



Gang-gang

February 2008

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

Monthly Meeting

8 pm Wednesday 13 February 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 first presentation will be a DVD/video by **Matthew Higgins** entitled '**Echidnarama**', an intimate insight into the private bush lives of these remarkable creatures. The documentary includes footage of a range of other animals and birds that share the bush with echidnas.

Matthew is a Canberra historian, bushwalker and cross-country skier who has also been making short films for several years, and which have been shown at film festivals and to community groups.

The main presentation will be by **Dr Leo Joseph**, ornithologist and Director of the Australian National Wildlife Collection at the CSIRO, on the "**Evolution In Birds of the Australo-Papuan Region: Looking Back and Forward.**"

What do you see when you see a bird? This talk is designed to explore the perspective that when we look at a bird in the field, we are really looking at the current point a bird finds itself on an evolutionary path that its ancestors have travelled as the species itself has evolved. In this talk Leo explores this by looking at some of the aspects that have attracted so many of us to the study of birds such as plumage, vocalizations, migration, nesting, as well as a few other odds and ends like mimicry and odour in birds. Then he'll trace how what has been learned by different research programs about one single bird can enrich the way we look at birds, whether at home or in travels further afield.

Everyone welcome

What to watch out for this month

We are now about two thirds through summer and the pattern for both the weather and the migrant birds this year is clear. At the end of October the hot dry first part of spring changed to a much wetter one in the lead up to Christmas. Ironically, though not probably surprisingly, the high rate of observations of "unusual" birds seemed to just about dry up completely (just as well I'd refrained from making any predictions in my November column). The exception has been the Little Bitterns seen at Acacia Inlet and later at Kelly's Swamp during January, though possibly not drought-related. However, the better rainfall gave a new lease of life as far as the breeding season was concerned. As noted in my report of the Kelly Road outing and the earlier one on the nest workshop held at Campbell Park, many species were able to breed successfully or attempt to breed due to the good rains in late October/early November, and the follow up rain in late November and December. Indeed the **Red-backed Kingfishers** reported at Dunlop had commenced breeding and had laid eggs before the opening to the nest was washed away in a storm, as illustrated so graphically in Roger Curnow's images shown at COG's Members' night. This was a first for the ACT. The successful **Little Eagle** nest nearby also reported by Roger is believed to be the latest this species has bred in the ACT, and was probably also due to the improved conditions, though the current high rabbit numbers are reported not to have been affected and actually increased during the drought. Some of the earlier nesting species don't seem to have fared as well; on my usual dog walking duties round Chapman the number of squawking young **Pied Currawongs** was considerably lower towards the end of last year. Perhaps this reduced the potential for predation and resulted in a better breeding year for many other species, though the hot and dry 3 week post New Year spell will have had an impact.

Even with the later season by the end of January the bulk of the breeding may be expected to be finished and for some



species such as the **White-winged Triller**, **Rufous Songlark** and **Fairy Martin** their relatively brief sojourn in the ACT will be over. Records for these species after mid January are usually very few, so keep an eye out and note when you last see them. This also applies to the **Superb Parrot**, which during December was very conspicuous in parts of the northern suburbs and then seemed to retreat en masse to Mount Rogers, where many members enjoyed seeing such a large gathering of them. Interestingly this species continues to find Lake Burley Griffin/the Molonglo River an insurmountable barrier, with as far as I'm aware no records to the south of these this summer. The **Common Koel** is another species which has been reported widely and mainly northside, but with some notable exceptions such as the Holder one which has been very vocal for several months and many residents will be pleased if it departs on schedule before the end of January.

Other species which tend to breed away from the built up areas may move into the suburbs for a period once they've bred, the **Dollarbird** being a good example of this, and the first reports have started to come in, typically close to Australia Day. In particular juvenile birds (which are much less brightly coloured including the bills) stay around till early March. The **Australian Hobby** is another species for which most observations seem to be post-breeding in the coming months. Also keep an eye out for **White-throated Needletails** and the rarer **Fork-tailed Swifts** on passing fronts or local thunderstorms. The peak season for these in the ACT tends to be February and March, and so far there have only been sporadic sightings. Again make sure that these valuable records are not lost but are entered into the COG database. Breeding records are the most valuable records of all, but for many species these are very under-represented.

