

# Gang-gang

August 2008

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

## Monthly Meeting

**8 pm Wednesday  
13 August 2008**

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

The August meeting will commence with a short presentation by the COG database manager, **Paul Fennell** who will demonstrate the COG on-line data entry system, highlighting improvements since the last demonstration in January 2007.

This will be followed by a short talk by **Chris Davey** entitled *Willow Clearing, Cormorants and Molonglo Reach*. Chris will discuss the potential impacts on the cormorant and Darter breeding colonies along Molonglo Reach of the clearing programme.

The main presentation will be by **Holly Parsons** and **Kate Ravich** on the **Birds in Backyards** (BIBY) programme. Holly is the Programme Manager and Kate the Chair of the Steering Committee of BIBY which is a research, education and conservation programme. Its aim is to connect people with the environment right outside their door. BIBY encourages

*Continued page 2*

**Everyone welcome**

## What to watch out for this month

While in July the weather has gradually become colder, it has still been a very mild winter. Despite this, as demonstrated by a very quiet COG chat line, bird activity, including numbers of birds overwintering, has continued to be low. However, this can be local or very patchy, as shown during our search for robins for the twitchathon. For example, the **Grey Fantail** and **Fuscous Honeyeater** were quite common at Newline, Campbell Park and Callum Brae, with a range of honeyeaters at the former site being attracted by the commencement of flowering of the red box. While this eucalypt species is generally not considered to be highly attractive to nectivorous birds, a pair of **Swift Parrots** was also present. Other chat line subscribers have reported similar congregations of honeyeaters including the **Red Wattlebird** in some areas. On the other hand there have been few reports of overwintering **Dusky Woodswallows** (the only place I have seen them has been at Callum Brae) or **Olive-backed Orioles**.

Our search over a number of week-ends have confirmed the very low numbers of **Flame Robins** compared with recent winters, with their absence from many areas in which they had been previously present also confirmed by other observers. By contrast, July seems to have resulted in an influx of **Scarlet Robins**, with at least 4 pairs in my local patch on



**Flame Robin**  
(*Petroica phoenicea*)

Photo by Lindsay Hansch

*Continued page 2*

## Congratulations to David Cook

In early June, we received a request for COG members to enter photographs in a competition run by 666 ABC Canberra. A note was posted on the chat-line about the request and I am please to say that David Cook won first prize. His winning photo can be found at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/kookr/2501097117/>. David has managed to win himself the *Australia: Land of Parrots* DVD and to have the picture published on the radio station's on-line gallery. — **Chris Davey**



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August meeting: continued from page 1

people to change the way they manage their piece of urban habitat using recommendations based on scientific research. BIBY works with not only the general public, but also those involved professionally in land management. Holly and Kate will discuss how BIBY does this, as well as talk about specific projects, such as the Guidelines for Enhancing Urban Bird Habitats and or expansion into more regional areas..

Attendance should be mandatory for all members interested in attracting birds to their gardens, as well as to help debunk the myth that BIBY is simply a copy of the GBS.

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What to watch out for: continued from page 1

NW Cooleman Ridge/Narrabundah Hill, including one in my GBS site for a couple of weeks.

During August/early September these robins will depart for higher altitudes or the mountains, along with **Golden Whistlers**, **Crescent Honeyeaters** (very few records this winter), the **White-eared Honeyeater** and to a lesser extent the **Eastern Spinebill**.

During July I saw the first **Welcome Swallows** in my patch. Although it's always hard to tell whether they're newly arrived or have overwintered nearby, previously they have been present during June, with sometimes up to 30 near water. **Will Tree** and **Fairy Martins** follow, and will the **Horsfield Bronze-Cuckoo**, one of the most conspicuous early arrivals last year, also come soon?

Towards the end of August listen for the first **Pallid Cuckoos** or the **Noisy Friarbird** calling. Other species which usually have arrived by then are the **White-naped** and **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters**, **Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike** (a few were reported in July), **Olive-backed Oriole**, **Dusky Woodswallow**, **Clamorous Reed Warbler**, **Rufous Whistler** and the **Grey Fantail**.

At the beginning of July there seemed to be some unusually early nesting activity, perhaps arrested as the colder weather gradually set in. However, some birds such as the **Yellow-rumped Thornbill** breed very early, others such as **Crested Pigeon** and it seems increasingly the **Black Swan** breed throughout the year, while others such as the **Australian Magpie** will start serious nesting activities soon.

