

Gang-gang

February 2011

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

FEBRUARY MEETING

7:30pm Wednesday 9.2.11

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 Bird of the Month talk will be by Dan Mantle on **Quail and Button-quail of the ACT**. This will be a brief overview of the identification and habitat preferences of the locally occurring Quail and Button-quail species in the Canberra region.

The main presentation will be by Damon Oliver of the NSW Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water entitled "The recovery effort for the endangered **Plains-wanderer** (*Pedionomus torquatus*) in the western Riverina of NSW".

The **Plains-wanderer** is an iconic endangered grassland bird of the western Riverina of NSW. It is considered a 'must-see' species by serious twitchers both from Australia

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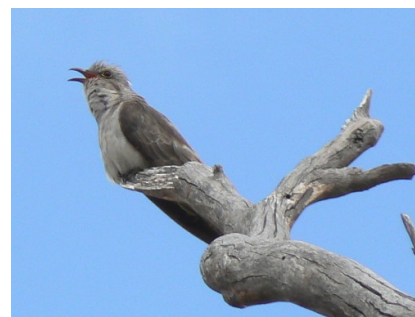
What to watch out for this month

With the much increased rainfall over the past 6 months, it is tempting to predict that bird species and activity in the ACT over the next few years will be quite different from the previous near decade of drought. While we'll only know this in the fullness of time, it's worth again briefly considering the evidence from this spring/summer. Of the western species more common during the dryer period there certainly have been reduced numbers of the **White-winged Triller**, which has been reported only at Callum Brae and Campbell Park (they bred at both places) and during the Namadgi Woodland survey. This also applies to the **Rufous Songlark**, even though it has been reported a bit more widely, including some still calling in mid-late January, close to when they might be expected to leave.

Pallid Cuckoos were also still reported calling round this time, both possibly indicative that conditions are still good enough for breeding, though probably too late to be successful. However, there have still been very few reports for the **Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo**, and single reports only of the **Brush Cuckoo** and of the **Horsfield's Bushlark**, but no more of the **Brown Songlark**. There have also been very few reports of **Fairy** or **Tree Martins** this season, perhaps because observers don't feel it's worth posting sightings on the chat line. There were some postings of them in mid-late January, with a significant find of over 300 of the latter settling down to roost in the reed beds at Black Mountain Peninsula.

As noted in my December column the northern species the **Eastern Koel** is increasingly being observed in the ACT, but whether this is drought related is unclear. It certainly seems to have been present in greater numbers this season and has been the subject of many posts on the COG chat line over the past couple of months, including being present in new areas. It also seems to have been much more conspicuous and easily observed compared with the previously largely aural records, including being seen or photographed in

Photo by Robin Hide



Pallid Cuckoo
(*Cacomantis flabelliformis*)

Everyone welcome

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pairs (or in one case two males together), even to the extent that copulation has been observed in 2 cases. Ripe prunus appears to be a favoured food for this fructivore. Importantly the species has also been identified as giving a wider range of calls, often the “wirra wirra”, or to my ears “wurra wurra wurra”.

I thought this may be associated with pairing, but many were still giving the more familiar far carrying “koell” call (still trying to attract a mate?) towards the end of January, with the birds in my local area of Chapman/Rivett clearly alternating between them on Australia Day. Compared with its first reported breeding round Ainslie only several years ago, it also seems to be breeding more widely, and also possibly extending its host species to the **Magpie-lark** in addition to the previous **Red Wattlebird**. If this increase is not drought related (as I suspect) I predict this species will become a common one in future ACT spring/summers.

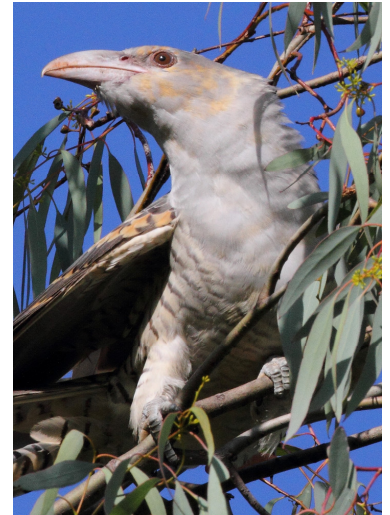
The **Channel-billed Cuckoo** also has been observed more frequently this season, with by my count at least six postings on the COG chat line of birds heard or observed calling in flight before Christmas, compared with only two reported sightings in the previous three COG Annual Bird Reports. More importantly an immature bird was seen and photographed by Geoffrey Dabb at Campbell Park on the morning of 21 January, this was both quiet and relatively sedentary (it was still found there late afternoon), and may represent the first indication of breeding in the local (ACT?) area. After Christmas there has also been the now usual influx of **Superb Parrots**, mostly northside where flocks of up to 50 have been observed including a good proportion of juveniles, but also the occasional observation of small numbers southside.

