

Gang-gang

August 2006

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

Monthly Meeting

8 pm Wednesday

9 August 2006

*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.*

Our short talk will be by COG president **Jack Holland**, on some basic points for raptor identification, as illustrated by the Little Eagle and the Whistling Kite. This bird of the month presentation will be a prelude to the Raptor Twitchathon on 3 September.

Our main speaker will be **Dr Leo Joseph**, director of the Australian National Wildlife Collection. His talk is entitled 'Some ornithological escapades in South America and Australia: or how I amused myself for 11 years'. Leo has been a birdwatcher for many years and in the 1980s fulfilled a lifelong dream to travel to South America. He returned to Australia and worked on the evolution of Australian rainforest birds for a PhD. South America still called and he returned there in 1994. In 1997 he moved to Philadelphia where he was the curator of birds at the Academy of Natural Sciences until his return to Australia last year.

Everyone welcome

What to watch for this month

The end of July/beginning of August is always an exciting and anticipatory time for many local bird watchers, with most of winter over and a build up of bird activity as spring is approaching. As I've been away I haven't been able to keep up with happenings closely, but it seems that the coldest winter for quite a few years has been reflected in the bird populations, with few reports of species such as the **Dusky Woodswallow** or **Olive-backed Oriole** that in the past milder years seemed to be overwintering in ever greater numbers. On the other hand there seem to have been a few more reports of the **Rose Robin** than last year, and even the occasional **Pink Robin** has been seen (the 2 robin species we couldn't locate on the twitchathon day). However, **Flame Robins** seem to have been much scarcer, certainly so round the Chapman area since we've been back. **Crescent Honeyeaters** also seem to have been very few in number.

And what will this spring bring? Will there be lots of **Rufous Songlarks** and **White-winged Trillers** to the west of Canberra as there have been for the past two years? Well, we should soon know as by the end of August many migrant species should have, or will be starting to, return. This should include most of the cuckoos, the **Dusky Woodswallow**, the **Grey Fantail**, **Noisy Friarbird**, **White-naped** and **Yellow-faced Honeyeater**, **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike** and **Olive-backed Oriole**. On the other hand very few **Golden Whistlers** and **White-eared Honeyeaters**, both of which seem to have been relatively common this winter, will not have returned to the higher areas.

Jack Holland

Notice of COG Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc will be held at 8 pm on Wednesday 11 October 2006 in the Multi-media Theatre, Canberra Girls Grammar School, corner of Gawler Cres and Melbourne Ave, Deakin — **Barbara Allan, Public Officer**

Agenda

1. Opening
2. Apologies
3. Confirmation of minutes of 2005 AGM
4. President's report
5. Adoption of president's report
6. Presentation of annual statement of accounts
7. Adoption of annual statement of accounts
8. Appointment of auditor for 2006-07
9. Election of office-bearers (President, Vice-president, Secretary and Treasurer) and ordinary committee members (nomination forms available at meetings or from the secretary)
10. Other matters for which notice has been given.
11. Close of meeting.

Field Trip reports

Superb Lyrebird survey, Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, 24th June 2006.

The third annual survey of the **Superb Lyrebird** at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve was run under perfect conditions; a typical winter's day in the ACT with a cold, foggy start that soon produced a clear, still morning. Nine COG members met at the gates at 7.30am and were soon dispatched to survey the Gibraltar Rocks, Devil's Gap, Fishing Gap, Ashbrook Creek and Camel Back trails. In addition, the Lyrebird trail, although not officially open to the public since the 2003 bushfires and now impossible to find without prior knowledge and a lot of luck, was surveyed for the first time.

Not counting the single bird reported from the Lyrebird trail there were 12 individuals recorded. With experience gained from the previous two surveys we have been able to re-evaluate past sightings and now estimate that there were six individuals reported in 2004 and 14 individuals reported in 2005.

During the survey 26 species were recorded, funnily enough the same number as the two previous surveys. The species recorded from along the trails included the **Brown Quail, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Crimson Rosella, Laughing Kookaburra, Superb Lyrebird, White-throated Treecreeper, Superb Fairy-wren, Spotted and Striated Pardalote, White-browed Scrubwren, Weebill, Brown and Striated Thornbill, Red Wattlebird, White-eared Honeyeater, Eastern Spinebill, Scarlet, Flame and Eastern Yellow Robin, Golden Whistler, Grey-Shrike-thrush, Grey Fantail, Australian Magpie, Pied Currawong, White-winged Chough and Red-browed Finch.**

Interestingly, over the three trails on the western side of the Tidbinbilla valley an average of six species per trail was recorded whilst there were 12 species per trail recorded from the three eastern trails.

Many thanks to the participants and to the staff at Tidbinbilla for allowing us early access into the Reserve

Chris Davey and Peter Fullagar

Ducks Plus – Commonwealth Park, 7 July

Question - what's the difference in a duck? Answer - there is no difference as one leg is both the same!!

