



Gang-gang

August 2013

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

AUGUST MEETING

Wednesday 14 August 2013

7.30 pm.

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

Barbara Allan's short talk will be the annual review of the previous year's **Bird Blitz**, a brief look at the findings across the eight years of Blitzes thus far, and an invitation to participate in Blitz 9, on 26-27 October. Please come along ready to nominate your preferred sites!

The main speaker will be **Associate Professor David Watson** of Charles Sturt University on "**Of mistletoes and birds: recent advances in understanding their ecological interactions and interdependence**".

For the past 15 years, David has been studying interactions between mistletoe and animals worldwide, and in this presentation he will review key findings involving birds. As one of few plant groups relying on birds for both pollination and seed dispersal, small differences in bird behaviour or habitat use can effect fundamental changes in mistletoe occurrence. Having studied a variety of mistletoe specialist frugivores and more generalist species that include mistletoe

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Everyone welcome

What to watch out for this month.

Two thirds of the way through winter and it is clear that it's likely to be a relatively benign one with, for example, lower than the average number of frosts in July. Therefore it's a puzzle to me why a number of the summer migrants who over-winter in varying numbers seem to be almost completely absent this winter. In fact a number of chatline posters have noted how quiet birds seemed to be this winter; certainly this is reflected in my local patch of NW Cooleman Ridge and the southern fence line of Narrabundah Hill, where even on a rare fine sunny afternoon it has been hard to find birds, even the common ones. Looking at my notes from various sources during the month, it appears that it was particularly quiet during the wet period mid-month, but even the fine last weekend of July didn't elicit many reports, including of the "I saw one too" variety. Perhaps many people are out of Canberra undergoing their own migration to escape the winter?

Nevertheless there still seems plenty of bird activity to discuss. During July, the **Grey Fantail** has still regularly been

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Crescent Honeyeater

Photo: Lyndon Howe

August Meeting—continued from page 1

fruits in their diets, he challenges the prevailing theory that mistletoe specialists represent co-evolved mutualists. Rather than offering superior dispersal services, mistletoe specialists are better considered exploitative, concentrating their favoured food resource, thereby increasing their medium-term food security. In addition to food, mistletoe plants represent popular nesting sites, and these interactions have been studied in a range of species, revealing the importance of microclimate and nest predation. Finally, the role of mistletoes and other parasitic plants on overall community structure is assessed, demonstrating the role of mistletoes as keystone resources and their potential utility in restoring degraded habitats.

What to watch for this month — continued from page 1

reported in small numbers, and the **Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike** a bit less so. There continued to be scattered reports of the **Yellow-faced Honey-eater** throughout July, plus a few of **White-naped Honeyeaters**, but I can find only three records of the **Olive-backed Oriole** at the Jerabomberra Wetlands in late June, and at Callum Brae in the few days leading up to 9 July, as well on 30 July. Interestingly Steve Wallace's analysis of the COG database indicates that of the last 31 years, only 6 years actually had records of this species in July.

There were several reports of the **Superb Parrot** mid-month, but I can find only single records of the **Rufous Whistler** and the **Fuscous Honey-eater** and none at all of the **Dusky Woodswallow**. Unexpectedly there has been a further report of the **Mistletoebird**, as well as one of the **Australian Reed-Warbler**. So for this winter at least it shouldn't be too difficult to tell whether sightings during August are of birds overwintering or early arrivals, particularly if observations of a given species suddenly increase. This includes the **Fairy** and **Tree Martins**; indeed there have already been a couple of sightings of the latter from mid-month after a more than 3 month absence of reporting, as well as the first for nearly 4 months of the **Fan-tailed Cuckoo**, the

least migratory of the 4 local cuckoo species. A posting just before this column was sent to the editors was of a **Noisy Friarbird** heard in Watson on the afternoon of 31 July. This is the first record since late April and based on last year's Annual Bird Report is a very early return.

So keep an eye and ear out for the above species and any other spring/summer migrants returning to Canberra during August to see if my rule of thumb, ie the later the departure, the earlier the return, holds true for this year.

The continued wetter weather in July has meant that the **Pink-eared Ducks** had left by mid-month, though I understand at least a few **Freckled Ducks** stayed for the whole month, as did a few **Red-kneed Dotterels**. There have also been a number of reports of the **Buff-banded Rail** and one of the **Australian Spotted Crake**; again Steve Wallace has pointed out both species have hardly ever been seen here in July. Speaking of winter visitors, it is unclear to me whether the **Brown Gerygone** is still in its usual winter spot of the rain forest gully at the Australian National Botanic Gardens (ANBG), as there have been no reports since Geoffrey Dabb's excellent bird of the month talk at the COG meeting on 10 July; perhaps it is now thought to be no longer worthy of reporting! I think the approximate time of departure is also an important record, as I don't believe its presence here in winter is simply pure chance because it is a "wanderer" during that time.



Mistletoebird

Photo: Julian Robinson

Surprise visitors this winter too have been several sightings of the **Scaly-breasted** and **Musk Lorikeets**, in particular the former for which there has been only one winter record previously in the less than 20 records in total in the COG database, as compared with about 25 records in total scattered throughout the year for the latter species. I guess this should not be surprising due to its generally more northerly range than the coastal Musk Lorikeet. Another visitor has been the **Scarlet Honeyeater**; again of the over 30 records of this species in the ACT on the COG database this is the first record for July, continuing the theme of unexpected sightings for this time of the year, possibly due to the mild winter? Again my thanks go to Steve Wallace for his mining of the COG database to provide me with this information.

In line with my comments made above about the lower levels of reporting from about the end of the first week of July, there seem to be no reports of the following winter altitudinal migrants, the **Pink Robin** and **Rose Robin**, **Crescent Honeyeater** and the **Yellow-tufted Honeyeater** after about 12 July, compared with many in late June/early July. Perhaps the mild winter has seen them leave early, which seems to have been the case with the **Scarlet Robin**, the **White-eared Honeyeater** and the **Golden Whistler** in my local patch of NW Cooleman Ridge and the southern fence line of Narrabundah Hill, as for these three I've only a single record of the first-named in July. Though other observers are still seeing them regularly, in my experience they certainly are usually much less conspicuous in the second half of winter, and leave during August/early September, so also keep an eye/ear out for these departing species, as well as the

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Australian Spotted Crake

Photo: Duncan McCaskill



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2013

20 July – 3 August Gulf of Carpentaria

Cairns to Mt Isa, returning via
Atherton Tablelands

1 – 20 September Strzelecki Outback

Vic, NSW, SW Q'ld, SA. 34th tour

22 – 29 September: NSW Central Coast, Barrington Tops NP, Barren Grounds NR

2 & 3 October Birding for beginners in Murray Valley NP

10 – 18 December: SW Western Australia birding and mammal tour

2013 Plains-wanderer weekends

7 & 8 December
28 & 29 December

2014 tours

2 – 8 Feb: Tasmania
19 – 26 April: Alice Springs
25 May – 8 June: Top End
June: Gulf Country
August: New Caledonia
September: Strzelecki Track
30 Oct – 6 Nov NSW Central Coast,
Barrington Tops NP, Barren Grounds
NR

Please see itineraries, checklists and
latest news on our website

www.philipmaher.com

Flame Robin, which continues to be relatively scarce this year close to suburbia.

There have been a couple of further reports of the **Restless Flycatcher**, again on the northside of Canberra, and interestingly at the same spot as seen a month ago. My experience from my local patch suggests this species tends to be rather sedentary or have regular daily movement patterns, particularly when present in winter. Finally there were several reports of a small number of the **Swift Parrot** caught up with the lorikeets mentioned above in the flowering box trees alongside Athllon Drive in Torrens in mid July.

In keeping with the relatively mild conditions, there have been quite a few reports of breeding activity from early July including of the **Red Wattlebird**, **Noisy Miner**, **Australian Magpie** and **Australian Raven** nest building. The most interesting observation was that of **New Holland Honeyeaters** nest building and mating at the Isabella Ponds and nest building at the ANBG, with Anthony Overs observing that they're a great example of a species that can breed in most months of the year if food resources are available. A number of postings on the chatline have remarked how nest building has been a stop/start affair with periods of inactivity or pausing as if the birds are not sure whether the time to breed was right yet. This is reflected in my observations of the **Masked Lapwing** in the backyard in Percy Crescent, Chapman, which though still often in the vicinity (with sometimes 3 birds together) seemed to have stopped breeding for over a month and it was only during the much sunnier last weekend of July that one was seen on the nest again, in a slightly different spot from in June.

We're fast coming up to the most exciting time on the bird calendar in Canberra, so please also keep an eye out for any further breeding activity in August, as well as arriving spring/summer migrants and departing winter altitudinal migrants. As usual always please ensure that all significant observations end up on the COG database. But just in case you think winter is already over there are still large flocks of **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos** feeding on the grass of median strips, etc, and there were a number of postings on the chatline of very noisy large flocks of **Pied Currawongs** still in the suburbs at the end of July, reminders that there is still a month of winter to go!

Jack Holland



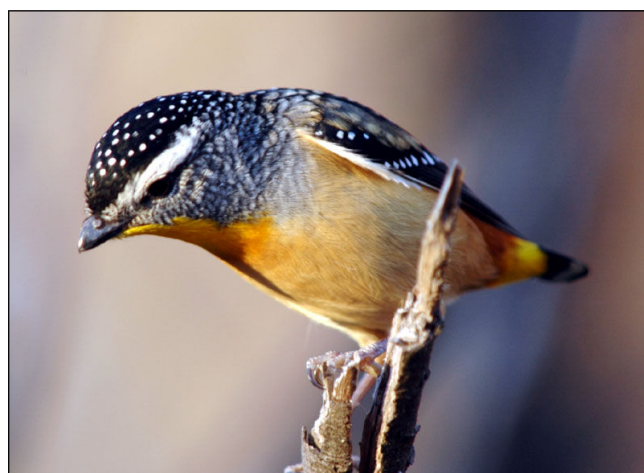
Striated Pardalote

Photo: Mary Bomford



Red-browed Finch

Photo: Duncan McCaskill



Spotted Pardalote

Photo: Stuart Harris

Field Trip Reports

Saturday 6 and Sunday 7 July - Mallacoota

We left Canberra in the freezing fog and cold equipped with mittens and beanies only to be met by sunshine in Mallacoota where temperatures ranged from 5°-16°C! Only 3 intrepid souls joined us for this trip, but they were well rewarded. Fortunately, for us one of them had just purchased a new telephoto lens, which he was itching to try out. On Saturday morning we initially birded on our block. Without much effort the following were observed: **Pied Currawongs**, **Wonga Pigeons**, **Australian King-Parrots** (at least 30), **Rainbow Lorikeets**, **Red Wattlebirds**, **New Holland Honeyeaters**, **Superb Fairy-wrens**, female & male **Satin Bowerbirds**, **Little Wattlebird** and **Eastern Yellow Robin**.

We then headed via the golf course to the beach where the real treat was in store. There was a mass of kelp and the birds were having a field day. **White-faced Herons**, **Pied** and **Sooty Oystercatchers**, **White-fronted Chats**, **Red-kneed dotterels**, **Silver Gulls** and **Willie Wagtails** were sighted with **Whistling Kites**, **Caspian Terns**, **Little Black Cormorants** soaring overhead. We then returned via the Pittosporum walk and sighted a couple of **Black Swans** on the inlet and unexpectedly a **Brown Goshawk** (which whizzed past and then settled for good observation) before heading back to the block for a well-earned coffee.

In the afternoon, a local birdo, Gerry Rushton, (an able replacement for Bob Semmens, who unfortunately had to undergo bowel cancer surgery the week before - he's on the mend) took us to the Sewage Works. Here we spotted **Welcome Swallows**, **Jacky Winters**, a **Nankeen Kestrel**, **White-naped Honeyeaters**, **Bell Miners**, **Australasian Grebe**, **Chestnut Teal**, **Grey Teal**, **Australian Shelduck**, **Eurasian Coot**, **Pink-eared Ducks** and a **Collared Sparrowhawk** chasing a **Grey shrike-thrush**. Fortunately, he went hungry. We also saw a family of **White-winged Choughs** and the inevitable **Galahs**. On the return we went via the wharf and were treated to the pelicans being fed, and a **White-bellied Sea-Eagle** flying overhead.

On Sunday, we went to Betka Beach where a new board walk has been built. **Superb Fairy-wrens** welcomed us and then we spotted a **White-throated Treecreeper**, **White-browed Scrubwren**, **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos**, and an **Intermediate Egret** as the track wound back via the river. More was yet to come at our final destination, the airport. As we pulled up it looked bereft of anything of interest, but we soon spotted **Jacky Winters** and added a **Tawny-crowned Honeyeater**, **Restless Flycatcher** and an **Australasian Pipit**.

Mallacoota hadn't quite finished with us yet, as Chris and I were fortunate to see on our return to our block a **Bassian Thrush**, **Eastern Whipbird** (on the feed table) and a **Common Bronzewing**. All in all a total of 66 species were recorded.

Barbara & Chris de Bruine

Wednesday 17 July – Northside wetlands

Notwithstanding the overcast, cloudy, rainy conditions on the northside, a very respectable 19 participants joined co-leaders Terry Munro and Terry Bell on the first outing to wetlands in Dickson (21 species), Lyneham (15) and Flemington (16).

The first urban wetland at Dickson was in very good condition and contained many waterbirds including more than 150 **Pacific Black Ducks**, several **Hardheads** and **Australian Wood Ducks**, with a **Little Grassbird** heard and glimpsed over the reeds on the little island.

By comparison, the conditions at Lyneham were somewhat off-putting with general untidiness and the accumulation of rubbish commented on by several members. A much smaller number of waterbirds was present including 1 **Grey Teal** and a pair of **Masked Plovers**. Signs of early nesting were evident with a pair of **Australian Ravens** busily engaged in building/renovating their nest high in a roadside gumtree.

We then travelled to the small pond/lake near the Racecourse on the left side of Flemington Road in Mitchell which held only a few waterbirds and one nesting **Purple Swamphen**, before venturing into an

many **Pied Currawongs**, **White-winged Choughs** and **Australian Magpies**, and several overwintering **Welcome Swallows**.

At this point, with a total of 35 species recorded for the morning, it was decided to leave the proposed visit to the remnant woodland behind Mitchell recycling depot to a separate later inspection.

Terry Bell

Sunday 21 July – Mount Majura Vineyard

Twelve brave souls turned up at Mount Majura Vineyard on a Sunday morning around 9am with a distant view of the snow-capped Tinderry Range. Pleasant aesthetics aside, it was horribly cold, 2 degrees to be precise, as we marched off rigidly for a lap of the vineyard in the hope of seeing some, if any, birds. In a slightly shortened walk of 90 minutes, we observed 22 species, and about the same number of **Eastern Grey Kangaroos**. We had good views of **Diamond Firetails**, **Scarlet Robin**, **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos** wafting through adjoining pines, a large flock (approx 25) of **Little Corella** and a similar sized flock of both **Red-browed Finch** and the Tasmanian variant of the **Silvereye** with buff flanks. Most pleasing to all was the manifestation of a hybrid **Crimson/Eastern Rosella**, a first for many participants. All agreed it was noticeably smaller (15-20%) than the flock of **Crimsons** in which it was ensconced and possessed a light blue cheek patch, green/black patterns on wings like an **Eastern** though with an overall 'jizz' of a juvenile **Crimson Rosella**. At the walk's conclusion, most participants availed themselves of plunger coffee, a range of Mount Majura wines, some French Black Truffle-infused Brie and most importantly, some ambient gas heating. The walk consensus was positive despite the near-alpine conditions.

Stuart Harris

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>

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.

Saturday 10 August - Lake Ginninderra beginners' morning

This is the second of our bird walks in 2013 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 18 August – Mystery bus trip - day outing

Jenny Bounds and Jack Holland are still finalising the planning of this bus trip which will involve a mix of woodland birds and waterbirds at some spots you may not have been to, or have even heard of! While a number of possible places have been checked, the final itinerary won't be decided until very close to the day, and will depend on where interesting birds might be expected to be seen.

So if you are interested in participating please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by email on jack.holland@environment.gov.au). The cost of transport by two 12-seater buses will be \$20 per person assuming we can fill or near fill both buses. The point of departure will be from the National Library car park at 8 am. As usual it will run until mid-afternoon, so please bring morning tea and lunch. There were still plenty of spots on the buses when this Gang-gang went into print.

Sunday 1 September – Molonglo Gorge

Jean Casburn will lead this outing, meeting in the Molonglo Gorge carpark at 9.00am, for a walk along the track beside the gorge. Participants require strong walking shoes and the ability to cope with a narrow track and uneven ground. If it is wet, an announcement on whether the outing will proceed will be posted on the chatline.

Saturday 7 September – 2 pm, 54 Grayson St, Hackett

This outing aims to give those who haven't surveyed before, especially during COG's annual ACT bird count (the Blitz), an opportunity to see if you'd like to be involved this year. Details in Blitz article, page 15.

Friday 13 to Sunday 15 September 2013- Galong, west of Harden

This outing will involve a visit to a property that has undergone an extensive replanting program over many years. The outing will be in response to an invitation by the property owner to view the large diversity of birds that now reside on the property in response to the planting program.

The outing will also involve a visit to Jindalee Nature Reserve, an old COG haunt of Box-Ironbark not visited for many years or possibly nearby to Douglas Range.

Accommodation for the two nights will be at the St Clement's Retreat and Conference Centre, see www.stclement.com.au and will provide a different accommodation experience than usually expected at a COG outing.

For further details contact Sue Lashko at smlashko@gmail.com

Sunday 15 September – 11 am 3 Thorn PI, Curtin

The second outing aimed at giving those who haven't surveyed before, especially during COG's annual ACT bird count (the Blitz), an opportunity to see if you'd like to be involved this year. Details in Blitz article on page 15.

Saturday 21 and Sunday 22 September – Eden pelagics

These trips are now fully subscribed and there are people on the waiting lists for both trips. Keep in mind for next year that it's best to get in early, rather than waiting until the last few days before the payment deadline, to avoid disappointment!

Monday 23 to Friday 27 September 2013 - Green Cape. This trip is now full.



Collared Sparrowhawk

Photo: Duncan McCaskill

Stitched photos and panoramas

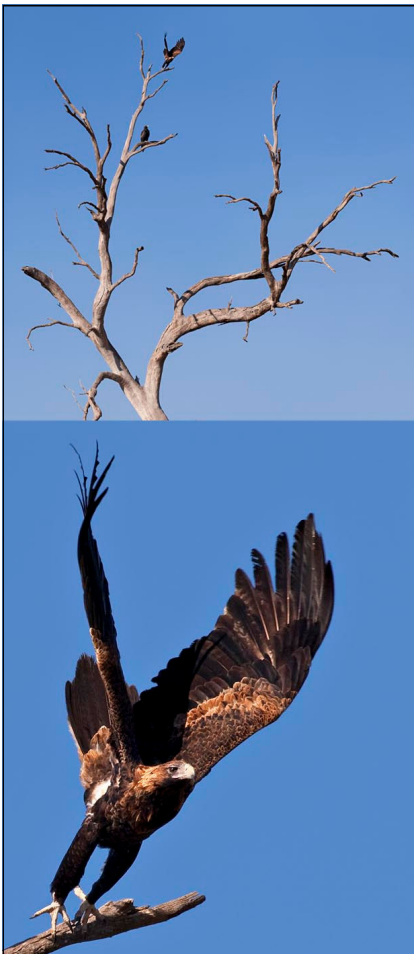
Photo Ops #14- Aug 2013

Julian Robinson

How often do we stand at a spectacular lookout wanting to fit all of that endless impressive view into one satisfying photograph? How often does the wildlife photographer mumble rude words as the highly sought-after bird finally and miraculously perches close, so close that only its eyeball, claws or one wing fit in the viewfinder?



A panorama taken on a recent COG outing to Barren Grounds — members looking over mist-filled Kangaroo Valley.



A large image of a pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles, stitched from about 20 photos (top, with detail below) .

Perhaps not that often, but if such things happen to you as they do to me and you're an enthusiast, you might like to consider the benefits of stitched or panoramic shots. I love them, not only because they solve the mentioned technical problems but also because they can provide a particular thrill to view if you can present them properly ... SO much detail and SUCH an expansive view!

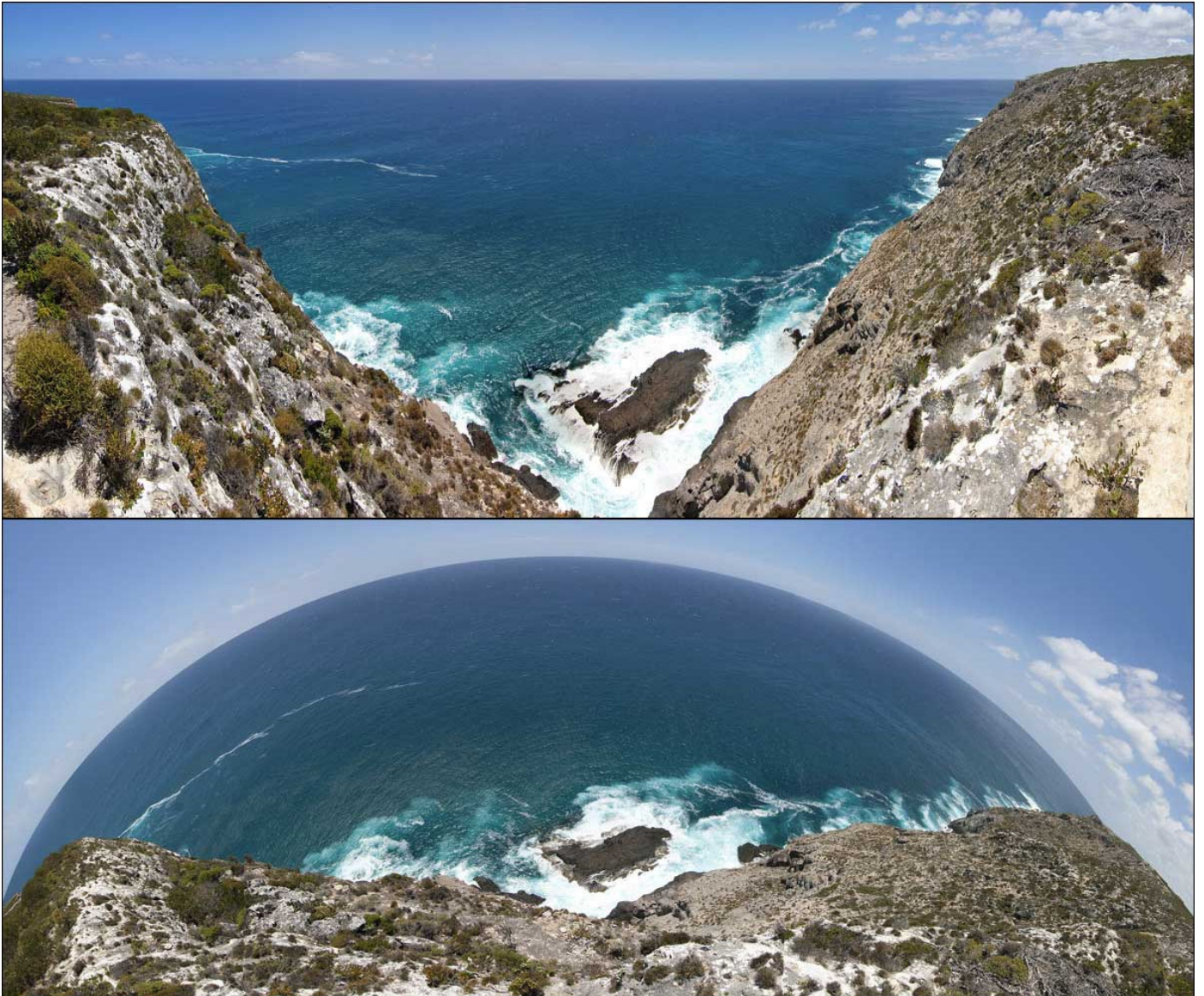
The idea is simple – you take a whole series of shots to cover the chosen expanse and later stitch them together into a single image. In the old days this involved joining photo prints into a montage using sticky tape and glue, with predictably variable results often involving sudden changes in brightness of the sky or lines that didn't meet. With the digital darkroom things became easier though still involving a long-winded painstaking process of matching images by manipulating and warping until the joins met properly. My first digital panorama took me fourteen hours to assemble!

Semi-automatic stitching software appeared a decade ago that has since evolved to the point where, assuming you take the original photos well, it's now a relatively painless process. Recent in-camera panoramic software possibly makes it even easier, though I'm not yet convinced about the quality or predictability.

Not all stitched photos are necessarily panoramas, if by that we mean a long thin photo covering a wide expanse in one dimension. Sometimes we can use the technique on smaller scale subjects to solve the bird-too-close problem, or we might just want to take an otherwise normal subject in super quality detail. Other times a bird's long tail might extend beyond the edge of the viewfinder (Superb Parrots do this regularly) so we might take an extra photo to cover just the missing bit and join the two later into a 'mini-panorama'.

Recent technology definitely makes the task easier, but the challenges still facing the stitcher are many. The most troublesome issues include parallax, seamless joining, projections, subjects that move and, most notably, finding a suitable way of presenting the end product that doesn't diminish its effect.

Parallax refers to the movement of near objects relative to distant ones as you shift the camera. Unless adjoining photos are taken from exactly the same point, a nearby tree branch will have a different background in two

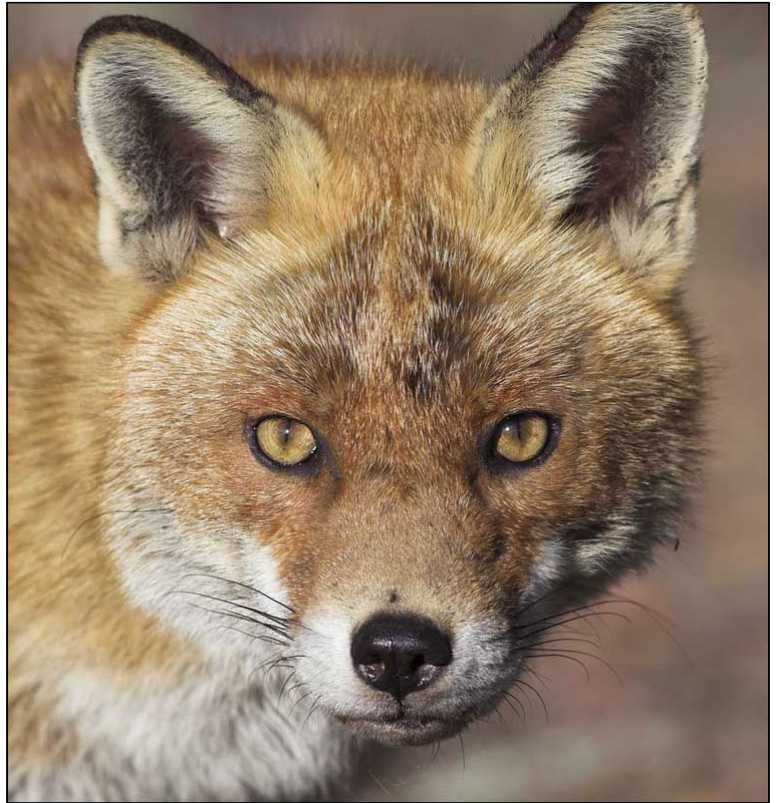


Two different projections of the same cliff-top image.

overlapping images, causing unfixable errors – joins that can't be made. The proper solution is to use a tripod with a panoramic head, a device that restricts the camera to rotate about the optical centre of the lens. Fortunately in practice we can often get away with handheld camera by being careful in how we move the camera between shots, or taking a subject with no near and far elements.

Even without parallax problems it can be difficult or impossible to make the joins invisible. Taking all your photos with identical exposure and focus settings is a necessary start but we can still get caught out by lens distortions, flare and vignetting, all subjects that are mercifully beyond the scope of this short column.

When we assemble a very wide-angle panorama we have to choose the projection to apply; that is, how we map the curved 3D expanse we photographed onto a small flat piece of paper or screen, in the same way that cartographers map the spherical earth to its flat representations. The choice of projection can make an enormous difference to a photo as the photographed area gets wider or more especially taller, away from horizontal. The two versions of the cliff top view over the ocean illustrate the point. This is actually a very wide angle view, though that is not easy to tell. The top version was projected to keep the horizon straight, with the result that a giant fictitious chasm appeared in the cliff I was standing near the edge of. The bottom version maintained a more realistic view of the cliff top but turned the horizon into a circle. Which is right? Neither, or both. Neither in my view acceptably shows what it looks like to stand at that location, or even gives an impression of what it feels like, so I don't count this as a successful use of the technique. In general we can choose projections to make verticals stay vertical, or horizontals stay horizontal, but not both at the same time, so the choice of projection will radically affect the end result. Fortunately, for complicated reasons, you can largely avoid projection difficulties by pointing the camera perfectly horizontal, taking



The Botanic Gardens Powerful Owl and a fox at Callum Brae were each stitched from three shots.

only a single line of photos, stitching with a cylindrical projection and accepting that all horizontal lines other than the horizon will curve.

Smaller stitched images such as those you might use to get the whole bird in shot aren't affected much by the preceding problems, but do have the likelihood that the subject will move between shots. The obvious solution is to choose a slow moving subject like the Powerful Owl (three shots, but completely unmoving at the time) or the fox



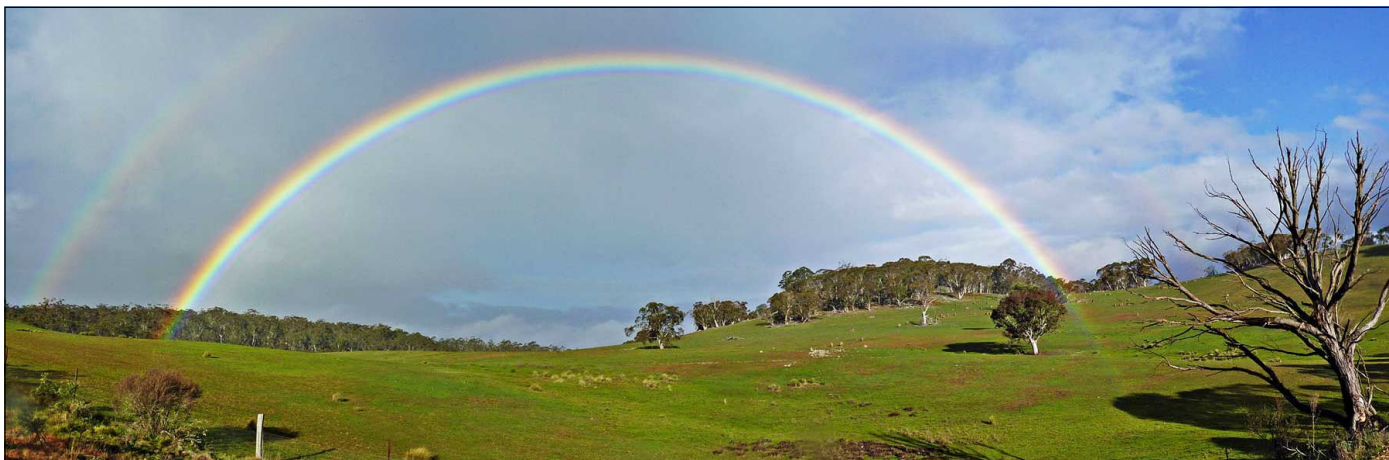
An Emu pauses before rapidly crossing the railway line near Round Hill.

(also three shots but slight movement that was corrected in processing). Or you could use the movement to make a sequence panorama like the Emu crossing the railway line.

An alternative way of getting moving wildlife into a larger panorama is to take a photo of the animal, then, keeping the same camera settings, methodically take many shots to cover the desired surroundings. The Wedge-tailed Eagles in the dead tree were taken this way, resulting in a very large high-resolution image that looks quite impressive on half a wall.

The biggest challenge with very-wide-angle panoramic images is that when displayed in usual print or screen dimensions they diminish the subject. Rainbows that cover half the sky requiring you to turn and bend your neck to see in their entirety become curious miniatures of themselves. My example of the rainbow taken south of Cooma is an interesting effect in itself, but the scale, the detail and the grandeur are gone. On a wall the only real answer is to print

it big – the bigger the better – and if possible curve it around the viewer. Another possibility is to choose a projection that evokes the feeling of expanse and depth at the expense of ‘reality’. This was my intention with the photo of Ebor Falls. Some may feel I’ve been less than successful in this, so, of course, I made another more literal version –

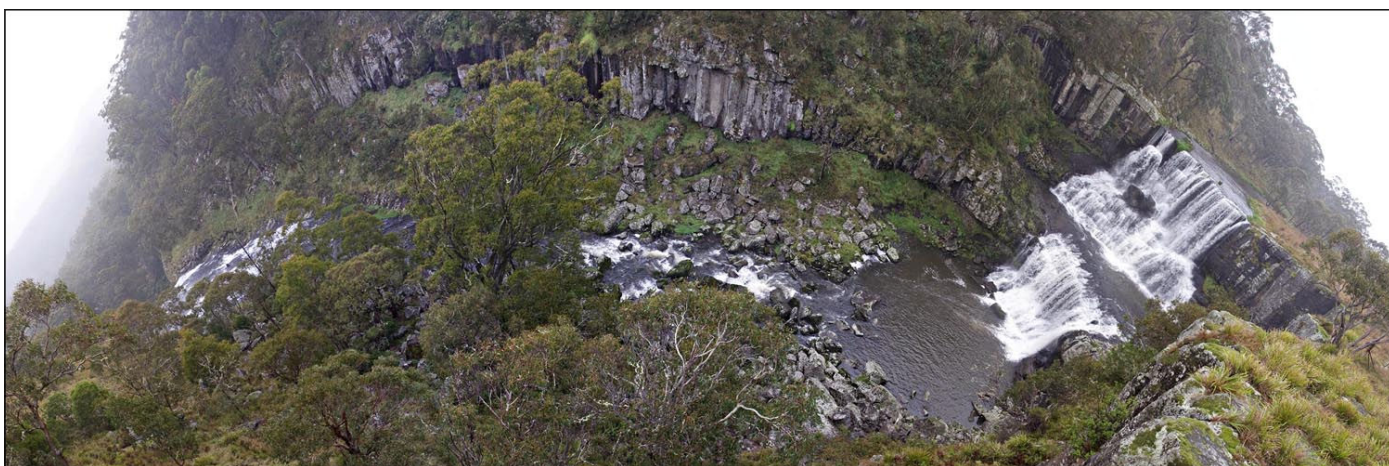


A ‘diminished’ rainbow.

a photographic incarnation of Groucho’s famous line: “Those are my principles, and if you don’t like them... well, I have others.”

The good news is that despite the traps, the production of a straightforward panorama like the one of COG members looking out over Kangaroo Valley is simple and fast and provides a record of that view that is not realistically possible in any other way.

Larger examples for the interested can be seen at www.flickr.com/ozjulian and look for the ‘Set’ (button near top of screen) titled Panoramas. Click, wait and then right click to view at original size.



Ebor Falls.

FOR SALE - CHILTERN

“Possums’ Retreat” is a 24.2ha sustainable lifestyle property with a 4.95ha covenant with Trust for Nature. It includes a modern 3 bedroom brick-veneer house, 1.9 KW solar panels, 200,000lt water tank, views of 3 paddocks each with a spring fed dam. 125 recorded bird species including Barking Owls, Turquoise Parrots, nest boxes for Red-Rumped Parrots and gliders. Used by COG for their last Easter campout. Near Chiltern and Beechworth, close to Barambogie and Chiltern-Mt. Pilot National Park, 100s of kms of riding and walking tracks. A quiet sanctuary for birds, animals and humans alike. \$510,000 negotiable.

Contact Peter and June Gotham (03) 57261619

or jm18gotham@gmail.com

Winter Woodland Surveys

Mulligans Flat

Jenny Bounds and the team did the survey on 30 June in fantastic weather conditions, fine and sunny. 48 species were recorded, well above average for winter. Some surveyors reported quiet sites, while others had a range of birds. **White-eared Honeyeater** numbers were good, with one team reporting 6 birds on their transect along the western ridge. All five thornbills were recorded, including **Yellow Thornbills** which are not common at Mulligans. A number of ducks were on the large dam including **Australian Shoveller** and a **Musk Duck**, as well as a **Whistling Kite**. **Scarlet Robin** numbers seemed normal for winter with sightings at a number of places. A highlight was 9 **Varied Sittellas** at site 10 at the northern end of the reserve. Interestingly, **Little Corellas** were around. Two teams saw Bettongs in the tussock grass woodland on either side of the quartz ridge.

Goorooyarroo NR north

Steve Holiday and Pru Buckley surveyed on a very wintry, cold, foggy morning, and recorded a total of only 28 species. Two mixed feeding flocks accounted for the majority of birds and species. The typical feeding flock at Gooroo is made up mostly of **Weebills**, **Striated** and **Buff-rumped Thornbills**, and a few other species including pardalotes, **White-throated Treecreeper**, **Golden Whistler**, **White-eared Honeyeater**, **Speckled Warbler** and **Scarlet Robin**. The lowlight of the survey was encountering two Dalmatian– spotted feral pigs with a brood of 8 piglets. Evidence of their feeding is becoming more widespread in the damp areas of the reserve. (Rangers are aware of the problem).

Goorooyarroo NR south

Steve Holliday and Pru Buckley did the winter survey on 23 June, in cold but fine conditions. Most sites were fairly quiet but they did encounter 2 mixed feeding flocks, and recorded 40 species in total, despite missing a few usually found. Highlights were a **Yellow Thornbill** near site 5 and a couple of **Fuscous Honeyeaters** near site 8, both species rarely recorded on the surveys. Species in or near the mixed flocks included **Scarlet Robin**, **Eastern Spinebill**, all 5 of the local thornbills, **Weebills**, **Golden Whistlers** and **Striated Pardalotes**. A male **Mistletoebird** was at site 9 and a brown **Flame Robin** near site 1. Other honeyeaters were **Yellow-faced**, **Brown-headed**, **White-plumed** and **White-eared**. The only raptors seen were two **Wedge-tailed Eagles** over Sammy's Hill.

Mt Majura NR

Kathy Walter and John Goldie surveyed over 22/23 June, two cold and crisp mornings, with 32 species in total over the nine sites. The first five sites, always the most interesting, proved so again with a couple of mixed flocks. Highlights included at least 4 **Scarlet Robins**, 3 **Golden Whistlers** including a fully coloured male, **Speckled Warblers**, **Striated** and **Brown Thornbills**, **Superb Fairy-wrens** and, an unusual one for these sites, 5 **Red-browed Finches**. Numerous species of honeyeater were found at a couple of sites including **Brown-headed**, **White-eared**, **White-plumed**, **Yellow-faced** and **Eastern Spinebill**. No **Common Bronzewing** were seen, which was unusual.

Campbell Park

Michael Lenz surveyed on 30 June, a perfect winter weather morning. 26 species were recorded for the 9 sites and 39 species on the walk in total. The most regularly recorded species were **Galah**, **Crimson Rosella** and **Weebill** (at 7 out of 9 sites), closely followed (unfortunately) by **Noisy Miner** (6 of 9 sites). Species of interest were 1 **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike**, 1 **Mistletoebird**, 4 **Varied Sittellas**, 2 **Speckled Warblers** and **Brown-headed Honeyeaters** at and between sites. Only 1 mixed feeding flock (not at a site) was recorded with 11 species, including 3 species of robin, 1 **Scarlet Robin** (male), 3 **Flame Robins** (incl. 1 male) and 1 **Red-capped Robin** (female). There was also a touch of spring: 1 male **Common Bronzewing** booming, 2 **Jacky Winters** in full song, **Wood Ducks** inspecting tree hollows, and a group of **White-winged Choughs** crowding in and around a nest.

Newline

Sue Lashko surveyed on 23 June, in fine, still conditions early on but the wind picked up for the last few sites. Newline was quite dry with most dams completely dry or very low. Unusually, the front paddock was quiet with the highlight being a **Scarlet Robin** on the easterly fenceline, whereas one of the back sites was the busiest with 14 species recorded. Rosellas were prolific throughout and they were doing a lot of chasing and tail wagging. The resident pair of **Rainbow Lorikeets** in Site 7 were ignored by the rosellas and, surprisingly, **Red-rumped Parrots**. The only mixed flock consisted of fairy-wrens, scrubwrens, **Double-barred Finches**, one each of **Speckled Warbler**, **Willie Wagtail** and **White-eared Honeyeater**, as well as **Weebills** joining them in the exotic shrubbery. **Striated Pardalotes** far outnumbered **Spotted**, with 23 of the former flying out of one tree. A **Wedge-tailed Eagle** was the only raptor sighted. 36 species were recorded for the morning.

Callum Brae NR (Symonston sites)

Sandra Henderson did the survey on 20 June, a clear, cold morning with a chilly breeze. Highlights for the morning were a **Mistletoebird**, at least 12 **Scarlet Robins**, two groups of **Speckled Warblers** with seven birds in total, one site where the only sighting was a pair of **Wedge-tailed Eagles** circling above, and lengthy sightings of a fox which looked very healthy but didn't seem too concerned by Sandra's approach. Despite detouring to favoured areas in the past, not a single **Flame Robin** put in an appearance. There were around 20 **Wood Ducks** in the reserve - they've been hard to find there over the past few months. A number of **Grey Butcherbirds** were around, heard at most survey sites. **Weebills** were very abundant, as were **Yellow-rumped** and **Buff-rumped Thornbills**. 35 species were recorded for the morning.

Jerrabomberra West NR

Jenny Bounds and Alison Russell-French did the survey on 28 June. Unfortunately, weather conditions were not optimum with low cloud around. It was one of the quieter surveys with several regulars not recorded and only 28 species (but not the lowest count on a winter survey at this site though). A highlight was an overwintering **Rufous Whistler**. Three **White-throated Treecreepers** were recorded in the same area, and **Grey Shrike-thrushes** were calling. An **Australasian Pipit**, a **Black-shouldered Kite** and 15 **Crested Pigeons** were spotted on the way out through the grasslands. Interestingly, no large white **Cockatoos** (**Sulphur-crested** or **Corellas**) were at the site that day, although there are usually plenty of them around there. Large numbers of white cockies have been seen feeding on the grassy parklands especially around Woden, so perhaps that is where they have gone.

Tuggeranong Hill NR

Lia Battisson did the survey on Saturday 22 June. It was cool and still, though sunny, at first, then overcast for the last three sub-sites. None of the seven sites were visited by many birds during the surveys. **Crimson Rosellas** were most conspicuous. **Honeyeaters** were represented by **Red Wattlebird**, **White-eared** and **Eastern Spinebill**. The highlight of the morning was a pair of **Wedge-tailed Eagles** soaring over site 1. In all 21 species were present on the Hill, eight during site counts.

Rural leasehold near Tharwa

David McDonald surveyed on 30 June, commenting what an unusual woodlands survey this was! It was apparently perfect conditions for birding—the survey commenced within an hour of sunrise, the sky was clear and there was no wind—but the number of birds and the species diversity were both really low. In fact, it could well be the smallest number of birds and species observed during the 24 years that David has visited the area. At most of the first eight of the nine sites there were only one, two or three species. All were common birds except that one had three **Speckled Warblers**. **Australian Wood Ducks** were perched high in the trees giving their peculiar winter breeding calls. Everything changed at the last site; it was full of birds! Not only did it include a mixed flock of small bush birds but there were also **White-plumed** and **White-eared Honeyeaters**, a **Grey Shrike-thrush** and, best of all, five **Brown Treecreepers**.

Hall/Gold Creek (Kinlyside)

Alison Rowell surveyed on a cold, clear morning, and recorded 24 native species. Some sites were quiet, with **Weebills**, **Buff-rumped Thornbills** and **White-eared Honeyeaters** being the most commonly recorded small birds. She encountered three mixed feeding flocks, all on sites surveyed after 9.30 am. Highlights were **Diamond Firetail**, **Varied Sittella**, **Speckled Warbler**, **Scarlet Robin**, **Eastern Spinebill** and **Brown-headed Honeyeater**.

Naas Valley site

Julie McGuinness surveyed on a beautiful clear, calm and cold morning following substantial rain in the preceding few days. At the first site two **Grey Shrike-thrushes** were calling, then at the top of a tall eucalypt 2 **Hooded Robin**, a male and female, and two **Diamond Firetails** sitting in the morning sun on the leafless branches. Other birds of note in this site were a **Scarlet Robin**, **Yellow-rumped** and **Striated Thornbills**, a couple of **Southern Whiteface** and a Collared **Sparrowhawk** being harrassed by the smaller birds. 24 species were seen altogether over the survey, mostly in small numbers except for large flocks each of **Starlings** (30 birds), **Sulphur-Crested Cockatoos** (24), **Crested Pigeon** (14) and **Wood Ducks** (20), and smaller flocks of **Red-rumped Parrots** (8) and **White-winged Choughs** (8). There was no sight or sound of the Brown Treecreepers unfortunately, but they seem to come and go from the survey area. Last birds ticked were two lovely **Jacky Winters**.

Request From a New PhD Student

Dear COG members,

I am a new PhD student at ANU studying brood parasitism of the **Pacific Koel** under Dr. Naomi Langmore. As most of you probably know, the koel has recently expanded its breeding range and is now breeding in Canberra. It has also begun using a new host, the **Red Wattlebird**. The **Red Wattlebird** was first known to be used as a host by the koel in Sydney in 1978 and in Canberra in 2008. Other primary hosts of the koel include the **Noisy Friarbird** and **Magpie-lark**. While these two species do occur in Canberra, they do not appear to be parasitised here, but they are parasitised further north (i.e. Sydney, Brisbane). This presents an interesting and unique opportunity to study how quickly host defences can evolve.

I will be spending the first summer of my study in Canberra and will be working in all the different parks, but mostly the botanic gardens. I will be searching for host nests and performing egg and koel recognition experiments on the above mentioned hosts to determine if these species are “naïve” or if they have some defences against parasitism by the koel. In the second year of the study I will be going up north, most likely to Sydney, where hosts have been exposed to koels for a longer period of time. I will perform the same tests on the same hosts and compare responses between locations.

The second aspect of my project is looking at how well the **Koel** mimics the host eggs and nestlings. I have already taken spectral reflectance measurements of koel and host eggs from the CSIRO egg collection. I will also be taking spec measurements of host (and hopefully koel) nestlings to see how similar they are in terms of colour. In addition, I plan to record nestling begging calls and behaviour.

I will be colour banding adults and all nestlings so they can be identified, but also because there is a lack of banding studies on these birds. I hope to add to our knowledge about the life histories and behaviour of these species by banding them.

My request to COG members: I would be very grateful if anyone who sees/finds **Red Wattlebird**, **Noisy Friarbird**, or **Magpie-lark** nests could let me know the location. The stage of the nest does not matter as I am focusing on both the egg and nestling stages. Even more importantly though, if parasitised nests are found or if koel nestlings or fledgelings are discovered, I would be extremely appreciative if I could be notified. It would be such a big help to my project, but also I hope to increase our understanding of these species through observation. If anyone happens to see a colour-banded **Red Wattlebird**, **Noisy Friarbird**, **Magpie-lark**, or koel, I would greatly appreciate it if they could let me know the location/date/time/and bands, if possible. In addition, if anyone has any tips or literature that might be of use I would appreciate that as well. My email is virginia.abernathy@anu.edu.au. Thanks everyone!

Virginia Abernathy

COG'S NINTH ANNUAL BIRD BLITZ

Yes, it is on again, on Saturday 26 and Sunday 27 October 2013. PLEASE help us - whatever your experience level – with our annual bird count (Blitz) on either or both days. We aim to survey in each of 165 grid cells throughout the ACT and to do this, we need as many COG members as possible to participate.

COG members are encouraged to “adopt” one or more locations or entire grid cells, and those already adopted will be shown on our website and updated from time to time. But don't be perturbed if your favourite location has been taken - multiple surveyors per location are quite acceptable, though it would be good if you took on at least one unclaimed site as well. Think about giving an unknown area a try – it might prove exciting. In order to claim a grid cell, please put in your bid to Barbara Allan, the blitz organizer, on blitz@canberrabirds.org.au or phone her on 6254 6520.

If you are very familiar with a site and regularly survey there, or do Birds Australia-registered two hectare surveys there, you would probably be the best person to survey that site for the Blitz if you can. But if last years' sites were boring or unpleasant or bird-free zones, pick somewhere new this time. Or better still, do a 2-ha 20-min survey to “cover” the site, then move on to somewhere more interesting. If work or family commitments preclude you from doing much at all, be sure to try and do at least a 20-minute, 2-ha survey of your own backyard and environs, to support COG's Blitz.

As usual, depending on the weather and Namadgi National Park management, we hope to be able to conduct surveys beyond the locked gates in the Park. The organiser is looking for more 4WDs and competent drivers to tackle the fire trails. Please contact Barbara if you'd like to be involved and/or if you have room in your vehicle and are willing to take passengers.

All standard Birds Australia survey methods are acceptable – just indicate on the electronic or hard-copy datasheet which one you used:

1. a 20-minute survey over 2 hectares (rectangle of 100 m x 200 m; or circle of radius 80 m)

2. a survey within 500 m of a central spot, time unlimited but 20 mins or more

a survey within 5 km of a central spot, time unlimited (though please stay within the one grid cell).

Remember to record the actual number of each bird species seen – e.g. 2 **Laughing Kookaburra**; plus any indication of breeding using the following codes: ih (inspecting hollow); co (copulating); nb (nest building); ny (nest with young); cf (carrying food); dy (dependent young). *Only* record species you are sure about. If you see a bird species on COG's "unusuals" list, take a photo of it, if at all possible; take copious field notes of all the details you observe and any features you didn't see; then submit a completed "unusual bird report form" (available on the COG website) with your hard-copy datasheet or email it to rarities@canberrabirds.org.au.

Datasheets are available at COG meetings; from the organiser; or from the COG website under "Forms" – the COG observation record sheet is the general-use form. You may also use COG's electronic input option for your Blitz records, using the standard ABA code not a specific Blitz one. [This means that any ACT bird record entered over the Blitz weekend will be treated as if it were a Blitz record]. If you aren't already a user of the online data entry system and would prefer to enter your Blitz records this way, please contact Paul Fennell our database manager for details – ptf@grapevine.com.au or 6254 1804. If you use hard-copy datasheets, please mail them to COG Blitz Records, PO Box 301, Civic Square ACT 2608; deliver them to Barbara; or hand them in at the November COG meeting.

To encourage members who have not been regular participants in the Blitz, this year Michael Robbins will be sending COG members a paper COG Observation Record pre-filled with name, address etc. The only information you have to add is the number of each species of bird you observe near your home, plus the date and time.

Blitz training days

To ensure that all COG members can participate in the Blitz, whatever their birding experience, this year we are offering training for newcomers to birding or to bird reporting. If you are a beginner and can only confidently identify magpies and other common birds, you can still participate by surveying around your home, your street or your local park – reporting only the birds you can identify with certainty.

You are invited to a one hour Blitz training session on either

Saturday 7 September at 2 pm (54 Grayson St, Hackett and Hackett Neighbourhood Oval), or Sunday 15 September at 11 am (3 Thorn Pl Curtin and North Curtin District Playing Fields). The sessions will provide practical tips such as knowing when to report and not report birds, help in being confident of your ID, and easy ways to estimate numbers. **Forms, notes & pencils will be provided.**

An optional second hour will include a search of a local park, more practice and tips about describing location, type of searches, use of latitude & longitude, support software & COG online system.

To register for the training, please contact Michael Robbins - mrobbins (at) home.netspeed.com.au. For all other Blitz queries or to nominate preferred sites, contact Barbara Allan on 6254 6520 or blitz@canberrabirds.org.au.

DEUA TIN HUTS (Via Braidwood)

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

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

Group booking discounts.

Email enquiry@deuatinhuts.com www.deuatinhuts.com Ph 02 4847 1248

MUDBRICK COTTAGE—MALLACOOTA

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

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

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

2012-2013 memberships:

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

New members

COG welcomes the following new members:

P Gatenby, Deakin
B Rebera, Ngunnawal
V Abernathy, O'Connor
S Koh, Kambah
K Mallett, Charnwood

NEXT NEWSLETTER

Deadline for September 2013 edition

Wednesday 28 August 2013

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

gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au Or

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

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

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

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COG library

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COG E-mail Discussion List

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

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

canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au

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

Canberra Bird Notes

Editor: Michael Lenz

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Gang-gang

If undeliverable, please return to

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