All of the above species normally move out of the area by the end of January to mid February, so any records from now are significant and should be forwarded for inclusion in the COG database. Two other species to look out for, especially on approaching storm fronts or during wet weather but may also be seen in fine clear conditions, are the **White-throated Needletail** (**Spine-tailed Swift** to some) and **Fork-tailed Swift**. While there have been a few reports to date, the next two months have been the peak time for small numbers of these species over the past drought years. Perhaps with the exception of just on the Gang-gang deadline, there is little evidence to date for a significant increase in sightings in this much wetter season.

While some concern was expressed about the possible effect of the heavy rain in early December on breeding due to chicks dying of because of cold and saturated nests, it seems to have been a good and prolonged breeding season. This includes waterbirds which didn't disperse due to the favourable conditions elsewhere. In some cases repairing of damaged nests was reported, or even of continued breeding in damaged nests (possibly due to predation), and at least one juvenile **Crested Shrike-tit** at Newline survived to fledge despite the rain and winds. In a number of cases successive nesting was observed such as for the **Magpie-lark** and **Australasian Grebe**, where eggs were laid again in the same nest very soon after the first brood “fledged”. Also of interest were the **White-faced Heron** chicks being raised in a nest at Campbell Park, but most pleasing for me was the image posted by Roger Williams late in the month of two immature **Australian Owlet-nightjars** at the same hole where a parent was found (and photographed) during the Nest Workshop in November.

Again any breeding activity from now is significant, particularly due to the truncated breeding seasons during the drought, and should be reported for inclusion in the COG database. — **Jack Holland**

Photo by Geoffrey Dabb



Channel-billed Cuckoo
(*Scythrops novaehollandiae*)

Volunteers Required

Brian Fair is looking for volunteers to assist him with the mailout of *Gang-gang* during 2011 from his residence in Queanbeyan. The task will only take between ninety minutes and two hours and will be done on a Tuesday night at 7.30pm, once per month. The dates for 2011 are: 01 February, 01 March, 05 April, 03 May, 31 May, 05 July, 02 August, 06 September, 04 October, 01 November and 06 December. If you can assist once or twice or more, please contact him at Email: briandf1@bigpond.com, Home phone: 6297 5321, Work Phone: 6265 7084 or Mobile: 0437 975 312.

Reports

15 December 2010 — Wednesday walk to Callum Brae

15 members met at the main entrance to Callum Brae on a pleasant and warm morning. Many thanks to Sandra for her reconnaissance on the previous day and her advice about the prevalence of grass seeds and various tall species of thistles. Despite these impediments and the generally soggy conditions she led us on a most enjoyable outing.

A total of 43 species was recorded with highlights being **Superb Parrot** (1), **Dollarbird** (2), **White-winged Triller** (2), **Varied Sitella** (2 small flocks), **Sacred Kingfisher** (2), **Double-barred Finch** (3+) and magnificent views of a male **Mistletoebird**. An **Australian Reed-warbler** in one of the overflowing dams was a slight surprise! The only raptor seen was a **Nankeen Kestrel**: the **goshawk** had obviously decided that an armistice was due. Missing in action were all **cuckoos**, **Noisy Friarbird** and **Rufous Songlark**.

Breeding records were **Crimson** and **Eastern Rosellas** (both DY) and **Willie Wagtail** and **Maggie-lark** (both ON).

— Martin Butterfield

January 2011 Monthly Meeting — Members Night

As usual the January meeting provided an opportunity for those who had not spoken at COG meetings before to tell us about interesting bird events that they had been involved with during the year.

The evening started with a short presentation about the privately owned Dirk Hartog Island, the most westerly point of Australia. The visit was part of a much longer trip that Noel Luff and his wife, accompanied by 'Ratty', undertook through central and Western Australia last year. Noel was able to show us the wonderful landscape and the various forms of accommodation on the island including non-existent camping sites. Noel mentioned the short but expensive ferry trip to the island and it would appear that the island is not suitable for those who prefer 5 star accommodation, but despite, that well worth a visit.

Christine Ledger then gave us a presentation on a long and fascinating trip that she and partner Geoff Alves took from the Shetland Islands in the U.K. to Darwin via the Trans-Siberian Railway and Singapore - a very long and unusual way to travel from the U.K. to Australia. Geoff's photographs of unusual and amusing bird-inspired sights along the way were a highlight of the presentation. Interestingly, for the UK and Western Europe, instead of bird books, Christine and Geoff downloaded the appropriate 'apps' to their iPod, a useful way to save weight and space.

Jane Williams then gave us a presentation on her and Roger's trip to Newhaven; an area known to most of us but unfortunately only visited by a few. The theme of the very interesting presentation was the various habitats to be found at Newhaven and their associated bird fauna. It was obvious that anyone travelling through that part of the world last year was given a show of inland Australia at its best.

Janette Lenz's interesting presentation was on the trip that she and Michael undertook last year to Madagascar, an island as long as Queensland stretching from the more tropical north to the arid south; an island not only fascinating for



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2-7 April 2011
Laos

Bald-faced Bulbul tour

8 – 23 April 2011
Sabah (Northern Borneo)

13 – 28 May 2011
Gulf Country
Cairns-Atherton-Cloncurry-Mt Isa

22 June – 5 July 2011
Top End
Darwin-Kakadu NP-Katherine-
Kununurra

10 – 17 July 2011
Alice Springs

6 – 13 August 2011
Pilbara (Western Australia)
Karijini and Millstream & Chichester
National Parks

3 – 22 September 2011:
Strzelecki Track, Outback

13 – 22 October 2011
Yorke Peninsula, Lake Gilles,
Ceduna

Plains-wanderer Weekends 2011
26 & 27 November
10 & 11 December
New Year's Eve 2011 Plains-
wanderer Weekend

**Tour itineraries, bird lists, check-
lists and latest news are on the
website**

www.philipmaher.com

its flora and fauna but also for its people. One of the highlights was to see a dancing **Sifaka**.

Terry Bell then gave us a pictorial presentation of his 2010 visit to Lake Eyre. He explained how the trip, though enjoyable, was cut short as rains forced the party to be rescued and taken to Moomba but luckily after their visit to Lake Eyre and the Cooper Creek. Terry noted that despite a flight over the lake there was little bird life to be seen as most of it was on Cooper Creek.

A summary of the 2010 COG Bird Blitz was then given by Barbara Allan. As in previous years this was a most successful event though the rains on the Sunday appear to have kept numbers down. A more detailed summary will be presented in a forthcoming CBN. The names of various event winners were pulled from the hat and those not present on the evening were notified after the meeting. The prize for the most unusual bird of the weekend was awarded to John Brannan for a sighting of a **Channel-billed Cuckoo**; a sighting confirmed by Sue Matthews and Jack Holland.

Many thanks to all the speakers and to those who made this such an interesting meeting. — **Chris Davey**

Mt Taylor - 15 January 2011

An enthusiastic group met at Mt Taylor at 7am for a walk on the lower slopes, and were serenaded in the carpark by **Grey Butcherbirds**. Like most reserves, the plant growth is impressive this year, but unlike some other reserves, there were no serious thistles in evidence.

Over 25 species were seen, on a morning which warmed up quickly. The dam yielded an **Australasian Grebe** as well as **Wood Ducks**, and Duncan's keen ear found a **Speckled Warbler** near the dam. A pair of **Gang-gangs** was spotted a couple of times, as were **Common bronzewings**. Other species seen during the morning included **Brown, Yellow-rumped** and **Buff-rumped Thornbills**, **Spotted** and **Striated Pardalotes**, **Kookaburras**, **Weebills** and **Noisy Friarbirds**. Thanks to Matthew for leading the outing. — **Sandra Henderson**

Kelly Road - 19 January 2011

25 members and guests gathered just off the Monaro Highway to visit this site which used to be a popular venue for COG outings. As we totalled 43 species on our walk, it is easy to see its attraction.

At the northern end, we spent some time looking into the paddocks. Highlights were **Diamond Firetail** (2), **Brown Treecreeper** (1, but posing brilliantly) and **Southern Whiteface** (4). Many **Dusky Woodswallows**, including several independent young still in very young plumage, **Fairy Martins** and **Rufous Songlarks** were flying overhead. A **Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo** was heard calling in this area.

After walking down the road a short distance we drove for about three kilometres to TSR 31. A number (>3) **Stubble Quail** were calling in the TSR but didn't flush, even when a 'roo bounced though. Another **Diamond Firetail** was seen perched high in a dead tree. At least three Sacred **Kingfishers** were recorded and we eventually achieved excellent views of **Fuscous Honeyeaters**. Fly-throughs included seven **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos** and two **Wedge-tailed Eagles**. — **Martin Butterfield**

23 January 2011 – Uriarra area

Due to concerns about a boggy road on our usual Brindabellas route, the venue was changed to four sites close to Uriarra Road, a change which provided some exciting observations and breeding records.

Uriarra Homestead Dam, now full and with the sandbars submerged, had 6 species of duck including **Musk Duck**, **Australasian Shoveler** and **breeding Grey Teal**, as well as **Masked Lapwing** with tiny chicks looking rather like dotterels. The highlight of this stop was clearly two **Latham's Snipe**, a species I have not seen around the dam in previous years. We observed 29 species, just below the 1990 record of 32.

Latham's Snipe
(*Gallinago hardwickii*)
at Kelly's Swamp
Photo by Lindell Emerton



For Sale

40 Acre Block Near Hoskinstown east of Canberra

Ideal for birdwatchers

166 Old Mill Road, Forbes Creek via Hoskinstown

\$119,000

This peaceful nature lovers' block offers a variety of bird habitats. It is adjacent to Tallaganda Forest and has fantastic views to the Tinderry Mountains. There are approximately 10 acres mostly cleared on one side of the road with fantastic views and the balance on the other side is undulating with scattered bush, native grasses and plants and a great little creek with some permanent water holes. It is a quick commute to Canberra.

For more information see <http://www.allhomes.com.au/ah/nsw/sale-residential/166-old-mill-road-hoskinstown-queanbeyan-region/1316778729011> or contact Jan Ladmore 0407 890 527 of Horizon Real Estate Bungendore, jan.ladmore@bigpond.com, www.horizonrealestate.com.au, or Julianne Kamprad 02 62382441, 0427 382 441



(Reports: Continued from page 4)

Uriarra Crossing and Swamp Creek Reserves produced 26 species, notably a juvenile **Dollarbird**, a **Brown Falcon**, breeding **Noisy Friarbirds**, **Magpies** and **Pied Currawongs** and a **Leaden Flycatcher** fighting what looked like a losing battle against a predatory **Pied Currawong**. Our lunch-break entertainment at Uriarra Crossing East was provided by a pair of **Tawny Frogmouths** with a nest on an exposed casuarina branch. Two nestlings/fledglings emerged to do some wing stretching exercises to the click of cameras. **Willie Wagtail** (nest) and **Leaden Flycatcher** (carrying food) were also breeding in the casuarinas. Other notables were **Dusky Woodswallow**, **Mistletoebird** and a flock of more than 20 **Red-rumped Parrots**.

Our last stop at Piney Creek (off Uriarra Rd near Mt Stromlo) revealed only a few birds (it was a hot afternoon), but it was great to see the continuing recovery of the forest, understorey and wildflowers following the 2003 fires and prior to that, some time as a degrading trail-bike track area. The area contains some uncommon eucalypts, and following a campaign by COG and other groups in the early 1990s, it was closed to trail-bikes. The area would make a splendid Nature Park for the future residents of Molonglo.

Overall, 49 species were observed with eight breeding records. — **Bruce Lindenmayer**

(Plains Wanderer: Continued from page 1)

and overseas. A recovery program for this species was established in 1999 by the former NSW NPWS, which continues to this day.

In the last 12 years the key actions to save this species have included community education, reserve acquisition (Oolambeyan National Park), predator control, ecological research, population monitoring and policy development that has minimised the impacts of potential threats such as land clearing and the use of insecticide to control locusts. Despite efforts to save this species, a prolonged drought from 2002 to 2010 has seen the NSW population decline by 75% since late 2001. Limited monitoring in 2010 has provided some promising evidence that the Plains-wanderer may be bouncing back from the drought. However, further monitoring in 2011 will be critical in determining whether this really is the case.

The biggest challenge facing the recovery effort for the Plains-wanderer is the ability to secure funding to reward and encourage landholders to manage their native grasslands for biodiversity and primary production outcomes. A revised state recovery plan is still in the developmental stage and needs the support of the landholder community for the recovery program to be successful.

Future Field Trips

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

Sunday 6 February — Jerrabomberra Wetlands (morning outing)

World Wetlands Day this year celebrates the 40th anniversary of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance. Ginini Flats is the only Ramsar site in the ACT, one of 64 in Australia, but the Jerrabomberra Wetlands are listed in the 'Directory of Important **Wetlands** in Australia' and will be the venue for this outing. We will search the wetlands and the adjacent Fyshwick sewage ponds for whatever ducks, waders, rails, waterbirds and other birds might be there and in the surrounding bush and grasslands. Meet in the car park off Dairy Road at 7.30 am. The outing is expected to finish by 11 am. Bring binoculars, and a scope if you have one, as well as a hat, sunscreen and water.

The Chief Minister has recently set up a Board of Management for the Jerrabomberra Wetlands to help guide the future development of the site as a first class wetland conservation area and educational facility. We are pleased that the Chair of the Board, Mr Warren Nicholls, has accepted COG's invitation to attend this outing and to say a few words about the aims of the Board – where it is heading and what is hoped for the future. Warren will also be available for questions during the course of the outing. COG President, Chris Davey is also a member of the Board as is COG member and past President, Dr. Dick Schodde. As both hope to attend the outing, now is the opportunity to find out what the future holds for the Jerrabomberra Wetlands and to provide your input into the planning process so that the potential that at present lies dormant within the Wetlands can be realised.

Make sure you enter this important outing to your diary.

The outing will be led by Harvey Perkins but for bookings, please contact Daniel Mantle (danmantle@hotmail.com or 0413 554 500). Should numbers become too large, the group might need to be divided in two, so if you are prepared to help lead this outing, please contact Daniel.

16 February — Wednesday Walk

The Wednesday Walk for February will start at the entrance to Umbagog District Park off Florey Drive, Latham. Meet at 9 am on. Most of the **walk** will be on bike paths and is quite flat. As well as the Park, we will visit part of Ginninderra Creek and possibly Jaramlee pond. — **Martin Buttefield**

Sunday 20 February – Private Property near Collector

Access has been granted for a morning walk on a private property on the Bicentennial Trail between Gunning and Collector. This property has not previously been visited by COG. On previous trips the following species have been observed: **Leaden Flycatcher; Gang Gang; White-throated Gerygone and Brown-headed Honeyeater**. The property is heavily wooded and undulating, so will not suit those with challenged mobility. We will meet on the northern outskirts of Canberra to arrange car-pooling at 7:30am. If time permits we will visit a nearby travelling stock reserve on the way home. Further details will be provided to those attending.

To book your place, or for further information please contact Lia Battisson liabattisson@grapevine.com.au or on 0412 788 791.

Saturday & Sunday 5-6 March – Eden Pelagic (two single day trips)

Following last year's successful July pelagic birdwatching trips, we will run further outings for COG members in March and October 2011. These will again be run from Eden Harbour with Freedom Charters. We will travel to the edge of the continental shelf in search of seabirds, cetaceans and seals

On the March trips (two separate one day outings) we hope to encounter a slightly different mix of seabirds to last year's winter trip. These should include a greater variety of shearwaters and petrels. We will meet at Eden Harbour early each morning (time to be confirmed) and aim to return to dock by 3pm, thus leaving enough time to drive back to Canberra on Sunday afternoon. Organising travel and accommodation will be each individual's responsibility but no doubt there will be opportunities for car-pooling and an informal get-together for dinner/drinks in Eden on the Friday and Saturday evenings.

As with all boating activities the trip will be weather dependent and rough seas could lead to the cancellation or postponement of the trip. Seasickness pills or other remedies are recommended for those prone to seasickness. All participants

should bring water, lunch, and sunscreen. More detailed instructions will be available closer to the day. The cost will be \$100 AUD per person.

To book a place on this outing, please contact Daniel Mantle (0413 554 500 or danmantle@hotmail.com), who will co-lead this trip with Anthony Overs. Both trips are restricted to 12 participants and filled on a first reply basis.

**NOTE: THERE ARE VERY FEW SPOTS REMAINING ON EITHER DAY.
IF INTERESTED, PLEASE CONTACT DANIEL IMMEDIATELY.**

Sunday 20 March – East Basin/Molonglo Reach (Electric/powered boat cruise)

This cruise on the upper parts of Lake Burley Griffin (East Basin) and the adjacent Molonglo River Reach, should coincide with the peak, early autumn nesting period - three species of **cormorant** and **darters** are known to breed here. 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 much wetter conditions than in previous years, though reports of darter breeding have been received and the clearing of the trees on the north bank in May 2008 seems to have had limited influence on the breeding.

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 it 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) as soon as possible as the boats usually fill up fast.

Proposed visits to the Australian National Wildlife Collection

At the COG meeting on 13 October 2010, Dr. Leo Joseph gave an open invitation for members to visit the Australian National Wildlife Collection held on the grounds of the CSIRO Gungahlin Homestead. This museum collection contains one of the best assemblages of bird material in Australia and is well worth a visit.

To get the most out of the visit it is necessary to visit the museum in groups of about 10 people, preferably during working hours, although a series of special out of working hours visits can be arranged.

To plan the visits it will be necessary to initially determine the number of members interested in participating, with an indication of preferred time of visit. Therefore, if interested, please contact Matthew Frawley at frawley.matthew@gmail.com with an indication of whether you are prepared to visit during the day or can only participate during an evening visit.

Friday-Tuesday 22-26 April – Willandra (Easter/Anzac Long Weekend)

The Easter long-weekend outing has been switched to Willandra NR (previously planned for Yathong NR). This trip will represent an excellent chance for COG members to see some of the more typically western species and the local grasslands should be in excellent condition following the extensive rains in 2010.

Noel Luff, who is the leader for this trip, has made a tentative booking of the shearer’s quarters. There are six rooms in the quarters, which have four bunk beds in each. Cost is \$25 per room per night. He needs an indication **NOW** from those who would like to use the quarters, so that he can make a firm booking. There is plenty of camping space, so that those who intend camping can contact him nearer the time. He can be contacted at noelluff@hotmail.com.au (or on 62883291).

Saturday & Sunday 10-11 December – Deniliquin Plains Wanderer Weekend

This year COG will return to the Deniliquin area to search for some of the special birds of the region, including the enigmatic **Plains Wanderer**. The weekend tour will be led by Phil Maher in the same manner as his regular ‘Plains Wanderer Weekends’ and will incur similar costs (only differences will be if we include some catering on top). This early notice is to advise those interested that accommodation should be organised shortly as there are limited local options and they will likely be busy in early December. One recommended option is the Deniliquin Riverside Caravan and Cabin Park (03 5881 1284).

This weekend outing will be limited to 14 people and will be filled on a first reply basis. Please contact Daniel Mantle (danmantle@hotmail.com or 0413 554 500) to book your place.

Woodland Surveys Update — Compiled by Jenny Bounds

Our late spring/early summer woodland survey period happened to coincide with the big wet and stormy week in late November/early December 2010, causing some disruption, with some sites under water and gumboots the order of the day for some surveyors.

Mulligans Flat NR

Jenny Bounds and the team did the survey on Sunday 5 December, after having to cancel the survey the previous week-end due to rain. It was with much relief that the skies were clear on the re-scheduled date, and the survey was able to be completed in pretty good conditions, except for underfoot. There was a lot of water still around from the heavy rain and storms of the previous week. Surveyors walking in gumboots through standing and running water up to mid calf, and Pacific Black Ducks swimming past along a flooded track through a site being surveyed, are not the norm!! 59 species were recorded and mostly the usual species. Highlights: **Leaden Flycatchers** in very good numbers this year, a **Red-capped Robin** at site 4, **Scarlet Robin** at sites 5 and 12, **Varied Sittella**, **Speckled Warbler**, **Olive-backed Oriole**, **Australian Grebes** with young, four species of **cuckoos** and all the usual spring migrants. A **Brush Cuckoo** flew into the area calling as we were having morning tea, a nice ending to the morning. President Chris Davey joined the group to search for **Superb Parrots** and got very wet in the long grass around the large dam woodland - it was funny to see him return with a snakebite bandage wrapped around one of his sodden boots to hold it together!

Goorooyarroo NR North

Nicki Taws did the survey on Saturday 12 December, a fine and cool if somewhat breezy morning. The tracks through Goorooyarroo were closed to vehicles so Nicki cycled in from the southern entrance. Similar to the reports from other woodland areas water was running or lying in areas not seen before and plant growth was prolific. Many species are having a prolonged flowering season, including swathes of chocolate lilies - deliciously distracting at times. The birds weren't quite as prolific, with only 30 species recorded. Of the summer migrants, **Rufous Whistler**, **Leaden Flycatcher**, **Mistletoebird** and **White-throated Gerygone** were most evident. Two **cuckoos** species, **Pallid** and **Horsfield's Bronze**, were recorded. The main breeding highlight was a very recently fledged **Grey Currawong**, a species which has declined significantly in our woodland surveys. One **Varied Sittella** was found, and one **Superb Parrot**, although the crew doing the **Superb Parrot** surveys the same morning recorded more across the wider area. The only robin recorded was a single **Scarlet Robin**, and there was no sight or sound of the **Brown Treecreepers** which have been in this part of the reserve in the past.

Goorooyarroo NR South

Steve Holliday, Prue Buckley and Dave and Kathy Cook were lucky to get a delightful morning on 5 December to do the last survey for the year. As expected the reserve was sodden; for the first time since surveys commenced running water in creeks drowning out bird calls was a problem! In places tracks had turned into temporary streams. 49 species were recorded, with nothing really unexpected. There were **Stubble Quail** calling from the grassland at the southern end of the reserve. Highlights included **Wedge-tailed Eagle** (1), **Superb Parrots** (5), **Little Corella** (not common here), **Pallid Cuckoo** (one very vocal bird), **Speckled Warblers** at two sites, both **gerygones**, **Dusky Woodswallows**, **Grey Butcherbird** and **Grey Currawong**, **Leaden Flycatcher**, a few **Rufous Songlarks**, and **Mistletoebirds** at eight of the nine sites. There were very few small **honeyeaters** with one record each of **Brown-headed** and **White-plumed**, and far fewer **Starlings** than usual; perhaps they have already finished breeding and moved to nearby grazing land. Plenty of frogs were calling from the very full dams and flooded areas, and hundreds of male Common Brown butterflies fluttered through the reserve.

Campbell Park/Mt Ainslie

Michael Lenz also picked the fine morning on Sunday 5 December for his survey, but like other locations it was rather wet underfoot: a first to do the survey wearing gum boots. The most widespread species were **Mistletoebird**, **Leaden Flycatcher**, and **Rufous Whistler** with **thornbills** and **Weebills** only at very few places. **King Parrot**, **Sacred Kingfisher** and **Dollarbird** were encountered only once each. There were two male **White-winged Trillers** in Campbell Park proper and another pair much further north. There were few signs of young birds out of the nest (**Leaden Flycatcher**, **Jacky Winter**, **Little Raven**, **Yellow-rumped Thornbill**, all only once), probably an indication of the impact the prolonged rain had on breeding success. Either incubating or building nests were **Magpie-lark**, **Leaden Flycatcher** and **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike**.

Newline

Sue Lashko did her survey early, on 21 November, before leaving for a trip, and managed to avoid the big wet week. However, all dams were full from the spring rains and there was water in places not seen before, including a pond near the road in the front paddock. In places the grass was two metres tall and so dense that falling down unseen rabbit holes and stumbling over branches was an issue. Waterfowl included **Grey** and **Chestnut Teal**, as well as **Australian Wood Duck**, one pair with six DY. **Starling** numbers were lower than in spring so perhaps some have dispersed after breeding, but there were plenty of signs of another round of breeding. Other species breeding included **Crimson Rosella**, **Buff-rumped Thornbill**, **Dusky Woodswallow**, **Common Myna**, **Crested Pigeon** and **Grey Butcherbird**. Three raptor species were recorded: **Wedge-tailed Eagle**, **Brown Goshawk** and **Black-shouldered Kite**. A pair of **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos** did a flypast and an **Owlet-nightjar** called. Summer visitors included several **Dollarbirds**, **Pallid Cuckoo** and **Shining Bronze-Cuckoo**.

Callum Brae NR

Sandra Henderson surveyed the six sites and reported some difficulties due to the amount of water on the ground. On 3 December she managed to do the first three sites closest to the carpark, with some difficulty as one site was underwater in waist high grass; fortunately the goshawks were not around. All the gullies were running with deep water and were impassable on the usual route near the quarry fence to get to the far side of the reserve. On the second attempt on 8 December in a break in the rain, she managed to complete the other three sites. Highlights of 47 species included **Dusky Woodswallows** nest building, **Brown Goshawks** with dependent young, 10 **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes**, three **White-winged Trillers** and a **Speckled Warbler**.

Jerrabomberra West NR (woodland patch)

Taking advantage of the break in rain periods, Jenny Bounds did the survey on 13 December in the woodland at the back of Jerrabomberra Grasslands Reserve (viz Jerrabomberra West NR). She had to walk in through the grasslands because of the very wet tracks and high vegetation growth including head high thistle patches, and found this one of the most difficult surveys. The woodland area which has mostly native wallaby and kangaroo grasses and not as much thistle was a bit easier to get through.

Birds were not abundant, but the usual species were around. One **Western Gerygone**, in addition to several **White-throated Gerygones**, **Dollarbirds** nesting, **Sacred Kingfisher**, three **Speckled Warblers** at one site and **Dusky Woodswallows** at another adjacent to the open grasslands were highlights. A **Brown Goshawk** called, but thankfully they were not active in the area. Quite a few **Australian Ravens** were around.

Tuggeranong Hill NR

Lia Battisson did the survey on Saturday 27 November, (the first day of the official survey period) thus missing the worst of the rainy week. Despite that, it was very wet underfoot in places. Some of the paths have been severely eroded and parallel paths are being trodden. 28 species in all were observed, with 18 of these within the sites and times of the surveys. Breeding activity at various levels was observed for 10 species. The **Galahs** were back at Site 2, in a hollow, but not very serious about it. Lia was delighted to report that **Little Corellas** had occupied a hollow at Site 3 which had been used by **Common Mynas** or **Common Starlings** in previous years.

Woodland near Tharwa

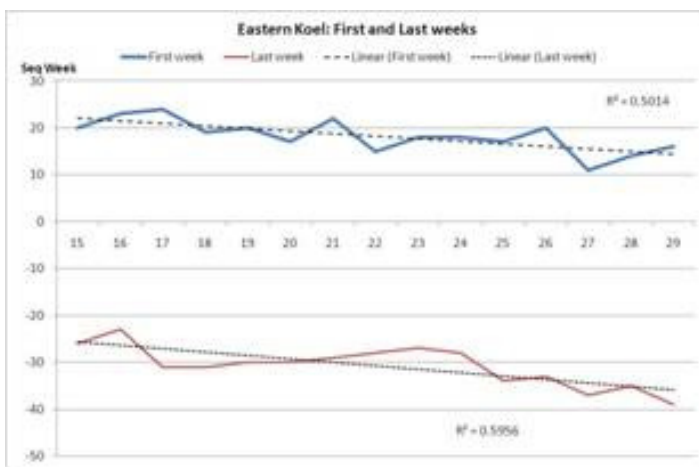
David McDonald made two attempts to do the survey. The first was washed out and the second turned out to be unusually productive, despite the best efforts of the *Red-eyed Cicadas* to drown out all the bird calls! The conditions were perfect, albeit wet underfoot and tall native grasses and weeds to push through. **Brown Treecreepers** with one dependent young at two sites and a male **Leaden Flycatcher** ensconced on its tiny nest were two interesting breeding records. **Brown Quail** were seen at two sites, an unusual species for that locality. The **Rufous Songlarks** were very obvious, giving their oh-so-flashy display flights. No **woodswallows** were observed. The stand-out observation was a single **Regent Honeyeater** seen in a patch of Red Box, the very spot where David first ticked this species way back in January 1990 during the Australian Bird Count survey. Interesting species observed between sub-sites included a **Southern Boobook** being woken up by **honeyeaters**, and **Speckled Warblers**.

Garden Bird Survey Notes

As a result of not providing a report for the last issue, the sightings below cover both sides of the monsoon!

- **Australian Hobby** nesting in Holder (Nov)
- **Channel-billed Cuckoo** in Ainslie (Nov and Dec)
- **Satin Bowerbird** in Ainslie (Dec)
- **Koels** all over the place all months (inc possible dependent young in Griffith in Jan)
- **Australian King-Parrot** feeding young in Aranda (Jan)
- **Superb Parrots** in Scullin and Kaleen (both Jan)

It only seems like forever



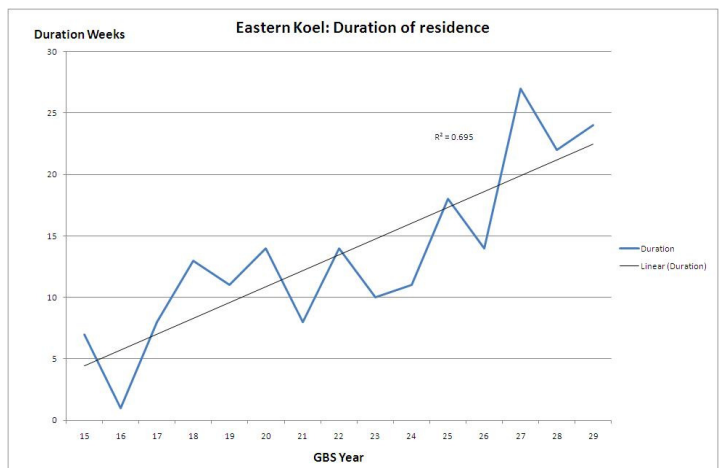
Some years ago a post to the chatline complained “Oh no the <suburb name> **Koel** is back again.” Today I received an email requesting that one of the local **Eastern Koels** (hereafter just **Koel**) have a mute button fitted.

Those comments together with an exchange on the chatline have led me to look at the local pattern of attendance of **Koels** in recent years. I have restricted what follows to GBS Year 15 (starting July 1995) onwards as, prior to then, the pattern is very patchy. Since then, the birds have been reported every year.

My initial examination was to see whether the dates of first and last reports (probably broadly equivalent to dates of first

arrival and last departure) have changed over this period. The first graph charts these two dates according to sequential week number (July 3 starts week 1). The value of the correlation coefficient shows that the trend, especially for the report of first sighting, is not statistically significant; perhaps we can refer to them as tendencies? In both cases the tendency is towards “later”: come later, leave later.

It also seemed that, as the tendency for last report was sloping down faster than that for first report, the period over which **Koels** were reported was increasing. Plotting this – under the name of “Duration” – gives a second graph, with a significant upward trend (ie the period of reporting is getting longer). Of course this does not mean that individual birds (or even an avideomographic cohort of birds) are staying longer, just that as a species they are being seen over a longer period.



Uses of GBS data

Information has been provided to COG for a submission relating to **Superb Parrots**. Information about **Glossy Black-Cockatoos** has been provided to the Molonglo Catchment Group to assist their planning of a habitat enhancement program. — **Martin Butterfield**.

Photo Ops 1 — Striated Pardalote

The simplified wisdom often given is that **Spotted Pardalotes** nest in earth tunnels and **Striated Pardalotes** use tree hollows. In fact the latter also often nest in earth tunnels. While the plain-crowned races do this more often, our own stripe-topped birds use earth tunnels at least a minority of the time. This photo shows two **Striated Pardalotes** emerging with difficulty from a tunnel in a Cullum Brae creek bank. Their gapes indicate the birds may be immature though they have fully moulted into adult-like plumage.

The micro-story associated with the picture is that the bird behind was very keen to get out while the one in front was not keen at all. Eventually, the keen bird actually pushed the other out where it remained vertical, clinging on to the



tunnel rim for support, while Ms Keen rocketed out and then landed on the earth wall very close to the tunnel. Eventually Mr Not-keen joined Ms Keen in a short tour of the creek bank, apparently examining pieces of dirt with great interest before they both flew off to join other birds in the group (crèche?) mentioned below.

I was intrigued to see that a couple of weeks before this photo was taken, there were three adults attending the nest. I hadn't known that pardalotes were cooperative breeders but HANZAB confirms several examples of three adults feeding young in and out of nests. I realised there were three birds involved, not because I can recognise individuals, but because at one stage two were lined up in the adjacent perch tree waiting for landing permission, such permission only being granted when a third exited the tunnel.

Later, at the time of these photos, I was even more interested to see that the nest was being visited by at least five birds (possibly many more), some of them adult or at least in near-adult plumage, and some juveniles. One of the adults took in grass for nest maintenance.

I have no idea what was actually happening inside the nest with some many visitors of different ages, or what stage of breeding was occurring there, but **Striated Pardalotes** commonly breed two or three times in a season so it could be that juveniles from one breeding event were present at the same time as the parents were preparing the nest for the next laying. Combined with one or more cooperative breeding assistants, this might explain the profusion of birds using the tunnel.



In fact there were pardalotes everywhere, and at one stage there were 16 in a nearby tree with others flying in the general area. I've never seen a large group of pardalotes together but others have, and HANZAB again confirms, that they congregate in large groups in autumn and winter. As this was summer it seems more likely this was an example of colony breeding and the 16 birds were all or part of a crèche. