominent for the first hour or so. A number of summer visitors were still present in low numbers; besides the species already mentioned, these were **Western Gerygone**, **Noisy Friarbird** and **Olive-backed Oriole**. There was no sign of honeyeater migration.

Majura Training Area (formerly Majura Field Firing Range)

On Tuesday 24 March, Paul Fennell and Chris Davey surveyed at the MTA. It was still and quite overcast, with only a very occasional glimpse of the sun and gloomy at the 7.30 am start. The marsupials were about, with three generations of Eastern Greys in large numbers, a few Red-necked and a single Swamp Wallaby. It was quite disappointing overall, with only 25 species seen on sites, and only three different species seen between sites. The highlight of the morning was a single **Wedge-tailed Eagle** perched at the top of a dead tree, the first bird we saw on the range. We had previously observed a couple of **Superb Fairy-wrens** at Range Control. A good sized group of **White-winged Choughs** was seen between sites as well.

On site 1 there were no birds on site, and only **Sulphur-crested Cockatoo**, **Australian Magpie** and **Rufous Whistler** were heard offsite. Site 7 had only 1 **Crimson Rosella** on site, and only a couple of **Australian Magpies** offsite. The other sites were slightly more productive, but populated by usual suspects, **Galahs**, **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos**, **Red-rumped Parrots**, **Noisy Miners**, **Australian Ravens** and **Common Starlings**. There were a few honeyeaters around, but not many, including: **Yellow-faced**, **White-eared** and **Brown-headed Honeyeaters**, **Red Wattlebird** and **Noisy Friarbird**. **Brown** and **Buff-rumped Thornbills** were observed, as well as **Weebills** and **Spotted Pardalote**, and one **Grey Fantail**. A couple of common ducks

were on Mick's Dam: **Australian Wood Duck** and **Pacific Black Duck**. Very few species were there in any number, apart from a dozen **Weebills** and **Buff-rumped Thornbills** on one site.

Mt Majura NR

Duncan McCaskill did the woodland survey on 24 March, starting soon after dawn. Most of the sites are **Noisy Miner**-dominated and they had little more than the usual **Australian King Parrots**, **rosellas** and **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos**. A family group of three **Superb Parrots** was a welcome addition to the list at a couple of sites, and **Rainbow Lorikeets** were at a couple of other sites. The 2 sites which don't have **Noisy Miners** and often have small birds were practically silent. A single **Yellow-faced Honeyeater** passing through was the only small bird at site 4. Site 5 had a single **Grey Fantail** at one edge and a small flock of **Buff-rumped Thornbills** was heard outside the site. There were no other thornbills observed, no **Weebills** anywhere, and only 2 sites had any **pardalotes**. There were no **Common Bronzewings**, which are usually recorded at some sites. Only 25 species in total were recorded.

Mt Ainslie NR/Campbell Park

Michael Lenz surveyed on 25 March, on the lower eastern slopes of Mt Ainslie. It was a mild and calm, partly overcast morning. The greatest surprise was the very low number of **Noisy Miners**, normally the most widespread and quite numerous species. This time the species was present at only three sites with one bird each. Even in the area immediately around the Campbell Park offices, only a few miners were encountered; possibly drought/post drought food shortage may be behind this. Unfortunately, the lack of **Noisy Miners** did not translate into higher numbers of small bush birds. The **Crimson Rosella** was the most widespread species (8 sites), followed by **Galah**, **Eastern Rosella** and **Spotted Pardalote** (each at 5 sites). A few small mixed feeding flocks were encountered, mostly in areas between sites. Species of interest included 4 **Superb Parrots**, 2 **Speckled Warblers**, several **Rufous Whistlers** and **Western Gerygones**, 2 **Dusky Woodswallows** and 1 **Mistletoebird**. The only other honeyeaters were **Brown-headed Honeyeaters** in two small groups. In total 35 species were recorded - 22 at sites and another 13 between sites.

Newline

The survey was carried out by Sue Lashko a little earlier than usual, on Thursday 12 March in perfect autumn conditions. Almost all the Newline paddocks were burnt in the January 2020 fires near the airport and Pialligo, with much of the understorey of largely exotic shrubs bare, but most of the large trees were singed only about half way up their height. However, older trees with large hollows and dead trees mostly burnt to the top and fell. With the recent rains, the paddocks were green, but unfortunately almost entirely with African lovegrass, blackberries and broad-leaved weeds. Rabbit warrens were prolific. The first birds heard were **Rainbow Lorikeets** and they seem to have taken over Newline, being recorded in seven of the 9 sites, with at least 60 recorded overall. Parrots of all types dominated the morning, including two pairs of **Little Corellas** and one of **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos**. **Australian Wood Ducks** were recorded in four sites, as well as on dams, all but one of which contained water. Small birds were scarce, with **Superb Fairy-wren** numbers low, just two **Double-barred Finches** near the concrete dump in unburnt vegetation, and a **Speckled Warbler** in among the dead leaves of a fallen eucalypt. There were still at least 20 **Dusky Woodswallows** in the front paddocks and, surprisingly, three **Fuscous Honeyeaters** feeding in epicormic growth. The only raptor of the morning was a **Brown Falcon**. The species total of 33 was low for autumn but not unexpected given the fire damage.

Jerrabomberra West NR

Jenny Bounds and Alison Russell-French (socially distanced) did the survey in the woodland patch on Monday 23 March, in fine and mild weather. Bird species and numbers were well down, the lowest autumn count ever there at 22 species. However, the reserve was green with good eucalypt re-growth in the Blakely's Red Gum particularly, and some wildflowers out looking like it was spring. The spring migrants like **Dusky Woodswallows**, which are often still there at this time of year, were gone, and there were no honeyeaters/no migration, (just the usual **Noisy Miners**). A **Common Bronzewing** at site 1 was a highlight (not recorded at that site before). One **Grey Fantail** and one **Rufous Whistler** were heard. Both **pardalotes** were around, as well as a few **Weebills**, and a couple of **Buff-rumped** and **Yellow-rumped Thornbills**. No raptors were recorded.

Symonston (Callum Brae & Isaacs Ridge NR)

Sandra Henderson did the surveys on 24 March. It was grey and overcast at the start, although the sun did come out later. The dams all had some water, and the large farm dam was very full. At the first two sites, for the first time ever, not a single bird within the 50m radius plot was recorded, and very few within 100m. Things improved at site 3, although nothing out of

the ordinary. Moving on to sites 4 to 6, on the far left side of the reserve, two mixed feeding flocks passed by with **Spotted Pardalotes**, **Weebills**, a **Speckled Warbler**, **Buff-rumped** and **Yellow-rumped Thornbills**, **Grey Fantails**, **Western** and **White-throated Gerygones**, **White-browed Scrubwrens**, and both **Rufous** and **Golden Whistlers**. An interesting breeding record was a **Chestnut Teal** with seven small ducklings. There were also **Grey Teal** on the dam. On the way back to the reserve entrance, there was another mixed flock, with two **Speckled Warblers** making lots of noise. Three **Wedge-tailed Eagles** appeared over the trees and slowly circled until almost out of sight. The total of 47 species for the morning was a good total for autumn. There was no obvious honeyeater migration, with only a couple of **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** around. There were no highlights for the 3 sites in Isaacs Ridge NR.

Tuggeranong Hill NR

Lia Battisson went to nearby Tuggeranong Hill for her essential exercise on Saturday 28 March and did the woodland surveys while she was there. Site 3 was the most productive with 11 species. At one stage all of the birds became very excited and a glimpse skywards revealed the cause of the ruckus. A **Swamp Harrier**, a first for these surveys, came over and circled around a couple of times before flying off. At Site 2, **Red Wattlebirds** were feasting on something they found in an old nest. A **Grey Butcherbird** tried to get in on the action but left without success. The honeyeater migration was in full swing, with moving flocks of **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** observed from all sites after 9:20am. Between 9:20 and 11am an estimated 360 birds, in flocks of up to 80, flew through. Three flocks of up to 30 paused in sites. An **Olive-backed Oriole** made it into a survey and **Grey Fantails** were at several sites. A couple of small mixed feeding flocks, including a **Scarlet Robin** and a **Speckled Warbler**, were nice to observe, albeit between sites. In all, 20 species were observed in sites, and a further 14 in between sites. The total species number was similar to last autumn.



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Hall/Gold Creek

The seven Gold Creek sites were surveyed by Alison Rowell in fine mild weather on 29 March. Dam levels had increased since the December survey but the ground vegetation was still very short and some trees were showing signs of drought stress (leaf thinning, dead regeneration). No migration of honeyeaters or other small birds was noted, with the only honeyeaters observed being **Red Wattlebirds** and **Noisy Friarbirds**. Only 13 species of birds were seen on the sites with a further 18 species recorded outside the survey areas.

Species seen at more than one site included **Eastern** and **Crimson Rosella**, **Common Starling**, **Australian Magpie**, **Grey Fantail**, **Weebill** and **Noisy Friarbird**. A pair of **Wood Ducks** was seen in a large tree with hollows at one site, and an interesting interaction was observed at another site between two **Australian Magpies** and two **Noisy Friarbirds**. The birds were in a large eucalypt where both species have nested in the past in different years. There was some to and fro calling among the four birds and their calls appeared to converge, as though they were using the same aggressive idiom. The **magpies** eventually chased the **friarbirds** away.

The variety of species and number of individuals of small birds was low, with a few observations of **Yellow-rumped** and **Buff-rumped Thornbills**, **Rufous Whistlers**, **Superb Fairy-wrens** and **White-throated Gerygone**, all outside sites. Parrots were common as usual, with an unusual observation of two **Australian King Parrots** at one site.

Help wanted

Mark Clayton

Nicki Taws and I have been involved with Bob Spiller from the Gunning district who is writing a series of natural history articles for a monthly blog by the Gunning and District Historical Society. So far Nicki and I have assisted in an article on the **Spotted Quail-thrush** in the Mundoonen Nature Reserve and adjacent properties and are looking at another species at present. Bob is keen to try and get some funding to run surveys in the Mundoonen NR and surrounding areas and I have suggested that members of COG may be interested in taking part - the reserve is within COG's Area of Interest. He is especially interested in the **Spotted Quail-thrush** but also in Koalas which have been recorded in the past, and obviously the general natural history of the site. I am still in discussions with Bob as to how things should be planned but have suggested point surveys of 10 minutes is probably the best way to go, similar to COG's Woodland Surveys. We have still to select a time frame for this to be done.

If anyone is interested in helping out could you please contact both Bob bobgunninghistoryblog@gmail.com and me chollop7@bigpond.com

We will try to keep those interested up to date with developments as things progress.
Thank you

K2C surveys

Nicki Taws

The K2C surveys this autumn were not able to be held as a COG event but over a week-long period in early April each of the sites was visited by a solo observer.

The impact of the severe drought last year was evident at a number of sites where the canopy had died back and was only just resprouting. The Clear Range fire in February severely burnt the Ingelara woodlands and most of the Scottsdale sites. Many of the large trees at these sites had fallen over but those that remained standing were resprouting with epicormic growth, including most of the recently planted trees.

A total of 80 species was recorded in the surveys with highlights including **Owlet Nightjar**, **Superb Lyrebird**, **Yellow-tufted Honeyeater**, **Satin Flycatcher** and a couple of late-departing **Rainbow Bee-eaters**. Other summer migrants which were still in the region included **Noisy Friarbird**, **Western Gerygone** and **Rufous Whistler**.

The honeyeater migration was very subdued at all sites, which may be a result of the weather for the whole week being somewhat cloudy and/or windy which is generally less than ideal for the honeyeater migration, or it may reflect the impact of the extensive fires to the west of the survey area on honeyeater numbers and/or movement patterns.

Two large dams are included in the surveys and usually have a high diversity of waterbirds; however, the only ducks recorded this time were **Australian Wood Ducks**. Presumably the widespread rains over the last two months have meant other duck species have dispersed far and wide. Raptors were also in lower numbers with only three species recorded - **Wedge-tailed Eagle**, **Brown Falcon** and **Collared Sparrowhawk**.

Of the Threatened species **Gang-gang Cockatoo** was recorded on 1 property, **Brown Treecreeper** 5, **Speckled Warbler** 5, **Dusky Woodswallow** 6, **Scarlet Robin** 6, **Flame Robin** 1, **Hooded Robin** 2 and **Diamond Firetail** 6. There were also **Southern Whiteface** at 6 properties, but **Restless Flycatcher** at only one.

A big thank you to the landholders for permission to continue with the surveys, and for my helpers for ensuring we covered all the sites.

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2020-2021 memberships:

- Individual: \$50
- Family: \$55
- Institution: \$50
- School student (under 18) \$20

New members

COG welcomes the following new members:

R Baxter
R Clay
E Cochrane

NEXT NEWSLETTER

Deadline for June 2020 edition:

Wednesday 27 May 2020

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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Gang-gang is published on COG's website in PDF format.

ISSN 2208-018X