Well the dozen members and guests who accompanied Peter Fullagar on a frosty foggy Sunday morning soon learnt that this bit of nonsense attributed to Spike Milligan is not true. Mainly using the common **Pacific Black Duck** as an example, Peter was able to show us there are subtle differences between male and females in plumage and much clearer differences in their calls and particularly their breeding behaviour. Did you know that it's the quality of the tertial feather and top of the head pattern that are the main plumage differences (as well as a slight size differential) and that it's the female that has the louder, more distinctive quacking call (as opposed to the male's courtship "peep" or whistle)?

Peter was also able to demonstrate the differences in breeding behaviour of the males and females. To his experienced eye, these are much clearer and diagnostic and he could sex them easily without the use of binoculars well before we could using these aids. He was also able to dispel some myths; for example, that the speculum is not green in pure ducks and purple in hybrids as I thought, and closer inspection revealed both colours could be seen on the same bird depending on the angle and quality of the light. And did you know that once a duck has something in its mouth such as nesting material it is then unable to walk, so this must be pulled in from around the nest site?

Commonwealth Park proved a very good venue as there were a number of paired black ducks as well as a few single females over which the bigger group of unattached males could go through their repertoire in trying to attract. The only other duck species seen was the **Australian Wood Duck**, in which the sex differences are much clearer, with not a great deal of display etc. The very tame **Eurasian Coot, Dusky Moorhen** and **Purple Swamphen** afforded an excellent comparison, including of juvenile birds, and to pose the question why it is that only **Coot** have webbed feet. One of the highlights, however, was not avian but a large **Eastern Water Rat** that swam across the pond in full view, had a brief altercation with a male **Darter** and then proceeded to preen itself on the same log fully out of the water just out of Darter reach, before swimming off again.

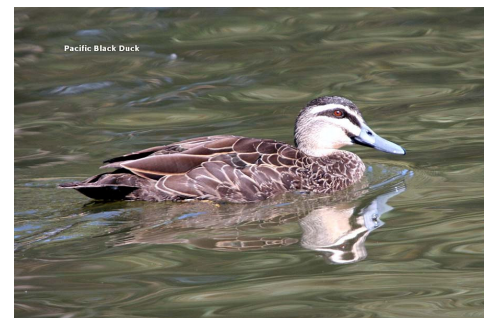


Photo by Lindsay Hansch

Pacific Black Duck
(*Anas Superciliosa*)

Many thanks to Peter for imparting so much of his considerable knowledge. The exercise is well worth repeating, perhaps at Tidbinbilla where there would be a wider range of ducks. One question Peter wasn't able to answer was how come all the birds weren't frozen in water that could at best only have been several degrees above zero, in contrast to the gathered participants huddled on the shore.

Jack Holland

Molonglo Valley Minibus Ecotour – Sunday 23 July

A mix of sightseeing and walking made this tour most enjoyable. The threatening clouds seemed to dissipate at each stop providing calm and mild conditions. A total of 41 bird species were identified during the day of which five were raptors (see below for a composite list).

Our first stop, Shepherd's Lookout, is renowned for not only its lovely view of Molonglo/Murrumbidgee River system, but also as the hunting ground for the **Little Eagle** and **Peregrine Falcon**. Although several species of typical woodland birds (**honeyeaters, thornbills, parrots, White-winged Chough, Striated Pardalote, Crested Pigeon and Superb Fairywren**) were sighted on the walk to the lookout there was no sign of any raptors. One **Australian Pelican** and two **cormorants** were all that were to be seen on the river.

After a brief stop at Coppins Crossing, we continued on to Mt Stromlo which provided a bird's eye view of sites in the Molonglo Valley under investigation for future urban development (shock horror). There was still no sign of any raptors but a few more species were added to the list. Unperturbed, it was on to Uriarra Crossing for lunch. A quick stop to view a **Nankeen Kestrel** perched in a dead gum along the road led to a fleeting glimpse of a small bird sitting on a fence - a **White-fronted Chat**, several people thought. A search along the road failed to find the bird again, so we proceeded on.

Lunch was enjoyed in the sun alongside the river as a **Brown Falcon** high up on the hill across the river sat keenly surveying its surroundings. Attempts to get a closer view of the Brown Falcon led to a close encounter with a young **Wedge-tailed Eagle** winging its way over the river.

On to the Woodstock Reserve for a pleasant walk that almost completed the full circle of the Molonglo Valley. Passing the convergence of the Molonglo and Murrumbidgee it seemed that Shepherd's Lookout was a stone's throw away across the river. More sightings were added to the growing list; in particular, several male **Flame Robins**, a flock of **Varied Sittellas** and a **White-throated Treecreeper**. The best was yet to come. On the trip home at a quick stop to look again for the elusive **White-fronted Chat**, it was found perched on a fence along the roadside at the corner of Uriarra and Coppins Crossing Roads, (vicinity of the new Deek's Park), it posed for sometime for 24 eager onlookers until a plain looking female enticed it away into the paddock. Many thanks to Jenny Bounds and Jack Holland for a most enjoyable day.

Julie Lindner

Future Field Trips

The Guidelines for the conduct and advertising of COG field trips are published on the COG web site. Both trip leaders and members/participants should familiarise themselves with these guidelines. In particular, the Registration Form should be completed for each field trip.



**Australian
Ornithological
Services P/L**

PO Box 385
South Yarra 3141
Victoria
Tel: 03 9820 4223
Mob: 04173 10200

enquiries@philipmaher.com

2006 Birding Tours

Plains-wanderer Weekends
Good Food PW Weekend
18 & 19 November 2006

**Regular Plains-wanderer
weekends**

December 2 & 3, 9 & 10,
16 & 17 and 30 & 31

2007 Birding Tours

**Tasmanian Endemic Bird and
Mammal Tour**
18—24 February
Bruny Island, Melaleuca, pelagic

South West Western Australia
27 February — 7 March

Thailand
7—24 April
co-led with Uthai Treesucon

Gulf of Carpentaria
June 2007—Cairns return

Strzelecki Track
August 2007

**Central Coast NSW
inc nearby national parks**
November 2007
Barrington, Gloucester & Copeland
Tops, Munghorn Gap and several
others parks

All above tours are accommodated

www.philipmaher.com

Sunday 6 August — Lake Ginninderra: Waterbirds for beginners -

This is the second of our bird walks in 2006 that is aimed specifically at beginners or new members. Meet Anthony Overs (6254 0168 AH or email on anthony.overs.reps@aph.gov.au) at 8.30 am 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. Please don't forget to bring your binoculars and field guide.

Wednesday 16 August — Wednesday walk: Jerrabomberra wetlands

The mid week walk for August will be to the Jerrabomberra Wetlands, which is one of the places where there has been a reasonable level of bird activity in an otherwise pretty quiet ACT winter. Both Kelly's Swamp and the Sewage Farm will be visited. Meet at the Dairy Road car park at 9 am and bring morning tea.

Saturday 19th August — Bibaringa: afternoon walk

'Bibaringa' is a private property located on the Cotter Road owned by the Guth family and is utilised primarily for horse agistment. Mindful of the fine balance required to sustain both horses and local endemic wildlife, the custodians have taken measures such as leaving fallen wood (much after 2003 fires), selective paddock fencing and sub-saturation agistment to encourage what natural flora and fauna remain to flourish.



Diamond Firetail
(*Stagonopleura guttata*)
Photo by Geoffrey Dabb

As a result, bird enthusiasts at this time of year may expect to find the following on, or over, Bibaringa: **Wedge-tailed Eagle, Brown Falcon, Brown Treecreeper, Diamond Firetail** and both **Scarlet and Flame Robins**. The possibility of overwintering **Dusky Woodswallows**, or **Southern Whiteface** and **Peaceful/Diamond Dove** also exist. We may even be some of the first to hear/see **Pallid Cuckoos** and other Spring migrants return as they do around this time of year.

Bibaringa is peppered with stately Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*) and has strong populations of aging Red Stringybark (*E. macroryncha*). Since the 2003 fires there has been vigorous epicormic growth on trees that survived the inferno (40%) and it is encouraging to see vast patches of eucalypt saplings re-emerging (which like a lot of things are now over my head).

If interested, meet the walk leader, Stuart Harris, at 1 pm at the entrance to Bibaringa, which is on the right hand side of the Cotter Road approx 1 km west of the Mt Stromlo turnoff. Stuart has been walking on, and observing the birds of, Bibaringa regularly for over 6 years now, with the kind permission of the Guth family. 105 species have been recorded in this relatively small area over that time.

Please bring a drink bottle and sturdy footwear as the walk will be undulating and over sometimes rocky, or even moist ground (much topsoil was lost post January 2003 and Bibaringa's meaning is 'place of springs'). Depending on group consensus, our party may take in some of the elevated views around Bibaringa, which afford sweeping vistas of the Murrumbidgee Corridor. Consensus will again determine the walk duration though it is not envisaged to go much beyond 4 pm.

The last COG visit to Bibaringa attracted 26 people so it would be appreciated if you state your intention to join us on the day as car pooling may be required to traverse the property. Also, please park well off the Cotter Rd as there is much weekend traffic in the area. Stuart can be contacted at home on 6232 4998, mobile 0404 330 965 or by E-mail on sharris@cpe.com.au or stu_thoth@hotmail.com

Sunday 3 September — Raptor Twitchathon: all day bus trip

The ambitious aim of this outing is to observe all of the eleven bird of prey species that may be reasonably expected to be seen in the ACT in the one day, and is modelled on the very successful Robin Twitchathon held last year. In

particular we will be concentrating on the identification of raptors, which many members find difficult. Some material will be available to assist in this process, which will be based on the Bird of the Month presentation at the August COG meeting.

