

# Gang-gang

February 2009

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

## February meeting

8 pm Wednesday 11.2.2009

*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.*

Nicki Taws will provide an update on the birds in the native revegetation study. She will present the results of the 2008 breeding season surveys and how they compare with those of 8 years ago.

The longer presentation will be by Rick Webster and Sue Logie on "**Superb Parrots in the Barmah-Millewa Region**". Rick will focus on the ecology and distribution of the **Superb Parrot**. Sue will outline the work done by landholders in Victoria and NSW to rehabilitate and establish habitat for the **Superb Parrot**.

Rick, an experienced ecologist, is based in Deniliquin and has worked primarily in the Murray-Darling Basin, specialising in threatened species, particularly the **Superb** and **Regent Parrots**. He has coordinated the annual Superb Parrot Count in NSW for the last 11 years and Sue has coordinated the Victorian count for the past 12 years.

**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. The dryish first part of spring/summer changed at the end of October to a much wetter one in the lead up to Christmas. While dry conditions still seem to predominate overall, for me the 2008-2009 spring/summer has been very different, particularly in relation to the birds present for my regular survey of the NW end of Cooleman Ridge. By far the most successful survey was on 21 December, 10 days after significant rain, with 41 species recorded. This is despite the large influx of migrants for breeding just not happening there this year, with no **Rufous Songlark** recorded, only a maximum of two male **White-winged Trillers**, and only a single pair of **Dusky Woodswallows** seeming to have bred (based on their aggressive swooping of other birds, as for the first time in 5 years I have not been able to find any nests with eggs/young for these latter two species). Both species had gone by early/mid December, though ironically both the **Pallid Cuckoo** and the **Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo** were still calling on 21 December, hopeful for some late

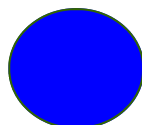
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## Jean Currie — 1923-2008

Dr Jean Currie OAM, died on 17 December 2008 aged 85. Jean and her husband Ian (who died in 2007) were keen long-term members of COG and several other Canberra natural history groups. They both had a deep love of the Australian environment and its plants and animals. They spent most of their adult working lives in Canberra where they raised their family. They both had distinguished careers in dentistry, Ian in private practice and Jean in the public sector where she took a leading role in setting up and running the school dental service in the ACT. Jean's service was recognized by the award of a Medal of the Order of Australia following her retirement.

Jean and Ian travelled widely, and even in her latter years when she was somewhat disabled Jean came to COG meetings and Christmas parties. She maintained a keen interest and understanding of the "bird world". She was always amazingly cheerful and communicative with a sharp mind and a ready smile.

Not surprisingly, her funeral service just before Xmas, was attended by some hundreds of friends and relatives — **Bruce Lindenmayer**



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*What to watch out for (continued)* nesting to parasitise? One surprise that morning was close to 20 **Gang-gang Cockatoos** flying over towards the Cotter, with dependent young based on the begging calls that accompanied the group.

But what a difference 4 weeks and some hot dry weather made. My next survey on 18 January yielded only half the number of species, and for the first time to my recall no spring/summer migrants whatsoever, not even the **Grey Fantail** (which had been there in good numbers previously) or the **Noisy Friarbird** (very few in our area this year).

I must stress that the above are my own observations and do not necessarily reflect the position across Canberra. Certainly from the chatline postings many of the above summer migrants were still being recorded elsewhere in January, with a number of reports of (postbreeding?) flocks of **Dusky Woodswallows** in particular. However, to be able to achieve a broad and definitive coverage we need to both keep good records and ensure they are included in the COG database. Only in this way can we confirm (or deny) my feeling that birds numbers have dropped seriously over the past few years. A top priority for COG has to be a new Atlas; I for one am very keen to help ensure this through participation as part of the team.

From my observations it seems to have been an average nesting season, in particular it continued to be good for water-birds, including the very unusual (and well documented) **Royal Spoonbill** breeding event at Kellys Swamp. With the continuing dry weather species that used to be very hard to see in Canberra such as the crakes, including the **Spotless Crane**, as well as the **Buff-banded Rail**, now seem to be relatively easy to find.

**Superb Parrots** have also been frequently observed this season, though with some debate about whether they're simply more widespread with numbers actually similar or even lower than last year. From mid January there were also reports of **Little Lorikeets** as well as some **Cockatiel**, the latter almost certainly visiting due to the dry conditions inland, something that they hadn't done until this year. Please keep an eye out and please report any sightings of these and any other similar species, as the **Superb Parrots** generally leave by the end of January/mid February. Please do the same for any late **Common Koels**; it was very interesting to read the reports on the chatline of the first documented successful breeding records, with the **Red Wattlebirds** as host (the latter seem to have been everywhere this year). **Dollarbirds** (several passed through Chapman over the past month) too will leave during February or early March, as will the **Rainbow Bee-eater** on return migration either high overhead (listen for their characteristic pee-pee calls and flight with orange wings), or if you're lucky lower along the creek lines.

The last of the **White-winged Triller**, **Rufous Songlark**, **Brown Songlark**, **Singing Bushlark**, and **Tree and Fairy Martins** will also soon have left. 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 typically there have only been sporadic sightings so far. Again please ensure you report all your last sightings of these species for this season. — **Jack Holland**

## Field Trip reports

### Sunday 7 December — Hospital Creek, Namadgi National Park

This last formal trip of the 2008 COG Field Trips Program was a reprise of the final 2006 outing with a minor variant. It was one of the rarer COG trips when walking is a significant component of the outing. A smallish group of COG members, again led by Julian Robinson, enjoyed a very pleasant walk under bright but somewhat breezy conditions, surveying a variety of habitats in a rough figure of eight route starting from the Yankee Hut car park and along the Old Boboyan Road. We then cut up the creek halfway along by following the Rehabilitation Trail, up and over a saddle to Hospital Creek, which we followed upstream for about 1 km. We then cut back up to the road and dropped down into historic Hospital Creek Hut for lunch, returning to the cars via a loop road once half way back.

The walk underlined my views that bird numbers are well down this year. Despite the early promise on reaching the car park, birds remained somewhat elusive and very few seemed to show themselves well, with many of the records (such as **Fan-tailed Cuckoo**, **Common Bronzewing**, **Sacred Kingfisher** and **Brown-Headed Honeyeater**) aural rather than visual. The best bird observed in the morning was due to Terry following up a slightly different sounding tree creeper call and being rewarded by a sighting of a **Red-browed Tree Creeper**; unfortunately he was the only one to do so. Nevertheless all participants had thoroughly enjoyed themselves when we sat down together under the shade of a single tree

to have our lunch on the edge of a much greener clearing at Hospital Creek Hut than two years ago (but unfortunately no **Brush Cuckoo** this time).

It was also one of the rare COG trips I've been on when most of the highlights were post lunch. First of all Julian led us to a small spring where we had great views of the **Yellow-faced, White-naped** and **Fuscous Honeyeaters** as they chased each other round, including resting in the bare branches of a dead tree above the ti-tree surrounding the pool of water. The often overlooked latter species (one of the more common birds of the day) was in breeding plumage, with small yellow plumes, a dark gape and the characteristic dark smudged eye.

We then returned to the wetter gully (not very really) along the road where we looked for the **Satin Flycatcher** we had heard calling on our way up, and were rewarded with great views of a pair building a lovely dainty nest in a rather slender upright fork of a completely dead sapling. Nearby was a **Dusky Woodswallow** on a nest in a typical spot against the trunk of a relatively thin but tall sapling. Otherwise this was surprising for two aspects, one a relatively thick forest surroundings and second that there appeared to be only one pair.

On return to the car park going a slightly different way we came upon the birds that we had missed on arrival. First of all we heard the plink-plink call of the **Brown Treecreeper** and had reasonable views of a bird that appeared to be gathering food, but breeding could not be confirmed. Another **Dusky Woodswallow** nest was found on a dead branch this time. Finally just as we were getting back into the cars there was the unmistakable calling of the **Rufous Songlark** in amongst a patch of bush. This remains my first and only record of this species this spring/summer.

A sighting of a different kind was two rather large dogs along Hospital Creek, the first a very unusual shape and colour, mainly white with a black head, followed by a second all-black dog rather more resembling the shape of a dingo. We got very close (within 10 metres) to the first as we flushed it from hiding in the long grass beside the creek, and it ambled away.

A total of 43 different species (down from the 57 last time) were recorded, all within the one COG grid cell. Certainly a very enjoyable day and my thanks once again to Julian Robinson for leading it so enthusiastically.

— **Jack Holland**

## Sunday 18 January 2009 — Brindabellas

COG's annual outing to the Brindabellas again attracted a full complement of birdwatchers on a beautiful summer's morning. Our meeting point at Uriarra Homestead Dam was again a great spot with 29 species "spotted" in just under an hour. The water level was as low as I have ever seen it, with now a large sandbank, and shallow water over much of the surface. The sandbank provided ideal habitat for both **Black-fronted** and **Red-kneed Dotterels**, identification of which was the highlight of our stop. Other waterbirds included Pacific **Black and Australian Wood Ducks, Australasian Shoveler, Grey Teal, Hardhead** and **White-faced Heron**. We also had good views of a flock of three **Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos** noisily flying overhead.

Our excursion to Blundells Creek and Warks Roads continued with our usual car shuffle which allows us to walk only downhill for several kilometres. The car drivers were greeted by a pair of **Gang-gang Cockatoos** showing great interest in a large hollow near our "car park".



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17 April — 2 May 2009  
**Vietnam birding tour**  
co-led by Uthai Treesucon

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

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

1 — 5 July 2009  
**Alice Springs**  
best birds: dusky grasswren & grey  
honeyeater, slaty-backed thornbill

8 — 18 July 2009  
**Gulf Country**  
best birds: Carpentarian & Kalkadoon  
grasswrens, rufous-crowned emu-wren,  
spinifexbird, flock bronzewing

13 — 25 June 2009  
**Top End**  
Kakadu NP, Katherine, Kununurra  
best birds: chestnut rail, white-throated  
grasswren, red goshawk, black-banded  
fruit-dove, Gouldian finch, chestnut-  
quilled rock pigeon

26 June 2009  
**Mitchell Plateau**  
best bird: black grasswren Kimberley  
honeyeater, yellow-eyed form of  
partridge pigeon

4 — 22 September 2010  
**Strzelecki Track Outback Tour**

**Tour itineraries, birdlists, checklists  
and latest news are on the website.**

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

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Exactly six years since the large bushfire, it was exciting to see the ongoing recovery of the native vegetation and (except for the roadsides where fleabane, blackberries and dandelions thrive) native plants have now largely displaced the weeds.

**Grey Fantails** in big numbers teased us all along the road although we were lucky to get some fleeting views of the shy **Rufous Fantails**. **Yellow-faced** and **White-eared Honeyeaters** were quite common as were **White-naped Honeyeaters** especially along Lees Creek. Other species in surprisingly small numbers were **White-throated Treecreepers**, **Pardalotes**, **Rufous and Golden Whistlers** and **White-browed Scrubwrens**. The **Flame Robins** seen in the years after the fire seem to have gone, but it was great to record a flock of **Scarlet Robins** with **Eastern Yellow Robins** calling along the track. Other notables were a pair of **Brown Goshawks**, **Australian King-Parrots** with dependent young, **Eastern Whipbird**, **Satin Bowerbird** and **Satin Flycatcher**.

Overall, 50 species for the trip provided a delightful outing. — **Bruce Lindenmayer**

## Wednesday 21 January — January Wednesday Walk

Our walk started at 9am almost at the gates of Yarralumla with eight members. Our route was down the bike path and over the Warrina Inlet bridge towards Weston Park. We swung along the lakeshore behind the nursery and returned the same way, concluding with a few of us taking a brief foray into the pines to find a **Grey Butcherbird**.

In total we scored 42 species including very good views of some green **Satin Bowerbirds** (as we saw them, could they be considered "spotted bowerbirds"?). We heard an **Eastern Yellow Robin**, had excellent close up views of **Gang-gangs** feeding in a hawthorn, three **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos** flew past during the **Butcherbird** hunt; and **Double-barred** and **Red-Browed Finches** and **European Goldfinches** were evident behind the nursery.

The weather was fine and the trees shady thus mitigating the warmth. But we did get our shoes (OK the soles of our shoes) wet (OK damp) so cannot really be considered unadventurous. — **Martin Butterfield**

## 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.**

### 16-19 February — Mon-Thurs — South Durras

This is I understand COGs first official visit to this delightful area within Murrumbidgee National Park. The Durras area is located on the southern most rim of a geological structure known as the Sydney Basin and has numerous small beaches occurring along the coast where erosion of the cliffs has formed protected bays. In addition to its unique geology Durras also has a series of rolling hills which form part of the coastal Murrumbidgee Range. Nestled in these hills is Durras Lake which is a drowned river valley, where canoeing and kayaking are popular.

If people are so inclined (and depending on the weather) the plan is to make a short morning tea diversion (say 1 hour) to Monga National Park before arriving at South Durras around lunchtime. Proposed accommodation is at South Durras Resort (formerly Beagle Bay Caravan Park) where there are good facilities plus camping, caravan and cabin accommodation options available. Species seen within the resort area include **White-headed Pigeon**, **Brown Cuckoo-dove**, **Gang-gang**, **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo**, **Rose Robin**, **Southern Boobook** and many others.

During our time there we have a choice of canoeing or kayaking (available for hire from various places) on the pristine Durras Lake (where we hope to encounter **Osprey**, **Sea-eagle**, **Peregrine Falcon** and those little jewels, the **Azure Kingfishers**), walking the heathland between the forest and the sea, or strolling the Spotted Gum and Ironbark forest trails (some cross country) where many bush birds may be expected. There is also the option of a drive/walk to Durras Mountain for spectacular views and many birding possibilities. We will have a couple of communal dinners/bbqs. Car pooling down to the coast is encouraged.

If you are interested in attending please contact Rod Mackay ph. 6288 3808 (home) or 0407456330 (mobile), or email [rodsgaredning@grapevine.com.au](mailto:rodsgaredning@grapevine.com.au). Please note that attendees will need to book their own accommodation, and are encouraged to do so early.

## Saturday 21 February 2009 — Monga National Park

David McDonald will lead a day outing to this area of wet forest just before the escarpment around 20 km east of Braidwood off the Kings Highway. Target species include the **Red-browed Treecreeper, Black-faced Monarch, Pilotbird, Olive Whistler and Bassian Thrush**. Meet at 07.30 am at the Queanbeyan Swimming Pool car park, Campbell Street, Queanbeyan, for car-pooling or, alternatively, meet at 09.00 am at the intersection of the Kings Highway and River Road on the right hand side of the Highway. Allow about 90 minutes for the journey from Canberra. A map and other details are available directly from the leader. Bring lunch and drinks. Comprehensive information about the National Park and its birds is found in the wonderful book, Steller, R (ed.) 2005, *Monga intacta: a celebration of the Monga Forest and its protection*, Robyn Steller, Braidwood, N.S.W. Registration for this trip is essential: please phone David McDonald on 6238 3706, email [david.mcdonald@socialresearch.com.au](mailto:david.mcdonald@socialresearch.com.au).

## 7-9 March — Saturday to Monday — Goulburn area (with Goulburn Field Nats) — campout

This trip over the Canberra Day long weekend will be a joint outing as part of our continuing links with the Goulburn Field Naturalists Society (GFNS). We will be travelling to Goulburn early Saturday afternoon to visit the Gorman Road Sewage farm. These ponds are very extensive in size, being very much bigger than those at our local sewage farm at Fyshwick, and on previous visits the numbers of waterfowl on them were correspondingly higher. These included many **Hardhead, Pink-eared Duck and Grey Teal**, with smaller numbers of **Musk Duck, Chestnut Teal, Australasian Shoveller and Blue-billed Duck**. If

time allows we'll also visit other similar spots in the local area. Overnight we'll be camping on one of the GFNS member's property, or those more comfortable with accommodation can stay in nearby Goulburn. We're planning to have Saturday night's dinner with our hosts at the historic Old Brewery, the oldest in Australia still using the original buildings. Next morning we will travel to the Towrang area, which is in a picturesque valley on the edge of Sydney's geology a few kilometres to the NE of Goulburn. After some bird watching along the Wollondilly River we will have morning tea at one of the Billyrambja Landcare member's property. This will be followed by a short drive to Bush Bottoms adjoining the Tarlo River National Park. We will be walking along a route where the vegetation/geology is very varied and **Glossy Black-Cockatoos, Spotted Quail-Thrush, Painted Button-Quail and Lyrebirds** are routinely seen, plus koalas have been reintroduced. The views are great and the birding and other fauna/flora opportunities will be very diverse. We will return to Canberra on the Sunday afternoon. If you're interested please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on [jack.holland@environment.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@environment.gov.au)) for more information. Participants are also welcome if they wish to join in only for the Sunday morning or Saturday afternoon/night events. More detailed information will be circulated to participants towards the end of February.

## BUT WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

An ANU Centre for Continuing Education course with COG member and 'AvIan Whimsy' author

Ian Fraser

**A cornucopia of Australian flora and fauna! We explore the wonderful folklore of our plant and animal names, take a brief look at the fascinating history of naming systems and spend time demystifying and even learning to enjoy those sometimes scary scientific names.**

**We'll become familiar with lots of the names that recur in Australian plants and animals, so we'll recognise them when we meet them in another guise. On the way we delve into the mistakes and even deliberate jokes embedded in the names of many organisms, and explore the often annoying phenomenon of why names seem to change so often. It also involves a wonderful journey through the biological discovery of Australia, using the hundreds of plants and animals that carry the names of the numerous human players. Some of these people are famous, many more just played bit parts in history, but each one lives on in this way – and I think you'll be glad to meet them! Lots of pictures, lots of fun, lots of surprises!**

**Four Tuesdays — 10 Feb – 10 March 2009**

**6.30 - 8.45pm**

**<http://www.anu.edu.au/cce/>; 6125 2892**

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## Sunday 15 March — East Basin/Molonglo Reach— Morning boat cruise

This will be the first cruise for 2009 on the upper parts of Lake Burley Griffin (East Basin) and the adjacent Molonglo River, where early autumn is the peak time for nesting, 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. This year could be very different following the clearing of the trees on the north bank in May 2008, though indications are that breeding has continued anyway. The boat trip will last about 2 hours from 8 am and will cost \$20, payable in cash on boarding. We propose to travel in the *MV Darter* which can carry 16 people, and though it has a motor is very quiet at slow speeds. If numbers exceed this the electric boat the *E.L. Cygnet*, which takes a maximum of 10 passengers, may also be used. 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 Landmark Apartments. This car park may be accessed off Bowen Drive (going either way). If you are intending to join in this outing, please book your place on the boat with Jack Holland (on 6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on [jack.holland@environment.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@environment.gov.au)) as soon as possible.

## Saturday - Sunday 28-29 March — Bumbalong Valley — campout on private property

This is a repeat visit to this spot following COG's successful camp-outs there in February 2002 and November 2006. The Bumbalong Valley is a very sheltered valley straddling the Murrumbidgee River about 10 km N of Bredbo. The area is generally not accessible and COG is very fortunate to have the opportunity to again visit. The proposed outing replaces the one that had to be postponed at the end of November 2008 due to inclement weather.

Last visit we recorded a very impressive total of 87 species in less than 24 hours, including nearly all the spring migrants. During the previous visit in early February we recorded 81 species. Numbers may be slightly down at the end of March but many of the later leaving migrants will still be there and some other species may be in transit.

After setting up camp mid Saturday afternoon we propose to do a survey of the birds on the property and the adjacent river. On Sunday morning we will proceed upstream along the river to survey back along the road, and probably access a couple of properties to identify the birds. There may be some interest to venture up the steep slope to the west to do atlas surveys of 2 grid cells for which access is otherwise very difficult.

We will be camping overnight on another one of the local properties at the N end of the valley, on a take everything in, take everything out basis. Participants should aim to arrive mid afternoon on the Saturday, and it is expected we'll stay until mid Sunday afternoon. Car pooling will be encouraged, so if you're interested please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on [jack.holland@environment.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@environment.gov.au)).

## Saturday 4 April — Private property near Mundoonen NR — Extended morning

Alex McLachlan has kindly offered to lead an outing to his 450 acre property that adjoins the Mundoonen range near Yass. Common local birds include **Hooded Robin**, **Brown Treecreeper** and **Diamond Firetail**. In 2008, Alex reported seeing **Stubble Quail**, **Painted Button-quail** and **Little Button-quail** at the same time within one hectare! To book on this trip, please contact Alex at [Alex.McLachlan@ga.gov.au](mailto:Alex.McLachlan@ga.gov.au) or 0422 655 393. More details, including directions, will be available in the March *Gang-gang*.

## Committee news

- A project to update the software used for the COG database is underway. This should enable more efficient data entry and easier extraction of results.
- Bruce Lindenmayer is assisting the committee with updating of COG's Forward Plan.
- COG has written to a number of MPs and committees re concerns about the loss of Superb Parrot habitat in Canberra. The clearing of mature trees in some developments in Gungahlin has been of particular concern.
- A letter has been written to the Government asking for restoration work on the large dam at Mulligan's Flat.
- COG is supporting a project to install interpretive signs at Red Hill and images by several of COG's talented photographers will be used in the signs.
- The popular CD of bird calls is being reprinted to meet ongoing demand.

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## Other items of interest

### Woodland Surveys Reports Nov/Dec 2008

#### Mulligan's Flat Nature Reserve

Jenny Bounds reported the Sunday, 30 November survey was the best in terms of numbers and species of birds for quite a while according to the team of surveyors. Highlights of the total 55 species included four **Hooded Robins**, **Scarlet** and **Red-capped Robins**, **Jacky Winter**, **Superb Parrot**, **Varied Sittella**, a number of sites with **White-winged Trillers**, **Speckled Warbler** at two locations, a pair of **Wedge-tailed Eagles** over the large dam area, and three species of cuckoos (**Pallid**, **Horsfield's Bronze** and **Shining Bronze**).

#### Callum Brae Nature Reserve

Jenny Bounds reported being swooped constantly at two sites by the resident **Brown Goshawks**, until she retreated a good way off. A site on the far southern boundary was by far the best with nesting **White-winged Trillers**, **Speckled Warblers**, **Dusky Woodswallows**, **Diamond Firetail**, **Olive-backed Oriole**, and lots of smaller birds including several **thornbills**, **weebills** and both **Western** and **White-throated Gerygones**. **Dollarbirds** were recorded at one site only and very few **woodswallows** are around Callum Brae this season. Total species count 49.

#### Jerrabomberra Grasslands Nature Reserve

Jenny Bounds reported highlights of 44 species from the survey in the woodland patch not too far from Callum Brae: two **Diamond Firetails** (one an immature), **Speckled Warbler**, **Fairy Martin** (first record there) and **White-winged Triller**. Numbers of **Dollarbirds** and **Sacred Kingfishers** (breeding migrants) were down on previous years and, unusually, no **Dusky Woodswallows** at all.

#### Castle Hill

David McDonald reported nothing of special interest but some important species missing: no **Speckled Warbler**, **Brown Treecreeper**, **Rufous Songlark**, **Tree Martin** or **Red-rumped Parrot** (the first time in 20 years surveying there that the latter were absent). Very low abundance of the small insectivorous birds and hardly any honeyeaters, despite a bit of flowering. Awful lerp damage with many young Blakely's Red Gum saplings dead. Lots of dieback in large trees.

#### Newline Woodland

Sue Lashko reported a shortage of **honeyeaters** at Newline - the usual **White-plumed**, but very few **wattlebirds** and only a few **friarbirds**. No **Brown Treecreepers** seen or heard this time and no **Crested Shrike-tits**. Probably the most interesting sighting was of two **Little Eagles** - both light phase - whereas the Fyshwick pair consists of one light and one dark phase. Other "nice" birds - **Speckled Warbler** and **Southern Whiteface** - but no **finches**.

#### Mt Majura Nature Reserve

Kathy Walter and John Goldie reported a **Speckled Warbler** as a highlight, but only at one of the usual sites. One **Leaden Flycatcher** and a **White-winged Triller**, but virtually no wrens. A couple of pairs of **Sacred Kingfishers** were nesting.

#### Majura Field Firing Range

Jenny Bounds and Paul Fennell did the survey on 8 December and reported a good deal of bird activity, more than on recent surveys. The best news is that there are (still) at least two **Brown Treecreepers** in woodland adjacent to one site, only about a kilometre or so from Newline in the same woodland corridor. A **Brush Cuckoo** calling was another highlight.

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## Goorooyarroo NR (South)

Steve Holliday and Pru Buckley reported generally good activity with reasonable numbers of small birds and even a few honeyeaters, in a total of 55 species. Still lots of Yellow Box flowering although only **Noisy Friarbirds** and **Red Wattlebirds** were seen feeding at the blossoms. A pair of **Wedge-tailed Eagles** and a third bird, possibly a young one, were also seen briefly. Other sightings included **Horsfield's Bronze- & Pallid Cuckoos**, both **gerygones**, four species of **thornbill**, **White-plumed & Brown-headed Honeyeaters**, **Varied Sittella**, **White-winged Trillers**, **Grey Currawong**, **Tree & Fairy Martins**, **Rufous Songlark**, and a single male **Superb Parrot**. On the minus side **Common Mynas** were recorded at 3 sites.

## Mt Ainslie NR/Campbell Park woodland

Michael Lenz reported 40 species with highlights being two **Brown Goshawk** territories, both **Gerygones**, male **White-winged Triller** persistently chasing a female **Pallid Cuckoo**, **Brown-headed Honeyeaters** and **Leaden Flycatchers** at several places. However, some of the areas that would have had three to five pairs in good years in the past, had either none or only 30 to 50% of their "usual" numbers. There were **Dollarbirds** at several sites, but they were absent in other known areas. At Campbell Park proper the "lawn"/tree scenario (hardly any shrub layer) provided better conditions for **Willie Wagtails**, with two pairs present.

## Narrandera Wetlands

Over the past couple of years a small wetland has been developed on the outskirts of Narrandera, using stormwater run-off from the town. I've been visiting the area frequently over the past few months, and have seen an impressive number of birds. For those with an interest in other fauna, the wetland is adjacent to the Narrandera Common, an area which has a good population of koalas – around 60-70 on most survey counts in recent years.

The wetland lies on the edge of town, on the Newell Highway between the Main Canal and the Murrumbidgee River, only a few hundred metres from the centre of town. A map at <http://www.maps.com.au/PDFS/Maps/riverina/Narandera.pdf> shows the location of the wetlands. There is a walking track around the wetland, several information signs and a small parking area. The area is not large (five hectares) and it is planned to add bird hides in the future. Much re-vegetation activity is underway, and apart from the waterbirds there are enough large eucalypts and other flowering trees and shrubs to attract regular visits from **Superb Parrots**, various **honeyeaters** and **Yellow Rosellas**.

A bird list is available at <http://www.mfn.org.au/NarranderaWetlands.html> (recently updated to include the **Little Bittern** I found there in December!). Regulars include **Royal Spoonbills** (I counted 18 on a recent visit, as well as two **Yellow-billed Spoonbills**), Great and Intermediate egrets, **White-necked Herons** and **Little Black** and **Little Pied Cormorants**. I've had brief glimpses of **crakes** in the reeds close to the shore. This little wetland is well worth a visit if you're in that area. — **Sandra Henderson** ([shirmax@actewagl.net.au](mailto:shirmax@actewagl.net.au))

## ANPS meeting

Members may be interested in this month's speakers and topics at **8 pm, Thursday 12 February**, in the CSIRO Discovery theatre off Clunies Ross St Acton.

**Short talk — A new management plan for the ANBG.** The Director of the ANBG, Anne Duncan and Assistant Director (Policy and Strategic Planning), Lucy Sutherland will briefly outline some of the issues that are being discussed as the new management plan is being prepared for the ANBG.

**Main Talk — Feathers and Leaves; an ancient partnership** — Speaker: Ian Fraser, local naturalist, author and ABC broadcaster who is fascinated by the whole natural world, but whose special passions are birds and orchids. He has been awarded the Australian Native Plant Society's Australian Plants Award, and the Australian Natural History Medallion, for services to education and conservation.

Ian has provided the following outline for his talk: "Of course birds couldn't exist without plants, but a surprising number of plants rely entirely on birds too. We'll immerse ourselves in familiar topics like feeding, pollination and seed dispersal, but will also see how plants make **flamingoes** pink and **turacos** green, and find out why Darwin dabbled inside **pigeons** which had floated in sea water for a month. Lots of pictures, some fun, and even some things you might not have known."



# Garden Bird Survey Notes

Some GBS-relevant highlights from the chatline for December and January include:

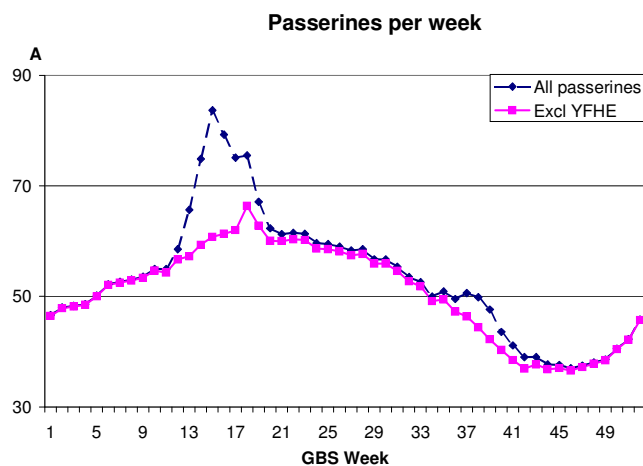
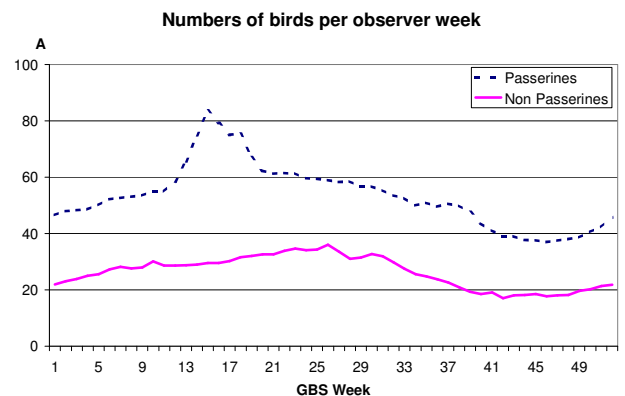
- A family of **Superb Parrots** in Aranda (and rated as the commonest bird at a site in Fraser [until 1<sup>st</sup> week of January]);
- **Southern Boobook** feeding young in Turner;
- **Little Lorikeets** in Macquarie;
- **Spotted Dove** (boo, hiss!!) in Chapman;

## Birds per week

A recent posting on the chat line commenced with “An unusually birdless morning ... ” which caused me to reflect on my own observations of the apparent paucity of birds around this time of year. So inevitably, it is graph time!

The first one shows the number of birds per observer week (broadly equivalent to a weekly value of A) over the 27 years of the GBS.

Responding to the preamble, this shows that, for both Passerines and non-Passerines bird abundance recorded at this time of year is well below that of a little later in the year but above that of Spring. Of further interest was the peak of Passerine numbers in Autumn; an initial hypothesis was that this series was affected by reports of numbers of migrating honeyeaters (especially **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters - YFHE**).



Thus a second graph was created, excluding YFHE from the number of birds. This clearly shows the peak introduced by that species. Given the problems of past reports of numbers of migrating honeyeaters this further strengthens the need to count only the maximum number of migrating birds within a site at a point in time.

I will leave it to others to explain the biology underlying the shape of the graphs.

## Applications of GBS data

Information on the observations of **Little Eagles** from GBS sites has been provided as input to a proposed paper for CBN.

## Progress on Year 27

Processing of Year 27 data has been completed and information provided to the editor of the Annual Bird Report and the authors of species accounts. — **Martin Butterfield**

## MUDBRICK COTTAGE

### Mallacoota

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

It is set amongst the trees in Mallacoota, Victoria (approximately 4 hours drive from Canberra). It is only 10 minutes walk to the beach, 5 minutes walk to the golf course and about 15 minutes walk to town. It sleeps 4-6 upstairs and there is a sofa bed downstairs.

It is fully self-contained with a kitchen and laundry.

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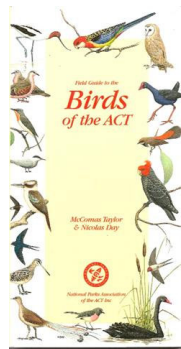
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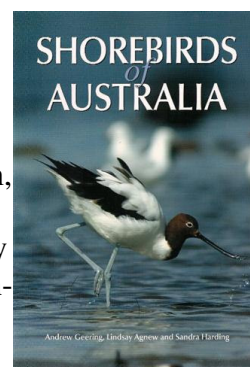
# COG SALES



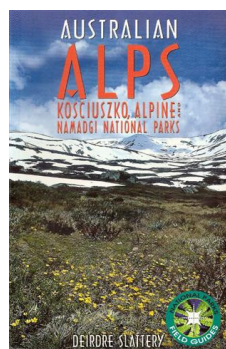
**Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT (Taylor & Day) - \$16.00** — Bird identification in the ACT has just become much easier! Here are all the birds of the ACT in colour, with easy-to-follow text and key biological data, in a compact field format that will fit easily in your pocket.

**Shorebirds of Australia (Geering, Agnew & Harding) \$33.00** — This title brings to-

gether the latest information about the evolution, ecology and behaviour of shorebirds and how they are distributed in Australia. This is a highly sought after title in the popular "CSIRO Publishing" series.



**Field Guide to the Orchids of the Australian Capital Territory (Jones, Egan and Wood) - \$33.00** — Orchids can be found throughout the ACT, in nature parks, urban reserves and in Namadgi National Park. They can be beautiful or bizarre; some look like ducks or spiders, others grow long beards or have delicately hinged appendages. This guide's handy size makes it suitable for use in the field.



**Australian Alps: Kosciuszko, Alpine & Namadgi National Parks (Slattery) - \$16.00** —

This guide is your key to the secrets of the three national parks that stretch over Australia's spectacularly beautiful rooftop - Kosciuszko in New South Wales, Alpine in Victoria and Namadgi in the Australian Capital Territory. Ideal for field trips, this guide will make a wonderful memento as well as a great reference for future trips.

**Watching Wildlife (Chris) - \$24.00**

**Why Don't Woodpeckers Get Headaches? And Other Bird Questions You Know You Want To Ask (O'Connor) - \$13.50**

**CD: Bird Calls of the ACT (Fullagar & Slater) - \$12.00**

**LIMITED STOCK: Messent Bird Calendar 2009 - \$8.00**

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

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## Avian Whimsy - No. 69

### The case for turtle soup

I'm not at all sure how I came across the *Song of Solomon* as a lad; it's a beautiful and erotic love song, and there are certainly lines in it beyond the ken of an innocent boy in the Adelaide of the late 1950s and early 60s. What struck me about it however was the information that 'the voice of the turtle was heard in our land'. I didn't question it – I was a fan of Lewis Carroll and Tolkien after all – but it stuck in my mind. It was almost an anticlimax to discover much later that the reference was to a turtle-dove, the origin being, as so often, onomatopaeic and coming to us from the Latin 'turtur'. (A bit of research has revealed that some trendier modern translations have opted to spell it out as 'turtle-dove' or even just 'dove'. Probably none of my business, but it seems very boring.) It seems to me that there are two options available for the species that Solomon was referring to; both the **European Turtle-dove** (*Streptopelia turtur*) and the **Eurasian Collared-dove** or **Collared Turtle-dove** (*S. decaocto*) occur through the Middle East. I tend towards the latter, in that it is a migrant and would suddenly have appeared and started giving voice in spring (the line about flowers appearing on the earth tells us that Solomon's creative juices were stirred by spring). If you feel strongly to the contrary that's fine – maybe he meant both.

For reasons that are less than transparent, the 'turtle-dove' sobriquet is applied arbitrarily rather than uniformly across the genus. There are 16 species of *Streptopelia* across Eurasia and especially in Africa where I've had the fortune to see several species, from the **Red-eyed** (*S. semitorquata*) and **Ring-necked** (*S. capicola*) **Doves**, ubiquitous across the southern continent, to the richly dark little **Adamawa Turtle-dove** (*S. hypopyrrha*), limited to a couple of map-dots in central west Africa. It was an exciting moment to see one walking to water in a sandy river bed in central Cameroon, with baboons barking approval.

My pleasure in them does not extend to Australia however, and I'm speaking specifically of **Spotted Doves** (*S. chinensis*); the current fad is to drop the 'Turtle-' part of the name, but the loss of the STD acronym seems too unfortunate to bear. They were common in Adelaide when I was growing up; now they (along with **Rainbow Lorikeets**) are the dominant bird there. Herb Condon of the South Australian Museum wrote in 1968 'The virtual disappearance of the **Peaceful Dove** *Geopelia striata* from about Adelaide may be attributed to the arrival of the **Indian Dove**.' My father, a keen amateur Adelaide bird observer for 70 years, always insisted that this was the case. In the Philippines it is replacing the **Island Collared Dove** *S. bitorquata*. Frith suggested in 1969 that it may compete with the **Bar-shouldered Dove**, which is confirmed by a web page devoted to the birds of the Pine Rivers Shire, north of Brisbane.

As ever in such matters the motives of those who brought them here, and arrogantly imposed them on us and the land, remain obscure – they felt no need to explain. Some birds did escape from aviaries; for instance after storms released birds from Adelaide zoo aviaries in 1931, they spread across 200km from Clare to Victor Harbour within 20 years. Most however were deliberately (and even officially) inserted into the environment, starting in Melbourne in the 1860s and continuing into the 1940s in north Queensland. They are now abundant from Cooktown to Tasmania, and in South Australia and the south-west of Western Australia. Bizarrely they have also been moved from their already wide range across southern and south-eastern Asia to New Zealand, Mauritius, Fiji, Sulawesi, Hawaii and California.

And ominously, reports from Canberra, including breeding records, are becoming commoner. I am alarmed and despondent; given that they live up to 2400m above sea level in the Himalayas they will have no trouble coping with our winters.

Seven years ago, long before the advent of Whimsies, I wrote in Gang-gang: 'I believe that COG – the organisation and its individual members – has an obligation to do all it can to avert it [ie the spread of STDs] while it is still manageable. We can all destroy nests, trap birds where they are coming to feed, push Environment ACT to be pro-active and encourage people to see **Spotted Turtle-Doves** as undesirable invaders. Not to do so is to state publicly that we prefer an exotic avifauna in Canberra to an indigenous one.' I am depressed that it could have been written freshly in 2009.

It's still not too late, but that day will come if we let it. So I beg, plead, urge, cajole, appeal, wheedle and beseech you – don't let it! Turtle soup and turtle egg omelettes aren't a solution in themselves, but they might be a start. Just don't quote me out of context.

Ian Fraser ianf@pcug.org.au



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## NEW MEMBERS

**COG welcomes the following new members:**

**M Leggoe, Wanniasa**

**G Ellis, Bungendore**

**K Clancy, Gunning**

## NEXT NEWSLETTER

**March deadline**

**Wednesday 25 February 2009**

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

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

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

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*Vice President*— TBA

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Civic Square, ACT 2608

*Newsletter distribution*  
Judy Collett and helpers

*COG membership*

**2008-2009 memberships:**

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

*Membership inquiries*—

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

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

*COG website*

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

*Office*

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

*COG E-mail Discussion List*

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

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