



Gang-gang

Februarv 2006

News letter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

Monthly Meeting

**8 pm Wednesday
8 February 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 from Gawler Crescent
using the school road signposted as
Gabriel Drive. If that car-park is full,
enter using Chapel Drive.*

The **short talk** for February will be given by **Joe Forshaw**, COG's own specialist parrot expert, who will talk to us about **Superb Parrots** in general and this year's influx in particular

Our main speaker will be **Caroline Blackmore**, a PhD student at CRES, supervised by Rob Heinsohn.

Caroline's talk is entitled, "The breeding biology of the **Grey-crowned Babbler**".

Everyone welcome

**Another chance to visit
Lord Howe Island
See page 3**

What to watch out for this month

Two species that I didn't predict and alert members to look out for in the December *Gang-gang*, that seem to have dominated the COG chat line traffic over the past two months, are the **Common Koel** and the **Superb Parrot**. Both of these have been increasing summer visitors to the ACT, but never in such numbers as in 2005-2006.

Reports of the former seem to have subsided now (or perhaps they've been relegated into the realm of the usual suspects), but there have been many reports from late November to early-mid January from many suburbs. Unusually, on a number of occasions, these have been of more than one bird, including females and suspected juveniles, raising the possibility of the first local breeding record. The inner suburbs of Belconnen have been particularly popular, but there have been observations Canberra wide, with only a few reports from Tuggeranong or Gungahlin. Most records are from the calls only, often early in the morning or evening, though there have been more than the usual visual observations. Even though calling loudly they can be very difficult to locate in a tree, but can sometimes be seen as they leave, often with other birds in pursuit. If they are in your area these birds will be very obvious, with even non-birders remarking about them. This was the case when at least two birds were very conspicuous in the Rivett/Chapman area for the first three days of 2006. Keep an eye/ear out for any remaining **Common Koel** this summer.

One bird that is likely still to be in Canberra when this *Gang-gang* hits the letter boxes is the **Superb Parrot**. This is a regular summer visitor in the northern parts of the ACT, largely centred around Mt Rogers in Fraser, but this year it has been here in unprecedented numbers, with at first Macquarie Oval the hot spot, and more recently the Belconnen area round the fruit and vegetable markets and the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) building where they've been recorded feeding on lerps. If you haven't seen this bird before, or if you haven't got them on your ACT list, now's the time to rectify this; it's a very aptly named bird. So far the activity has been almost exclusively in Belconnen, with no records south of the River/Lake, but keep your eye out for it in your own suburb. Joe Forshaw's talk about this species at this month's meeting will be particularly timely.

As indicated last time for the **White-winged Triller** and the **Rufous Songlark**, their brief period here is nearly over, though there were still a few present round Chapman in mid January. Also, as predicted, there seems to have been at least a partial return (though slightly earlier than expected) of



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7-11th **Exotic Hong Kong**
with Dion Hobcroft \$ 2200
(excludes airfares)

18-22nd **Divine Lord Howe Is.** \$ 1780

March 2006

Newcastle Waders Afloat \$ 550

31-3rd April **Warrumbungles** \$ TBA

May 06

8-14th **South West Queensland** \$ 2190

July 06

22-26th **Comboyne & Crowdy Head**
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the **Dollarbird** which move into the suburbs for a period once they've bred. The very hot and dry weather in December and the first half of January did seem to take its toll on nesting, with some reports of nest failures containing young. Also look out for **White-throated Needletail**, and any related **Fork-tailed Swifts** passing through on their way back to the Northern Hemisphere, particularly on storm fronts. For reasons that are not entirely clear these are much more likely to pass through the ACT in February/March than on their way south in October to December.

Jack Holland

Field trip reports

Shoalhaven Wader Weekend 2-4 December

Most of the 14 participants drove from Canberra to Crookhaven Heads in atrocious weather conditions on Friday evening, with Mike Doyle the only one brave enough to pitch a tent on arrival. Everyone else was accommodated in cabins or campervans. Fortunately, the weather was fine on Saturday morning; however, the wind was so strong that telescopes were blown over and exposed skin was sand-blasted. This did not deter us or the birds – in fact, it brought **Short-tailed, Wedge-tailed** and **Fluttering Shearwater** right into the mouth of the estuary. The beach between Lake Wollumboola and the ocean yielded **Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint, Red-capped Plover** and **Ruddy Turnstone**, as well as **Crested, Common** and nesting **Little Tern**.

We subsequently learnt that the Little Tern was banded at Manning River estuary, Harrington, NSW (between Port Macquarie and Newcastle) on 21/2/1994 - 11 years 9 months and 12 days before we saw it - and was 385 miles from where it was banded. When banded it was at least 1 year old. I'm not sure how long terns live but ours is about 13+ years.

The wind had not abated by lunchtime, so it was decided to seek sheltered spots on Jervis Bay. Myola yielded few waders, but everyone had excellent views of a **Scarlet Honeyeater** in the forest behind the beach. Callala was also a disappointment, although some saw a **Brown Cuckoo-dove**. A stop at Orient Point late in the afternoon yielded **Whimbrel, Eastern Curlew, Godwit** and **Pied** and **Sooty Oystercatcher**, and a late afternoon walk along the shoreline adjacent to the caravan produced a **Grey-tailed Tattler, Whimbrel** and **Eastern Curlew** on the same rocky outcrop, allowing size comparisons to be made.

We gathered for a barbeque dinner on Saturday night, with everyone contributing to the pre-dinner nibbles, salad or dessert. We feasted well and all agreed that these communal meals are a highlight of any overnight trip.

It was a great relief to awake to a sunny Sunday with just a gentle breeze. Despite this, the shearwaters were still close to shore as was an **Arctic Jaegar**, which settled on the water just off Crookhaven Heads, allowing great views for about 5 minutes. The rest of the day was spent on Comerong Island, one of the best spots for waders on the South Coast. The spring tide meant we could not approach the birds from the usual direction; rather we had to walk along the ocean beach towards Shoalhaven Heads before tucking ourselves

into the dunes, from where we had fantastic views of a good range of waders from large to small – **Eastern Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit, Pacific Golden Plover, Red Knot, Terek Sandpiper, Red-capped Plover** and **Red-necked Stint**. There was also an impressive variety of terns – **Gull-billed, Caspian, Crested** and **Little**.

The Wader Study Group reports that the Red Knot we found at Comerong Island was banded in Victoria – they don't say where, but give lat 38S and long 145E. It was flagged sometime after 1990 (which I guess is when they started to use orange leg flags) and was 621 km from where it was flagged.

After a late lunch in the shade, we had a short walk through the rainforest on Comerong Island. Highlights were **Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoo** feeding young and **Brown Gerygone**. The drive back to the car ferry yielded a **Swamp Harrier**.

Despite the less than ideal weather conditions, the weekend yielded 83 species, including 14 different wader species and 5 different tern species. We had an excellent opportunity to compare the size, colour and markings of these birds, and someone was even heard to say, "I could get to like wader-watching!"

Sue Lashko

Wednesday Walk - Dunlop Grasslands - 14 December 2005

On a bright clear day, 12 members led by Roger Curnow and Joe Barr, started from the Jarramlee Homestead Road accompanied by a large number of bush flies but could complete only half of a too-ambitious planned walk around the Dunlop Grasslands. Starting from the recently named Fassifern Pond, where a newly-hatched family of **Eurasian Coots** was in residence and **Reed Warblers** and **Fairy Martins** were also present, the group crossed Ginninderra Creek (**Wood Duck** and **Water Dragon**) and soon found a very noisy and very tame **Rufous Songlark** in a small group of trees. The dead willows contained **Rainbow Bee-eaters** and **White-winged Trillers** among other species but the **Stubble Quails** heard in the grass nearby could not be flushed. A small family of at least three foxes was also seen. **Australian Pipits** (some carrying food) and a **Dusky Woodswallow** were seen further along the track before a visit to the **Fairy Martin** nest site in an old Sewerage Pumping Station where there were clear signs of the destruction of many nests among the few remaining. None of the nests seemed active but the martins were still in the area. A few of us saw one of the local **Wedge-tailed Eagles** appear over the ridge for a few moments. Only a few species were seen in the next stretch of grassland before (*continued page 4*)

Lord Howe Island 2006

Following the success of last year's visit, the COG Committee is again offering a trip to Lord Howe Island to members. Timing and the program are still being negotiated with Ian Hutton, LHI's resident bird expert. We hope to be able to link in with a research or conservation related event, however, our preferred timing is November 2006. Peter Fullagar, one of the researchers on the Woodhen recovery project and an expert on seabirds was on the last trip with us and has indicated he is interested in going again with a COG group. The program is likely to include a range of talks, walks, birdwatching (both by land and sea), snorkelling and other events. Accommodation is likely to be at Somerset Apartments (see <http://www.lordhoweisle.com.au>). The group will be limited to 16; already 13 places have been provisionally booked.

For further information or to put your name on a waiting list contact Jenny Bounds on phone 6288 7802 or e-mail jbounds@tpg.com.au.



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Services P/L**

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enquiries@philipmaher.com

2006 Birding Tours

5 —11 February 06

Tasmania - Bruny Island, Derwent Bridge, Melaleuca & pelagic trip. Accommodated.

23—30 April 06

Central Australia birding tour
Alice Springs, Uluru, Glen Helen. Accommodated

15—30 May 06

Top End - Darwin, Kakadu NP, Kununurra, Mitchell Plateau, Lake Argyle Accommodated.

1 — 8 August 06

New Caledonia birding tour

15 August – 2 September 06

Strzelecki Track Outback Tour

Accommodated

check website for availability

7– 24 April 2007 Thailand

www.philipmaher.com

we reached the welcome shade of the tree corridor behind Macgregor where **Weebills**, **Noisy Friarbird** and **Superb Wrens** were seen. Recrossing the creek took us to Jarramlee Pond where a newly-hatched family of **Dusky Moorhens** could be seen as well as another **Wood Duck**, **Pacific Black Duck** and **Grey Teal**. Back along the walking track past trees containing a **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike** nest with a fat baby in residence and squabbling **White-plumed Honeyeaters** and **Red Wattlebirds**. Final highlights were seen near the cars where a **Horsfields Bronze-cuckoo** was first heard, then seen, and an **Australian Hobby** and a **Sacred Ibis** passed close overhead. A total of 42 species seen and heard with the area across Gooroomon Creek left to be visited on a future occasion!

Lake Burley Griffin/Molonglo River – evening electric boat cruises Saturday/Sunday 14 & 15 January

We had a full boat on both evenings for the first COG trips of 2006. The main purpose was to check for nesting **Darters** and **Cormorants** on the Eastern side of Black Mountain Peninsula and in Molonglo Reach.

Despite my fears, following a check from the bike path over Xmas, there was appreciable nesting activity at various places along the peninsula. We first saw a typical mixed colony of **Little Black** and **Little Pied Cormorants** (ratio of about 5:1), in one to two trees overhanging the water. About a dozen nests could be counted, but it was very hard to determine exactly how many birds were on nests or just simply near them as they took off *en masse* on our approach. Several hundred metres further down, near the start of Gary Owen Drive, there was another colony, again predominantly **Little Black Cormorants** on or near about seven nests, one of which contained at least two young (very distinctive with their black down). However, there were also a couple of **Darter** nests here with females sitting tight, as well as about nine very large chicks, some still on the nest but others well away from them. All were still very white though some already had black wings, indicative of nesting having taken place early in the season. About 100 metres further on were another two **Darter** nests, one with a female sitting and the other with two medium sized chicks and parents close-by.

All in all, about 70 **Little Black** but less than 10 **Little Pied Cormorants** were seen, with over 15 **Darters**, including the large chicks, but only the single **Great Cormorant**, well away from the nesting area. This nesting activity was certainly the highlight of the night, otherwise water birds were rather scarce. There were lots of **Eurasian Coot**, quite a few **Black Swans** with large but still grey or greyish cygnets (in one case still quite small). Later we checked for nesting **Silver Gulls** on the south bank, finding a total of only three nests (one with an egg), seen on one boat in Lotus Bay. The number of moored boats in other bays is considerably fewer than two years ago when nesting was so prolific.

As expected, there were many more **Darters** nesting on the Molonglo Reach with over 30 adult birds (a slight majority were females but with up to 10 males in breeding plumage) seen and at least 22 nests (five on the north bank) spread out along the Reach, again at all stages of breeding — from birds sitting tight, to smallish chicks, to large chicks sitting on or near the nest. On one occasion there appeared to be five chicks on a single nest, the most COG and Jim the skipper have seen together. A male was also seen gathering nesting material. Cormorant numbers were down, however, with **Little Black Cormorants** (about 35 in total) nesting only in a single tree at the usual spot where the river widens appreciably. At this spot there were about six birds sitting on nests before taking off on our approach, and young were seen in three nests. As for the previous evening, **Little Pied Cormorants** were low in number and with no nesting activity noted. In amongst these were several **Great Cormorants** and while at least one was in breeding plumage no confirmed nesting was observed. A lone **Pied Cormorant** was seen fishing close to the entrance to the reach, completing the number of species that can be seen in Canberra.

Other nesting activity observed: a **White-faced heron** on a nest (as reported on the chat line earlier in the week), a **Purple Swamphen** on a nest in the reeds; two **Magpie-larks** on a nest; and a single largish cygnet, already with a white striped red bill. A pair of **Chestnut Teal** resting on a log near the river bank (the first COG and Jim the skipper have seen on the Reach), six **Australian Shelduck** loafing in the distance on the eastern shores of the basin, several **Sacred Kingfishers** and a lone **Dollarbird** were the other highlights in what was yet another very successful COG trip up the River.

As a number of people were not able to be accommodated on these two trips, it is intended to run repeats, probably in March or early April, particularly to check on progress with nesting. These may be early morning trips, and may be slightly shorter for the one on LBG as the level of birding interest outside of the nesting area on the eastern side of Black Mountain Peninsula tends to be low compared to that seen on Molonglo Reach, as illustrated by a total of 15 versus 35 species in the above trips. An indication of your interest would be welcome.

Jack Holland

COG outing to Brindabellas – 22 January 2006

Our annual outing to Blundells Creek and Warks Roads had some unusual excitements this year. Uriarra Homestead dam (our assembly point) had an interesting variety of waterbirds with **Australian Wood Duck, Australasian Shoveler, Grey Teal, Hardhead, Hoary-headed Grebe, Dusky Moorhen, Eurasian Coot and Masked Lapwing**. There was also the usual assembly of bush birds. The highlight was a flock of at least six **Nankeen Night Heron**. All the birds were in mature plumage, in contrast to most previous years when we have seen only immature birds.

Our clever car shuffle plan in Blundells Ck Rd (enabling us all to walk only down hill) came a bit (un)stuck when one of our shuttle cars bogged in a creek crossing. Fortunately, Mike's 4WD and towrope (which snapped just after we had pulled the car out!) saved us from further embarrassment.

The recovery in the vegetation in this part of Namadgi National Park since the 2003 fire was great to see! Wattles, native understorey shrubs and forbs have now largely replaced the exotic weeds and grasses that came up everywhere after the fires, although, there are also a few nasty new blackberry thickets. Whilst many of the larger eucalypts still show burnt and bare upper limbs (and there are many dead ones) the vegetation is clearly now supporting many of the native birds which we used to see there. One notable addition is the striking number of **Flame Robins**, almost all of which were young birds. There were also good numbers of **Spotted Pardalotes, Yellow-faced, White-naped and White-eared Honeyeaters, White-browed Scrubwrens, Superb Fairy-wrens, Brown and Striated Thornbills, White-throated Treecreepers, Grey Shrike-thrushes, Silvereyes, Grey Fantails, Golden and Rufous Whistlers**. The highlight of the Blundells Ck Rd walk was excellent views of a pair of **Rufous Fantails**. Some younger members of our group were even able to hear them call.

The beautiful narrow valley along Warks Rd (and Lees Ck) has been one of my favourite places in the ACT, since I surveyed it for the 1980's COG Atlas. It was not as badly burnt as the nearby higher elevated areas, and still retains ferns and blanket bush in the creek and some tall ribbon gums along the road. **White-naped Honeyeaters** were there in big numbers, and we recorded three pairs of **Satin Flycatchers**, one of which had two dependent young, a pair of **Red-browed Finches** and a **Satin Bowerbird**. Just as we finished lunch we heard a **Pilotbird** calling and sharp-eyed Gillian spotted a **Red-browed Treecreeper** going slowly up a ribbon gum. It was the best part of her day, and we all had excellent views of the bird and its "red" brow.

The trip total was 43 bird species. Not bad for an area "destroyed by bushfires".

Bruce Lindenmayer

Woodland Surveys

Newline Site— December surveys at Newline usually mean lots of tall grass and grass seeds, and this survey was no exception, with gaiters the order of the day. In one paddock, the seed stalks and heads were almost over my head, but it was not the worst grass growth I've encountered in seven years of surveys at Newline. A **Brown Goshawk** was around in the front paddock and may have influenced relatively low counts at the sites there. Unlike the summer survey in 2004, I was surprised there were no **Leaden Flycatchers** or **Trillers** recorded in December 2005.

Highlights within a total species count of 42 were: numerous **Dollarbirds** right across the site down to the quarry, probably 5-6 pairs (there are usually a pair or two at Newline at this time of year, but this is the most I've ever recorded); **Jacky Winters** on a nest in a tree near the road at site 2; a **Speckled Warbler** near the dump, two **Varied Sittellas** at site 9 which is mostly small to medium Blakely's Red Gum trees; **Rufous Songlarks** and a **Pipit** at the quarry end; and one **Brown Treecreeper** at site 3 in the front paddock.

Jenny Bounds

Future Field Trips

Jerrabomberra Wetlands – Sunday 5 February – morning outing

Come to our local wetlands and help celebrate World Wetlands Week. This outing will appeal to all levels of expertise. We will search for ducks, rails and small birds of the grasslands and discuss their behaviour and habitat. We will also visit the adjacent Fyshwick Sewerage Ponds to look at the birds of deeper water.

The area is very open so please bring a hat, sunscreen and plenty to drink. Meet at the car park off Dairy Road at 7.30 am. The outing is expected to finish by 11 am. Please book with Tom Green on 6247 0630 or

tomgreen@netspeed.com.au

Wednesday walk – 15 February – Percival Hill, Nicholls

These walks are gentle rambles suitable for mature-age birders from beginners onward. Meet at **9 am** at the end of

Schow Place (off Temperley St) in Nicholls for the first COG visit to this area. A range of woodland species is expected to be seen. Please bring a hat and water/morning tea. Grass seeds may be a problem. The walk will finish by lunchtime.

Kambah Pool to Red Rocks Gorge – Sunday 19 February – morning outing

This will be COG's first visit to this area since the January 2003 bushfires. The path between Kambah Pool and Pine Island has been reconstructed and offers a fairly easy way to walk to the Gorge along (although mostly well above) the Murrumbidgee River. It is a walk of about 2.5 km to the Gorge with a steep down and up (about 30 metres elevation with some steps) about half way, where the path dips to the river. There is still much less canopy than prior to the 2003 fires and therefore the walk is now hotter in temperature. The bird activity also seems lower, but there is still a good range of bush birds and the chance of some interesting sightings, especially falcons nearer the Gorge. It will be particularly interesting for those concerned about the way the vegetation is regenerating after the bush fires three years ago and the impact of this on our birds. Meet Michael Robbins (contact 6231 7391, or at jrobbins@netspeed.com.au) at **8 am** at the car park at the south end of Kambah Pool, second turning left after you cross the cattle grid at the entry to the Bullen Range Nature Reserve. Bring sunscreen, water and something for morning tea, as we'll probably be out for 2 to 3 hours.

Cape Conran Coastal Park – 24-27 February 2006 – extended weekend campout

Note that due to unavoidable circumstances the dates for this trip have been changed from that published in the draft 2006 COG Field Trips Program

COG is again venturing to the coast for the now regular, late summer, post-holiday period campout. This time we are going to Cape Conran Coastal Park in Victoria. It is an easy drive of about 350 km southeast of Canberra via Cooma, Bombala and Cann River. The campsite is located in banksia woodland and we will visit a variety of bird habitats on or near this unspoiled coast. There will be plenty of opportunities to relax and socialize. New members are always welcome. Contact Martyn and Pat Moffat at mpmoff@bigpond.net.au or on 6282 3583 for information.

Rob Roy Forest/Woodland Reserve – Sunday 5 March – morning outing

The first morning walk of March will be COG's first visit to Rob Roy Nature Reserve on the SE fringe of Canberra. The reserve is surrounded by leasehold land so it is little visited, but last year produced a **Chestnut-rumped Heathwren** and **Glossy Black-cockatoos**. Michael Wright and Alastair Smith found these birds and will jointly lead this walk. A variety of other bush birds should be seen. The area we will be visiting involves a relatively long walk that encompasses some rough terrain so good walking boots are an essential accoutrement, as is a reasonable standard of fitness. Please take plenty of water, a hat and sun block. Meet at 8 am at the end of Haxton Place Conder. Please contact Alastair (6161 8608) or on membership@canberrabirds.org.au for more information.

Taylor's Creek – Sunday 12 March – Atlassing opportunity on private properties

Taylor's Creek catchment lies between Tarago and the east side of Lake George. In October 2004 COG conducted a blitz-style outing for the Taylor's Creek Landcare Group who were keen to know of the birdlife on their properties. On the 2004 outing 24 COG members helped survey 31 two-ha sites on eight properties across 11 rarely-visited COG grids, resulting in 89 species recorded on a less than ideal morning. The survey covered a variety of woodland and forest types, plus wetlands and grasslands. The outing in 2006 is in autumn but will visit the same sites and follow the same format, ie. small survey teams will each visit a number of sites on different properties during the morning. We will finish with a lunch provided by the Landcare group, and a roundup of the findings for the morning. Anyone is welcome to attend, and each survey team will have an experienced birder to form the nucleus of the team. If you are interested in joining this outing, exploring some new territory and meeting some enthusiastic landholders, please contact Nicki Taws, on 6251 0303, Mobile 0408 210736 or email ntaws@bigpond.com so that survey teams can be organised.

Wadbilliga National Park – Saturday 18 - Monday 20 March – long weekend camp-out.

For this Canberra Day long weekend COG will be holding a camp-out in the Wadbilliga National Park, an area which as far as I know we've never been to previously. We'll be camping at the lovely Cascades camping ground within the park, alongside the Tuross River. This has three wood BBQs, a number of picnic tables and a single pit toilet, but other wise it will be a bring everything camp. It's a good two-hours drive from Canberra, best via Cooma and Numeralla which is sealed all the way until the turn off, 13 kilometres from the campsite.

We'll be exploring the park for its birds and other wildlife, visiting such places as the Tuross Falls and the Wadbilliga

Crossing. This will include some spotlighting for night life, the area is known to have lots of possums and Greater Gliders. There are platypus in the River. Birds expected to be seen or heard include **Superb Lyrebirds, Pilotbirds, Olive Whistlers, Bassian Thrush, Spotted Quail-thrush** and hopefully **Powerful Owl**. Please express your interest (including for further information) to Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail to jack.holland@deh.gov.au). A leader is still needed for this camp-out, preferably some-one who is familiar with the area. Also if someone has access to spotlighting equipment, this would be appreciated.

Longer Term trips

Jamberoo Valley/Barren Grounds NR – Friday night - Sunday, 26-28 May – weekend, accomodated

The accommodation for this trip to a past favourite COG spot will be at Ben Ricketts Environmental Reserve with self-catering cabins about one km from Barren Grounds. They are nicely furnished, with the majority of beds being bunks, but very open plan. Be aware that cabins may need to be mixed genders. For those with web access the address is www.benricketts.org.au if you want to look at photos of the cabins. We will explore several marked walking tracks on the property, which pass through rainforest, very tall eucalypts, creeks and a waterfall, offering opportunities to see the rich variety of native plants and animals. We will hopefully do some spotlighting as **Sooty Owls** are sometimes heard at night.

We will also visit Barren Grounds and neighbouring areas where there is a range of walks from easy to medium difficulty. Barren Grounds Reserve is in the Southern Highlands about 2 – 2.5 hours drive north of Canberra. It is famous for its specialty birds as well as its flora - flowering heath in spring and summer, and banksias in winter. The reserve is rich in bird life. On the heath, we are most likely to come across various honeyeaters and possibly **Southern Emu-wrens**. If we're lucky, we might even see a **Ground Parrot** or **Eastern Bristlebird**.

Cost will be around \$45-50 per person depending on the number of people we get. Space is limited and bookings will be taken on first in first served basis. Please express your interest **NOW** as we need to know the number to make a firm booking as soon as possible. A commitment

FOR RENT

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.

For further details contact Greg or Sallie Ramsay

31 MacRobertson St, MAWSON, ACT 2607, (02) 6286 1564 or e-mail at greg.ramsay@actewagl.net.au

MUDBRICK COTTAGE

Mallacoota

Our mudbrick 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. For further information, please contact Barbara de Bruine on

(02)– 6258 3531

will need to be made through a full payment to the treasurer by late February. Contact Kathy Walter or John Goldie on (H) 6241 7639 to book your place.

Other Surveys/Activities of Interest

Should Little Eagles *Hieraaetus morphnoides* Be Listed As Vulnerable in the ACT?

We surveyed twelve species of breeding raptor in the ACT in 1990 - 1992 then surveyed the same locations again in 2002-2005. We also searched areas in the ACT not thoroughly searched in the 1990 - 1992 survey. Most species were stable but Wedge-tailed Eagles *Aquila audax* had increased, apparently because of increasing numbers of macropods used as food, and Little Eagles *Hieraaetus morphnoides* were decreasing, from 11 active nests (with at least 1 egg or young) in the early 1990's down to 1 active nest in 2005. In some cases Wedge-tailed Eagles apparently displaced them, however, Little Eagles disappeared in areas containing no nesting Wedge-tailed Eagles. Little Eagles may continue to breed in diminished numbers in the ACT, or disappear altogether, and this is at least partially due to ACT Government policy targeting some remaining Little Eagle breeding habitat for suburban development. Little Eagles may need to be listed as Vulnerable in the ACT. We would appreciate any reports of Little Eagle nests or resident pairs (not one-off sightings) that COG members can provide for the ACT.

Jerry Olsen & Esteban Fuentes – ph. (02) 6201.2504

COG SALES 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: Preliminary Atlas** - NSW Bird Atlasers - **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 Bird Songs of Canberra – Cassette - \$10.00.

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.

The Friends of Grasslands will be visiting the Scabby Nature Reserve on Sunday 26 March. They will visit the area between Mt Scabby and the upper Sams Creek swamp near Yaouk where there are some magnificent mature stands of snow gum with tiny patches of *Sphagnum* Bog and the extensive *Carex* mire. The latter has provided a 12,000 year history of vegetation followed by significant European disruption. The site is reached via Shannons Flat and Yaouk, a two hour trip with a possible stop at the Mt Clear camp ground and the ancient stone terraces on the Murrumbidgee. Once there, the active can follow Sams Creek or climb the lower slopes of Mt Scabby while the sane stroll amongst the woodlands. Bring lunch. The meeting place Monaro Highway just south of Johnson Drive, Calwell, at 8 am to travel in convoy. Talk to Margaret Ning (6241 4065) if you plan to come and to arrange car pooling.

2006 COG Field Trips Program

The 2006 COG Field Trips Program is published for members' convenience in this edition of *Gang-gang*. There have been some exciting additions to the draft published in the November *Gang-gang*, and it now offers another very strong program with a number of new places to visit and some good spots for return visits, as well as some old favourites.

A few organisers/leaders are still needed for some trips, in particular for the very important Easter camp-out (one of the most popular events on the COG calendar), this year at Munghorn Gap, where we have secured a secluded spot. Unfortunately the original leader can no longer take this trip. If you can help with this, or with any other of the trips still needing a leader, please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by e-mail at jack.holland@deh.gov.au).

No suggestions were received to organise/lead a late October mid week camp and this has been deleted from the program. However, any offers will still be gratefully received.

COG's draft Guidelines for the Advertising and Conduct of COG Field Trips have been available from the COG web site and their availability has been published in three editions of *Gang-gang*. There has been a very limited response to these, and they have been finalised and are being implemented from the first outing in 2006.

From the Committee

Apart from its more routine business, the committee considered a number of other topics at its January meeting:

- The two UHF hand-held CB transceivers have been successfully tested on a COG field trip; they are now available for loan from the secretary.
- We continue to wrestle with the problem of an appropriate level of insurance for volunteers on projects for which we are receiving government grants.
- COG regularly receives requests from members of the public, to come and look at rural properties and survey birds thereon. If any members would like to undertake such tasks from time to time, please contact the secretary.
- COG has been invited to hold a stall again, at the Tidbinbilla Easter Extravaganza. This is a great opportunity to promote COG to the general public in a pleasant, open-air venue. Shelter and tables and chairs provided; we seek someone to take out the display equipment and organise a few volunteers. Expressions of interest to the secretary please.
- Apologies from the editors of *Canberra Bird Notes*. The December 2005 issue has been delayed and will not be distributed until the end of February.

Conservation issues

- **Water Skiing trial on Lake Burley Griffin** – COG has finally received a response from the NCA about the concerns we raised and the process of consultation and decision making – this is not a totally satisfactory response from COG's perspective and we are considering further options to obtain more information. Attempts to find out when skiing is actually taking place so that visual effects etc on birds can be monitored have proved difficult.
- **Wildlife corridors** – The Legislative Assembly for the ACT Standing Committee on Planning and Environment released Report No 17 in November 2005 on Wildlife Corridors and Draft Variation to the Territory Plan 231 – East Gungahlin Suburbs of Kenny and Throsby and Goorooyaroo Nature Reserve. This report was pleasing as it picked up recommendations made by COG and other groups in their earlier submissions to the Committee, particularly relating to re-drawing the boundaries of Mulligan's Flat and Gooroo reserves further back to Horse Park Drive to better buffer them from urban effects. The report is worth a read for those interested in these reserves.

Common Mynas – an update

Following representations from COG members concerning Common Myna traps, a response was sought from Environment ACT on related issues. They have responded that

"from the trapping trial, Dr Chris Tidemann concluded that these traps are not a practical method for substantially reducing the number of Mynas in areas where they already occur in high abundance, which includes most of Canberra. The fairly low catch-rate, and the fact that some Mynas apparently avoid the traps, means that deploying even a large number of traps would most likely result in ongoing 'sustainable harvesting' of Mynas, rather than reducing numbers to low levels. For this reason, Environment ACT does not advocate the general use of these traps for control of Mynas in Canberra."

With regard to the general public using these traps for Mynas, our understanding is that there is nothing in ACT legislation prohibiting a person trapping Mynas on their own premises or keeping Mynas in captivity (which would apply to decoy birds in traps) provided animal welfare standards are met (ie. the same as for keeping any pet bird) (the Animal Welfare Act and associated codes of practice are available on the web at ???). Similarly, our understanding is that there is nothing preventing a person killing Mynas caught in a trap, provided that the method used is humane. Environment ACT does not provide a service to the general public for euthanasing Mynas."

Based on the above, the committee unfortunately is unable to support the purchase of traps for use by members, including because it is unclear whether a humane method for euthanasing trapped birds is available to the general public.

Further information on any of the above issues is available from the relevant committee member.

Avian Whimsy #38 – Words and Birds for Colour

I used to be a bit cynical about authors of novels who claimed that their characters ran the book, and that they had no real control over where the story was going. However I can well believe it now, given how often this little piece of frippery heads off in an entirely other direction from the one in which I'd naively thought I was taking it. The other day I received Volume 9 of Handbook of Birds of the World (yes I know I'm behind but I'm buying them on the never-never and am actually starting to catch up!). The introduction is an always fascinating – and often challenging – essay on a birdy topic. This one is on naming of birds, and inter alia the author did an analysis of the most commonly used species names. Intrigued I started to do the same for Australian birds and came up with some not unexpected results, eg the wide use of *novaehollandiae* (12 times) and *australis* (five). I was surprised at just how many are named for people too; I made it 73, most of which are not used in the common name, and few of which are duplicated. I was going to delve into all that and more, but then I started looking at names for colours and the article got totally hijacked.

I'm aware of, and delighted by, the creativity of botanical taxonomists in finding different ways of saying 'red' for instance, but hadn't thought about it for animals. There are some terms referring non-specifically to the bird's colouring – eg *variegata* (five), *versicolor* (four, means the same as *variegata*) and *picta* (ie painted, two). There is one *unicolor* and one each of *discolor* and *bicolor* (they mean the same), but four *tricolor*. However, by my count there are no less than 224 names specifying a colour! (I am using the Birds Australia 2003 list, which includes all Australian records, including territories and territorial waters.)

White leads the way, with 43 'white' species, using just three terms – *leuco-* (25), *alb-* (16) and *pallid-* (two). The first two are direct Greek and Latin respectively; the last just means pale. Maybe it's just that there aren't many shades of white, but other colours have a much greater diversity of expression – even black, which comes in a close second with 41 species! Again, straight translations from Greek (21 with *melano-*) and Latin (9 with *nigr-*) lead the way. However six use *ater* or *atri-* meaning matt black, three are *tenebros-* (from Latin for darkness) and *carbo* and *funereus* (for the mournful implication of black, in this case applied to Yellow-tailed Black-cockies) each get a guernsey.

Colours are hard to delimit, as the nine different terms used for 38 'red' Australian birds illustrate (this becomes 12 terms and 41 species if we include pink). Just over half of the 'reds' are described with '*ruf-*', meaning reddish, but most of these are rufous in the way we use it, ie reddish-brown. *Russ-* implies the same, while *eryth-* and *rubri-* are Greek and Latin for 'red red'; *pyrrho-* is another of Greek origin, meaning 'reddish'. *Haem-* and *sanguin-* both mean red by referring to blood, *ferr-* to iron (ie rust) while *flammea* does it by evoking fire. For pink, both *ros-* and *rodino-* derive from a rose flower, while *carn-* means pink via 'fleshy'.

Yellow is next with 37, and with eight different ways of saying it. As well as *chrys-* (Greek, 12) and *flav-* (Latin, 13), we have *citri-* (ie lemon-coloured), *lut-* (ie egg-yolk coloured), *aur-* (golden), *croc-* (crocus) and *ochr-* (ochre yellow). The most curious yellow though is *isabella*, meaning greyish-yellow; if you're squeamish you may not wish to read this! It is purported to derive from Isabella of Spain (she of 'Ferdinand and ...' fame) who in a very rash moment swore not to change her 'body linen' until the Moors were driven from Spain (or besieged Granada fell, etc). It was not a quick process and the colour resulted...

Grey is a bit moot, due to the existence of *fusca/fuscus* which really means grey-brown! There are eight of these, but another 17 which are more unequivocally grey. Again *gris-* (Latin) and *polio-* (Greek) are direct translations, while *ciner-* and *fulig-* literally mean ashy or sooty.

After that the numbers drop off a bit. There are seven 'greens' (five Greek *chlor-* and two Latin *virid-*) and eight 'blues' (six *cyano-*, one *azurea* and a *caerulea*). *Cyano-* is from Greek and *caerulea* from Latin, both for dark blue, while azure comes to us from Persian via Arabic and Old French! There are seven purple species with three ways of delineating shades – *porphyrio-*, *violacea*, and *phoenic-* for reddish-purple. There are also five *oliv-*, though perhaps they should be allowed to supplement the greens. Finally, fuscous aside, there are two *brunneo-*, a *castaneus* (ie chestnut) and a *cinnamomeum* for brown. And no, I haven't told you what the birds are – there isn't room and besides, you have to do *something* for yourself!

I love colour – I'm lucky enough to see the world thus and don't 'get' black and white photography. I could never paint with a brush, so instead revel in (and am frustrated by my regular failure to find) ways to paint with words. I am delighted that taxonomists of Australian birds have found nearly fifty ways of doing so.

(Though I love words, I am no linguist. If you have concerns or comments on any of my translations I'd love to hear them.) And my thanks to Jeannie Gray, who pointed out a few that I'd missed.

Ian Fraser ianf@pcug.org.au

Bits and pieces

January Quiz Night – Under the genial guidance of quizmaster Ian Fraser, a fairly motley crew had an enjoyable evening grappling with some of the more esoteric features of Australian wildlife (even including some birds). Rosemary Blemings' donation of native plants as prizes was well received. Unfortunately your reporter was unable to record details of the winning team as the evening ended in mild chaos amid cries of "Protest" "Send for the stewards" "Recount" etc, resounding around the hall. Nonetheless, a great time was had by almost all. Our thanks to Ian for a job well done. There is no truth to the rumour that just because he was likened to the Great Galah in Kimba, South Australia, he took umbrage and vowed never to run another quiz night. He has a totally different reason.

Volunteers required – to help with the *Gang-gang* mailout. There are gaps in the roster on 4 July, 1 August & 5 September. All we're asking is for help for about one hour (from 7:30pm) on those days, preparing the newsletter for posting. Please contact Judy Collett, 35A Hackett Gardens, Turner, phone 6262 7016, mob 0409 077 804 or by e-mail at jcollett@cybermac.com.au

Photo required – A high quality electronic photo of Latham's Snipe is sought for a schools education project on natural heritage. Must be high quality image, eg 1-2mb. If you can assist, please contact Erika Steller, Project Officer at the Conservation Council ph 6247 7808 or email: ccserac.project2@ecoaction.net.au

Bird pox virus – Marg Peachey, the RSPCA's Wildlife Officer has asked to be notified of any sightings of birds (particularly magpies, currawongs and choughs) which may be suffering the bird pox virus. The virus, which is contagious and a notifiable disease, shows up as lumps on the feet and legs and sometimes on the faces of birds. So far there have been reports of sightings in the northern suburbs of Hall, Belconnen, Nicholls and Giralang. One report came also from Hughes but has not been confirmed. Marg can be contacted at the RSPCA on 6282 8300 or by e-mail at mpeachey@rspca-act.org.au

Back copies of *Gang-gang* – Anyone interested in copies of *Gang-gang* going back to 1992 should contact Rosemary Blemings at roseble@tpg.com.au

Birds Australia, Southern NSW & ACT Group, 2006 Seminar

Birds in the Urban Landscape — 1:00 pm, Saturday 25 March 2006, Newington Armory, Sydney Olympic Park. For further information and bookings contact Birds Australia Southern NSW & ACT Group (BASNA) office, PO Box 1322, Crows Nest NSW 1585, phone: (02) 9436 0388, fax: (02) 9436 0466, e-mail rosella63@bigpond.com. COG's very own Geoffrey Dabb will be making a presentation on Canberra's birds at the seminar.

Australian Bird Study Association – AGM and Science Day

Call for abstracts – The Association is holding a Science Day in conjunction with its next AGM to be held in Canberra on Saturday 25 March 2006. The theme of the science day will be "Raptors: nocturnal and diurnal".

The Organizing Committee has called for abstracts of papers for presentation at the meeting. It is expected that each presenter will be given 30 minutes for presentation and questions. Interested speakers are invited to submit a half page abstract, attached to, or embedded in, an e-mail to Nick Nicholls (nick.nicholls@csiro.au, phone Thursday and Friday, (02) 6242 1753) by close of business, Friday 10 February 2006.



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Note from the editor

Apologies for the lack of photographs in this issue. I'm still grappling with the intricacies of text boxes in MS Word and my machine doesn't seem to do the same things as Tanya's. We're working on the problem and hope to reintroduce photographs next issue.

Apologies also to our Christmas Barbecue Poets Association. Their contributions to the season's festivities have also had to be held over to the next issue.

Greg Ramsay

Gang-gang

Next newsletter

MARCH deadline

Wednesday 22 February 2006

Please send updates, articles, advertisements etcetera to

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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.
Field trip reports should be less than

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Canberra Birds Conservation Fund

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

COG website

www.canberrabirds.org.au

COG membership

**2005-2006 membership: Individuals,
families and institutions: \$35. school**

Office (6247 4996)

COG no longer has an office in the Griffin Centre.

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

COG E-mail Discussion List

COG has an email announcement and discussion list for members and friends of COG: 'Canberra Birds'. Join the list by sending an empty email message to canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au.

Editor Canberra Bird Notes

CBN@canberrabirds.org.au



Gang-gang

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