As we will be visiting several spots in the ACT where raptors are likely to be present, transport will be by two 12-seater buses. The point of departure will be the National Library car park at 8 am. This is quite central, close to where some species are expected to be, and where the parking is free. It will run until mid afternoon so that the buses can be returned late that afternoon, so please bring morning tea and lunch. With the rising fuel prices and higher charges for hire of the buses costs will be \$20 per person, including the COG admin fee. This is dependent on sufficient numbers to fill the 2 buses. At present one bus has been filled, so could those interested please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au) as soon as possible. With 2 full buses there will not be the possibility for any tag-a-long vehicles.

A draft route and the exact itinerary will not be determined until closer to the day, and will depend on recent reports of where these birds are, though there will be an attempt to stay within the ACT boundaries. If any member is aware where a particular species can be reliably found and viewed with such a big group, could you please let Jack Holland know.

Saturday/Sunday 16-17 September — Frogs' Hole Creek, Frogmore: over night campout on private property

COG has been invited for a follow up visit to observe the birds on this property at Frogmore, 26 km to the NE of Boorowa, and about 2 hours drive from Canberra. This is an undulating bush block of close to 150 ha, with a large number of old eucalypts of several species including Yellow Box, White Box and Apple Box and patches of very old Black Cypress Pine. A large number of plantings have gone in over recent years and quite a lot of re-growth of callitris and other native species is evident since grazing was limited. Over the past 6 years over 125 different species have been recorded here, including a number which are close to their eastern limit such as **Cockatiel, Blue-faced Honeyeater**, both **Babblers, Gilbert's Whistler** and **Apostlebird**.

A total of 75 bird species were recorded during the COG visit over the Saturday and Sunday in late April 2005 - a very impressive total considering the time of year. Six new bird species were added to the property list. Large numbers of **Diamond Firetails** and **Hooded Robins** were seen as well as a large mixed flock which included **Scarlet Robins, Varied Sittellas** and many thornbills and **Weebills** and small honeyeaters. **Striped Honeyeater, Black-chinned Honeyeater, Superb Parrots**, an **Australian Owlet-nightjar** and both **Pied** and **Grey Butcherbirds** were good sightings. This follow up visit is timed when most of the spring migrants should have returned.

We will be camping overnight at a lovely spot near the creek on a 'take everything in, take everything out' basis. Participants should aim to arrive early afternoon on the Saturday, and it is expected we'll stay until mid Sunday afternoon. Car pooling will be encouraged, so if you're interested please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au).

30 September to 2 October — October Long weekend: Nangar National Park

Nangar National Park is situated off the Eugowra-Orange Road, approximately 15km east of Eugowra. Full details were published in July's Gang-gang. Because of limited camping facilities, however, the trip has been fully subscribed. Anyone wishing to put their name on a wait-list should contact Margaret McJannett on **phone** 6161 3450 or **email** mcjannett9@hotmail.com.

Saturday-Sunday 7-8 October — Bungonia: overnight campout on private property

As part of our continuing links and joint outings with the Goulburn Field Naturalists (GFN), COG has been invited to observe the birdlife on a private property belonging to GFN members near Bungonia. This is a large 300 ha property with a topography varying between flat, undulating and hilly, and that has 5 kilometres of frontage to Bungonia Creek. Half of this length was virtually totally logged and has been replanted and fenced off. The remainder of the creek is not fenced off, but does contain some former riparian vegetation and beautiful waterholes.

No bird surveys have previously been undertaken for the property, but at the time of year there should be a peak for a mix of spring migrants and more coastal birds not commonly found in Canberra. COG will also have access to the Old

Bungonia School where there is plenty of room to pitch tents, an external shower and toilet block, a large BBQ, or if wet, cooking facilities inside. There is also a wood fire inside if it is cold.

Exact details are still to be finalised but participants should expect to arrive in Bungonia on the afternoon of the Saturday when we will do some local birding, and stay until mid Sunday afternoon. Car pooling will be encouraged, so if you're interested please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au).

Monday 16 to Friday 20 October — Mid Week Accommodated Field Trip: Oolambeyan National Park

We have negotiated arrangements with the NSW Parks Service, for a COG group to stay at this new national park on the edge of the Hay plain (SW of Griffith), which was purchased to preserve Plains-wanderer habitat. Tom Green, Sue Lashko and I did a rekky there in late April - amongst the birds we saw there last time: **Painted Honeyeater, Pied Honeyeater, Banded Lapwing, White-winged Fairy-wren, Singing Honeyeater, Black-faced Woodswallow**. There are a variety of habitats in this 20,000 ha park, sand dune callitris pine and rosewood community, Plains-wanderer habitat, shrubland and grassland, and spring should be a very good time for birds. We will be accommodated in the homestead which is quite comfortable and has several good sized bedrooms with bunk-style beds, plus cooking and bathroom facilities - set in a very nice garden with verandahs. There is a size limit on the group and, depending on the number of people who go, rooms will be shared between 3-5 people. There will also be conditions on vehicle access in parts of the park, so we will do a lot of activities on foot. You will need to provide your own bedding, food etc - we will organise some communal meals and there is a new gas barbecue area which we can use. Access to the park is good, on unsealed roads suitable for 2 wheel drive. As part of the deal with the Parks Service we will be providing bird lists, which will contribute to the management plan being developed for the park. It is a very good opportunity to stay in this new park, which may not come around again. For enquiries or to register, phone Jenny Bounds, 6288 7802 or email Jenny: jbbounds@optusnet.com.au

Fivebough Wetlands Forum and Birding and Nature Fair - 22-26 November 2006

A number of COG members have expressed an interest in attending this event in the Leeton area, and have wondered whether there would be sufficient additional interest to make it a formal COG field trip.

Activities will involve Lectures and Workshops about birds and other aspects of the Natural World; Birding and Nature related Trade Market Stalls; Displays of interest to the bird watching industry; Wetland Birding and Nature Tours; Entertainment, Art, and Varied Cultural activities. Details of the draft programs etc are on the home page of the Fivebough and Tuckerbil Wetlands Trust at <http://www.fivebough.org.au/>.

If there is sufficient interest it would be best done as a formal COG outing, for a variety of reasons. There is no competing field trip activity that week/weekend. One possibility would be to hire a 12 seater bus, or car sharing, to help defray ever rising petrol costs.

If you are interested please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au).

Other activities of interest to COG members

5-6 August: The second National Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater survey weekend for 2006

Survey forms can be obtained from the acting Swift Parrot recovery officer, Stephen Dalla Costa (Stephen.DallaCosta@environment.nsw.gov.au, ph: 1800 66 57 66), or David Geering (david.geering@environment.nsw.gov.au, ph: 1800 62 10 56) or from the Birds Australia Swift Parrot web page (<http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au/birds/swift.html>). Volunteers are asked to contact either Stephen or David to nominate the areas they wish to survey or to get some survey area suggestions. COG does not have any organised activity for moderate to experienced birders on this weekend, so why not get some friends together, enjoy the late winter weather and survey some sites?

Sunday 13 August 2006 — Barren Grounds: Ground Parrot Survey 9am to noon

Ground parrot surveys at Barren Grounds have been conducted annually since the January 1983 fire. Volunteers from Birds Australia, COG, CBOC, Birding NSW, the University of Wollongong, NPWS and elsewhere have always come along to help. The results over the past few years have been quite erratic. What will happen this year? Why not dress in



IN THE PICTURE

your picture framing shop

presents 'A Study of Nature'

a collection of wildlife illustrations by Cameron Mitchell

Opening Night

Thursday 17th of August from 6pm – 9pm

at Shop 2, 26 Florence Street, Hornsby, NSW

(next to Westpac bank)

exhibition continues through till the 31st of August

to see more of Cameron's artwork, check out

www.artistsaviary.com

your stoutest walking gear, wet weather gear, sun bonnet, take a picnic lunch and find out for yourself? For more information, contact Jack.Baker@environment.nsw.gov.au

Inaugural Christmas Island Bird Week: 1-7 September 2006

Over the past two and a half years, Parks Australia has been running an intensive Biodiversity Monitoring Programme (BMP) on Christmas Island. In collaboration with visiting scientists, they have been researching the abundance, trends and status of many of the island's native and introduced species, including bats, reptiles, crabs, insects and, of course, seabirds and land birds. During the inaugural Christmas Island Bird Week (1-7 September 2006), the BMP team and collaborating scientists will be showcasing aspects of their bird research. This will include the opportunity to join the team as they attach micro-electronic tracking devices to the enigmatic Abbott's Booby and Christmas Island Frigatebird, and band Red-tailed Tropicbirds, Brown Boobies, Common Noddies, Christmas Island Goshawks and Java Finches. Participants will get rare and intimate insights into the ecology and behaviour of these exotic island birds, and learn first hand about other aspects of the island's ecology and conservation issues.

Organisers are planning five days of scheduled activities for participants with the visiting scientists, plus nightly seminars on a range of topics and an opportunity to spotlight for the elusive Christmas Island Hawk Owl. Further information about the Bird Week can be found at www.christmas.net.au

2007 COG Field trips program

It's time already to start thinking about the field trips program for next year. This will be the sixth year in a row that I will be primarily responsible for its drafting. Perhaps it's because I been away, but the cupboard is really quite bare, usually at this time I have quite a few ideas taken from the chat line etc. So I'll be relying on you all more than ever; and if you have any new places you think are worth visiting next year, favourite places that COG should visit again, past outings that you think ought to be repeated, or any type of outing that you think would be suitable please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au).

Most of all, offers to lead outings in 2007 will be gratefully accepted. The 2006 program has again run smoothly because members have been happy to help organise and lead one, or at most two, outings for the year. That's all it takes folks, so please let's continue this co-operative spirit and keep making a success of this very important part of COG's program!

COG's Bird Blitz 2006

Members are reminded to keep the weekend of **28-29 October** free, for this year's bird blitz. We will again aim to have a minimum of one 20-min, 2-ha survey done in each of the 165 grid cells in the ACT, and it would be wonderful if every ACT-resident COG member participated! We are still negotiating with Namadgi National Park management about conditions of access to the locked areas of the Park; once those matters are clarified, we will be able to start the organisation process. Would all members with 4WD vehicles who are intending to participate let me know please (allanbm@bigpond.net.au or 6254 6520), also whether you would like to survey the same area or areas as last time, and whether you would be prepared to take other birders. Preference in the allocation of grid cells will be given to those who survey the area regularly. If you are keen to see the greatest variety of birds, I suggest you opt for a grid cell containing one of the Canberra Nature Parks; for scenery and the challenge of somewhere possibly new and different, think about the grid cells in Namadgi. But if you have very little time or other commitments, a 20-min survey in your suburb would be appreciated.

Barbara Allan

Subscription renewal time again (third reminder)

If you haven't renewed your membership for 2006-07 yet, please consider doing so soon. Join us for another great year's birding and friendship! Fill out the orange membership form from the June *Gang-gang* or download one from our website www.canberrabirds.org.au and send your cheque in to COG, PO Box 301, Civic Square ACT 2608, or transfer the funds electronically, as per the instructions, especially making sure you tell us who you are. We have had a few anonymous transfers so if your next address label does not record that you are financial, and you believe you are, please let us know. Or you can always pay at the next meeting.

Garden Bird Survey

A reminder that the last GBS period ended on Sunday July 2, so participants who have not already handed their completed 2006 charts in should bring them to the August meeting or deliver them to David Rosalky or Barbara Allan as soon as possible. New charts for the year commencing **Monday July 3** will be available from David at the meeting. Members with queries about GBS records can call David on 6273 1927.

Woodland Survey – Tuggeranong Hill

We are looking for a new Site Co-ordinator for this survey, which Alan Ford has been ably managing for the last couple of years. The Tuggeranong Hill locality is one of 14 ACT woodland areas which are surveyed four times each year, in a long-term project supported by Environment ACT. The data set is analysed by a statistician, and interesting population trends have emerged from the last seven years of surveys. Most of our site co-ordinators have been surveying the same sites for several years. This stability has contributed greatly to the quality of the data and hence to the success of the project.

The site co-ordinator carries out each seasonal survey within a window of about 9 days, which allows them to choose a weekend or week day, and suitable weather. The Tuggeranong Hill survey involves 10 minute surveys at 7 different monitoring points. The person taking up this role needs to have a good knowledge of local birds, and be willing to commit themselves to surveying on four mornings a year. COG provides a small amount of money towards postage and petrol costs, and a substitute surveyor can be provided when the site co-ordinator is unable to do a particular survey.

Site co-ordinators enjoy getting to know their site in all seasons, and seeing the effect of environmental changes such as drought, grazing and fire on the birds of 'their' patch. This role would suit someone living in the Tuggeranong Valley – and I guarantee that they will enjoy the view of their valley from the last survey point of the day.

I coordinate the surveys for COG, and anyone who may be interested in undertaking this role can contact me to discuss (arowell@webone.com.au or phone 6247 7390)

Alison Rowell

Tackling the Indian Myna problem — Bill Handke

We now know from the research of Chris Tidemann and others (including COG members during the 1990s) that Indian Mynas (also known as the Common Myna) are a serious environmental threat to native wildlife because they take over nesting hollows, evicting birds and small mammals, and prey on nestlings and eggs:

- Crimson and Eastern Rosellas, Red-rumped Parrots, and small mammals like sugar gliders which occur in our local reserves are often their victims – it is quite serious given that suitable hollows in old eucalypts for native animals are already in short supply across the landscape
- there are particular concerns that Indian Mynas will spread out into woodlands to the north of Canberra and could impact on the Superb Parrot, a threatened bird which visits the northern areas of the ACT to breed in the spring/summer.

The Indian Myna has been rated by the World Conservation Union as one of the world's 100 most invasive species. It has been assigned an *Extreme Threat* category in Australia, receiving the Pest of Australia award in the Wild Watch Quest for Pests 2005.

The Canberra Indian Myna Group (CIMAG) was formed in mid April to help tackle the problem in our region. With notable COG members involved, CIMAG has worked up a broad strategy to:

- raise public awareness that this bird is a serious environmental threat, not just a nuisance
- inform the public on how to limit the Mynas' spread by reducing its feeding, nesting and roosting opportunities, and
- undertake a humane reduction program through trapping and euthanising captured birds.

The reduction program results to date are extremely encouraging — some 2779 Indian Mynas taken out of the environment in such a short time (927 in June alone) — and show that backyard trapping can have a positive local impact.

A monitoring program, using the Garden Bird Survey, will help to assess the wider Canberra-scale impacts of CIMAG's activities. To this end, it would be most valuable if COG Garden Bird Surveyors dutifully recorded Indian Mynas in their survey region. CIMAG is also asking its members to contribute to the Garden Bird Survey.

While it is unlikely that mynas can be completely eradicated, unless a start is made to reduce and control their numbers, there is a risk that we will lose many of our native birds — particularly parrots. However, with community effort some balance can be brought back to natural systems to give native birds and animals a better chance to resist these foreign invaders.

If you want more information about what you can do to help discourage this invader, or want to be included on the CIMAG email information list, contact Bill Handke (02 6231 7461 or email handke@grapevine.net.au).

Yankee Doodlings — 4

I concluded my last missive with a comment about the feeders in Central Park and will commence this with another small, and less well known, human intervention for birds.

This is known to a select few as the Riverside Drip and is found on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. It refers to a spot where a tap is left running slowly from early April and the water piped to a cluster of rocks where it forms a small pool. If the weather is dry this can be the only source of water in the woodland for some distance and it provides a very attractive locale for viewing migrants as they head up the Hudson Valley. In a pleasant Saturday afternoon in May I marked down well over 30 species, including a couple of additions to my life list.

A surprising addition to my year list from the Drip was a female **Wild Turkey**. It appears that these birds are

recolonising the wooded parts of the city by flying across the Hudson from the Palisades of New Jersey. So are other wildlife. A coyote has also been found recently in Central Park and deer are common in the commuter belt just outside the city boundaries.

The traditional spots were also very productive in Spring. During the peak warbler migration the Ramble in Central Park was an absolute hive of activity. Not only were up to 40 individuals dashing about the place but several professional guides were leading tours through the area. One tour group was reported as having 60 clients! My biggest day in the Ramble scored 48 species in total of which 17 were migrating warblers.

At the same time of year Jamaica Bay – basically the patch of water and marsh off the end of the runway at Kennedy International Airport – was hopping. Not only were there thousands of ducks, geese and waders but the gardens were replete with warblers (and a couple of lifers were spotted there). As you'd judge by the word "garden" this is also a human addition to the scenery although as these were developed some decades ago they have some large trees now which provide a very good refuge for the birds moving up the coast.

Although everything has now calmed down for Summer the last excitement also came from the Bay. This was the appearance of three **Fulvous Whistling-Ducks** which stayed around for some weeks. It is pleasing that despite its proximity to a really large airport this site is able to be managed extremely well for waterbirds.

Within a month of writing this (ie early August) the first migrants will be heading south again.

Martin Butterfield

COG SALES

- **'The Long Paddock** - a Directory of Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves in NSW' by Rural Lands Protection Board - \$31.00
- **The Birds of Western NSW: A Preliminary Atlas** - NSW Bird Atlassers - **reduced** to \$5.00
- **Finding Birds in Darwin, Kakadu and Top End** by Niven McCrie and James Watson. \$24.00.
- **Wet and Wild** - A Field Guide to the Freshwater Animals of the Southern Tablelands and High Country" by M Lintermans and W Osborne, \$28.00 (RRP \$34.95).
- **Wildlife on Farms** - by David Lindenmayer RRP \$29.95, **special price** for COG members - \$25.00.
- **Where to Find Birds in NE Queensland** - Joe Wieneke - \$16.00.
- **Reptiles and Frogs of the ACT** - Ross Bennett - \$13.00.
- **Native Trees of the ACT** - \$6.50.
- **Birds of Rottnest Island** – by Denis Saunders & Parry de Rebeira -\$15.00
- **Birds of Rottnest Island** – a check list - \$1.00
- **Grassland Flora** – a Field Guide for the Southern Tablelands (NSW and ACT) – by David Eddy et al. - \$13.00
- **Our Patch** – Field Guide to the Flora of the ACT Region - \$13.00
- **The Nestbox Book** – Gould League - \$12.50
- **Birds of Queensland's Wet Tropics and Great Barrier Reef** by Lloyd Nielsen - \$25.00
- **Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT** – by Taylor and Day \$14.00
- Simpson and Days' **Birds of Australia CDROM** Version 5.0 **special price** - \$45.00
- COG Atlas - \$12.00
- COG Car Stickers - \$2.00
- COG Birds of Canberra Gardens Poster - \$4.00
- COG Garden Bird Survey Chart (New Version) - \$1.00
- COG Badges – two colour versions - \$5.00
- COG Birds of the ACT – Two Centuries of Change – by Steve Wilson - \$25.00
- COG Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the ACT - \$1.00

COG T-shirts, Polo shirts, all above and other books on local flora and fauna available at the monthly meeting sales desk or by contacting Carol Macleay (for post and packing costs) on 02 6286 2624.

AvIan Whimsy #44 — The First Time

That's the name of surely one of the most beautiful love songs ever written in English, Ewan McColl's evocative ballad to Peggy Seeger, charting gently and intimately the key stages of a developing relationship. I guess most of us could do that, albeit probably more privately and perhaps less lyrically. But what about our Other Relationship? Nothing sordid implied there – I'm talking of the love affair that we all share, with birds. What else can you call the passion that leads us to follow a single bird, not necessarily a 'new' one, for an hour or so to absorb all of its subtle nuances, or just muse in a hide for ages, watching life potter along? Can you remember the tentative beginnings of awareness, through to the consummation of your passion for them? Was it an epiphany for you, or a gradual and inevitable development? Just pause for a moment there and try to remember – the rest of this will wait for you.

It seems, rescanning their books, that for Sean Dooley and Simon Barnes (see below) birds were always part of their lives; Simon through his father's encouragement, Sean apparently despite his father. I wanted to consult Bill Oddy's *Little Black Bird Book* for his story, but sadly it seems to have fallen into a black hole, probably the one I also call my office.... (Um, I didn't lend it to you, did I?)

For me I always knew I wanted to do things that involved animals. (I told an infant school teacher that I wanted to be a zoo keeper when I grew up; she suggested that a zoo director might be a more appropriate goal. I've no idea still if she was right, but I did become a keeper for a year, though never a director.) My first memories involve following tolerant Sleepy Lizards – Shinglebacks here – through the paddocks, while Peter the Bull Terrier kept an eye open for less benign reptiles. He was somewhat neuronally challenged but utterly faithful, and very good at his other job of protecting dad's ducks from stray cats. (My younger sisters were restricted to following caterpillars round the verandah, but because I've recently had breakfast we won't pursue that one to its conclusion.)

Being a small boy, what I was really interested in was big African mammals, but by the time I was 12 I was keeping day lists of birds seen on a family holiday. I have the booklet now, all written out in Best, a page per day. It reflects the more relaxed approach to nomenclature – **Blossom Parrot**, **Mountain Duck** and **Peewee** for instance (though I still use the latter). The only guide was of course Cayley's somewhat rudimentary *What Bird is That?*, which might help explain **Black-breasted Buzzard** along the Coorong. The rest of it looks pretty convincing and comprehensive though. Being a thorough boy I also noted Rabbit and Fox (dead).

But my epiphany came shortly prior to that when we spent a week in a shack at Milang on Lake Alexandrina. There was a **Black-winged Stilt** colony breeding just down the road and I was entranced by them, visiting daily to see their impossibly spindly red legs trailing as they whirled crossly into the air, yapping like puppies. To this day one of my very favourite activities is pottering around wetlands.

It's strange to those of us immersed in the awareness of birds (because after all, it's so much more than just 'watching', isn't it?) that others are – or even could be – unaware of and unmoved by birds. A favourite book at the moment is Simon Barnes' *How to be a Bad Birdwatcher; to the greater glory of life*. (I don't want to be distracted by a broader paean of praise for it, but I've just written a review of it – ask me for a copy of that if you're interested.) In it he says, "I don't go bird watching. I am bird watching." It's not an obscure philosophical statement, but a simple statement of fact which we all know intuitively. Wherever we are (outside at least), there are birds. So whether we're walking through Civic, or hanging out the clothes, or having brunch with friends, or at the footy or cricket or an outdoor concert, we're immediately aware if a **Hobby** or swift whips over, or if a **Grey Currawong** or **Gang-gang** calls. It's not something we just go and do sometimes – it's an integral part of our entire existence. Just like being in love really.

So, how was it for you?

Ian Fraser (ianf@pcug.org.au)



WONGA

Bawley Point

South Coast of N.S.W.

Two well equipped timber cottages in 50 acres. Damp and dry warm temperate forest, kunzea and rock provide for a diversity of birds and other animals. A short walk down the driveway leads to sand dunes and beaches, sea birds and Hooded Plovers. Close to National Parks, lakes and historic sites.

patricia.walker@bigpond.com

phone 02 6251 3136

www.visitnsw.com.au (follow the links to accommodation and Wonga)

NEW MEMBERS

COG welcomes the following new members:

Lynley Bayliss, North Lyneham

Glynis Whitfield, Ngunnawal

Next newsletter

September deadline

Wednesday 23 August 2006

Please send updates, articles, advertisements etcetera to the

Editors of *Gang-gang*

gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au

or send 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.

Print photographs with or without articles are encouraged and welcomed.

COG info

President

Jack Holland, ph 6288 7840 (h)
Email: jack.holland@deh.gov.au

Vice President

Nicki Taws, ph 6251 0303

Treasurer

Lia Battisson ph 6231 0147

Secretary

Barbara Allan ph 6254 6520

Address for correspondence

The Secretary
COG, PO Box 301
Civic Square, ACT 2608

Newsletter distribution

Judy Collett and helpers

Membership inquiries

Alastair Smith ph 6161 8608(h)
membership@canberrabirds.org.au
for changed address or other details

Gang-gang editors

Sue Lashko and Greg Ramsay
ph 6286 1564
Email: gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au

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.

Office

COG no longer maintains an office. For all enquiries or access to COG's library phone Barbara Allen on 6254 6520

COG website

www.canberrabirds.org.au

COG membership

2005-2006 memberships:

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

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

Editor Canberra Bird Notes

CBN@canberrabirds.org.au



Gang-gang

If undeliverable, please return to
Canberra Ornithologists Group, Inc.
PO Box 301, Civic Square ACT 2608

**SURFACE
MAIL**

**POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA**