



Gang-gang

AUGUST 2012

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

AUGUST MEETING

7:30pm Wednesday 8.08.2012

Canberra Girls Grammar School

corner Gawler Cres and Melbourne Ave, Deakin. The meetings are held in the Multi-media Theatre at the School. Enter off Gawler Crescent using the school road signposted as Gabriel Drive. If that car-park is full, enter using Chapel Drive.

The short talk will be by **Barbara Allan**. She will present some findings from **COG's 2011 bird blitz**, held last October; look at trends since the first blitz in 2005; and outline procedures for the 8th blitz, to be held on the weekend of 27-28 October.

The main presentation: **Powerful Owls Uncovered** will be by **Dr David Bain**, the Powerful Owl Project Officer with BirdLife Australia in Sydney.

The Powerful Owl (*Ninox strenua*) is an iconic threatened species, being the largest nocturnal bird in Australasia, and it is found amongst the suburbs of our largest cities. BirdLife Australia through its Birds in Backyards program is undertaking a project on the Powerful Owl in the broader Sydney region looking at the breeding success, site fidelity, susceptibility to disturbance and threats to this urban-based population. This information will feed back into the conservation and management of this amazing species. Come and join us for this talk which will focus on the Powerful Owl in general and the current status of research within the project.

Everyone welcome

What to watch out for this month

There may well still be a month of winter left, but August is a time when there is often already considerable movement in Canberra's bird populations, with many individuals of those species that came to spend the winter here leaving, and the first of the "summer migrants" arriving. In respect of the latter, the returns from the first six (of eight) weeks of Geoffrey Dabb's winter birds' survey have confirmed the results from the first two weeks, with the clear stand out still the **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike**, which has been recorded every day in both June and July. This is far more than for the next most recorded species, from less than 50% of the days, the **Yellow-faced Honeyeater**, followed by, in rough order, the **Rufous Whistler**, **Fan-tailed Cuckoo**, **Olive-backed Oriole**, surprisingly the **Australian Reed-Warbler** and the **Superb Parrot**.

There has also been a further record of the **Shining Bronze-Cuckoo**, not on Geoffrey's list probably because it is considered a "complete" migrant, though I have seen it in Canberra over winter. The surprise has been the complete lack of observations of the **Noisy Friarbird** and, even more surprising, of the **Dusky Woodswallow**, given the relatively high numbers which stayed over two years ago. Overall the results support so far that very few "summer migrants" have stayed in Canberra this winter compared with Geoffrey's similar survey two years ago. While the



Noisy Friarbird (*Philemon corniculatus*)

Photo: James Rolevink

survey period will be over by the time you read this column, please forward any outstanding records to Geoffrey, if you haven't done so yet. His survey, like John Leonard's survey of

the Gang-gang Cockatoo in June, is a clear illustration of how valuable relatively simple surveys can be to help focus the attention of members in this quieter period.

The first of the birds, of the above named species that deserted Canberra for the winter, will be arriving during August. Numbers of the **Grey Fantail**, **White-naped Honeyeater** and the **Welcome Swallow**, species which have been regularly reported during winter, are also likely to swell. Also likely to return are **Tree** and **Fairy Martins**; there has been only the one record for the former, and none for the latter, in July. In “big” years (when conditions inland are very dry) the first cuckoos may also be recorded in August, but I’m predicting relatively low numbers of cuckoos in Canberra this spring.

August is also the time when the winter altitudinal visitors to Canberra start to return to the higher areas, and certainly they seem to move around more during this month. This includes the 4 red robin species, including the **Flame Robin** which seems to have been present in the peri-urban areas of Canberra only in small numbers this winter, but has finally been seen in my local area of Cooleman Ridge/Narrabundah Hill. By contrast the **Rose Robin** has been regularly reported, most notably at



Rose Robin
(*Petroica rosea*)

Photo : Julian Robinson

the Botanic Gardens, where there have also been a few sightings of the **Pink Robin**.

Likewise there have been a few observations of the **Crescent Honeyeater**, one of which was calling in my local area for a few days mid-month, just venturing in

my GBS site on one occasion. Particularly towards the end of August please keep a record of last observations of the above species, as well as of the **Swift Parrot** and the **Yellow-tufted Honeyeater**, for which there have only been a few reports this winter. Numbers of the more common winter visitors, the **Scarlet Robin**, **Golden Whistler** and the **White-eared Honeyeater**, are also likely to decline sharply in Canberra during August.

Despite it still being winter, and a relatively cool and long one at that, there have been a surprisingly

large number of reports of breeding activity in July. This includes nest building by the early breeders such as the **Australian Magpie** and the **Yellow-rumped Thornbill** and the **Masked Lapwing** already sitting on eggs, including at some well-known sites such as the back lawn next to the swimming pool in Percy Crescent, Chapman. **Black Swans** have been reported with cygnets (this species is known to breed during winter) and, more surprisingly, **Buff-rumped Thornbills** reported nest building and **Common Bronzings** sitting on eggs in Dennis Ayliffe’s backyard in Fraser. According to the ACT Bird Atlas, the last-named species doesn’t start breeding until the end of September.

White-winged Choughs have also been reported nest building already, including the group in the tree close to the dam at the end of Kathner Street, Chapman, where they have been seen relining last year’s nest. Again this is early for this group which I have been watching since 2008. An unusual report was an immature chough being fed by several groups during the COG Wednesday walk at the Botanic Gardens on 21 July. Similarly there have been a number of reports over the past months of **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos** feeding dependent young. I have witnessed this behaviour a number of times, including very recently in my GBS site, and always as two birds accompanied by a begging young. It poses the question of whether these birds only left the nest recently, or did so last autumn and but have had a very long “dependency” period. There was also a report on the chat line of a male **Australian King Parrot** either feeding a young bird or perhaps a female as part of pair bonding behaviour.

As the breeding season gets into swing mixed feeding flocks (MFFs) will break up; certainly the one which is still present in my GBS site is very different in composition from four months ago, with the main species now being the **Striated Thornbill**, unusual for my site, and the **Weebill**, with the other species previously an integral part often only loosely associated. With their similar habits of “hovering” off the leaves and being very active, this has posed difficulties in accurately determining the numbers of each, particularly with the former being rather silent.

So during August we can say goodbye to winter in Canberra with the first of the “summer migrants” returning and the breeding season getting well and truly started. As always please ensure that all significant observations end up on the COG database.

— Jack Holland

Field Trip Reports

Saturday 9 June — Bendick Murrell NP

Four members headed to Young on Friday afternoon and had a pleasant evening. They made a slow start on Saturday, recording a **European Goldfinch** flying over the motel. We still arrived at Bendick Murrell before our 8.30 am meeting with the two who left Canberra early for a beautiful, cold but sunny morning drive.

Bendick Murrell National Park was drier than in March but still had plenty of water around so we didn't drive far, but saw 37 species in approximately 3 hours. The highlight for me was the two **Peregrine Falcons** flying at high speed low over our heads. Jenny was most taken with the **Rose Robin** she found, and we were all quite surprised by excellent views of an **Olive-backed Oriole** as we sought the robin. **Brown Treecreepers**, **Speckled Warblers** and **Golden Whistler** also allowed us good views. However, we saw little of the 6 **Varied Sitellas** and only heard the **White-browed Babblers**.

The surrounding farming area also provided good birding, especially one largish farm dam which had **Australian Shoveler**, **Grey Teal**, **Pacific Black Duck**, **Australasian Grebe**, **Little Pied Cormorant** and **Yellow Spoonbill**.

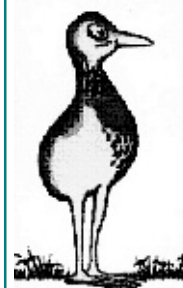
We had a latish lunch short of Koorawatha Falls as, after leading us along a testing four wheel drive challenge course of large boulders, i.e. "the track", with cars at impressive side angles, Jenny suggested we not try to drive any further and I and the other driver agreed.

We finally got good views of **Grey-crowned Babblers** at the gate to Spring Forest on our way home, and said hello to the COG member bogged about halfway to the campsite. With a total of 66 bird species over the whole day, some nice flowers and scenery we felt well pleased and celebrated with coffee and cake at the Boorowa bakery before heading home.

— Michael Robbins

Sunday 15 July – Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve

On a typical Canberra winter morning fifteen members and guests met in the carpark by the Visitor's Centre at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. Those of us who arrived early had a little time to observe the birds in that area, whilst others negotiated the new roads in the Molonglo development. We set out, in a reduced number of cars, for the Cascade and Lyrebird Trails. Although it was not freezing cold, there was a breeze, and there was a healthy layer of snow on the hills, so we were not sure what we were in for. However, in the dense foliage we were sheltered from the wind, so it was quite pleasant.
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2012 tours

August: Alice Springs

New October tour: Scarlet-
chested Parrot tour
Yorke Peninsula

September: Strzelecki Outback

November: New Caledonia

November: SW Western Australia

2012 Plains-wanderer week- ends

1 & 2 December
15 & 16 December
29 & 30 December

2013 Tours

February: Tasmania
February: New Zealand
June: Top End
July: Gulf Country
August: Alice Springs
September: Strzelecki Outback
October: Yorke Peninsula
to Ceduna

2013 Plains-wanderer week- ends

23 & 24 November
7 & 8 December

Please see itineraries,
checklists and latest
news on our website
www.philipmaher.com

The trip Leader, David McDonald, explained a little about the breeding cycle of the **Superb Lyrebird** and played a short tape of their calls before we set out along the generic track. Soon afterwards those of us at the front of the party saw a couple of **Eastern Yellow Robins**. We all heard an estimated four lyrebirds calling and saw scratchings and scats, but the regrowth was so dense, particularly along the Cascade Trail, that we couldn't see them from the track. Mimicry included **Grey Shrike-thrush** and **Pied Currawong** in the main. Most of the bush birds were identified by their call only, as well. The Lyrebird Trail was more open and David made several trips off the track to see if he could find a mound, but none were located.

The list of species for the morning was not extensive and there were no surprises. The total number of species for the morning was twenty-three, thirteen species in the car park, and eleven on the trails. The ubiquitous **Pied Currawong** was the only species seen in both the carpark and the trails area.

Many thanks to David for leading this outing and sharing his knowledge with us. — Lia Battisson

Wednesday 18 July—Australian National Botanic Gardens

Twenty-three members and guests enjoyed this outing on a clear brisk morning. We started off by heading for the CSIRO gate hoping for the **Rose Robins**, and they did not disappoint, with both male and female birds putting in an appearance in trees over the path. **White-naped Honeyeaters** and an **Eastern Yellow Robin** were also seen at the same stop. Close to the Sydney Gully a very obliging **Eastern Spinebill** sat at eye level no more than a metre from the path, posing for the admiring throng - it had clearly not yet been to the standard "How to frustrate photographers 101" course because everyone had a good look at this fellow and the photographers got great close-ups while it continued to sit there. **Australian Wood Ducks** were seen in several trees, a couple of **Crimson Rosellas** munched on the correas while we admired them at close range, and in one of the several groups of **White-winged Choughs** an immature bird was being fed by two of the adult birds as they foraged along the path. Lindell pointed out the new **Satin Bowerbird** bower, and a number of the birds were seen and heard nearby, including one blue-black male.

Other species for the morning included **Gang-gang Cockatoo**, **Red Wattlebird**, **Pied Currawong**, **Australian Raven**, **Superb Fairy-wren**, **Spotted Pardalote**, **Sulphur-crested Cockatoo**, **Galah**, **White-browed Scrub-wren**, **White-throated Treecreeper**, **New Holland Honeyeater**, **Silvereye**, **Brown Thornbill**, **Grey Fantail**, **Blackbird**, **Australian King Parrot** and **Laughing Kookaburra**. — Sandra Henderson

Saturday 21 July—Eden Pelagic

Twelve Canberra birdos descended on Eden, southern NSW, for what is now an annual pelagic trip aboard the Connemara. Conditions all week had been quite calm, with only light winds and no swell to speak of. Conditions on Saturday turned out to be decent, with 15-20 knot southerlies once we had got out beyond the lee of Green Cape. Sea temperatures as I recall them were about 14.5 C inshore and about 15.5 or a bit more at the shelf. The sea was a bit choppy but with no large swells to talk about, and we only had one or two seasick passengers despite a few newcomers to pelagic birding.

It turned out to be another weird old day on the ocean. There was a distinct lack of regular winter specials, as witnessed by a complete absence of any **Providence Petrels**, **Cape Petrels**, **White-fronted Terns**, **Wilson's Storm-Petrels**, **Northern/Southern Giant-Petrels** and **Buller's Albatross**, all very regular birds at this time of the year.

In sheer bird numbers, it was the **Shy Albatross** and **Fairy Prion** that kept the day going. In the albatross stakes, the odd **Black-browed** or **Indian Yellow-nosed** had to work hard to break the **Shy** monotony, while a single probable 2nd-year **Gibson's Albatross** put in a brief appearance at the burley point at the shelf edge to wow the first-timers. In amongst the prions was a smattering of **Fluttering Shearwaters**, the odd **Sooty** and **Short-tailed Shearwater** and a **Brown Skua** which obligingly gorged itself on the burley thrown to it.

The avian highlight was most certainly a **Grey-backed Storm-Petrel** which I spotted at the burley point at the shelf edge, but unfortunately it approached and left via the reflected sun and thus only one other person got to see it at least half satisfactorily. I spotted another one (or the same bird?) again on the way back to port but again it kept its distance and remained very elusive.



Yellow-nosed Albatross
(*Thalassarche chlororhynchus*)



White-bellied Sea Eagle
(*Haliaeetus leucogaster*)



Shy Albatross
(*Thalassarche cauta*)

Australasian Gannet
(*Morus serrator*)



Photo montage: Michael and Janette Lenz

Perhaps the most interesting moment of the day was when we stopped close to shore to burley at the 40-fathom mark. **Fairy Prions** were the first birds to be attracted to the trail of sharks' liver left behind the boat and eventually a few **Shy Albatross** showed interest, before a stunning adult **White-bellied Sea-eagle** turned up out of the blue and dived down to pick a piece of burley off the surface of the water, all quite close to the boat! I think some great photos could have been obtained if those of us on board had been a bit more ready for the action.

For large periods of the day there were very few birds in sight, but it was interesting to see how the number of **Shy Albatrosses** peaked at the 40-fathom mark and again at the shelf-edge, particularly the latter where it seemed as though we were motoring into a wall of wheeling birds.

In addition, we had **Little Black**, **Great** and **Black-faced Cormorants** and **Australasian Darter**, as well as **Pacific Gull**, **Australian Pelican** and **Welcome Swallow** in the bay.

On the mammal front, we had Australian Fur Seals and Short-beaked Common Dolphins. —**Tobias Hiyashi**

ANUgreen winter bird monitoring thank you

ANUgreen held another successful seasonal bird monitoring. A total of 23 volunteers participated and covered 12 sites. Admittedly the weather was not at its best, and some teams had a dull day with few birds of interest to see. However, we still managed to identify 43 species in total, with 23 common species and 20 additional ones. Perhaps the most interesting bird recorded was a **Rose Robin** behind the Jaeger buildings here on campus.

Our last monitoring for 2012 will be in October (tbc). Please continue to join us. Another invitation email will be sent out closer to the date.

TIM YIU,

Biodiversity Officer, ANUgreen, Facilities Planning

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Future Field Trips

Before the start of each trip, each participant must sign a COG Field Trip Registration Form which acknowledges the participant's responsibilities. The form reads as follows:

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

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

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

Sunday 5 August - Googong Foreshores

Join **Philip Veerman** for an afternoon's birding at Googong Dam. If you wish to carpool from the southside of Canberra, meet in the carpark at Kambah Village, corner of Drakeford Drive and Marconi Crescent, at 11.15am or the Spotlight car park at Warroo Street and Bungendore Road at 11:45 am or meet at the Ranger station at midday. To access Googong Foreshores, take the Old Cooma Road from Queanbeyan and turn left into Googong Dam Road. The walk will begin at the Ranger Station at 12 midday and will be finished by 4 pm. You can contact Philip by phone on 62314041 or pveerman@pcug.org.au (or on the day 0411716177).

Saturday 11 August - Lake Ginninderra Beginners' morning

This is the second of our bird walks in 2012 that is aimed specifically at beginners. Meet **Anthony Overs** (bookings essential on 6254 0168 or anthony.overs@gmail.com) at 8.30am in the car park at the western end of Diddams Close on Ginninderra Peninsula (also known as Diddams Close Park - see Yellow Pages Map 38, ref A9). We will walk the shores of the peninsula around to the eastern side, then back to the car park along Diddams Close. We should be able to view several species of waterbirds up close, focusing on the identification features of the common species such as the various ducks, "waterhens" and cormorants. A variety of bush birds are also likely to be seen. Bring your binoculars and field guide.

Sunday 19 August - Burra

This outing is to Ian Anderson's property, "Kurrajong Gardens", at 156 Hutchinson Place, Burra. People can either travel there direct or if any want to travel in a convoy they can meet at my place in Canberra, 12 Wylly Place, Hughes. It takes about 40 minutes to drive from Hughes to the property. I suggest we aim to arrive at Burra by 8.30 am. I will therefore expect to depart from my place in Hughes by 7.50am.

Those wishing to travel direct to the property from Canberra will need to use a part of the section of the Old Queanbeyan to Cooma Road. One of the options, perhaps the easiest, is to take the Monaro Highway and just before Williamsdale take the turn left towards Burra. Continue on this section of the Old Queanbeyan to Cooma Road for about 7 or 8 kilometres, most of which is dirt, until you come to a right hand turn with a bitumen road - Badgery Road. Continue on this road for about a kilometre. Turn right into a cul-de-sac, Hutchinson Place, which is a dirt road. The property, near the top of the cul-de-sac, has the number 156 stamped on a metal plaque on the fence, and has a Conservation Agreement sign on the front gate with the name "Kurrajong Gardens".

Those coming from the Queanbeyan direction need to take the Queanbeyan to Guises Creek Road. (There is no settlement at Guises Creek which is a fire control centre on the Monaro Highway.) Turn left at the Burra sign just before the historic Anglican Church on the right hand side. Continue on past the turnoff to London Bridge and Tin Hut Dam on the left until you come to Badgery Road on the left hand side, after turning right off the Burra to Michelago Road and crossing Burra Creek heading towards Williamsdale. Turn onto Badgery Road and follow the instructions from there given above.

A third option which may suit some people is to travel along the Monaro Highway to the Guises Creek Fire Station, turn left and continue on towards Queanbeyan until they reach the Burra sign. Then as above.

Contact Ian on 62810609 (home) or 0413754453, or by email: lananderson@grapevine.com.au

I suggest those coming bring something for a morning tea snack. There are facilities available at the property, including hot water and protection from inclement weather. — **Ian Anderson**

Sunday 2 September – Mt Majura

Meet at 8.30am at the Mackenzie St car park near Grayson St for a morning's birding. The focus will be on searching for **Glossy Black-Cockatoos** but we hope to find plenty of woodland birds including returning migrants. — **Terry Munro**

Friday 7 to Sunday 9 September – Shore, Rain Forest and Heath with Illawarra Birders

We will be shown a number of good birding spots in the Illawarra by the Illawarra Birders (IB) who joined COG on the Wee Jasper trip in February 2012. Trip starts Friday night, because of early start on Saturday and the roughly 3 hour drive from Canberra.

Proposed schedule is 8.30 am start on Saturday with an approximately 3 hour visit to Tallawarra Ashponds, then depending on interest, weather etc a possible quick visit to Lake Illawarra to see some shorebirds. Lunch on Saturday - everyone should bring a packed lunch and drinks for the day so that we can adjust timings as appropriate and all stay together. After lunch we aim to visit the Mt Kembla ring track which has good rainforest with **Logrunner**, **Pilot Bird**, **Bassian Thrush**, and recently a calling **Noisy Pitta**. This bit of the trip will be about 2 hours depending on sightings. Dinner on Saturday will be joint COG/IB do at a Thai restaurant in Windang, near Oasis Caravan Park.

Sunday morning we'll visit Barren Grounds or Budderoo Fire Trail, depending on the advice from locals as to which is likely to be best on the day. Then COG people will head back to Canberra.

Members attending will need to book their own accommodation. The Oasis Caravan Park is a good starting point <http://www.oasisresort.com.au/> but there are numerous alternatives nearby.

Registration is essential. Please advise **Michael Robbins** (mrobbins@home.netspeed.com.au) if you wish to join this trip as soon as possible but no later than 12th August as numbers will probably need to be restricted.

Sunday 16 September – Woods Reserve

It has been some time since COG has visited this neck of the woods. **Lia Battisson** will lead the group. We will meet at Woods Reserve at 8:30 am and look around that area, before walking up to Gibraltar Falls and back. It is expected that we will finish before lunch. Bring morning tea with you. Car pooling is encouraged. Meet at Kambah Village at 7:45 for a 7:50 departure. Those on the north side may wish to nominate a place to meet. Contact Lia on 02 6231 0147 or liabattisson@grapevine.com.au

Saturday 22 September (morning) – Namadgi Visitors Centre woodlands

Spring in Canberra is a time of renewal, with the arrival of many migratory birds that depart during our colder months, lots of breeding behaviour, plants in flower and abundant insect life. It is an exciting time to be outside and observing nature. It is in this context that we will visit the woodland that surrounds the Namadgi Visitors Centre. Nestled at the foot of the towering Mt Tennent and not far from the Murrumbidgee River, this small patch of remnant woodland contains many mature Yellow Box and Blakely's Red Gum trees, so our focus will be on woodland birds. There is also a dam here that is home to water birds, so there is a lot to see in this one location.

Meet **Matthew Frawley** at the front of the Namadgi Visitors Centre at 8am. Please bring water, sunscreen, hat and food for morning tea (there are ice creams available at the visitors centre as well). Hope to see you there.

Woodland Winter Surveys

Mulligans Flat NR

Jenny Bounds and the team had reasonably good weather for the survey on Sunday 24 June, and a very social time afterwards at morning tea, with several of the rangers and educational experts at the Woolshed for a meeting about educational programs for the Sanctuary. Birdwise, some sites were quiet, with activity off site or in-between sites where mixed flocks were passing through. The usual winter birds were around: **Golden Whistler**, **White-eared Honeyeater**, as well as an occasional **Yellow-faced Honeyeater** and **Eastern Spinebill**. Several sites recorded **Scarlet Robins** (usual for winter) and **Brown Thornbills** (recorded more frequently in the past 18 months), with quite a few **Buff-rumped Thornbills**, **Weebills** and **Brown-headed Honeyeaters** in the mix. **Fan-tailed Cuckoo** was recorded at 2 sites on the eastern side of the reserve - it may have been the same bird moving through - and Varied **Sittellas** were recorded at three locations. After the survey, a female **Red-capped Robin** was spotted near the woolshed. 42 species were recorded for the morning.

Goorooyaroo NR (north)

Nicki Taws did the survey on 25 June, a fairly typical wintery morning - fog and frost clearing to a fine day but quite windy. As usual at this time of year some sites were very quiet. Small birds were concentrated into two flocks, one of which passed through one of the sites. It numbered 50+ birds and included **Yellow-rumped**, **Buff-rumped** and **Striated Thornbills**, **Weebills**, **Speckled Warblers**, **Striated Pardalotes**, **White-throated Treecreeper**, **Golden Whistler** and **Scarlet Robin**. In contrast to the autumn survey, **Noisy Miners** were mercifully scarce. Rosellas were too. **Golden Whistler**, **White-eared Honeyeater** and **Scarlet Robin** were recorded at a few sites. No **Hooded Robins** were recorded, and they haven't been seen for several surveys now. A nice surprise was a couple of **Tree Martins**.

Goorooyaroo NR (south)

Steve Holliday with **Prue Buckley**, **Dave** and **Kathy Cook**, had some fairly iffy weather for the winter survey on Sunday 17 June, with rain threatening and an icy wind. Despite this, 37 species were recorded, although numbers recorded at each site varied greatly depending on whether there was a mixed flock present or not. A **Double-barred Finch** near site 9 was possibly a new species record for the reserve. There were several flocks containing a variety of species such as **Grey Shrike-thrush**, **Golden Whistler**, **Striated (many)** and **Spotted Pardalotes**, **Weebill**, **Striated**, **Yellow-rumped** and **Buff-rumped Thornbills**, **White-eared Honeyeater**, **Grey Fantail**, **Willy Wagtail** and **Scarlet Robin**. At Site 2 in a sheltered and quite densely vegetated gully were **Speckled Warbler**, **Brown Thornbill**, **Silvereye**, **Superb Fairy-wren** and **White-browed Scrub-wren**. A few **Tree Martins**, with a larger group of **Welcome Swallows**, were seen around a dam near Horse Park Drive. Other records included a **Common Bronzewing**, 2 **Wedge-tailed Eagles** and a **Black-shouldered Kite**.

Mt Majura NR

Kathy Walter and **John Goldie** did their surveys on Saturday and Sunday mornings, 23 and 24 June. It was cold, but mostly sunny. As usual, the northern most sites proved the most interesting with an amazing mixed flock that consisted of around 30 **Striated Pardalotes** sunning themselves high in a dead tree, **Spotted Pardalotes**, **Speckled Warblers**, **Buff** and **Yellow-rumped Thornbills**, **Superb Fairy-wrens**, **Silvereye**, **Grey Fantail**, **Double-barred Finch** (a first in that site), **Scarlet Robin**, **Willie Wagtail** and **Golden Whistler**. The flock moved from the first site to the next. **Grey Currawongs** were at two sites, and two **Welcome Swallows** in one site which haven't been recorded there before. 26 species were recorded in total.

Campbell Park (including Mt Ainslie NR sites)

Michael Lenz surveyed on 20 June, a crisp, but calm and mostly overcast morning, starting a bit later to give birds a chance to "warm up". However, most sites had only a few species present; in fact one of the best sites

in the past produced only 1 **Australian Magpie**. There was some activity between sites, and finally the day was saved with one mixed feeding flock each at 2 sites, with 10 and 13 species respectively. They included **Double-barred Finch**, **Speckled Warbler** (this species also at two other places), 1 male each of **Rufous** and **Golden Whistler**. Another 'winter bird 2012' was a **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike**. In total 28 species at sites, and a further 4 elsewhere were recorded.

Callum Brae (Symonston)

Sandra Henderson did the survey on 27 June, an overcast morning, but reported that the birds didn't seem bothered. There was a very large gathering of 100s of **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos** and **Little Corellas** (with a few **Long-billed Corellas**) on Narrabundah Lane, just outside the reserve, obviously roosting in the reserve at night. It was a very slow start at the first survey site, with two **Crimson Rosellas** only, but other sites were a little better, with **Yellow-rumped Thornbills** and **Striated Pardalotes** the most numerous birds in survey sites! The highlight for the morning was a mixed flock up along the quarry fence (not at a survey point), which had about eight **Flame Robins**, two **Scarlet Robins**, a dozen **Diamond Firetails**, a **Jacky Winter** and some **Yellow-rumped Thornbills**. **Noisy Miners** were in abundance around the reserve, with a group of 14 sitting in one dead tree. There were eleven **Scarlet Robins** in all, with other highlights being an **Olive-backed Oriole** and an immature **Grey Butcherbird**. The only raptor for the morning was a **Brown Goshawk**. The large farm dam near the pylons had a group of five **Hardhead**, but no grebes visible. 44 species were recorded in total.

Red Hill NR

Harvey Perkins with **Stuart Harris** did the survey in cool but sunny conditions on 30 June. It was a fairly typical winter survey though the diversity of birds was slightly up and the total number of birds slightly down compared to the 14-year winter average. As with other surveys, feeding flocks, mainly of thornbills, added life to often quiet sites. There were lots of **Weebills**, and **Speckled Warblers** were seen in four different locations. Choughs made only their third appearance in these surveys, and **Australian Wood Ducks**, which are rarely present, were recorded twice, in trees in two different locations. Only two **Gang-gang Cockatoos** were heard, which is fewer than normal (average of 8-9 birds per survey).

Jerrabomberra West NR (woodland)

Jenny Bounds reported the survey on 20 June, one of the coldest morning for years, with thick frost and a light fog rolling in to the valley - maximum temperature in the woodland was 4 degrees mid morning!! Surprisingly, there were birds around, with plenty of **Superb Fairy-wrens** enjoying the cover from re-growth and tall weeds, and usual winter birds such as **Golden Whistler**, **White-eared Honeyeater** and **Silvereyes**, and flocks of both pardalotes. **Australian Wood Ducks** were around the trees looking for nest sites, a pair of **Rainbow Lorikeets**, **Little Corellas** and one **Long-billed Corella** flew through, and a **Black-shouldered Kite** sat quietly in the gloomy fog on the edge of the grasslands. **Red-browed Finches** and a **Grey Shrike-thrush**, species only occasionally recorded there were also around. **Noisy Miners** were fairly scarce yet they are usually around in numbers, and a few regulars (eg **Speckled Warbler** and **Southern Whiteface**) were absent this time. 30 species were recorded for the survey which is not bad for winter.

Tuggeranong Hill NR

Lia Battisson did the survey on 25 June, starting out foggy even at 9am, but it was still and mild for this time of year. Birds were very sparse at the first four sites, with a total of four species observed. A marked improvement was seen after the sun came out at 11am. A mixed feeding flock which included **Scarlet Robin**, **Brown Thornbill**, **Yellow-rumped Thornbill**, **Rufous Whistler**, **Buff-rumped Thornbill** and **Striated Thornbill** was seen at site 4. Another highlight was seeing the **Wedge-tailed Eagle** again. In all twenty-one species were observed, sixteen of which made it into survey plots.

(cont' page 10)

Rural leasehold near Tharwa

David McDonald reported poor weather for the start of the survey (cloudy with a strong cold wind) on 30 June, but conditions improved as the morning progressed. Species diversity was low (17 species) as was bird abundance. It was great to see three **Brown Treecreepers** at the first site, and another two at the last.

Speckled Warblers were missing from their usual spot but two were at another spot.

Interestingly, no **Little Ravens** were observed, and very few **Australian Ravens**. Although the survey was started later than usual, it turned out not to be a problem as there were far more birds, and more species diversity, at the last two sites than at the earlier ones. Perhaps the birds were responding to the warming of the day?

Newline

In still and calm conditions, Newline once again did not disappoint. Mixed feeding flocks (MFFS) improved the counts in several sites; one in the front eastern paddock included 36 **Superb Fairy-wrens** (which obligingly flew from bush to bush, 3 to 4 at a time, allowing accurate counting), **Brown-headed** and **Fuscous Honey-eater**, **Grey Fantail**, **Willie Wagtail**, 2 **Brown Treecreeper**, **Golden Whistler**, **White-throated Treecreeper**, **Speckled Warbler**, **Striated Pardalote**, **Grey Shrike-thrush** and **Weebill**. In another MFF, **Superb Fairy-wrens** were joined by 43 **Red-browed Finch**, as well as **Double-barred Finch** and **Silvereye**. **Pacific Black Duck**, **Australian Wood Duck**, **Grey Teal**, **Australasian Grebe** and **Little Pied Cormorant** were making use of the full dams. 42 species were recorded by **Sue Lashko** for the morning.

— Compiled by Jenny Bounds

We'd like your Feedback!

You may notice that the style of this edition of **Gang-gang** is different from the printed version.

The content is the same, but we are using **Arial** type-face instead of **Times New Roman**.

Do you find it easier to read on-line?

Do you have other comments about, or suggestions for the lay-out?

We'd love to hear from you.

Contact Janette through lenzmj@homemail.com.au

Back-up Layout Editor Required

COG invites expressions of interest from members who might be willing and able to assist from time-to-time as a back-up for the layout editor of **Gang-gang**.

Training is available. You will need good technical skills and the time to process the materials at the end of a month when required. Anyone with desk-top publishing experience – or with good word processing skills – would be capable of doing the job.

If you can help, please contact Janette through lenzmj@homemail.com.au

MEDIA RELEASE



Rare natural history artworks to go on show at the National Library

Extraordinary natural history paintings and drawings by Australia's first professional artist, John William Lewin (1770-1819), will soon go on show at the National Library of Australia.

More than 150 of Lewin's remarkable and distinctly Australian drawings and watercolours, drawn from the National Library of Australia, the State Library of NSW and other national and international collections, feature in *Lewin: Wild Art*, the first comprehensive exhibition of his works in 200 years.

Sponsored by a wealthy London insect collector, Lewin arrived in Sydney on 11 January 1800 with a mission to collect and draw Australia's natural history for European audiences. He accidentally missed the boat to Australia and found himself embroiled in Australia's first defamation case, but he was to become well established as an artist in the colony and left an unrivalled record of our past.

Director-General of the National Library of Australia Anne-Marie Schwirtlich says, "We are thrilled to be able to show these wonderful and important Australian artworks, selected from the Library's collection, the renowned collection of the Mitchell Library, as well from the collections of the British Museum and England's Natural History Museum."

Curator and Mitchell Librarian at the State Library of NSW Richard Neville says Lewin was instantly captivated by the foreign landscape and exotic wildlife and "was the first to turn Australia's emblematic natural history into art". "Right from the start he was producing these powerful and beautifully observed compositions of insects, birds and plants in their natural environment – an approach completely at odds with conventional English methods."

"His work out-classed First Fleet artists and he created a style adopted by Audubon and Gould 20 years later but never achieved the levels of recognition they did."

***Lewin: Wild Art* opens on 28 July 2012 and runs until 28 October 2012. Admission is free.**

nla.gov.au



COMMITTEE NEWS

COG and CIMAG representatives have met with TAMS representatives to discuss the increasing populations of **Feral Pigeons** in Tuggeranong in particular. The emergence of a new strain of avian paramyxovirus in Australia is a concern, with fears it could spread to other bird species. COG and CIMAG will continue to discuss the issue of pigeon control with the government. **Spotted Doves** are also of concern, but population densities are low, making control difficult.

Annual subscriptions are now overdue. Payments (\$35) can be made by mail, electronic funds transfer, or at meetings.

— Sandra Henderson



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AvIAN Whimsy #95 — Currawongs; the most obstreperous birds?

The boldly staring eye is one of the first things people remark on. The heavy straight business-like beak with the wicked little hook on the end suggests, quite rightly, deadly purpose. Most of their hunting is for invertebrates, searching carefully, stopping to listen and relentlessly pursuing small prey under loose bark and in crevices, hammering at surfaces with that powerful beak. Vertebrates feature quite heavily too, however, and grisly stories abound, if we choose to interpret them that way. Eye witness accounts refer to a persistent assault on the feet of a large Green Tree Frog until it fell to the ground, was seized and eaten as it was held down; another tells of a pair working as a team to harry a Feather-tailed Glider. It is understandable if people were shocked at seeing one hurtle into a family of Superb Fairy-wrens and seize the blue male, or select a male Scarlet Robin from a mixed foraging party. Accounts are numerous of eggs and nestlings taken. Are you nodding grimly? Sorry, what was that – currawongs?? No, no, I was talking about Grey Shrike-thrushes, generally one of our 'favourites'.

If you're suggesting that it's not the same thing you'd be right – in fact unlike shrike-thrushes, currawongs are primarily fruit eaters, at least outside of breeding season. (We normally use 'currawong' in the south-east mainland to imply Pied Currawong, but the comments here are generally applicable to the other species as well.) Overall they are truly omnivorous, but even so most of their meat is in the form of insects; their favoured prey is phasmids, the big stick insects which in numbers can defoliate eucalypt forests. In particular they favour the big-bodied gravid female phasmids, for which a million eucalypts are doubtless grateful, in their quiet way.

OK, of course I'm trying to make a point here. We have favourites, in almost any facet of life, which is fine as long as we acknowledge our biases, at least to ourselves. It's understandable that we should get upset that 'our' nests are raided in our yards that we've set up to protect wildlife. On the other hand, everyone loves blue wrens, but they can slaughter hundreds of native animals, including babies, in our garden every day. So, our concern for birds preying on other animals, including baby ones, does not extend to insects. Our bias here is almost entirely towards other vertebrates.

The really important difference between currawongs and shrike-thrushes in this context is simply one of

abundance. If shrike-thrushes were present in flocks, searching the shrubbery for nests, we may well turn our animus towards them and feel benignly towards the occasional cheery Pied Currawong we encountered. We've done two things here (and make no mistake, this one is primarily down to us). Both are due to the fact that we've improved conditions for currawongs in Canberra, primarily by planting exotic berry-producing shrubs like *Cotoneaster* and *Pyracantha* species. These produce fruit mostly in autumn and winter, providing a reliable food source at what would normally be a tough time of year, and there is little doubt that this allows currawong populations to remain higher through winter than would have been the case in pre-European times.

Furthermore until recently virtually the entire Canberra Pied Currawong population headed for the hills in spring to breed in the mountains. Even in the early 1980s a begging currawong in Canberra was a most unusual occurrence. In 1976 the surprisingly impressive *Readers Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds* commented that "very few people have ever seen their nests", a statement that seems ludicrous today. Now, while many Pied Currawongs do still breed in the mountain forests, very many also breed in the same suburbs where they spend winter. There are two implications of this dramatic behavioural change. The period when growing baby currawongs want lots of protein to get them established (like most other chicks) is the time when currawongs prey most on vertebrates, including nestlings. Formerly this harvest took place out of sight and largely out of mind, but suddenly it was happening right in our faces. A secondary implication of this was that the menu in suburbia was rather different from the mountain fare. Up there, discreetly hidden away, all the nestlings taken are of native species; in suburbia a good proportion are exotics such as Feral Pigeons, Starlings, Black-birds and Common Mynas. Overall the proportion of currawong diet which comprises native birds has undoubtedly fallen in recent decades (though the higher number of currawongs must also be considered).

Our concern with currawong diet is not new, though the focus of the concern has changed. Alec Chisholm, in his column in the *Argus* of 27 October 1934, reported that the Brisbane Pest Destruction Board from 1925 to 1934 paid (the bounty is not recorded) for the carcasses of 55,204 'Scrub-magpies' – that is,

Pied Currawongs). Their crime is not described, but I assume it was for pinching fruit rather than for the killing of other birds (after all they also paid out for 171,541 starlings and 443,913 sparrows). Various early writers listed a wide range of food taken to which they were not welcome, including raisins on the drying rack, quinces, olives, maize (after stripping off the covering) and chook eggs, as well as insects which were not begrudged. References to nestlings are very scarce.

I don't expect to change any minds by a mere Whimsy. But if it encourages someone to re-examine the nature of a bias, it will have been worthwhile. Birds are just what they are – only we judge them as being right or wrong.

PS last month I received a veritable tsunami of responses – at least three or four – about my use of the word 'streperaphobe'. If you wondered too, but didn't like to ask, just look up Pied Currawong in your field guide, and look at the first word in italics which follows it.

Ian Fraser calochilus51@internode.on.net



Pied Currawong (*Strepera graculina*) Photos: Graham Stephinson, David Cook

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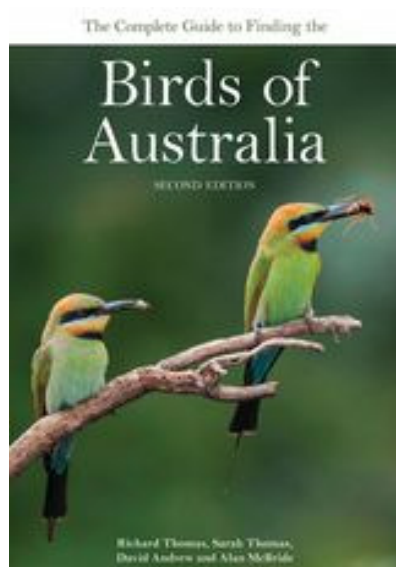
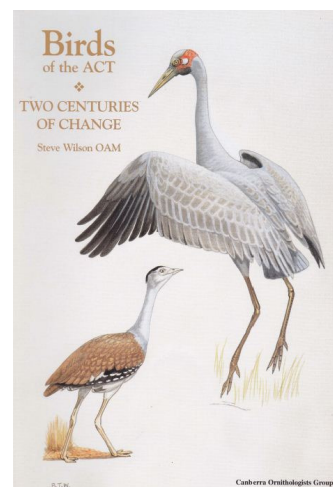
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COG SALES

Birds of the ACT: Two Centuries of Change **Steve Wilson OAM, Canberra Ornithologists Group**

Published by COG in 1999, a number of this historic book were found in COG's dusty archives recently. The book provides a 'history of recorded birds' of the ACT for two centuries. It contains a Margaret Preston woodcut and illustrations by Robin Brown. Many of the people who contributed to the book are still active members today. A beautiful book for only \$10.

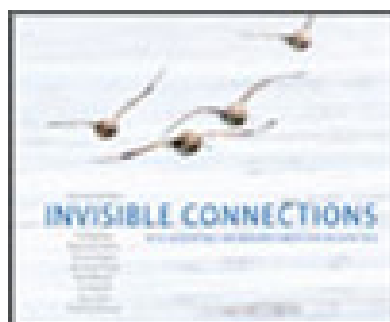
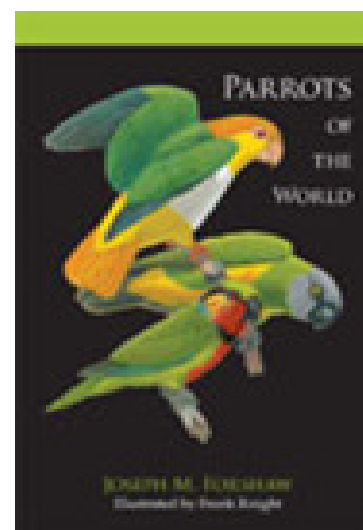


The Complete Guide to Finding the Birds of Australia, 2nd Ed. **Richard Thomas, Sarah Thomas, David Andrew, Alan McBride**

First published in 1994, this was the first ever book of its type in Australia – a complete guide to locating every resident bird species. This fully revised second edition describes the best-known sites for all of Australia's endemic birds, plus regular migrants such as seabirds and shorebirds. It covers all states and territories, and is the first guide to include all of Australia's island and external territories. Member's price \$32.

Parrots of the World **Joseph M Forshaw, Frank Knight**

A stunningly illustrated, easy-to-use field guide to all 356 species and well-differentiated subspecies of parrots. 2010 - CSIRO PUBLISHING - 336pp - \$28



Invisible Connections: Why Migrating Shorebirds Need the Yellow Sea **Phil Battley, Brian McCaffery, Danny Rogers, Jae-Sang Hong, Nial Moores, Ju Yung-Ki, Jan Lewis, Theunis Piersma, Jan van de Kam**

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New members

COG welcomes the following new members:

H. Deane, Narrabundah
T. Moleta, Florey
C. Darwood, Flynn

and welcomes back
N. Hermes and M. Fyfe who have rejoined COG after an absence of some years.

NEXT NEWSLETTER

Deadline for the September edition

Wednesday 29 August 2012

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 and welcomed.

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COG membership

2012-2013 memberships:

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

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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 website

www.canberrabirds.org.au

COG library

For all enquiries or access to COG's library phone Barbara Allan on 6254 6520

COG E-mail Discussion List

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

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

canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au

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

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