Jack Holland

Field Trip reports

Kelly Road, Sunday 2 December 2007

Despite the closeness to Xmas, the early start and the very wet day before, plus the competing Lady Elliot Island trip, well over 25 members and guests joined me in my first trip in several years to this prime piece of grassy woodland just to the south of the ACT border. Our first stop was a brief look at the more open woodland at the northern end of Kelly Road, walking back up along the railway line for several hundred metres. This proved very rewarding, as almost immediately we found a **Dusky Woodswallow** nest in a relatively low and exposed position so the heavily streaked chicks could easily be seen. In quick succession a number of other species were seen, including **Southern Whiteface**, **Brown Treecreeper** and **Red-rumped Parrot**. A number of **Rufous Songlarks** were busy doing their mate attracting display flights, occasionally alighting close enough on wires or a pole to allow observation of their plain features, and very occasionally their rufous rump. **Martins** (and **Welcome Swallows**) were constantly overhead, but were even less obliging at showing the main identification feature, the rufous head of the **Fairy**, and the much darker head of the **Tree Martin**. However, the highlight for most was a pair of **Diamond Firetails** feeding in front of us, regularly jumping up to get seed heads at the top of the grass stalks and then spending time eating them.

After about an hour we moved down to the start of TSR 36, now named Black Flat 31. On getting out of the car the difference from my recollection was clear, as what used to be a jungle of sweet briars now resembled an English parkland. And the difference in bird activity compared with previous visit in December 2004, when this had just been done but the dead bushes were still piled up, was soon obvious too, with it being much harder to find species than earlier at the northern end. However, we persevered and as we moved a kilometre or so down the road we managed to find a total of 30 species (well down on what I used to tally there). These included an adult **Australian Wood Duck** with 8 half-grown ducklings in tow, more **Brown Treecreepers** (including a pair regularly entering a spout in a dead branch) and **Rufous Songlarks**, and several **White-winged Trillers**, including for some good views of a female on a fence or feeding low to the ground. The expected **Fuscous Honeyeaters** were difficult to find at first, being reluctant to call, but we did find and have very good views of a number, including several building nests, one of which was low down and quite open, allowing all participants great views as both birds busily constructed a very fine structure suspended from the outer twigs and leaves.

All in all a very successful outing and a good way to finish the formal weekend COG Field Trips Program for 2007. The lower activity in the formerly magical mile from the start of TSR 36 was somewhat disappointing, though it remains arguably the best spot close to Canberra to see **Fuscous Honeyeaters**. We still managed to find 40 species including 10 with breeding activity, most in the early stages such as nest building. Well worth a repeat visit.

Jack Holland

Woodland Project - Summer surveys—Jenny Bounds

Mulligan's Flat - Sunday 2 December 2007

In beautiful fine weather, it was a great day for the woodland survey. Of 45 species recorded, the highlights were: **Superb Parrots** near the large dam, a **Speckled Warbler's** nest with young near our parking spot, **Scarlet and Red-capped Robins**, **Varied Sittellas**, and **Striated Thornbills** with a cuckoo baby, probably a **Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo**. The next survey dates will be Sunday 30 March and Sunday 29 June - volunteers please note your diaries.

Callum Brae - Monday 3 December 2007

This survey, on a warm, humid morning was marked by shrieking **Brown Goshawks** and ear splitting cicadas. First I was attacked by a noisy pair of Goshawks (which had a nest around the first sites in the woodland), swooped repeatedly to the point that I had to stand against the trunk of a large tree to finish the survey. On retreating to the other side of the reserve to survey the three sites there, it was even worse with cicadas all over the woodland patch; in fact it was like a scene from a horror movie with the insects crawling up tree trunks and some buzzing around. Of 40 species in total, the other highlights were nesting **Dollarbirds** and **Speckled Warbler** at site 6. It was disappointing to see so much Saffron Thistle in the reserve, emerging from the drought following the November rain - in some places it completely covered large areas. I understand it's not a priority weed for management by the Parks Service, but think more needs to be done (more funding and resources at timely points etc) to target species like this when they can be better controlled at rosette stage.

Jerrabomberra Woodland

The woodland patch at the Jerrabomberra Grasslands Reserve was quieter than usual, with fewer small birds around. Only one pair of **Dollarbirds** are nesting this year (usually there are 3 pairs), but **White-winged Trillers** were active, as well as **Sacred Kingfishers** and **Dusky Woodswallows** at the usual sites. **Brown Songlarks** and **Skylarks** could be heard from the grasslands area and a **Peregrine Falcon** flying through was a highlight. No Brown Tree-creepers were seen again - I think we have lost them from this woodland area.

Castle Hill - Saturday 8 December 2007

Alison Rowell and I surveyed David McDonald's patch on an overcast, cool and very humid morning. With the November rains, which have been heavier in southern Canberra, the ground layer was looking great with different native grasses and shrubs. It was fairly quiet in terms of the small birds like thornbills; the highlights were Brown Treecreepers at site 1 in and out of a hollow in a large Yellow Box, a pair of nesting kestrels nearby, a **Boobook Owl** chased out of a tree by the kestrels, and surprisingly a **Rose Robin**, (brownish-grey bird with no colour - most likely a female), feeding in small saplings. **Southern Whiteface**, **White-winged Triller** and **Leaden Flycatcher** were also recorded.

Majura Field Range - Monday 17 December 2007

Paul Fennel and I did the surveys on this occasion. The weather was cool and breezy, following a cool change overnight, but we did see a male **Hooded Robin** in the usual area, near site 3. The highlight, however, was a **Black-eared Cuckoo** calling from a tree, also in the **Hooded Robin** territory, a patch of woodland with quite a lot of bursaria. Unfortunately the woodland area, especially in the southern part of the range, is showing degradation from kangaroos overgrazing, with the wallaby grass (*Joycea*) very eaten down at a time when it should be flowering and producing seed.



**Australian
Ornithological
Services P/L**

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

enquiries@philipmaher.com

2008 Birding Tours

**25 February—2 March
Tasmania Birding &
Mammal Tour**
incl pelagic & Melaleuca flight

**12—30 March
Thailand**

A repeat of our wonderful 2007 trip with over 400 species of birds recorded; fantastic mammals, reptiles, butterflies, flora, scenery and food. Co-led by Uthai Treesucon, Thailand's foremost birding guide
See website for checklist & trip report

**July
New Caledonia
incl Lifou & Ouvéa islands**

**10—28 August 2008
Strzelecki Track
Outback Tour**

See other 2008 tours
on our website

www.philipmaher.com

Lady Elliot Island—December 2007

Twenty or so lucky COGites and friends spent a very pleasant three days on this most southerly coral island on the Great Barrier Reef. We flew in two small planes from Hervey Bay, circling the island and its fringing reefs before putting down on the grassy airstrip that bisects the island and parallels the resort.

Lady Elliot is approx 42 hectares in size, easily walked around in a couple of hours, but endlessly interesting as we watched the antics of nesting **Common and Black Noddies**, **Great and Lesser Frigatebirds**, **Red-tailed Tropic Birds**, and **Roseate, Crested, Bridled and Black-naped Terns**. **Brown Boobies** and terns dove for fish off the inner reef edge and the frigatebirds hung in the sky like Pterodactyls.

At night **Wedge-tailed Shearwaters** came in to burrows under the *Pisonia* trees; and the noddies squawked endlessly in the trees behind the huts.

Waders were seen on both the grassy airstrip and the sand and rocky shores – **Pacific Golden Plover**, **Lesser Sand Plover**, **Bar-tailed Godwit**, **Ruddy Turnstone**, **Wandering and Grey-tailed Tattler** and **Little Curlew**. **Buff-banded Rails** crept around under our feet and, along with **Capricornia Silvereyes**, stole food from unattended plates. **Tawny Grassbirds** flew between tall shrubs calling melodiously.

The weather was rainy at times, but mostly warm and fine. The accommodation was simple and adequate; the food plentiful and varied.

Along with the prolific birdlife, a highlight was the snorkelling off the beach with Green Sea Turtles and a myriad of colourful reef fish amongst the hard corals.

Many thanks to John and Barbara Cummings for organizing such a pleasant, relaxing and interesting trip. Hopefully they will do it again sometime. If you want to find out more about LEI see the island website at www.ladyelliott.com.au/.

Julie McGuinness

Mid-week Walk to Uriarra Crossing, 16 January 2008

Despite some trepidation about the weather (initially temperature and then potential storms) the walk went off well.

We walked from Uriarra Road down to and across the Molonglo with the target species of **Rainbow Bee-eater** being sighted on the way down to the river. During this phase we also saw **Red-browed Finch** and **Double-barred Finch** and had great views of a **Brown Falcon** hunting in the pasture on the way back up to the road and two **Wedge-tailed Eagles** soaring over the confluence. A mystery raptor was seen on the far side of the Molonglo: it perched nicely in the top of a tree but was a pure silhouette.

Heading down to the picnic area a **Diamond Firetail** was seen beside the road. The casuarinas held **Mistletoebird**, and a **Black-fronted Dotterel** (and two Masked Lapwings) were seen on the (sandpiper-deficient) sandbar. The bird of the trip was seen as we got back close to the west side of the crossing in the form of a juvenile **Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo** being fed by a **Superb Fairy-wren** – as well as feeding itself.

In total 42 species were recorded despite a few of the usual suspects (Noisy Friarbird, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike and Olive-backed Oriole) being absent.

COG outing to Uriarra—20 January 2008

COG's annual outing to the Blundells and Lees Creeks part of Namadji National Park took a rather different course this year. After 50 mm of rain during the previous two days, past nasty experiences with a dodgy creek crossing and particularly as it was raining in the Brindabellas when we arrived at Uriarra Homestead, we reverted to Plan B. This



Pacific Golden Plover—Lady Elliot Is—David Cook

involved a longer stay at Uriarra Homestead Dam and visits to Uriarra Crossing, Uriarra Crossing East and along Uriarra Road.

Following the rain, we had a fine and sunny day and the nine of us enjoyed some very rewarding bird watching. The dam had a flock of 30 **Grey Teal**, and small numbers of other ducks, **Eurasian Coot**, **Dusky Moorhen** (breeding), **Australasian Grebe** and a lone **Latham's Snipe**. Notable bush birds included **Restless Flycatcher** and **Red-browed Finch**. The species list of 27 compared well with our all-time record of 32 for the site.

Back to Uriarra Crossing, we were greeted by a pair of soaring raptors and another perched, very high and quite distant, spotted by a sharp-eyed Martyn. After much observation, debate (and with the aid of Julienne's telescope) we concluded that the flying pair were adult dark phase **Little Eagles** and the perched one an immature. Other notable records included three **White-faced Herons** and Brown, Buff-rumped, Yellow-rumped and Yellow Thornbills and a noisy pair of **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos**. As we switched to the Uriarra East picnic area, we disturbed a flock of **Red-rumped Parrots**, whilst a small flock of raptors was chasing and being chased by other birds. A pair of **Wedge-tailed Eagles** was vigorously doing battle with a Brown Falcon and some magpies whilst the pair of **Nankeen Kestrels** were minding their own business. **Masked Lapwings** were darting around the casuarinas, but could not distract us from excellent views of two **Dollarbirds** high in the trees over the river. Then the first pair of raptors from over the river returned, now in better light and head-on, allowing us to confirm (from their flat profile) that they were Little Eagles and not Whistling Kites. Other notables were **Mistletoebirds**, a flock of **Weebills** and everyone's favourite, **Superb Fairy-wrens**.

On our way back we visited a site along Uriarra Road of some personal interest to me. Known in the early 1990's as "Piney Creek", it was an intact site of native woodland and forest with some uncommon eucalypts. At that time, it had been given over to a trail-bike track area and was suffering rapid erosion and degradation. COG and other conservation and natural history groups lobbied the then fledgling ACT Government and the trail-bike track was closed. This approach became the model for the subsequent campaign for Mulligans Flat. The Piney Ck area (about 1 km north of Mt Stromlo) was badly burnt in 2003 but has recovered well and there are large areas of regrowth with intact native understorey and few weeds. It was a bit late for most birds but we recorded an **Australian Hobby**, **Laughing Kookaburras**, **Brown-headed Honeyeaters**, thornbills, **Weebills**, scrubwrens and, of course, fairy-wrens.

Plan B was a winner: we had a great time and recorded 51 species. Bitumen all the way and no nasty creeks.

Bruce Lindenmayer

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.

8-11 February 2008 Ulladulla – extended weekend

Bob Rusk will be hosting COG for an extended long weekend of birding in the Ulladulla area. A number of habitats will be visited in the area including wet forest, heathlands, beaches and headlands. Bob will lead organised walks in the mornings and point members to other local birding spots for the afternoons. A wide range of accommodation options are available, including local caravan parks. It will be up to individual COG members to book and pay for their accommodation. Bob will be able to provide you with a few suitable options, and booking early is advised. Please contact Bob on 4455 6813 or sharonrusk@bigpond.com.

Sat 16 February 2008– Mulligan's Flat Nature Reserve – Twilight walk and picnic dinner

Join Jenny Bounds for an evening walk and picnic dinner at the Mulligan's Flat Nature Reserve, meeting at 5pm at the main gate to the reserve (now opposite the northern Forde development - access from the north along the unsealed road - follow signs to the reserve). We will stroll through the reserve looking for woodland birds foraging in the last couple of hours of the day. We will conclude the evening with a picnic dinner in the reserve. Bring along water, hat and sunscreen for the walk, and dinner and drinks for later. For more details, and to book, please contact Jenny Bounds on ph 6288 7802.



Common Noddy and Young—Lady Elliot Island—David Cook

Canberra Day long weekend campout 8-10 March 2008—Lacmalac / Goobarragandra River

This long weekend campout will be an opportunity to visit a relatively unknown spot not too far to our west. A combination of open forest, riverine and woodland habitats can be explored from here. Or simply sit by the river and relax for a couple of days.

We will camp at Thomas Boyd Trackhead, 23 km SE of Tumut on the Goobarragandra River, on the Hume and Hovell Walking Track and on the edge of Kosciuszko National Park.

From Tumut follow the main street (Wynyard Street) down to the river, cross on the old bridge and follow the signs to Lacmalac. 11km past Lacmalac (don't blink, you may miss it!) watch for a cattle grid; the campground sign is partly obscured by bushes.

Facilities at the campground are good and there is a large grassed area suitable for caravans and trailers. There are no showers, but there is hot water for washing, and free barbecues in a covered area. Take your own drinking water. Camping fees are \$5.00 per person per night (\$3.50 for groups over 10, so hopefully we will qualify).

For more information contact Sandy Sutherland on 62275622 or email sandy.sutherland@bigpond.com.au

East Basin/Molonglo River; Sunday 16 March 2008 – Electric/powering boat cruise

This will be outing/cruise for 2007-2008 on the upper parts of Lake Burley Griffin (East Basin) and the adjacent Molonglo River. This has been done a number of times on different dates, but the experience is that early autumn is the peak time for nesting. While the main objective will be to view breeding activity, with three species of cormorant and darters known to breed there, the area is also rich in other water birds, and a variety of land birds can be seen on the banks.

The boat trip will last about 2 hours from 8 am and will cost \$20, payable in cash on boarding. Please book your place on the boat with Jack Holland (on 6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@environment.gov.au). Depending on the numbers we will travel either in the electric boat the "E.L. Cygnet" which takes a maximum of 10 passengers, or the MV "Darter" which can carry 16 people, and though it has a motor is very quiet at slow speeds. The boats allow both a quiet approach as well as access to areas normally difficult to get to. The point of departure will be the little landing adjacent to the car park in Bowen Park opposite the new Landmark Apartments. This car park may be accessed off Bowen Drive (going either way).

Easter Camp 21-24 March

We will camp on private property at Chiltern in northern Victoria, about 4 hours drive from Canberra. The site is suitable for tents, caravans or campervans. Some tank water is available. We will bird in a variety of habitats in the local area but may go further afield to the Murray (or to local wineries) if it is very hot and/or if fire bans are in place and forests closed. Please contact Sue Lashko at SMLashko@gmail.com to register your interest. Contact Julie McGuinness at julie.mcguinness@bigpond.com if you have ideas on good places to visit in the region.

Other Surveys/Activities of Interest to COG Members

Volunteer Interpreters needed at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve

Many COG members will be aware that the wetlands area at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve (TNR) has been closed for several months. The redeveloped area will be opening at the Tidbinbilla Extravaganza on March 30th 2008 and will provide new opportunities for visitor experience and education. The ACT Government has formed a partnership with Conservation Volunteers Australia to introduce a Volunteer Interpreter Program at the Reserve. Under this Program, trained volunteers will be positioned at interpretation stations along trails in the new wetland area, offering informal education to visitors. From July 1st, 2008, CVA will also manage the TNR Visitor Centre and Volunteer Interpreter duties will extend to the Visitor Centre.

Volunteer Interpreters will help visitors to better understand and appreciate the natural world. They will have a chance to develop their own knowledge and to share this with others. COG member, Paula Banks, is the Volunteer Manager for this exciting new Program. Anyone interested in becoming a Volunteer Interpreter is encouraged to attend an Information Session - these will be held regularly until the end of January. Call Paula on (02) 6247 7770 or email vip@conservationvolunteers.com.au for details. Be quick - applications for the first intake will close on February 1st and places are limited. If you are too busy to commit to the Volunteer Interpreter Program don't despair as there may be other ways in which COG members can get involved. Whether you want an active role or just to visit, Paula hopes to see you all out there!

Australian Native Plants Society Canberra Region Inc. Bulletin February 2008

Meeting: Thursday 14 February, 8pm CSIRO Discovery, Clunies Ross St, Black Mountain

Speaker: Dr. Philip Gibbons

Dr Philip Gibbons is a senior fellow at The Fenner School of Environment and Society at the Australian National University. He left a burgeoning career in an abattoir to undertake research and develop policy on logging and land clearing which he has done for the past 20 years under the employ of a number of state and commonwealth government agencies.

Topic: Land clearing and offsets: no net loss or the tail wagging the dog?

Australia is among the top 10 land clearing nations. While there has been recent legislative change to reduce the loss of native vegetation in Australia, underlying demand for land clearing—such as population growth, holiday houses, better roads—continues unabated. Significant land clearing is still permitted in Australia provided the impacts can be offset by improving or establishing native vegetation elsewhere. Does this policy lead to “no net loss” or is it just a case of the tail wagging the dog?

Bird Banding Iron Range Cape York—expressions of interest

The dates for the next bird banding trip to the Iron Range National Park on Cape York Peninsula are from Sunday November 9th until Saturday November 15th. Could all those who have in the past expressed a desire to come please **reaffirm** their intention to do so as well as anyone else interested. I have been told by the organiser that the cut-off date to register, for permit purposes, is June 30th. If you think you may have room to take a passenger, or are in need of a lift, let me know but I make **no** guarantees. I am **not** organising people but can put you in touch with one another. My contact details are, email, chollop7@bigpond.com and my home phone number is (02) 62413620. Please note I will out of contact from February 23rd until March 16th and possibly from mid September until early October.

I came across the following in a 1927 Canberra Times which is part of a digitisation pilot at the National Library.

"City of Birds.

The Wild Life Preservation Society suggests that the extensive tree planting in and around Canberra will make it a city of birds.

None will be more welcome or more attractive than the beautiful and interesting birds of the Upper Murrumbidgee country, the lovely

Monaro Tableland, and the nearby Eastern slopes. "With the right sorts of trees," the annual report of the society states, "we may expect to see, not as visitors, but as part of the resident population of Canberra, no less than 100 species of our birds to the infinite delight of our legislators and resident populace."

Canberra Times, Tuesday 26 July, 1927, page 4

Although the paper was right about Canberra birds, its journalists were less knowledgeable about whales, declaring in January 1928 "The animal which has the longest life is the whale.

Unless it is harpooned it usually lives 600 years, and it is nothing for one to celebrate its thousandth birthday." The same short item also said that "In its native haunts the eagle will often live to be 200 years old."

Sandra Henderson

Expressions of Interest sought for COG tasks

Various positions have become available and expressions of interest are sought from the membership to fill the following roles:

Sales Desk Manager

The Sales Desk provides an opportunity for the membership to purchase books and other items at a discount price and to obtain brochures on items of local and interstate interest. The Desk is a popular venue at monthly meetings and provides a valuable service to members. The duties involve ordering stock, setting up the Desk and selling merchandise at monthly meetings and balancing the accounts

Raffle Organiser

A popular event at each monthly meeting is the Raffle. The job involves coordinating with the Sales Desk to provide a raffle prize, selling tickets at the door before the start of the meeting and to provide the takings to a member of the committee for banking.

Exhibition/Education Officer

An important role of COG is to provide exhibition and educational material at events that help to advance the aims of COG. Duties involve caring for, updating and maintaining the exhibition material and if possible increase the opportunities to educate members of the public on the importance of birds and their conservation.

Please contact Chris Davey (Tel:62546324, email chris_davey@aapt.net.au) or any other member of the committee for further details.



Ruddy Turnstone—Lady Elliot Island—David Cook

– in publications, educational kits, posters, flyers, and as the basis of paintings. There are about half a dozen such requests a month. The rights to all images are held by the photographers, not by COG. To eliminate the need for referral of all requests back to photographers, the COG committee recently agreed that, with permission, the secretary could respond immediately to such requests if they are of a non-commercial nature and the individual photographers are acknowledged.

To date many of COG's talented photographers have agreed to this proposal, and it has already proved helpful, with several requests able to be answered. If you are one of the photographers, and you've not yet responded to the email about this proposal (sent out in December), please do so.

Lost property from COG Christmas Party

The following items were left behind at the Christmas party and will be available from the President for collection at the February meeting:

- Enamel yellow tray with picture of lemon
- Metal spoon with long handle
- White dish
- White table cloth

The COG online gallery

Those of you who use the COG website will know there's an excellent gallery of images on the site. As a result, the COG secretary regularly receives requests from other organisations and individuals wishing to make use of those images in various ways

In 2008, requests to COG have related to the use of images in flyers for a National Parks event, brochures promoting conservation work by the ANU's Fenner School, and for inclusion on a website. Not unexpectedly, the images most often requested are from Geoffrey Dabb, whose skills with the camera are well known to those who attend COG meetings regularly.

Garden Bird survey

A Happy New Year to all readers and particularly those who compile GBS Charts!

Sorry I missed an entry for November: time escaped from me! GBS-relevant highlights from the Chatline for November – January include: Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoos in Jerrabomberra (and much evidence of waterbird breeding from the same site); Superb Parrots in Ainslie; Little Corellas stopping over in Wanniasa; Painted Button-quail in Florey; Common Koel all over the place; and sites in Torrens and Wanniasa joining those blessed/afflicted with Spotted Turtle-dove. Several observers contributed to discussion about mimicry by Common Blackbird, and behaviour of Satin Bowerbirds.

COG is cooperating with Chris Tidemann from ANU re continued analysis of GBS data for Common Myna and using GBS data to explore the situation with Crested Pigeon. We have also provided data to Jerry Olsen of UC to assist in prey analysis for Australian Hobby and Peregrine Falcon. In answer to a query from a member, information was posted on the chatline about breeding by Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike.

Martin Butterfield



Black Noddy—Lady Elliot Island—David Cook

Committee News

Bruce Ramsay, who was a member of the COG Committee, and also ran the Sales Table at meetings, has had to give up these roles because of work commitments. If anyone is interested in taking over the running of the Sales Table, please let one of the committee know.

Paul Fennell has agreed to coordinate the Annual Bird Report.

A Memorandum of Understanding has been negotiated with Territory and Municipal Services (TAMS), under which COG will provide data to TAMS annually on threatened bird species in the ACT. TAMS is also proposing a series of consultative meetings with community groups, and has invited COG to be involved.

Since Christidis and Boles is the reference base for COG's records, the Committee agreed to purchase a copy of the new edition for the Records Management Committee so it could be compared with the previous edition.

BIGNET meeting. COG is hosting the next meeting of the Bird Interest Group Network in April this year. The business sessions will be held at the Australian National Botanic Gardens. There are a number of ways members can assist. To ensure the success of the meeting, we need volunteers to:

- take and write up minutes for the meeting (summary/outcomes)
- organise morning and afternoon teas, including delivery to the meeting venue
- organise the food, the setting up, and to act as marshalls at the gate for a breakfast at Mulligans Flat on Sun. 6 April
- Man (or woman) a small scale sales desk on one day, focusing on COG publications and local materials.

If you are willing to assist, please contact the committee (see contacts on back page of Gang Gang) or email cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.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. Contact Barbara de Bruine (02) 6258 3531.

This cottage can now be viewed by using Google and typing in Blue Wren Cottage - Mallacoota.

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

(02) 6286 1564

or e-mail

gramsay@actewagl.net.au

COG SALES

- **The Long Paddock:** A Directory of Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves in NSW - Rural Lands Protection Board - \$31.00
- **Wet and Wild:** A Field Guide to the Freshwater Animals of the Southern Tablelands and High Country - M Lintermans and W Osborne, \$28.00 (RRP \$34.95).
- **Where to Find Birds in NE Queensland** - Jo Wienke - \$16.00.
- **Grassland Flora:** A Field Guide for the Southern Tablelands (NSW and ACT) - David Eddy et al. - \$13.00
- **Our Patch:** A Field Guide to the Flora of the ACT Region - \$12.50
- **The Nestbox Book** - Gould League - \$12.50
- **Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT** - Taylor and Day \$16.00
- **Birds of the ACT: Two Centuries of Change** - Steve Wilson - \$25.00
- **Woodlands:** A Disappearing Landscape – Lindenmeyer et al \$34.00
- **Feather and Brush:** Three Centuries of Australian Bird Art – Penny Olsen - \$50.00
- **COG Car Stickers** - \$2.00
- **COG Badges** – red or grey - \$5.00
- **COG Bird Songs of Canberra** – Cassette - \$10.00
- **COG Bird Calls of the ACT** – CD \$12.00

All these items plus various pamphlets (most free) and membership application forms are available at the monthly meeting sales desk or by contacting Bruce Ramsay via email to barkeramsay@velocitynet.com.au or telephone 02 6294 5881 (after 6.30 pm please)

Avian Whimsy #60—

Penguin Suits and Emu Parades; birds in the language

It started with a discussion of the etymology of ‘cranberry’, as things are wont to do. It turns out that it was originally (from German) ‘craneberry’, for the elongate flower shape. ‘Why not a Whimsy on bird words in general English?’ suggested Lou; I am ever loth to gainsay her, not least because her ideas tend to be good ones. And once I started thinking about it, it became obvious how rich a lode this is.

I was initially surprised at how many of the words are derogatory ones, but then recalled what arrogant sods we tend to be, and my surprise ceased. Turkey, goose, cuckoo and booby are widespread and well-established terms of abuse (eg Sir William Hooker on William Swainson’s botanical forays “of which he is as ignorant as a goose”; true, if you regard ignorance as an anserine trait.) You will see my point about our arrogance though when you realise that ‘booby’ became synonymous with ‘foolish’ because they were trusting and tame and thus easy to kill. A peacock is someone vain and pompous, though it seems to me that not all blokes who dress up and strut to impress females have feathers. Pigeons were also regarded as foolish and the word has a venerable history of describing an easy mark or sucker. A stool pigeon was originally someone used as ‘a decoy to entice criminals into a trap’ (from Michael Quinion’s indispensable World Wide Words web site). ‘Coot’ tends to follow ‘silly’, for no overt reason. (They’re not bald though – when ‘bald as a coot’ was applied, bald, or beld, meant white.)

Australia has contributed to this genre of course; ‘galah’ and ‘drongo’ are more or less affectionate home-grown terms of obloquy. It’s hard to avoid the impression that flocks of galahs, loafing and fooling while food is processed from crop to intestine, do have too much spare time on their feet. Drongos on the other hand are very smart, quick alert birds indeed, and presumably the owners of the 1920s Australian racehorse named it thus in the hope it would be as nippy. In fact, despite the now reasonable assumption that the poor nag must have been totally hopeless, it wasn’t and even managed the odd gallant second; however it never quite cracked it and so the original connotation was more of a trier who didn’t quite have it.

Two other familiar bird-derived Australianisms presumably arose from watching White Cockatoos. A cockatoo is a lookout, especially at a two-up game, based on the belief that feeding cockies always leave birds on guard; a cockie on the other hand was a farmer who, like the birds, scratches in the dirt to make a living. Later this expanded to ‘cow cockie’ etc. And no-one who grew up in Australia more than a couple of decades back is likely to have escaped participation in an ‘emu parade’, a straggling line of rubbish collectors. In England one who collects things, especially bright and shiny ones, is a magpie; in Australia the same person became a bowerbird. An apparently more recent coining is the use of ‘rooster’ to describe a political challenger (especially a covert one, and in the ALP). Mark Latham – remember him? – publicised it, but I’d be wary of saying he originated it. On the other hand I can’t find an earlier usage in a fairly cursory search.

If you stretch your neck for a closer look, you’re craning, or taking a gander. (To goose on the other hand refers to other, less savoury farmyard behaviour, which we need not delve too closely into here.)

Some few birdy words are actually positive. ‘Raven-haired’ in the classics always seems to be followed by ‘beauty’. Hawk-eyed is a neat way of expressing exceptional visual acuity. We (well OK, you perhaps) swan along looking effortless and aesthetic. (I’m more likely to be like a duck, maybe looking relaxed on the surface but paddling flat out to maintain the illusion.) Not that I’ve ever worn a dinner suit, but surely ‘penguin suit’ to describe one can only be positive! Less certain as to its flattery intent is the application of ‘penguin’ to nuns.

On the other hand be wary of words, especially verbs, which would appear to be of bird origin but actually arose from quite disparate sources. They include gull (to fool), which actually seems to be associated with an old word for ‘to swallow’. ‘To swallow’ however does not derive from the bird either! To crow is onomatopoeic; so is the bird’s name, but separately. Quails may cower, but that’s not why we use the verb. And suffice it to say that the verb shag is utterly unfeathered in origin.

I’m out of space now, so I’d better duck off.

Ian Fraser ianf@pcug.org.au



WONGA

*Bawley Point
South Coast of
N.S.W.*

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

*patricia.walker@bigpond.com
phone 02 6251 3136*

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

COG welcomes the following new members:

Geoff Skillen, Cook
Anne Ackroyd, Melba
Monica Freeman, Deakin
Leonie Macpherson, Kingston
Fay Chisholm, Spence
Simon Robinson, Bundanoon
Sue Serjeantson, Spence

Next newsletter

March deadline

Wednesday 27 February 2008

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

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

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

COG info

President

Chris Davey ph 62546324 (h), email chris_davey@aapt.net.au

Vice President

Jack Holland, ph 6288 7840 (h)

Treasurer

Lia Battison ph 6231 0147

Secretary

Sandra Henderson ph 6231 0303
cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au

Address for correspondence

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

Newsletter distribution

Judy Collett and helpers

Membership inquiries

Sandra Henderson ph 6262 1481 (w)
membership@canberrabirds.org.au
for changed address or other details

Gang-gang editors

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

Canberra Birds Conservation Fund

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

COG website

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 membership

2007-2008 memberships:

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

COG E-mail Discussion List

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

Editor Canberra Bird Notes

CBN@canberrabirds.org.au



Gang-gang

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

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