



Gang-gang

FEBRUARY 2021

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

FEBRUARY MEETING

**Wednesday 10 February 2020
7.30pm,**

normal face-to-face meeting

Following the approval of our COVID Safety Plan, COG will hold our 10 February meeting as a face-to-face one at the usual venue, Canberra Girls Grammar School (CGGS) Multi-media centre, corner Gawler Cres and Melbourne Ave, Deakin.

Attendees will need to sit so that there is only one person per 2 sq m and with 1.5 m distancing, by maintaining 2 spare seats between people except for members of the same family or group of close contacts.

All attendees must practice good hand and respiratory hygiene and stay home if unwell.

As required by the ACT Government for application of the 2 sq m per person rule, the 'Check in CBR' app will be used to collect participants' contact details, using the QR code displayed at the entrance to the venue.

If attendees do not have or cannot share this app, COG will make a paper record of their names and contact details.

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

Over the 9 weeks from 26 November 2020 covered by this column, the weather at first was relatively cool and often cloudy, until it cleared and warmed up from around the end of the first week of January, and gradually became hotter with a heatwave over the final weekend. In contrast to what might be expected under the La Niña influence, it hasn't been wet; in fact there has been a bit less than average rainfall with conditions becoming surprisingly dry at the end. Despite this, bird activity within the COG Area of Interest (AoI) has remained high with lots of interesting sightings, as described below. The drying conditions did seem to be responsible for the observation of a few post-breeding mixed feeding flocks (MFFs) in my local area of Cooleman Ridge/Narrabundah Hill from mid-January.

In respect of summer migrants, one I hadn't alerted readers to, but which may have been expected after a wet spring, was the **Australian Painted-snipe**, for which a male was first reported from Kelly Swamp on 18 December by Deb and Rod Ralph (they thanked Lyndon for alerting them to it). It was then seen and photographed by many observers up to Christmas Day when, after a



Geoffrey Dabb

Australian Painted-snipe

Everyone welcome

Proposed attendees should make themselves familiar with COG's approved COVID Safety Plan for CGGS, the full details of which are available on COG's website.

The first though main presentation will be by **Jack Holland** on **"The Rise and Rise of the Eastern Koel in the ACT"**.

The Eastern Koel is a relatively recent arrival in the ACT, with the first report being in December 1985. Since that time numbers have increased almost exponentially, particularly following the first report of its local breeding in 2009. After a fledgling was first observed in his Chapman garden in January 2014, Jack has had a very keen interest in this species and has since published yearly summaries of the Koels in his local area, as well as, with the help of many observers, summaries for the past 4 seasons of Koel activity throughout the ACT. In this presentation he will summarise some of the interesting facts, including some surprising ones, he has learnt about the distribution, activity and breeding of the Eastern Koel in the ACT, and show that there is still lots to be discovered about this enigmatic species.

Following this the Blitz co-ordinator **Nicki Taws** will present the **preliminary findings of the 2020 annual COG Bird Blitz**, and will then hand out the prizes.

Committee Calling

The committee met on 21 January for its regular monthly meeting. This was our first face-to-face meeting since COVID. (We are happy to report that despite COVID we did meet every month in 2020 electronically.)

We are organising another committee planning day soon when we will work out how to implement ideas from the survey in 2019. Unfortunately, COVID slowed our attempts to do this last year.

Work on replacing COG's bird database is continuing. This has been a challenge for the Committee for a number of years as the bird database landscape has evolved and changed so dramatically; eg with the large migration of recording to eBird. We hope that we can develop an easy way to record data about local birds that complements other systems and simplify production of the Annual Bird Report in future. Due to problems with getting data into and out of the old database, the ABR for 2019-2020 has been delayed.

The Mulligans Flat Draft Strategy for 2020-2045 is open for public comment (available here - <https://www.yoursay.act.gov.au/mulligans-flat-woodland-sanctuary-draft-strategy>). The committee will be making some comments about the importance of encouraging ongoing community involvement and citizen science activities at Mulligans.

The committee will also make a submission about the development application for the area on Dairy Road near Jerrabomberra Wetlands (see <https://www.nca.gov.au/consultation/draft-development-control-plan-2101-part-block-11-section-38-fyshwick-dairy-road>). The submission will highlight the importance of protecting the Wetlands for birds and wildlife as pressures increase from surrounding uses. The Committee has also reopened a dialogue with ICON concerning issues around Fyshwick Treatment Ponds now that COVID restrictions on meetings have eased.

The committee has been asked to meet with the company undertaking environmental investigations at the North Curtin Horse Paddocks. This will allow us to reinforce our submission last June that called for maintaining a wide natural corridor along the creek to allow birds to continue to use the area and move through the landscape.

The committee (particularly, our secretary, Bill) continues to respond to many emails from the public and other community organisations asking for bird identifications; data relating to specific sites; advice on how to encourage some birds, and discourage others; etc. Regular Standing Items including finances, surveys and excursions were managed.

Neil Hermes *President*

Alison Mackerras *Minutes Secretary*

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

week's possible absence, it was joined by the more colourful female on 2 January. This led to some hope they might breed, but the pair was seen and photographed by fewer birders, with the last of them seen on 7 January. According to the 2018-2019 Annual Bird report (ABR, this rare, non-breeding visitor was last recorded at the big dam on Lake Rd off Lake George in February 2017 after the wet 2016 spring. There were suggestions then they may have bred, but this was never fully confirmed.

A spring/summer migrant less expected after a wet spring was the **Black-eared Cuckoo** heard on Jerrabomberra Wetlands NR Woodland loop by an anonymous eBirder on 30 December. Of the less common of these migrants, 1 or 2 **Painted Honeyeater** were still reported on eBird from the Mt Ainslie/Campbell Park eastern forest margin on four occasions between 4-28 December. However, sightings including photos on 1 and 12 December of 2 juveniles with yellow gapes were posted only on the COG chatline. The most recent report of this species was of a pair at Mulligans Flat NR by Liam Manderson on 30 December.

White-browed Woodswallows have been reported from only two locations over the period, from to the north of Gundaroo in both months, as well as 3 birds at Glendale Depot in Namadgi NP on 1 January. Up to 23 birds were reported from the former by Michael Lenz on 4 December, though at the time he was unsure whether any had started to breed. However, on 16 January he reported 4 to 5 pairs there, of which 3 at least had young earlier that week. Michael also reported a pair of **Masked Woodswallows** there on 3 December, with the only other report of this species being a single bird by Sandra Henderson seen at Lake Jerrabomberra NSW on 25 December.

The **Horsfield's Bushlark** was reported from 4 locations in both December and so far in January, most recently on Parkwood Rd by Lachlan Reed on 19 December. In contrast the **Brown Songlark** was reported from around 14 locations in December, but only 6 so far in



Hardhead

Julie Clark



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Good birding, good food

Top End birding tour

10 — 24 May 2021
Darwin, Kakadu, Katherine,
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Atherton Tablelands & Iron Range NP

Cairns & Atherton
31 May — 5 June 2021

Julatten to Iron Range NP

5 June — 13 June 2021

The Pilbara birding tours NW WA

29 June — 8 July 2021

12 July — 21 July 2021

Central Australia

6 — 16 August 2021
Alice Springs, West MacDonnell
Ranges, Glen Helen, Yulara,
Erdunda, Marla

Nullarbor Plain birding tour

5 - 20 September 2021

Plains-wanderer Weekends 2021

16 & 17 October 2021
30 & 31 October 2021
27 & 28 November 2021

Personal tours around Deniliquin, NSW, and all of Victoria.

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January, most recently from West Belconnen Pond by Michael Lenz on 14 January. Again, these sightings were mainly from the northern and eastern edges of Canberra. The **Rufous Songlark** was reported from over 25 locations in December, and a similar number so far in January, so does not seem to have yet started to depart. The same applies to the **White-winged Triller** which has also been reported from around 25 locations so far in January. The above species are the first spring/summer migrants to leave, so please keep an eye out for them during February.

The **Cicadabird**, which also has usually left by the end of February, was reported from 7 locations in December, and a remarkable 10 locations in January, many more summer sightings than usual, and so far in 2021 all from the mountains to the south-west of Canberra. Likewise, the **Brush Cuckoo**, which also often leaves by the end of February, was reported from 13 locations in December, 7 of these being to the northeast of Canberra including Mulligans Flat. So far in January 2021 it has been reported from 17 locations, 6 of them to the north and east of Canberra, again more sightings than I would expect in summer. There have been 3 reports of the **Channel-billed Cuckoo** over the period, single birds from Ngunnawal on 27 November, from the Kowen Forest on 19 December, and Macarthur on 5 January. Despite the wetter spring the more inland cuckoos do not appear to be present in large numbers, with the **Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo** being recorded from just 8 locations in December and 7 so far in January, and the **Pallid Cuckoo** from just 5 locations in December and so far in 2021, with none since 6 January.

Surprisingly there have been no reports of the **White-throated Needletail** during the period, and only two reports of 3 and 4 of the related **Fork-tailed Swift** over Jerrabomberra Wetlands NR on 21-22 January, reflecting the drier time over the past 9 weeks. They are a species to look out for during February especially as storm fronts approach, though they can also be seen hawking in clean air as the above were.

In respect of “unusual” species the most unexpected were the **Budgerigars** to which Ryu Callaway first alerted chatline subscribers as they were reported to Canberra Nature Map rather than eBird. These were 2 birds from near Mt Clear Campground, Namadgi NP on 23 December, 6 birds feeding on Wallaby Grass on Tinderry Rd, east of Michelago on 25 December, and 4 birds on Mountain Creek Rd, Mullion, on the route from Uriarra to Wee Jasper on 28 December. Ryu noted the remote locations and numbers of these birds suggested a wild origin. Con Boekel then posted a link to an article on the **Budgerigar** boom following rains in the dry country, and subsequently Kim Farley recorded 3 birds at Naas Road at Apollo Road on 4 January, and Deb and Rod Ralph one bird on Tharwa Drive opposite Lanyon Homestead on 6 January.

The 2018-2019 ABR lists it as a rare, non-breeding visitor/escapee with records of single birds most probably being escapees, and notes that, while wild flocks may have been recorded in the COG Aol in the past, there are no records of this occurring in the present data set. So these are rare records indeed. Another “unusual” species that was not previously reported in 2020 was the **Australian Little Bittern**, first heard by an anonymous eBirder at Jerrabomberra Wetlands NR on 18 November, and then reported by a number of observers. It proved to be quite elusive and was often heard only or fleetingly seen to 31 December, with then only a couple of sightings on 16 January.

Perhaps not “unusual” but a rare breeding visitor at an unexpected location was the **Chestnut-rumped Heathwren** first reported by Con Boekel at Black Mountain Nature Reserve on 9 December. Two birds were together in the artificial heathlands at the western downslope end of the high-tension powerlines. Con noted these heathland/tall grass areas were being maintained under the powerlines, presumably to reduce potential wildfire damage, and there was potential for other individuals to be present in or near the Burgan which is spreading on the southern and south-western slopes of Black Mountain and the southern slopes of the ANBG Annexe. This species was subsequently recorded here on 3 occasions between 12-19 December, with Zebedee Muller seeing and taking some excellent photos on the first date. It is interesting to speculate how long this relatively poorly mobile species has been there as well as how it got there, the nearest known location for them being at Bluetts Block around 8 km away. A 2021 sighting there was by Sue Lashko on 22 January who heard one giving its tweet tweet witchey woo call; it was then seen clearly perched, with its cocked tail, rufous rump, eyebrow, and heavily streaked breast and throat.

Another unexpected observation was the immature **Australasian Figbird** reported on 30 December by Ryu Callaway, Sandra Henderson and Lia Battisson on the Molonglo River near the RSPCA/Tuggeranong Parkway. Ryu noted that they had dismissed the bird as an immature **Olive-backed Oriole** at the time, but after examining the extra photos he took, the facial markings and beak shape seemed to be a good fit for an immature figbird. This had not been as obvious in the field due to poor light and relative inexperience with immature figbirds. This species is not mentioned in the 2018-2019 ABR and Ryu noted eBird has only 3 occurrences of them in the ACT, in December 2009, January 2019 and April 2020, so it was quite an unusual sighting. Of special interest to me was that it was photographed with a **Satin Bowerbird**, a similarly plumaged bird.

Sandra clarified that they had interacted; the Figbird was first in the tree before the Bowerbird came in below, then flew up and made a half-hearted “attack”, before both flew off into a large pine tree.

A **Blue-billed Duck** was regularly reported only from Jerrabomberra Wetlands NR during December, but only on several occasions to 12 January when the focus had turned to Upper Stranger Pond from 1 January where up to 3 were reported before Kim Farley first reported a brood of 5 ducklings on 11 January (see further below). Julie Clark then reported one from Yerrabi Pond on 20 January. In contrast, apart from those in the Sanctuary at Tidbinbilla NR, only the single **Musk Duck** was reported from the western foreshores of Googong Dam on 8 December. However, on 2 January a single duck was reported from Barooka Wetland south of Michelago, before a large number of observers reported a female from the large dam at Uriarra Station between 17-26 January.

After not being reported for 9 months, up to 12 **Freckled Duck** were reported from 6 December to the time of writing. Two **Plumed Whistling-Duck** were reported on 25 December by Liam Manderson at the Macarthur Horse Paddocks. They were heard flying over while spotlighting in the paddocks for quail. He was unable to get then in the spotlight, but heard their characteristic high-pitched whistles constantly as they flew over, heading from the tip in the direction of Lake Tuggeranong. Up to 16 were seen at the Trucking Yard Lane dam Bungendore during the period, where up to 50 **Australian Shelduck** have also been reported, though Michael Lenz saw 130 at east Lake George on 28 December.

Apart from some records of a single bird at West Belconnen Pond up to 3 December, throughout the period **Great Crested Grebes** have been reported only from locations around the Cotter Dam, where they have bred successfully (see below). The **Common Sandpiper** has continued to be reported from Isabella Pond, only a few times in December but much more in January, no doubt from birders wanting to include it on their 2021 ACT list. A **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** was reported from Jerrabomberra Wetlands NR by a number of observers between 16-18 January, and a **Caspian Tern** was reported from there on 6 and 12 December, as well as at the Trevillian Quay and Kingston foreshore by Mikayla Burke on 6 January. From 11 December an **Intermediate Egret** was regularly reported from Jerrabomberra Wetlands NR, culminating in 2 birds seen there on 20 December.

A **Black Kite** was reported from Uriarra Village on 28 December, Jerrabomberra Wetlands NR on 15 January, and at Shepherd’s Lookout on 26 January. Otherwise none of the rarer raptors have again been reported, though there were reports of a **Black-shouldered Kite** from Ginninderra Creek Nichols on 8 December and from the nearby Crace Pond on 10 January. An immature **Powerful Owl** was photographed at Warks/Blundells Creek Roads on 9 and 21 December.

A **White-headed Pigeon** was reported on 31 December from the Lyrebird Trail at Tidbinbilla NR. An **Azure Kingfisher** was reported from Cotter Bend and Kambah Pool NR during December, and from these as well as a third spot on the Murrumbidgee River at the Uriarra Loop Track during January, suggesting that this species is either very mobile or more likely it is present at a number of spots along the river. All reports in January being within 9 days lends support to the latter, but there was then a bird reported from Sullivans Creek on 22-23 January. A **Cockatiel** was reported from Mulligans Flat NR on 30 December, as well as two from Nelanglo TSR north of Gundaroo on the same day.

A male **Scarlet Honeyeater** was first reported close to the horse gate at Campbell Park on 6 January, and was then seen there by many observers up to 18 January. There were then reports, including of a pair, from Namadgi Visitors Centre from 17-25 January, as well as a bird heard at East Uriarra Reserve on 22 January. Finally two **Blue-faced Honeyeaters** were reported from Curtin on 19 December, and a single bird from the National Zoo and Aquarium on 6 January.

Of the special birds I have been asking readers to keep a special lookout for during 2020, the **Jacky Winter** was reported only from the known location, Namadgi Visitors Centre. The **Hooded Robin** was not reported during December, but from 3 locations so far in January, with many reports of up to 3 birds at Naas Rd at Apollo Rd, 3 birds on the nearby Apollo Rd on 1 January, and one bird at a new site (Burra Rd, Michelago) on 7 January. The **Restless Flycatcher** has also been reported only from the known location to the north of Gundaroo, but the good news is that Michael Lenz told me on 16 January they had successfully raised a second brood of 2 young there.

It remains unclear to me why there should be fewer records of the above 3 species in late spring/summer, so please continue to look out for them. In contrast, apart from the known north of Gundaroo location, the **Crested Shrike-tit** was reported from 5 locations during December and 7 locations so far in January, all in the mountains to the west of the Murrumbidgee River, so it does look relatively secure, at least in this habitat.

As I foreshadowed several months ago, it has been a very good breeding season for the **Stubble Quail** with reports from over 65 locations in December, and slightly more than that number so far in January. It does not seem to have been as good for the **Brown Quail** reported from just 5 and 7 locations for December and January, respectively. **Painted Buttonquail** were reported from 2 locations during December, none of them new (so just 5 locations for 2020), and one in January so far when Shorty and Christine D photographed one on the road at Naas Rd, Tennent on 5 January; a rare opportunity indeed. A **Little Buttonquail** was reported after dark from the Macarthur horse paddocks on 3 occasions by Liam Manderson between 25-27 December, and one was seen by 4 observers at Naas Road at Apollo Road on 6 January.



Painted Buttonquail

Shorty

As might be expected based on the excellent conditions, particularly early on, there has been significant breeding activity reported over the period. Apart from the **Painted Honeyeater**, **White-browed Woodswallow** and **Restless Flycatcher** reported separately above, excellent waterbird breeding has in particular been very noticeable:

- Following a call from Bill Graham that there were 5 **Hardhead** ducklings at the pond in the Mulanggari Grasslands reserve, from 30 December Julie Clark visited a number of ponds in Gungahlin and found 4 other broods, two at both the big dam at Mulligans Flat and at the Valley Way Pond, of between 1 to 8 ducklings. Together with the 7 ducklings at Kelly Swamp, this is a remarkable **Hardhead** breeding event, noting Alastair Smith's recent article in CBN of how few ACT breeding records there are for this species, no doubt triggered by the good rain up to the end of November.
- This was followed by the observation of 5 **Blue-billed Duck** ducklings with their parents on Upper Stranger Pond, first reported by Kim Farley on 11 January, and subsequently by many others, though by 25 January only 3 seemed to have survived. Again, this is a rare breeding event with the BIRD INFO on the COG website indicating that there have been only 6 records of their breeding in the 35 years to 2017, all of dependent young, but only 3 records in spring/summer.



Blue-billed Duck

Kym Bradley



Pink-eared Duck

Shorty

- The **Pink-eared Ducks** have also had a good breeding season with *inter alia* Shorty and Christine D reporting 2 batches of ducklings and one duck still on the nest at Kelly swamp on 18 December. Again, there are only 10 breeding records on the BIRD INFO on the COG website, all of dependent young between December and April.
- **Great-crested Grebe** breeding on the Cotter Dam has been successful too, with on 30 December Sandra Henderson, Lia Battisson and Ryu Callaway taking special care to obtain an exact count of the breeding population they had been monitoring as accessed from Bracks Hole Road. Of the 18 birds counted, there were 5 young all still very small and stripy, as well as 2 birds still on the nest. On 5 January Sandra and Sue Lashko reported 6 chicks in total - three families with two chicks each. As I have noted previously the BIRD INFO data contains only 6 breeding records, just a few displays in October and dependent young from February to April, with no nest records at all, underlining the significance of this observation.
- **Australasian Darter** breeding has also been confirmed there with on 5 January Sandra reporting a total of 7 birds including some on nests, and with recently fledged young hanging around a nest where adults were already onto their second brood. However, the Molonglo River west of the Tuggeranong Parkway bridge is a more important site with on 30 December Sandra, Lia and Ryu reporting that after a careful count of individuals there were 44 **Australasian Darters** there, and many nests with young. There were also 60 **Little Pied Cormorants**, with many nests

with young, 7 **Great Cormorants** with occupied nests and 6 **Little Black Cormorant** nests with young. In my experience this is quite early in the season, clearly influenced by the much wetter spring. The **Little Pied Cormorants** at the Tuggeranong Marsh seem to have bred even earlier with on 7 December Sandra Henderson reporting 30 birds there. It was her best count as she was not sure of the numbers of young in all the nests. There were recently fledged young and occupied nests with up to five young in some nests. Taking into account the **Pied Stilt** and the **Silver Gull** breeding I noted earlier, and the very extensive reports of other ducks breeding, all in all it has been an excellent waterbird breeding season.

- It leaves only room for limited land bird breeding, the most noteworthy of these being Shorty and Christine D coming across a pair of **Red-browed Treecreepers** taking food to a nest on Bendora Road on 15 January, and not long after the young fledged. Again, this is a rare observation, as this species has been recorded breeding in only 9 of 36 years according to the 2018-2019 ABR.
- Last but not least it has been a very good breeding season for the **Eastern Koel** with to date reports of 60 fledglings coming to my attention, the highest number at this time in my now 7 seasons of monitoring this breeding. This includes good evidence of a **Magpie-lark** being the host for the first time in Canberra.

So please watch out for the last of the early departing spring/summer migrants mentioned above, in particular for the **White-throated Needletail** and **Fork-tailed Swift**, as well as for further breeding activity. Please continue a special look out for the **Restless Flycatcher**, **Jacky Winter** and **Hooded Robin**.

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.

Jack Holland

Notice to members

I am writing to all members about the status of the COG Annual Bird Report (ABR). At the COG committee meeting last Thursday it was decided that at this stage we are not able to assemble the 2019-20 ABR. We are still in the position of not knowing how to input records to the various COG databases or how to produce the individual species files necessary for the ABR. The immediate implication is that there will be no ABR report available for Volume 46 #1 of CBN although we may be in a position to fill the volume with other material.

The production of the ABR is a major undertaking for COG with the process starting in early July and ending up with the publication in Canberra Bird Notes around February/March. There are a total of 17-20 COG members contributing their time at various stages of the production, with the ABR costing about \$1500 to publish.

In addition to looking for a Database Manager, we are now in the position of looking for an Editor for the ABR with Paul Fennell wishing to retire, having occupied the position over the last 12 years.

The committee feels that the ABR is a most valuable way to assemble, check and distribute information within the COG database collected over the previous 12 months. If you have any thoughts on how to improve the ABR or distribute the information in a different way, or you can suggest changes to the format, please let me know.

For those who may not be aware, individual species reports can be found at [Birds of the Capital Region - Canberra Birds](#) then click on 'Bird Info' and then click on a species of interest, then on 'Data Sheet'.

Thanks you for your past contributions and for your understanding of the difficult position that we find ourselves in over the COG database issue, in particular our not being able to fill the position of Database Manager.

Chris Davey (COG Committee Member)

Report of a Latham's Snipe survey in Namadgi National Park

2 December 2020

The National Snipe Survey, involving members of the Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG) and other volunteers, has provided a reasonable idea on the number of Latham's Snipe on the lowland lakes and swamps of the ACT. Records from the High Country are very patchy and to my knowledge there has been no systematic survey conducted in the wetlands of the Brindabella Ranges.

Frith (*Birds in the Australian High Country*, 1976) makes no specific mention of Latham's Snipe except that they favour swampy locations and wet grassland whilst Wilson (*Birds of the ACT; Two Centuries of Change*, 1999) notes that there have been occasional reports from mountain swamps.

On talking to local ACT Rangers and others who spend time in the High Country, there is mention of Latham's Snipe being seen but very few of these observations appear to be documented.

In the COG database, which captures eBird and Birddata records, there are occasional *ad hoc* records of sightings at Glendale, Birrigai, Mt Clear, Nursery Swamp, Honeysuckle Creek Bogs, Corin Road at the start of the Square Rock walk, Old Boboyan Road at Bulls Hat Creek and Old Boboyan Road at Grassy Creek.

The ACT Action Plan for Listed Migratory Species (March 2018) lists High Country wetlands that are listed in the Directory of Important Wetlands: Bendora Reservoir, Ginini and Cheyenne Flats, Snowy Flats, Cotter Flats, Rock Flats, Upper Cotter River, Nursery Swamp, Rotten Swamp, Scabby Range, Cotter Source and Upper Naas Creek but none, to my knowledge, have been specifically surveyed for Latham's Snipe although the Action Plan lists Birrigai, Nursery Swamp, Upper reaches of the Naas River and Ginini Flats as High Country locations where Latham's Snipe have been recorded.

On Wednesday 2 December 2020 a trial survey was conducted in the Namadgi National Park. Six COG members and friends, accompanied by three ACT Parks and Conservation Rangers were given approval to survey sections of Bogong Creek, Orroral Valley and Nursery Swamp, all areas still closed to the public from the January 2020 bush fires. All areas, though severely burnt, appeared to be well on the way to recovery with vegetation covering the recently deposited silt which was up to 25cms deep in places. A team of three including one Ranger walked into and surveyed Nursery Swamp, whilst two teams of three including the other Rangers drove to Bogong Creek and then moved on to Orroral Valley. Each team, wearing waders, walked three abreast, keeping 1.5m apart where possible and following the edge of the swamp walking slowly for about 1 hour and then returning either along the same route or a different route either deeper into the swamp or back via dry land.

The Nursery Swamp team started walking at -35.6709 148.9565, spread out across the swamp and then returned a similar way trying to cover as much of the swamp as possible, covering a distance of 3.32 km over 1.5 hours. At Bogong Creek both teams started walking at -35.7605 148.9591. The first team walked upstream for approximately 1 km and then returned via the nearby road. The second team walked downstream for 1 hour and returned through the middle of the swamp covering 2.35 km. At Orroral Valley both teams started opposite the Orroral Valley Tracking Station at -35.6284 148.9585 and walked for 45 minutes. The first team walked across the swamp and then downstream on the far bank returning across the swamp so covering approximately 0.65 km, whilst the second team covered 1.5 km along the near bank and returned via dry land.

At Nursery Swamp approximately 3.32 km of suitable habitat was covered with 3.35 km at Bogong Creek and 2.15 km at Orroral Valley. No Latham's Snipe were flushed and there were no signs of feathers, droppings or their characteristic feeding patterns in the silt.

Both Bogong Creek and Orroral Valley swamps were covered in dense Phragmites with pools of open water and wet silt throughout the area (see Photos 1 and 2). At Bogong Creek the Phragmites was growing to a height of approximately 1m whilst at Orroral Valley the Phragmites was taller to a height of approximately 1.5m. At Nursery Swamp the dominant sedge is *Carex gaudichaudiana* (Fen Sedge) with some patches of Phragmites (see Photo 3). There are patches of mud alongside the creek and around the occasional pools of open water (see Photo 4) but the swamp is largely comprised of dense sedge cover. Of interest is the rate of vegetation recovery and the silt load in the swamps. Although not assessed, the fresh silt appeared

devoid of invertebrates and this could possibly account for the bird's apparent absence. The intensity of the fire may also have baked the soil and killed invertebrates within.

The bird list for Bogong Creek can be found at [eBird Checklist S76965617](#), for Orroral Valley at [eBird Checklist S76965659](#), and for Nursery Swamp at [eBird ChecklistS77356740](#). A list of birds recorded on the 3.2 km walk into Nursery Swamp is at [eBird ChecklistS77357150](#).

We regard this trial survey as a success despite no Latham's Snipe being detected. The three areas, although recovering from the January bushfires, represent High Country areas in the ACT where Snipe are likely to occur. We recommend that the survey protocol be repeated for any future assessment of Snipe numbers in the High Country of the ACT.

The survey was run by Lori Gould and Chris Davey. We thanks Rangers Nick Thorne and Nathan Kay for arranging access and, addition, Ranger Miriam Fokker for accompanying the teams. We also thank Michael Robbins, Nicki Taws, John Bundock and Sophie Mills for surveying and to Clare Mcinnes, Biodiversity, Planning and Policy, Environmental Division, EPSDD for arranging a grant from the ACT Migratory Species Action Plan to cover equipment, food and fuel.

Chris Davey (13 December 2020)



Photo 1. Typical Latham's snipe habitat at Bogong Creek



Photo 2. Typical Latham's snipe habitat at Orroral Valley



Photo 4. Typical Latham's snipe habitat at Nursery Swamp



Photo 3. Typical view of Nursery Swamp

Future Field Trips

COG Trips

Each participant must sign a COG Field Trip Registration Form at the start of each trip and before proceeding on the trip which acknowledges the participant's responsibilities (wording follows). An Emergency Contact Name and Number are required.

"I declare that I am capable of undertaking the 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 that I am adequately equipped.

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

Changes to trips are notified on the COG chatline <http://canberrabirds.org.au/publications/discussion-email-list/> and trips page of COG website <http://canberrabirds.org.au/category/trips/>.

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.

Be Covid-safe on COG field trips:

Maintain social distancing of 1.5 metres
Maintain hand hygiene

DO NOT ATTEND if you have any cold or flu symptoms

Sunday 7 February – Warks Road/Blundells Creek Road

Meet at 7.30am at the corner of Cotter Road and Uriarra Road (opposite Uriarra Homestead). The walk will involve a car shuffle to allow us to walk slowly down Blundells Creek Road and along part of Warks Road. Bring hat, sunscreen, plenty of water and morning tea. The walk will end before lunch.

Register with Sandra Henderson at shirmax2931@gmail.com - please include your mobile and emergency contact name and number.

Sunday 14 February 2021 - Molonglo Reach Boat Trip

Description: This outing/cruise will be on the upper parts of Lake Burley Griffin (East Basin) and the adjacent Molonglo Reach, where late summer/early autumn is historically the peak time for breeding of darters as well as three species of cormorant there. The area also has a variety of water birds, and a range of land birds can be seen on the banks.

We will again be travelling in the electric boat "MV Gull" which allows both a quiet approach as well as access to areas difficult to get to from the land.

Meeting time: The boat will depart at 8:00 am and the trip will last about 2 hours and will cost \$20, payable in cash on boarding.

Meeting place: Kingston Boat Harbour at Trevillian Quay. Participants will need to leave their cars in Eastlake Parade, where there is free all-day weekend street parking, or in the Glass Works/Bus Depot Markets car park and walk across Eastlake Parade and down Trevillian Quay. Once you have crossed the canal, keep going straight ahead for around 50 m until you reach a gap between the buildings. Turn right and Wharf 6 and the boat should be clearly visible after 20 m once you reach the harbour.

Name of leader and contact details: To participate, please contact Jack Holland by email on jandaholland@bigpond.com – please include your mobile and emergency contact name and number. When going to press this trip was close to fully subscribed as we had nearly reached the maximum of 20 passengers allowed by the current COVID-19 restrictions. A short wait list will be started.

Sunday 21 February – Uriarra TSR

This is a little-visited Travelling Stock Reserve on Uriarra Rd.

Meet outside the reserve gate at 8am. There is limited space for cars to park on the roadside, so numbers will be limited. I may be able to arrange for the gate to be unlocked for the day, but if not it may be necessary to use a step-ladder (which I'll bring) to get over the gate. There are some steepish sections through the reserve, but there should be a range of bush birds to find. Please pre-register at shirmax2931@gmail.com - please include your mobile and emergency contact name and number. The walk should take about two hours. As usual, wear sturdy shoes and a hat, bring water and sunscreen.

Sunday 28 February – Flea Bog Flats and surrounds

For this morning's outing please meet at the park/playground off Jaeger Circuit, Bruce and park off the road on the left, just past Weatherburn Place on your right -35.2497 149.0824 for those with a navigation system. We will meet at 8:30 and head off to explore this little gem in the middle of the Belconnen suburbs. We will then continue to explore O'Connor Ridge ending up at Gossan Hill.

Register at chris_davey@aapt.net.au - please include your mobile and emergency contact name and number.

For further details contact Chris Davey MOB 0418 679 847

Sunday 7 March – Wee Jasper

This outing will include a visit to private property, as well as a walk along part of the Hume and Hovell Track. Meet at Stromlo Forest Park carpark at 7.00 am for carpooling. Bring morning tea and lunch. Snakes should be out and about, so take the usual precautions with footwear and clothing, and carry a snake bandage. Please register with Sue Lashko at smlashko@gmail.com- please include your mobile and emergency contact name and number.

Advance notice of Easter camp

Friday 2 to Monday 5 April - Wanganella Easter Camp

This camp will be on private property at Wanganella north of Deniliquin. We will be able to access an old shearers' kitchen and bathroom, although facilities are limited. Very basic hot showers, electric kettle, microwave oven and toaster, and a dining room are available. There are a range of places in the Wanganella/Deniliquin/Mathoura areas to bird, and on a previous Easter camp even the area around our camp was rich in birdlife. There is plenty of space for campers. It is expected most participants will arrive Thursday/Friday, and leave Monday. The property is about 60km from Deniliquin, and on one day we will travel to Mathoura about 90km south of the property.

If interested please let me know. Register with Sandra Hemderson at shirmax2931@gmail.com- please include your mobile and emergency contact name and number, or email me if you have questions.

Field Trip Reports

Sunday 29 November - Callum Brae NR

Ten members and guests joined me for a walk at Callum Brae. The cicadas were singing loudly as we gathered at the start, and the noise was unrelenting for the whole morning. Shortly after we started the wind came up, and gusts were very strong at times. These factors combined to make it a very difficult morning of birding, reflected in the low number of species seen or heard.

Weeds, and in particular the huge swathes of tall Saffron Thistles, kept us largely confined to the tracks, although these too were rather overgrown in places. On the upside, all the dams are full to overflowing, although waterbirds numbers were very low on the day.

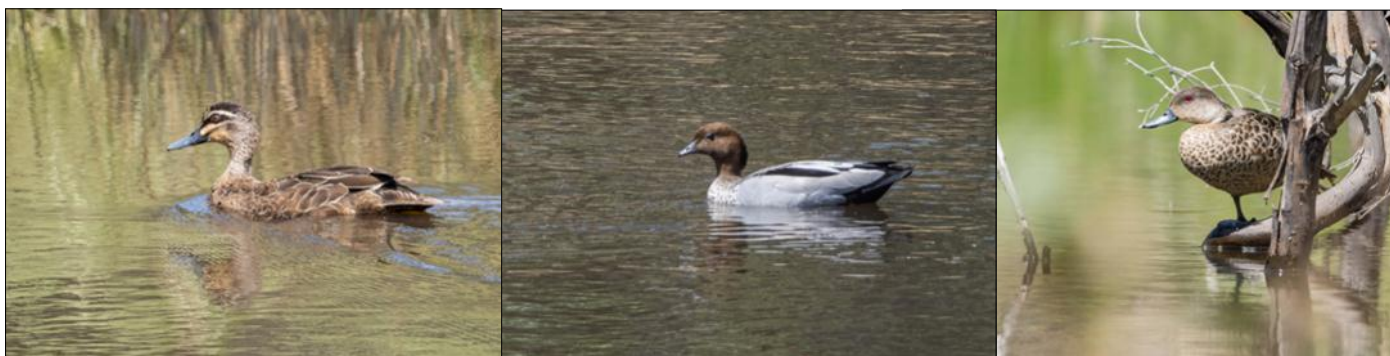
Throughout the morning groups of **Australian White Ibis** were seen flying overhead, and three **Little Pied Cormorants** also flew over. **Striated Pardalotes** were observed entering and leaving hollows in a known nest tree, and an **Australian Reed Warbler** was seen carrying food across a dam. A **Magpie-Lark** was at a nest with an unknown number of chicks. The only raptor for the morning was an **Australian Hobby** preening in a tree on the Mugga Mugga property.

Sandra Henderson



Long-billed Corella

Peter Higgins



Pacific-black Duck, Australian Wood Duck, Grey Teal, Striated Pardalote, Superb Fairy-wren

Peter Higgins

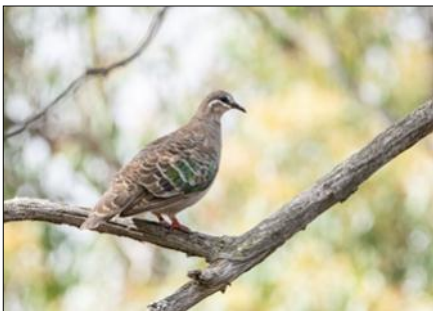
Sunday 13 December – Aranda Bushland NR

An enthusiastic group of 13 enjoyed a very productive outing to the south-west corner of Aranda Bushland. With two eagle-eyed teenagers and 5 Aranda/Cook locals among our party, birds didn't have a chance of being overlooked. It took us some time to move more than about 30 metres from the entrance gate as 18 different species showed themselves along the adjacent creek line including **Leaden Flycatchers** and **Brown-headed Honeyeaters** each with a recently fledged young, **Common Bronzewing**, **Striated Thornbills** and **Noisy Friarbirds**.

Birds seemed determined to give us all prolonged views, including a **Striated Pardalote** that called for about 5 minutes from a dead stick at the top of a low eucalypt sapling and a pair of **Spotted Pardalotes** that stopped in dead sticks along with 2 recently fledged young. A pair of **Gang-gang Cockatoos** took turns working on the entrance to a hollow, with the female almost disappearing inside before the pair engaged in some mutual grooming.

In total, of the 34 species recorded, 10 exhibited some form of breeding behaviour; in addition to those mentioned above, a **Crimson Rosella** was seen exiting a hollow, **Noisy Friarbirds** had a nest with 3 large young, **Olive-backed Orioles** and **Magpie-larks** had occupied nests, and **Pied Currawongs** and **White-winged Choughs** were feeding this season's young. Apart from the **Leaden Flycatcher** pair mentioned above, 2 other pairs were also in breeding mode, one pair at the final stages of nest building and another pair with an occupied nest. All 3 pairs were within about 50 metres of each other.

Sue Lashko



Common Bronzewing, Crested Pigeon,
Gang-gang Cockatoo, Gang-gang Cockatoo,
Noisy Friarbird, Leaden Flycatcher

Peter Higgins

Wednesday 16 December - Lyrebird Trail, Tidbinbilla NR

Twelve keen souls met at the Mountain Creek carpark, on a very wet and rather gloomy morning. The rain persisted through much of the walk.

A **Shining Bronze-Cuckoo** called several times as we gathered at the carpark and, although we heard several birds along the first part of the track, few were seen. At the first bridge, I and one other member of the group caught brief glimpses of a male **Rose Robin**, which disappeared much too quickly. Following that moment of excitement, we saw no birds for a considerable distance, although we admired the fringe lilies, trigger plants and a couple of hyacinth orchids about to burst into flower. On the downward track, a **Common Cicadabird** called close by, then flew into the top of a dead tree next to the track - a lifer for some, and a welcome addition to year lists for others. In the same area, most saw a **Rufous Fantail** which proved to be camera-shy.

We managed only 25 species for the walk, but some of those were very special, so we were all well satisfied.

Sandra Henderson

Sunday 17 January – Uriarra

The first outing for 2021 began as usual at Uriarra Homestead dam with 28 participants enjoying perfect weather for birding: mild, still and sunny. Among the 38 species recorded at the large and small dam and the surrounding area were a female **Musk Duck**, two **Nankeen Night Herons**, two **Black-fronted Dotterels**, and a steady stream of **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos** flying over.

Our next stop was Uriarra West where a short walk along the riverside yielded 24 species, the highlight of which was a female **Satin Bowerbird** feeding a juvenile with butterflies which the adult de-winged before presenting them to its offspring. An **Olive-backed Oriole** was on a nest, a **White-faced Heron** did a fly-over and the usual array of small bush birds kept us busy.

At Uriarra East picnic area, despite lots of picnickers, swimmers and dogs, we recorded 37 species. Breeding activity included **Leaden Flycatchers** ON, **Galah** FY, **Noisy Friarbird** ON, NY and FY, **White-winged Chough** ON and juvenile **Olive-backed Oriole** and **Willie Wagtail**. Raptors put on a good show with a pair each of **Wedge-tailed Eagles** and **Nankeen Kestrels**, and a **Brown Falcon**.

Many people had not visited Stony Creek Nature Reserve so we did a short walk into the first section of the reserve. A **Dollarbird** flew over on the way in but then obligingly perched to give good views on our way out. The resident **Pied Butcherbirds** with their two offspring showed well, with one of the offspring hassling a perched **Nankeen Kestrel**. The most notable absentee for the morning was **Rainbow Bee-eater**.



Nankeen Kestrel

Richard Arculus

The total of 60 species was a good introduction to ACT birds for the birding newcomers who joined the morning outing.

Sue Lashko

Wednesday 20 January – Lindsay Prior Arboretum

Approximately 23 members gathered at the National Rock Garden for a stroll around the Lindsay Prior Arboretum. Sandra gave some remarks explaining the career of Lindsay Prior which clearly justified him having an Arboretum named after him. For some reason the nearest eBird Hotspot is called Barrenjoey Point.

As we headed off a number of brown ground-loving birds were seen and originally identified as **Australasian Pipits**. On looking closely several of them were soon renamed as female **White-winged Trillers**. Personally, I always find them a difficult species to identify, usually arriving at that species as the bird fails to meet the characteristics of all other brown ground-favouring species.

Other species added to the list before we reached the trees included an overflying **Australian Darter**, **Yellow-rumped Thornbills**, **Crested Pigeon**, **Dusky Woodswallow**, **Australian Magpie** and **Magpie-lark**. We followed the edge of the lake, hearing many, and seeing a surprising proportion of, **Australian Reed-Warbler**. The trees did not seem to be a favoured habitat and few species were added in this stretch.

As we got back closer to the bike track several less common species were added. An adult **Nankeen Night-Heron** flew back and forth across the water. It seemed to be nervous of humans, and was possibly further agitated by the harassment by several **Noisy Miners**. Three **Dollarbirds** were seen as well as a single **Sacred Kingfisher**. Close to the start of the road into the Arboretum, several **Striated** and **Yellow Thornbills** were heard.

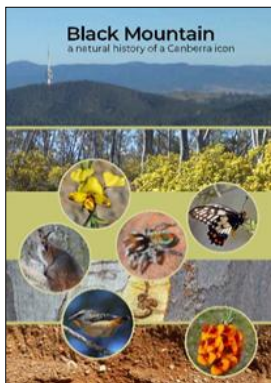
Overall we recorded 41 species in 146 minutes.

Martin Butterfield

Publications for Sale

COG provides a range of birdwatching related publications for sale to members at discounted prices (around 10-30% off RRP). Contact Kathy on sales@canberrabirds.org.au if you would like to purchase a publication.

Black Mountain: a natural history of a Canberra icon



Ian Fraser and Rosemary Purdie with Friends of Black Mountain

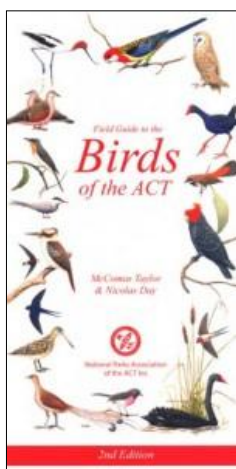
This book takes us to the ecological heart of Black Mountain, in the heart of Canberra, a conservation reserve since 1970. Find out about the area's geological evolution, its native plants and animals and their habitats, how the biodiversity has changed over the last three decades, and how species survive fires and storms and are affected by invaders. Meet the enthusiastic professional and citizen scientists who have been keenly documenting and studying more than 640 plant species and thousands of insects and other animals living on the mountain, and learn about the challenges for maintaining the area's natural values in the coming decades.

This attractive and richly illustrated book is published to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Black Mountain Nature Reserve. It is a good read for the general public as well as ecologists, conservationists, and senior secondary and tertiary students, with clues to explore and protect this special place, now and into the future.

Members' Price: \$30

Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT

McComas Taylor & Nicolas Day



This revised second edition illustrates in colour the 217 birds likely to be seen in and around the ACT. It has easy-to-follow descriptions in a compact format. Only local birds are shown making this Field Guide much simpler to use than comprehensive national guides. McComas Taylor has been watching birds in Canberra for over 30 years and has written, broadcast and lectured on the subject. Nicholas Day is widely recognised as one of Australia's foremost wildlife artists.

Members' price: \$20.

New Places: December 2020—January 2021

Sandra Henderson

Mundoonen Nature Reserve

Where is it: Hume Highway, between Yass and Goulburn (which is a stretch of the highway those of us in Canberra seldom travel).

I was there as part of a small team undertaking bird surveys. Lia and Sue have also been involved, as well as Ned on the first occasion.

Survey areas have been marked by the local organisers. In addition to surveying birds, I've also entered a few records into Canberra Nature Map for interesting plants. Our first survey, in early December, turned up **Varied Sittellas**, no less than seven **Olive-backed Orioles**, and 10 **White-throated Treecreepers**. On the January survey the highlight was a **Gang-gang** family, perched together on a branch. It's an interesting reserve, with our surveys mainly being along vehicle tracks. We've since been informed that there have only ever been two previous sightings of Gang-gangs in the reserve, back in 2003!



Gang-gang Cockatoo

Sandra Henderson

Bangalee Nature Reserve

Where is it: on the Shoalhaven River, near Nowra.

I visited with Ryu and Zebedee after a day at Lake Wollumboola. We called in because there had been records in the past for **Green Catbird**, which some members of our little group wanted for their life lists. There is a mown track along the river. Although views of the river are frustrated by the tall vegetation. At some point a strange call alerted us to the presence of the target species, which we were able to locate. We also heard **Brown Cuckoo-Dove** and **Wonga Pigeon**, and saw **Crested Shrike-Tit**, **Eastern Whipbird**, **Red-Whiskered Bulbul** and **Black-faced Monarch**. EBird lists over 100 species for this reserve, so definitely worth more time in the future.

Taemas Bridge

Where is it: a bridge over the Murrumbidgee in the Wee Jasper area

Ben Serafin from Yass LLS has recently kayaked down the river in this area, and came across some waders he thought were



Sharp-tailed Sandpiper

Sander Henderson

Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, but sought confirmation. Ryu investigated access on foot, so we set off to find these birds. We walked from the bridge to a series of wetland areas created by the river in this wetter-than-usual season.

A five-hour, ten km walk produced 58 species in this quite remarkable habitat. Much of it was easy walking, but there were a couple of spots I'd not choose to do too often!

The target waders did turn out to be **Sharp-tailed Sandpipers** (12 in all), but other species seen along the way included **Great Crested Grebes**, a **Great Egret**, **Pied Stilts**, **Stubble Quail**, over 70 **Australian Pelicans**, six raptor species, **Eurasian Skylarks** and **Brown Songlarks**.

Lambing Flat Chinese Tribute Garden and Chinamans Dam Reserve

Where is it: Pitstone Rd, Young, NSW

A really nice picnic area on the outskirts of town. We saw no really unusual birds, but did observe an odd display by a pair of Eurasian Coots – in shallow water, facing each other with bowed heads touching, while one bird raised his wings repeatedly. There are several ponds, BBQs, picnic tables, and the Tribute Garden recognizes the contribution of the early Chinese settlers. If you're in the area this is well worth a visit.

Another new spot visited in the past two months included Broken Dam Rd in the Harden area, where two Spotted Harriers were well worth a quick roadside stop!

Woodland Surveys

late spring/early summer 2020 survey round

compiled by Jenny Bounds

After abundant rainfall over spring, weed growth including introduced grasses at some woodland sites was significant. Saffron Thistle was a metre or more high, with patches impenetrable, at some sites.

Mulligans Flat NR

Jenny Bounds and the team surveyed on Sunday 6 December, in quite windy and cool conditions after a strong, overnight weather change, not optimum survey conditions. However, some sheltered sites had reasonable numbers of birds, and a reasonable number of species were calling. Large-bodied birds were more prominent than small insectivores. A total of 51 species was recorded, on the low end for this time of year, no doubt due to the conditions. There were no robins recorded but there were a number of breeding records, with dependent young for **Noisy Friarbirds**, **Noisy Miners** and **White-winged Choughs**, as well as on the first dam past the Sanctuary main gate, **Australian Wood Ducks** with 19 ducklings, and a pair of **Australasian Grebes** with 3 babies. **White-winged Triller** and **Varied Sittella** were heard in the woodland near the large dam, and a **Pallid Cuckoo** was around on the eastern side of the reserve. A **Grey Currawong** was recorded at site 4, north of the Woolshed, an area where there are nest records some years. **Superb Parrots** were at the entrance gate and near the edges of Forde, commonly recorded there. The only two raptors seen were a **Brown Goshawk** and **Australian Kestrel**. The flowering grasses in the reserve were looking great after the good spring rains.

Gooroo NR (north)

Nicki Taws did the survey on a cool overcast early December morning. The native grasses were lush and long and somewhat wet, but there were no weed and thistle jungles as was the case in so many woodland areas this season. The usual spring migrants were vocal including **Noisy Friarbird**, **Sacred Kingfisher**, **Grey Fantail**, **Leaden Flycatcher** and both **gerygones**, although it seemed as though there were fewer **Rufous Whistlers** than usual and no **Olive-backed Orioles**. Highlights included up to a dozen **Stubble Quail** calling from various patches of grassland, a small group of **Varied Sittellas**, 2 **Superb Parrots** flying through, **Speckled Warbler**, **White-winged Trillers** outside survey sites, and a **Brush Cuckoo** calling. **Pallid Cuckoo** was also calling. Dependent young were recorded for **White-winged Chough**, **Buff-rumped Thornbill**, **White-throated Gerygone** and **Australian Raven**. The only honeyeater apart from friarbird was **Brown-headed Honeyeater**. The only raptor species was a couple of **Wedge-tailed Eagles** perched on Sammy's Hill.

Gooroo NR (south)

Steve Holliday and Prue Buckley did the survey on 15 December. Conditions were good but with an occasional drop of rain, and increasingly humid as the morning progressed. As elsewhere, there was phenomenal growth of weeds, forbs and grass in this part of the reserve. A total of 40 bird species was recorded during at survey sites, and 52 overall. Amongst the more interesting species found were 2 **Southern Whitefaces** between sites 1 and 8 at the southern end, the first since 2016 for these surveys, **Pied Butcherbird** was heard in several places, a **Brush Cuckoo** called in the distance, and quite a few **Stubble Quail** were calling.

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A good range of summer migrants were seen although, apart from a couple of very noisy **Rufous Songlarks**, these were mostly quiet and in low numbers. Species recorded included **White-throated** and **Western Gerygones**, **Noisy Friarbird**, **Rufous Whistler**, **Sacred Kingfisher**, **Dusky Woodswallow**, **Leaden Flycatcher**, **White-winged Triller** and **Olive-backed Oriole**. Other species of interest included **Speckled Warbler**, **Grey Currawong**, **Wedge-tailed Eagle** and **Brown Falcon**. There was a flock of 30+ **Spotted Pardalotes** at site 9. Breeding records were rather few but included 3 small **Australasian Grebe** chicks on one of the dams, **Common Starlings** and **Yellow-rumped Thornbills** carrying food, **Striated Pardalotes** entering a hollow, and **Superb Parrots** with begging young.

Majura Training Area (formerly Majura Field Firing Range)

Paul Fennell and Barbara Allan surveyed on 7 December, a cool, sunny, but quite windy Monday morning. Despite the conditions and missing a few of the regular species (like **Pied Currawong** and **Crested Pigeon**), they recorded a good total of 44 species, 39 species at sites and 5 species in between sites: **Common Bronzewing** (1), **Magpie-lark** (2), **Australasian Pipit** (2); **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo** (3), and an unidentified raptor (possibly a **Brown Goshawk**) on North Rd. There were **Crimson** and **Eastern Rosellas** around, with 12 **Red-rumped Parrots** at the Grenade Range site just north of the airport. Apart from a couple of **Noisy Friarbirds**, 1 or 2 **Red Wattlebirds** and a bunch of **Noisy Miners**, there were few honeyeaters. Summer migrants were **Rufous Whistlers** at some sites, **White-winged Triller** and **Dusky Woodswallows** at Mick's Dam, a couple of **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes**, 2 **Grey Fantails**, and 3 **Leaden Flycatchers** (with dependent young). **Australian Magpies** and **Australian Ravens** were common, but the only raptor identified was a **Nankeen Kestrel**. Mick's Dam, at the northern end of the range, was the only body of water where birds were observed, which included **Australian Wood Duck**, **Grey Teal**, **Eurasian Coot**, and **Australasian Grebe**. All dams were full to the brim. There were some interesting mixed flocks of small birds, including **Weebill**, **Buff** and **Yellow-rumped Thornbills**, **Brown Thornbill**, **Western** and **White-throated Gerygones**, **Superb Fairy-wren** and **Speckled Warblers** with dependent young.

Mt Majura NR

Kathy Walter, John Goldie and Duncan McCaskill conducted the surveys over two mornings, 30 November and 5 December. The vegetation was extremely lush with grasses above the waist at some sites. A total of 29 species was observed overall. Highlights were a single **Dusky Woodswallow**, **Sacred Kingfisher** calling at a couple of sites, a silent **Dollarbird**, **Brown-headed Honeyeaters** heard, and **Superb Parrots** and **Rainbow Lorikeets** at a number of sites. Small birds were pretty scarce with only 1-2 each of **Brown Thornbill**, **Superb Fairy-wren** and **Weebill**. **Speckled Warblers** and **Buff-rumped Thornbills**, usually regular at one or two sites, were found only in between the survey areas.

Mt Ainslie NR/Campbell Park

Michael Lenz did the survey of the 9 sites on the lower eastern slopes of Mt Ainslie on 4 December under a clear sky and light winds. Bird activity was largely restricted to a few patches, with only one of those at a survey site. Overall bird numbers were low. Species numbers/site ranged from 0 to 5, with the one exception of 12 species (and most of those were seen in a large Yellow Box). The most widespread species were **Galah** (5 sites) and **Noisy Miner** (4 sites). **Dusky Woodswallow**, **Grey Fantail** and **Little Raven** were seen each with one fledgling. The latter species nests only occasionally at Mt Ainslie. Other species of interest included **Brown Goshawk**, **Brown Falcon**, **Dollarbird**, **Brown-headed Honeyeater**, **Varied Sittella** and still very vocal **White-winged Trillers**. In total 23 species were recorded at sites and a further 18 off sites.

Newline



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Sue Lashko surveyed on Sunday 29 November, initially in light winds but by the end, the car radio was declaring a severe wind warning, unsurprising as limbs had been falling off burnt trees for the previous hour. The spring rains had resulted in incredible weed growth with thistles over 2 metres high making frequent detours necessary. It was a morning for raptors with a **Brown Goshawk** sitting tight, but a **Whistling Kite**, and a pair each of **Nankeen Kestrels** and **Wedge-tailed Eagles** appearing to enjoy the windy conditions. The most vocal migrant of the morning was the **Rufous Songlark** with birds spread throughout the Newline site. Other migrants included **Dollarbird**, **White-throated Gerygone**, **Sacred Kingfisher** and **Dusky Woodswallows**. Given the conditions, the low species count of 41 was unsurprising.

Jerrabomberra West NR

Jenny Bounds did the survey on Thursday 10 December, in very good weather conditions, and started very early. However, the weeds in the reserve were 'horrendous', especially saffron thistle on the track into the woodland patch and tall, dense, impenetrable thickets in some places. After negotiating the track covered in places by thistles, she managed to pick the way through to the 7 sites, going around dense thistle patches in places; a couple of the star pickets marking the sites were completely covered and inaccessible. Total bird species was on the low side for December, at 38. However, it was good to see a number of **White-winged Trillers** and **Dusky Woodswallows** active where they are usually recorded, and a couple of **Southern Whiteface** on the rocky slope near the woodland/grassland edge, **Tree Martins** at site1, and a couple of **Rufous Songlarks** in full voice. **Speckled Warbler** was recorded at one of the sites deep in the woodland. A few **Noisy Friarbirds** were around and the usual range of rosellas/parrots. There were no raptors. In the grasslands on the way in and out, at least 20 **Australasian Pipits**, and a **Eurasian Skylark** calling.

Tuggeranong Hill NR

Lia Battison surveyed on 28 November. The morning started out warm and grew to very warm by the end of the surveys. Birds were thinly dispersed across the Hill, with 9 being the maximum number of species at any one site. Breeding records were **Australian Magpie** and **Pied Currawong** feeding young, **Galah** and **Rainbow Lorikeets** sitting by hollows and a pair of **Leaden Flycatchers** building a nest. A **Nankeen Kestrel** was observed again, this time on site 4. A total of 24 species was observed during the surveys, and an additional 10 between sites.

Rural Leasehold near Tharwa

David McDonald conducted the survey on 9 December. As others observed this season, the native grasses (and in many places weeds) were growing profusely. Since David has been surveying birds at this site, he had never seen grass growth like it, mostly *Themeda* Kangaroo Grass, waist to chest high, and exceedingly dense throughout the whole site. Immense numbers of Red Eye Cicadas made an incredible din. The weather was apparently perfect, sunny, still, with a mild temperature. Despite that, both bird species diversity and bird abundance were surprisingly low, just 20 species (plus a **Leaden Flycatcher** between sites) and 65 birds in total. Three breeding records were **Galah** (occupied nest), **Grey Teal** (9 ducklings), and **Crimson Rosella** (dependent young). It was particularly pleasing to see the summer migrant **Rufous Songlarks** back, after an absence of some years. Perhaps the most important observation was a single **Red-rumped Parrot**. This species used to be a breeding resident on the site, but is rarely seen there nowadays.

Rural Leasehold near Mt Tennant

Julie McGuinness did the survey on 3 December on a mild, calm but overcast morning. Like other areas, weed growth was rampant following good spring rain. One survey site was completely covered in thick shoulder high (probably) **Hairy Mustard** weeds and waist high **Saffron Thistles**. The undergrowth on the other survey sites was much more manageable to traverse, but still resulted in very few ground favouring birds being seen, apart from a couple of **Yellow-rumped Thornbills** seen in between survey sites. Despite this, there was a reasonable species diversity, with 29 species being seen in survey sites and 26 between sites, with a total of 38 species seen in total, with all in small numbers only. Migrants and/or species of conservation concern seen were **Rufous Whistler**, **Noisy Friarbird**, **White-throated** and **Western Gerygone**, **Rufous Songlark**, **Jacky Winter**, **Leaden Flycatcher**, **White-winged Triller**, **Dusky Woodswallow** and **Tree Martin**. A **Collared Sparrowhawk** was seen in one site, two **Brown Falcons** adjacent to sites, and an **Owlet Nightjar** was heard calling. Breeding records were **Noisy Friarbird** and **White-winged Triller** on nests (the latter with a nestling seen), and **Striated Pardalote** and **Common Starling** carrying food into hollows. **Common Starlings** were seen carrying food in four survey sites. Only one **Dusky**

Tom Oliver Award 2019 - Birdlife Photography

At the January 2021 COG meeting, Con Boekel gave a short talk about the bird-related things he has done since retirement. One of the things he has done is write a photo essay for which he won the Tom Oliver Award in 2019. The 28 page essay will be published in Gang-gang over three issues. This first part follows here. Every effort has been taken to retain the layout of the essay.

Bird photography for what?

A photo essay

If the eye is a window to the world as well as a mirror to the soul, what is a camera?



Grey Butcherbird

*Image taken on 31 August 2017 at Kingscliff, NSW¹f/7.1,
1/400sec, ISO 1600, 500mm²*

In this image the author is reflected in the eye of a Grey Butcherbird.

1. All images were captured by the author using Canon equipment, generally a combination of a Canon 5D Mk IV camera and a Canon EF 500mm 1:4 L series lens.
2. Each image is annotated with a basic set of technical details. These relate to capture only but are intended to show that there is virtually an infinity of technical choices available to bird photographers when capturing, processing and presenting an image. Images have generally been processed using DPP4, PSE 13 and NeatImage.

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Introduction

If a picture tells a thousand words, which thousand words? Which words might a picture hide in plain sight?

Alexander Von Humboldt is credited with ‘inventing’ nature. His basic insight was that in nature all things are connected. This photo essay is about the connections between bird photographers, the birds, bird imagery, and the consumers of bird imagery. It moves from thinking globally to acting locally.

The essay is about the choices that are available when capturing, processing and presenting bird imagery. Each chapter looks at these choices. First I look at the broader context within which we frame our choices: culture and science, as well as our more general motivations for making and presenting bird images. I then move into the space where humans and birds interact – life and death, endangered species, threats, and extinction. Finally, I move to the birds’ responses – adaptation, evolution and resilience.

As bird photographers, we can make conscious choices in each of these areas and throughout the essay I identify various contributions that we might choose to make. Each chapter includes a bird image to illustrate some of my choices.

1. The Anthropocene – Thinking globally



Grey Teal

Image captured on 3 May 2017 at Sullivan's Creek, in the heart of the nation's capital f/4, 1/2000 sec, ISO 400, 500mm

A few years ago NASA scientists were surprised to discover an additional reason for the shift in the axis of the earth. First they checked their instruments: these were accurate. Then the scientists set about finding a recent re-arrangement of mass to explain the shift of our whole planet. They soon found it. Ice melt had transferred sufficient mass from one part of the planet to another to cause the axis to shift. By way of global warming, humans have shifted every single atom in the whole planet.

Apart from moving the planet around, humans alter the atmosphere, fire regimes, light, soils, land forms, inland waters, oceans, and chemical and nutrient distribution.

Together, these impacts represent the Anthropocene Era — an era in which all non-living things on Earth are affected by human activity.

As for all non-living things, so for all living things. A recent United Nations (UN) report warned of a million species threatened with extinction.

Each mass extinction event is given a title. For example, the Cretaceous-Palaeogene Extinction Event marked the end of the dinosaurs. My view is that we are already well into the Anthropocene Extinction Event. Australia is a gold medal performer when it comes to extinctions – and many of Australia’s past and prospective extinctions are of bird species. The existence of the Anthropocene Extinction Event is contested. My view is that we only have to look around us for confirmation.

At any one time, several billion individual birds belonging to about 10,000 species hatch, live, and die as they try to make their way through to the other side of the Anthropocene Extinction Event. In this context, what choices are available to bird photographers?

The Grey Teal image illustrates some of my choices. The Grey Teal is geared for boom and bust and the birds are hardy survivors. In composing the image, I chose the juxtaposition between a bird and a ball from the ‘World Game’. It forms a metaphor for thinking globally and acting locally. Various messages are possible: ‘Sport has environmental impacts’ or ‘Is the real ‘World Game’ our Anthropocene Extinction Event?’

The colour highlight in the composition is the bird’s eye, which is looking directly at the viewer as if to say, ‘What about it?’

2. Culture



White-faced Heron

*Image taken on 1 February 2018 at Sullivan's Creek, ACT¹f/8,
1/4000 sec, ISO 1600, 500mm*

What we mean by 'bird', and hence the way we choose to create bird images, varies by individual and by culture. Within each culture, art traditions, practices and theories inform the choices we make as bird photographers when capturing, processing and presenting our images. The viewers' interpretations are also based on *their* cultures. The unconscious influences are large. The possible conscious choices are practically infinite. For example, a common choice by photographers in composing and/or cropping is using the 'Rule of thirds'. This is based on a rich Western art tradition about how to arrange elements in a composition in an aesthetically pleasing way. By way of contrast, Western photographers and viewers tend to find a bird crowded into the corner of an image as being 'ugly'.

Our culture both opens up our photographic choices and bounds our choices.

In this example, I have consciously taken inspiration from found art theory as practised by Picasso. I have ‘found’ a White-faced Heron’s leg and, using post processing, have turned it into a Hill’s Hoist. If Picasso could have some fun making a ‘bull’s head’ out of a bicycle seat and bicycle handles, why can’t a bird photographer?

In the same general way, all bird photography involves finding a bird, and then making choices about capturing, processing and presenting an image of the bird. The myriad choices we make, in turn, send messages. The messages can be implicit or explicit, conscious or unconscious. To what extent should our awareness of the Anthropocene Extinction Event influence our choices?

3. Science



Latham's Snipe

*Image captured on 2 February 2017 at Jerrabomberra Wetlands Nature Reserve, ACT
f/8, 1/2500 sec, ISO 3200, 500mm*

Science is the basic building block for species and ecosystem management. Science underpins our efforts to save species from extinction. One choice bird photographers might make is to give priority to capturing images that can be used to support or to promote science. The images might give scientists insights about bird behaviour or add to the data. They might help to illustrate findings in reports, or to promote a particular message arising from the science. As we move further into the Anthropocene Extinction Event, what choices can, or should, we make about giving priority to supporting science?

One set of routine choices involves whether to report details such as the time, date and location of the image capture, as well as gender and age class, where this is known.

This image records a Latham's Snipe (tagged P8) in difficulties. It had been fitted with a tracking device, as part of a project aimed at recording local movements and habitat use, as well as the migration path to and from Japan.

In this case the cord holding the satellite tracker to the bird had slipped between the upper and lower mandibles. The bird was trying to remove the cord. The project team was alerted and the bird was subsequently recaptured and the transmitter removed.

Other individuals in the project have been tracked to Japan and back, giving valuable information about habitats that are important to the survival of this species. The project team has received quite a few images from bird photographers showing tag details, date and location. These have made a useful addition to data gathered in other ways.

Latham's Snipe is rated as nationally 'secure' by the Federal Government but is rated as 'vulnerable' in Victoria by the Victorian Government.

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

2020-2021 memberships:

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

New members

COG welcomes the following new members:

J Dempster
J Harris
K Neufeld
N Finger
P Kardel
M Benson
D Meischke
G Shaw
J Willows
M Ryan

NEXT NEWSLETTER

Deadline for March 2021 edition:

Wednesday 24 February 2021

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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