As always keep an eye out for these early nesters and arriving spring and departing altitudinal migrants in your local area, and please make sure all your sightings are provided to the Records Management Team and can be considered for the 2008-2009 Annual Bird Report. — **Jack Holland**

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## Field Trip reports

### Sunday 6 July — Googong Dam

Eleven participants came on the walk. The weather was cold and mainly overcast with little wind. A total of 55 species were recorded for the day, 51 at the main dam area and a further four at the Tin Hut end.

A few Eucalypt trees were in flower, including a red stringybark and a red box near the main entrance. These attracted honeyeaters such as **Red Wattlebirds** and **White-eared Honeyeaters** and there was a mixed feeding flock of small birds nearby. Other honeyeaters recorded on the trip included **Eastern Spinebills** and **Yellow-faced**, **Brown-headed** and **White-plumed Honeyeaters**.

Other highlights included a flock of an estimated 10 **Red-browed Finches**. Overhead, a soaring **Wedge-tailed Eagle** temporarily shared air space with a **Whistling Kite**. The kite quickly decided it had an appointment somewhere else and made off at high speed. We had excellent views of a female **Hooded Robin** in a dead tree, beautifully camouflaged by its colouring. A little further on a **Flame Robin** was anything but camouflaged, perched serenely on the top of another dead tree. Not far away from it a **Collared Sparrowhawk** was moving furtively through the trees.



Photo by Geoffrey Dabby

**White-plumed Honeyeater**  
(*Lichenostomus penicillatus*)

Down near the boat ramp, a pair of **Diamond Firetails** obligingly perched next to each other on a strand of fence wire at quite close range. One was facing us and the other presented a view of its back. The striking diamond markings and full range of colours of this bird were therefore clearly visible.

Waterbirds seen on the dam included **Black Swans** and **Eurasian Coots** as well as Cormorants and several duck species.

Two of the participants also visited the Tin Hut end of Googong Dam, where four additional species were recorded, **Australasian Grebe**, **Australasian Shoveler**, **Noisy Miner** and **Brown Treecreeper**. The pair of **Brown Treecreepers** were in a patch of dry forest feeding on the ground, presumably on ants. They were close enough for the barring on their tails to be clearly visible. Not far from them a diurnal wombat lumbered across the shallows of Burra Creek seeking greener pastures.

It is sobering to reflect on what the likely impact of the proposed new settlement of Googong on the rich avifauna of Googong Foreshores might be. An expected 16,000 people will live in this new area between Googong Foreshores and the Old Cooma Road. Apparently wildlife corridors are proposed for the new development but how effective will they be? — **Ian Anderson**

### Wednesday 16 July — Midweek walk - Newline Quarry

**Honeyeaters** were the stars of the walk to Newline Quarry. There must have been about 300. They were hard to count as they were moving quickly. We estimated 130 **Fuscus**, 110 **White-naped**, 60 **White-plumed** with a sprinkling of **Yellow-faced**. They were frequenting the *Box* trees that have begun to flower in the section of the paddock from the dam to the boundary near the quarry and the shipping containers. There was a further sprinkle of **Noisy Miners** which were mostly observed on the tip side of the road where the trees are more widely spaced. It is likely the honeyeaters will remain in this area for a while as the trees have only just begun to flower.

We got good comparative views of two **Little Corellas** flying with two **Long-billed Corellas**. We were able to hear the two different calls.

**Brown Treecreepers**, a **Crested Shrike-tit**, **Red-rumped Parrots** (inspecting a hollow) and a group of **Red-browed Finches** were other notables in a total of 22 bird species. We had a nice turn out of 17 people.  
— **Julienne Kamprad**

## 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.

### Sunday 24 August — Science Week at Jerrabomberra wetlands — Morning

**Volunteers required — see page 6**

### Wednesday 20 August — Midweek Walk

This month's Wednesday walk will be to Stromlo Forest Park. Meet at the car park near the grandstand at 9am.



### Australian Ornithological Services P/L

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[enquiries@philipmaher.com](mailto:enquiries@philipmaher.com)

## 2008

5 — 24 September

**Strzelecki Track  
Outback Tour**

### 2008 Plains-wanderer Weekends

29 & 30 Nov; 6 & 7 Dec; 20 & 21 Dec  
2008; 3 & 4 Jan 2009

## 2009

22 — 28 February 2009  
**Tasmania birding & mammal tour**  
including pelagic & Melaleuca flight

17 April — 2 May 2009

**Vietnam birding tour**  
co-led by Uthai Treesucon

3 May — 9 May 2009  
**Thailand Pitta Tour**  
co-led by Uthai Treesucon

12 May — 1 June 2009  
**Borneo and Peninsula Malaysia**  
co-led by Dennis Yong

8 — 26 August 2009  
**Strzelecki Track  
Outback Tour**

[www.philipmaher.com](http://www.philipmaher.com)

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## Sunday 31 August — Kama Woodlands — Morning

Chris Davey will lead this outing. Access is difficult so please meet on the wide grassy verge at the intersection of William Hovell Drive and Coppins Crossing at 8.30am sharp where we will transfer into appropriate vehicles. The Kama woodland is of interest as the population of **Brown Treecreepers** are individually banded. Before the walk, Chris will give a short presentation on what the birds are up to. Please contact him on ph. 62546324 (H) or [chris\\_davey@aapt.net.au](mailto:chris_davey@aapt.net.au) for further details and to book your place. The walk will be limited to the first 12 takers.

## Sunday 7 September — Repeat Raptor Twitchathon — All day bus trip

The ambitious aim of this repeat outing is to observe as many as possible of the eleven bird of prey species that may be reasonably expected to be seen in the ACT in the one day. 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 2006 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 again be the National Library car park at 8:00 am where you can park your car for free. It will run until mid afternoon, so please bring morning tea and lunch. With the rising fuel prices and clarification of costs the bus hire and insurance, costs will be about \$18 per person, including the COG admin fee. This is payable on boarding the bus and will be dependent on sufficient numbers to fill both buses. Would those interested please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on [jack.holland@environment.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@environment.gov.au)) as soon as possible. If there are two 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.

## Friday 3 to Monday 6 October — Long weekend campout to Round Hill Nature Reserve

The October long weekend campout this year is to Round Hill Nature Reserve in central NSW. We should see quite a variety of western birds as there is a large range of habitat types in the area, including mallee, callitris and eucalypt woodlands. Past COG trips have seen **Splendid Fairy-wren**, **Crested Bellbird**, **Major Mitchell's Cockatoo**, **Yellow-plumed Honeyeater** and much more. Depending upon how the season is going (& luck) we could see some of harder to find or unusual species as well.

Round Hill is between Lake Cargelligo and Mt Hope and is 5+ hours drive from Canberra. I expect we will spend most of our time close to camp with perhaps a couple of short drives. There is also a lot of scope for visiting interesting places on the way there and back. It will be a "bring everything in, take everything out" camp. Being a Nature Reserve we have to limit numbers and let NSW National Parks know who is coming, so contact Sue Lashko on [SMLashko@gmail.com](mailto:SMLashko@gmail.com) <<mailto:SMLashko@gmail.com>> or phone 62514485 (ah) to register your interest and /or receive more details.

## Saturday-Sunday 11-12 October — Bungonia —overnight campout on private property

As part of our continuing links and joint outings with the Goulburn Field Naturalists Society (GFNS), COG has again been invited observe the birdlife on a private property belonging to GFNS members near the historic village of Bungonia. This is a large 300 ha property bordering Morton National Park, with a topography varying between flat, undulating and hilly. About 5 kilometres of Jacqua Creek flows through it. 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.

This time we will be camping on the property to ensure we pick up all the birds we missed out on when we did a morning circular walk taking in some of the varied habitats through the property, including the best parts of the Jacqua Creek. In this time we picked up 50 species including **Sacred Kingfisher**, both **White-throated** and **Western Gerygone**, **Brown-headed Honeyeater** and **Specked Warbler**. Birds seen on a preliminary visit included **Spotted Quail-thrush**, **Southern Whiteface** and several **Jacky Winters**.

Participants should arrive mid afternoon of the Saturday. After setting up we will do some birding around the house and other selected habitats, with a similar circular walk as last time planned for Sunday. Car pooling



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will be encouraged. If you're interested please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on [jack.holland@environment.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@environment.gov.au)). Participants are also welcome if they wish to join in only for the Sunday morning or Saturday afternoon/night events.

## Committee news

- Jenny Bounds and Chris Davey appeared before an ACT Government planning committee looking into the Molonglo development.
- If you have thought about assisting with COG's work, please contact someone from the Committee (details are on page 12.) There are opportunities for people to assist with the preparation of *Canberra Bird Notes*, help with organising field trips, or assist with conservation issues.
- Many members have paid their 2008-2009 subscription. If you have not paid, your membership will cease at September 30.

## Other items of interest

### Saturday 9 August 9:00am — Superb Fairy-wrens — Is their life a Soap Opera?

**Superb Fairy-wrens** are a favourite of people everywhere, regardless of their level of interest in birds in general. These birds have an amazing life history. Far from being the sweet and innocent family group that they appear to be, their lives are more like a soap opera. Holly Parsons is completing a PhD on Superb Fairy-wrens in the suburbs. Her talk will cover these birds in general, her PhD findings, and what we can do to make our urban environment more Fairy-wren friendly. The talk will run for 1 to 2 hours followed by a short walk in search of fairy-wrens. This talk is free for Birds Australia members and \$5 for non-members. To attend the talk please contact the Birds Australia Discovery Centre office [basna@birdsaustralia.com.au](mailto:basna@birdsaustralia.com.au) and include your contact number so they can advise you of the venue..

## Barren Grounds

COG has been advised that the **Ground Parrot** survey at Barren Grounds, which has been held each August for many years, will not be undertaken this year or in the future. The area is now being monitored electronically. The results of the 25 years of surveys is being written up for publication. Thanks are extended to the many COG members who have helped in these surveys since 1983. — **Jack Baker**

## Threatened Bird Network (TBN) — The Australian National Waterhole Count

In recent years counting finches coming in to waterholes to drink in the early hours of the morning has become a valuable tool in the conservation of some of our most threatened species. Birds such as the **Gouldian Finch** move vast distances each day and very often the only time to sight (and particularly count) them is when they are drinking. This behaviour is typical of many other species, particularly in the drier parts of the Australian continent.

As a way of using this behaviour the TBN is organising the very first Australia wide “National Waterhole Count”. All you need are a pair of binoculars, a place where birds come to drink, and to be available to count on the morning of **11 October**. It doesn't matter if you count at the leaky tap in your backyard or a water trough on the Canning Stock Route - the important thing will be to **count!** We are hoping to have as many volunteers as possible, and all data will be deposited with Birds Australia as part of the national Atlas of Australian Birds database. The method is simple and a survey pack, complete with data sheets and a description of the methods, is available by contacting count coordinator Milton Lewis via email at: [dalysium@inet.net.au](mailto:dalysium@inet.net.au) or through the TBN at [tbn@birdsaustralia.com.au](mailto:tbn@birdsaustralia.com.au).

## Myna Matters

The Canberra Indian Myna Action Group (CIMAG) advises that its latest *Myna Matters Bulletin* (#13) is now available on its website ([www.indianmynaaction.org.au](http://www.indianmynaaction.org.au)).

## The Australian Science Festival

**Sunday 24 August — Jerrabomberra Wetlands and Fyshwick Sewage Ponds, “Waterbirds need Wetlands” guided tour conducted by COG. Meet at Jerrabomberra car-park at 9:10am.**



### **The Australian Science Festival**

**16 to 24 August 2008**

The *Australian Science Festival* is part of National Science Week that runs from 16–24 August 2008. The *Australian Science Festival* (ASF) <http://sciencefestival.com.au/> (program to be included in the *Canberra Times* on Wednesday 13 August) has a range of science or technology based events, including major events such as the Amazing World of Science sponsored by ActewAGL and dozens of smaller events held at various places around Canberra such as the ANU, CSIRO and the Botanic Gardens.

An application was made on COG’s behalf, to register an event in this year’s *Australian Science Festival*, called “**Waterbirds need Wetlands**”. This proposal was accepted and a small grant has been made available to COG for improved signage and a morning tea. This support is provided by the Australian Government through the ACT National Science Week Co-ordinating Committee.

We anticipate around 40 members of the public attending, mainly families interested in learning about bird-watching and the value of wetlands for birds and the environment.

We would like interested COG members to act as either guides, or to generally interact with attendees, or to help with the morning tea near the Jerrabomberra car park. The aim is to conduct two tours at once, the Jerrabomberra Wetlands and the Fyshwick Sewage Ponds, then change over mid-way and have a morning tea. If anyone attending could bring any spare binoculars to lend to those attendees from the public for the morning, that would be much appreciated.

Could any members interested in helping out, please register your interest with Anthony Overs (6254 0168 H or [anthony.overs.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:anthony.overs.reps@aph.gov.au)).

**Details:** Jerrabomberra Wetlands and Fyshwick Sewage Ponds tour on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> of August from 9:30am to 11:00am, meeting at the Jerrabomberra Wetlands carpark on Dairy Flat Road. **Could COG members arrive 20 minutes earlier to help set up the event.**

## Winter observations

Over recent weeks we had several reports of early nesting activity, perhaps a reflection of a relatively mild winter. However, my impression is that we get similar observations every winter, the main candidates being thornbills, ravens and magpies. If members would add all those observations to the database, we should be able in due course to separate “impressions” from “facts”, and we may well see possible shifts (for example, earlier start in the timing of breeding).

As far as early observations of migrants are concerned, they could be from displaced birds from further south or west (eg. with changes in weather or exhaustion of their local food supply, forcing them to move onwards to appear in our area). Very limited calling/singing may also be an indication that they are not really early spring arrivals.

However, for me the 2008 winter is notably different to that of 2007 with regard to two common species. In 2007 we saw a great exodus of **Red Wattlebirds** (RWB) from

our area, in all likelihood joining the mass migration along the coast heading north; and that movement lasted for weeks. (At the same time we had a good influx of **Weebills** into suburbia - and they were not there for just short periods but stayed for weeks). Both events were most likely linked to the extreme drought conditions.

In this winter **RWBs** are everywhere in town and the surrounding country, and in good numbers, but so far I have not seen any **Weebills** at the various suburban sites they frequented last year. In fact, one of the key sites for **Weebills** I found in 2007 was Haig Park in Braddon (utilizing the many *Argyle Apples* along Henty Street). At the time there were almost no **RWBs** present which would, no doubt, have made life for the **Weebills** difficult and prevented a build-up in **Weebill** numbers. This year, Henty Street is home to many **RWBs** (30 to 80 max.), but not to any **Weebills**.

Photo by Stuart Harris



**Weebill**  
( *Smicronis breviostris* )

These observations are just a glimpse into very different ecological circumstances for our birds in both winters. In 2007 the drought meant there was only limited food for the larger honeyeaters and they moved out of town, while in 2008 there is plenty of food for them (mainly lerps at the moment), hence many birds can stay. For the **Weebill**, in 2007 the woodlands no longer provided enough food, and some found reprieve in suburbia, but in 2008, it seems, they have no need to leave the woodlands. No doubt, many factors are involved, and the situation is different for every species, but very exciting, indeed.

By the way, the group of **Noisy Friarbirds** in the Ainslie/Braddon area along Limestone Ave. is still around. They are remarkably quiet, and often rather hidden deep in the foliage, perhaps a strategy to limit the attention **RWBs** may otherwise pay to them and to reduce the number of incidences of being chased by them. — **Michael Lenz**

## UNDERSTANDING BIRDS

*Learn to think like a bird!*

An ANU  
Centre for Continuing Education course  
with COG member and  
'Avian Whimsy' author, Ian Fraser



Six two-hour sessions  
covering evolution,  
structure, ecology,  
behaviour, habitats, bird-  
watching tools and  
techniques.

For beginners and  
experienced birders;  
*lots of slides.*

Discussion of the issues en-  
couraged!

Tuesdays, 6.30pm, plus  
2 x 3-hour field trips.

30 September to 4 November.

For further details and bookings contact  
the CCE on 6125 2892 or [enquiries.cce@anu.edu.au](mailto:enquiries.cce@anu.edu.au)

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## Woodland Project — Winter surveys from some COG sites

### Mulligan's Flat

Jenny Bounds and team surveyed at Mulligan's Flat reserve on Sunday 29 June. It was fairly quiet, but the usual winter birds, **Scarlet Robin**, **White-eared Honeyeater**, **Golden Whistler**, a few **Yellow-faced** and **White-naped Honeyeaters**, as well as quite a few **Brown-headed Honeyeaters**, were around. 30 **Tree Martins** over the large dam wall area was an interesting sighting, as were 14 **Red-rumped Parrots** in the woodland near the large dam, and 3 **Speckled Warblers** in a mixed flock north of the shearing shed ruin. After the survey, a pair of **Wedge-tailed Eagles** was seen over the eastern part of the reserve.

### Majura Field Range

At Majura Field Range on Friday 27 June, Alison Rowell and Jenny Bounds recorded a lot of small bird activity at the sites, including **Fuscous Honeyeaters** at one site not too far from Newline, **Varied Sittella** at another and **Brown Thornbills** which are not recorded often at this location.

### Gooroo North

Nicki Taws did the survey at Gooroo North on Sunday 29 June, an unseasonably mild day. The usual winter feeding flocks were in abundance — at Gooroo these are dominated by **Weebills**, and **Buff-rumped** and **Striated Thornbills**. A highlight was one immature male **Hooded Robin** right near the site of the December nest and March fledgling (possibly the same bird). Also, perhaps a sign of the mild weather, two **White-throated Gerygones** were calling, as well as a male **Red-capped Robin**. In contrast to reports from other parts of Canberra, there were very few **honeyeaters**, apart from the usual **Brown-headed** and one **Eastern Spinebill**.

### Campbell Park

From the woodlands on the lower slopes of the eastern side of Mt Ainslie, Michael Lenz reported highlights from the 29 June survey as: **Noisy Friarbird**, **White-throated Gerygone**, **Mistletoebird**, a group of six **Willie Wagtails** and two **Jacky Winters**.

### Newline

Sue Lashko surveyed at Newline on 30 June with help from Julian Robinson. Initially it was fine and calm but the wind made life difficult later. The front paddock was alive with **honeyeaters** — **White-plumed**, **Fuscous**, **Yellow-faced** and **White-naped**. There was only one tree in flower, with most others in heavy bud or infested with lerps, so there was plenty of food. For the first time, the **Brown Treecreepers** were not recorded despite a special search. **Striated Pardalotes** were particularly noisy and one was doing his "wing display". There were two **Peaceful Doves** present. At the last site next to the dump, it looked decidedly unpromising in the windy conditions, but there was a surprising range of small birds taking turns at flying out from their shelter in a pile of dead briar rose — 24 **Double-barred Finch**, three **Speckled Warbler**, two **Southern Whiteface**, 13 **Red-browed Finch** and finally 15 **Superb Fairywren**, which just goes to show the importance of the briar rose piles to small birds.

Photo by Jenny Bounds



**Double-barred Finch**  
( *Taeniopygia bichenovii* )

### Callum Brae

Jenny Bounds' survey of Callum Brae reserve on Saturday 28 June recorded a good number of small birds in the survey sites, including **Speckled Warbler**, **Double-barred Finch**, lots of both **pardalotes**, **Brown Thornbill** and **White-eared Honeyeaters**. Also, **Scarlet Robins**, **Flame Robins**, **Fuscous Honeyeaters** and **Dusky Woodswallows** were found on the sunny slopes at the back of the reserve near the quarry fence. A **Wedge-tailed Eagle**, a very dark bird, perched on a tree at one of the sites, and a flock of about 60 Galahs was chased and attacked by a Peregrine Falcon. It missed!

*Continued next page*



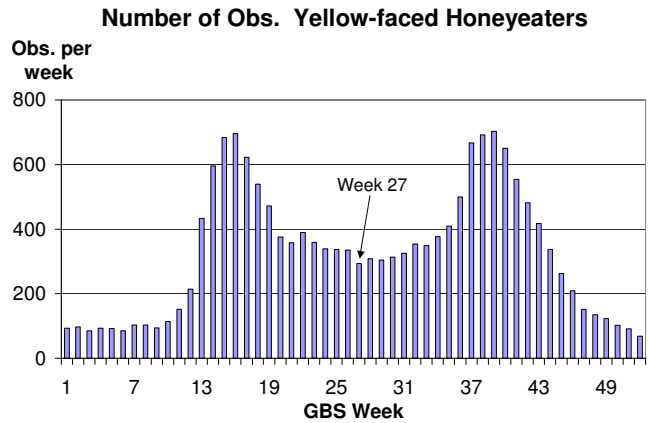
# Garden Bird Survey Notes

Some GBS-relevant highlights from the chatline, and other sources, for late June to late July include:

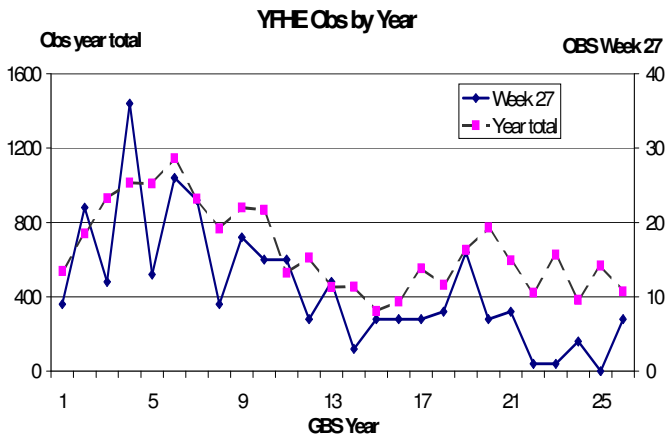
- **Brown Thornbills** nesting in Cook;
- Male **Superb Parrot** in Watson;
- A **Tawny Frogmouth** continues to be present in our garden at Carwoola (I suspect the increased rate of observation is due to acquiring a small dog and going outside late at night.)

## Yellow-faced Honeyeaters in Winter

There was recently an exchange on the chatline about a sighting of **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** in Canberra in week 27. The original post expressed surprise at this, while a response reproduced a seasonal map from the New Atlas of Australian Birds to suggest that they are in fact quite common here in winter. The GBS data shows that they are 'common' relative to the summer weeks (when they are up in the mountains) but 'uncommon' when compared to the migration periods.



## But wait: there's more!



This second chart shows that while the number of observations of the species over a year (scale on LHS) might have declined since the early 80s the number of observations in week 27 (scale on RHS) has dropped much more in most years since year 13. There is probably an interesting question or two in that!

## Year 27 Charts

Thanks to Kay and Anne for collecting the Charts at the July Meeting. I will be coming to the August meeting and will be very happy to receive more Charts. If people with completed Charts cannot make the August meeting please let me know by email ([martinflab@gmail.com](mailto:martinflab@gmail.com)) and we'll make some other arrangements.

— Martin Butterfield

## Woodland Project - continued

### Jerrabomberra Reserve (woodland)

Jenny Bounds reported that the usual interesting species were around on Monday 30 June, but not many flocks of small birds. Of 30 species recorded, highlights were a pair of **Flame Robins** at a site on the grassland edge, Southern **White-face**, **Speckled Warbler**, and a **Brown Goshawk** chased all over the woodland by **Noisy Miners** — that might explain the low small bird activity. — Jenny Bounds

## MUDBRICK COTTAGE

### Mallacoota

Our mudbrick cottage (*Blue Wren Cottage*) is available for rental for all those nature lovers out there!!

It is set amongst the trees in Mallacoota, Victoria (approximately 4 hours drive from Canberra). It is only 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,  
[barbdebruine@hotmail.com](mailto:barbdebruine@hotmail.com), or see  
<http://www.stayz.com.au/25595>.

## PASSIVE SOLAR HOUSE

### South Rosedale

*Arupingi* is a passive solar house situated in a peaceful bushland setting in South Rosedale.

Birdwatching is possible from the comfort of a chair on the front or back deck, while for the more energetic, Guerrilla Bay and Burrewarra Point are within walking distance. The wetlands at Barling's Beach are only a few kilometres away. Rich birding is available in almost any direction.

Contact Greg or Sallie Ramsay

6286 1564 or  
[gramsay@actewagl.net.au](mailto:gramsay@actewagl.net.au)

# COG SALES

The following items plus various pamphlets (most free) and membership application forms are available from the sales desk at COG meetings.

- **Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT** by Taylor and Day - \$16.00
- **Birds of the ACT: Two Centuries of Change** by Steve Wilson - \$25.00
- **Bird Calls of the ACT** – CD - \$12.00
- **Bird Songs of Canberra** – Cassette - \$10.00
- **COG Car Stickers** - \$2.00
- **COG Badges** – red or grey - \$5.00
- **The Long Paddock: A Directory of Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves in NSW** by Rural Lands Protection Board - \$31.00
- **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
- **Where to Find Birds in NE Queensland** by Jo Wieneke - \$16.00.
- **Grassland Flora: A Field Guide for the Southern Tablelands (NSW and ACT)** by David Eddy et al. - \$13.00
- **Our Patch: A Field Guide to the Flora of the ACT Region** - \$12.50
- **The Nestbox Book** by Gould League - \$12.50
- **Woodlands: A Disappearing Landscape** by David Lindenmayer et al - \$34.00
- **Feather and Brush: Three Centuries of Australian Bird Art** by Penny Olsen - \$50.00

A range of substantially discounted titles, mostly from CSIRO Publishing, is also available at meetings or may be ordered via email/telephone by COG members only.

**All these items plus COG T-shirts and Polo shirts are available at the monthly meeting sales desk**

## Avian Whimsy #65 — There were these Two Englishmen and a Spaniard who went to Australia...

... and became a thrush, a grasswren and a crow...

The story of Australian exploration by Europeans includes some episodes of extraordinary heroism and stoicism, plus a few of total idiocy and arrogance (not mutually exclusive of course). I was contemplating this while crouched in freezing drizzle at the National Botanic Gardens trying to will a **Bassian Thrush** to emerge from the stygian gloom of the shrubbery (without any of what might pedantically be termed 'success'). Not that I was seeing myself as heroic or even exploratory, but I was thinking about the 'Bassian' element of the name; it seemed better than contemplating the whereabouts of my apparently absent toes.

George Bass was a most interesting and attractive man, very much a reflection of his time, interested in everything and driven by a desire to discover new things. He was born to a tenant farmer, became a naval surgeon and learnt some very impressive seamanship and navigation on the job. He studied languages, the classics and contemporary radical philosophies. We know him best from his remarkable adventures exploring the essentially unknown coastline south of Sydney in the tiny *Tom Thumb* with former shipmate Matthew Flinders. Later he successfully tackled the entirely unknown and hazardous Bass Strait in an open whaleboat, and subsequently, again with Flinders, sailed around Van Diemens Land. He wrote of the plants, animals, people, and general impressions, while mapping coastlines. I've got some serious doubts about naming organisms after people, but if we're to do so, George was a good model. However, I don't believe that my recalcitrant thrush was named for him. (But please bear with me, I've still got the same modest allocation of marbles that I had last month.)

Nor do I think that the **Torresian Crow** was named for the somewhat mysterious Luis Vaez de Torres, who first appears in history as captain of the *San Pedrico*, one of three little ships under the overall command of the very experienced Pedro Quiros, sent from Peru in 1605 to search for the deduced great southern continent. Quiros was separated from the others and returned to Mexico (bullied it seems by a very narky crew), whereon Torres, made of tougher stuff assumed *de facto*, if not *de jure*, command of the rest of the expedition, stared down the crew and explored on. He wasn't very lucky, and missed the east coasts of Australia and New Guinea, but did follow the south coast of New Guinea, establishing that it was not a peninsula of a southern continent; in the process of course he explored what became 'his' strait.

Two hundred years later, Yorkshireman Edward Eyre was at least as tough. When in 1839 a boat didn't turn up as expected at Streaky Bay at the eastern end of the Great Australian Bight, he just walked back to Adelaide across the arid top of Eyre Peninsula (which of course it then wasn't). Subsequently, after three attempts to defeat the wild and terrifyingly dry head of the bight, he managed to walk to Albany in four months, with his companion and friend, Wylie. And the **Eyrean Grasswren**? Nope, not his either, I'm sure.

So what has all this waffle been about then? Fair question actually. On the face of it, these three doughty and skilful explorers, none of whose lives overlapped, seem to have little else in common – until the extraordinary polyhistor William Baldwin Spencer drew them together in 1896. Spencer was a remarkable Australian, an evolutionary biologist, anthropologist and photographer who was the foundation chair of biology at Melbourne University and appointed the first women as university lecturers in Australia. He was president of the Victorian Football League, Field Naturalists' Society and Royal Society of Victoria. He is probably most famous for his incredibly detailed studies, with photographs and wax cylinder sound recordings, of the people of the central deserts, with Alice Springs telegraph station master Francis Gillen. (So many stories, so little space!) However from a biological perspective perhaps his most enduring legacy was to divide Australia into three major bioregions, based on the moist tropics and sub-tropics, the central arid lands, and the cooler temperate south-east and south-west. And he called these, respectively – (suspenseful pause here), the Torresian, Eyrean and Bassian zones!

I'm confident that the birds we've mentioned were named for these regions, rather than directly for the explorers commemorated by Spencer. Curiously, Eyrean and Bassian have only been used once each to describe a bird species, and Torresian twice (the other being in **Torresian Imperial-pigeon**). Not that they're particularly helpful names mind you; for instance the crow also goes into deepest Eyrean territory, and is not the only corvid in the Torresian zone. The **Eyrean Grasswren** is one of six Eyrean grasswrens, if you see what I mean. And both **Bassian** and **Russet-tailed Thrushes** are found in both the Torresian and Bassian zones. Still, that only adds to the story, don't you think?

Ian Fraser [ianf@pcug.org.au](mailto: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:

C Rees, Mawson  
L & I Harman, Kaleen  
K Scott, Macarthur  
P Tyerman, Higgins  
S Wallace, Fraser  
C Hindson, Deakin  
M Maconachie, Deakin

## NEXT NEWSLETTER

September deadline

Wednesday 28 August 2008

Please send, articles, advertisements, updates etcetera to the Editors at [gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au) or c/- The Secretary COG, PO Box 301 Civic Square, ACT 2608

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

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

## COG info

*President*—Chris Davey, ph 6254 6324  
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*Vice President*—Jack Holland  
ph 6288 7840 (home)

*Treasurer*—Lia Battison ph 6231 0147

*Secretary*—Sandra Henderson 6231 0303  
[cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au)

*Address for correspondence*

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

*Newsletter distribution*  
Judy Collett and helpers

*COG membership*

2008-2009 memberships:

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

*Membership inquiries*—

Sandra Henderson ph 6231 0303  
[membership@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:membership@canberrabirds.org.au)  
for changed address or other details

*Canberra Birds Conservation Fund*  
Donations to this fund are tax deductible. Funds are used to support projects that protect and enhance native birds and the environments that sustain them.

*COG website*

[www.canberrabirds.org.au](http://www.canberrabirds.org.au)

*Office*

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

*COG E-mail Discussion List*

COG has an email discussion list for members and friends: 'Canberra Birds'. Join the list by following the links on the COG website or by sending an empty email message to [canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au) with the subject 'subscribe' without the quotation marks

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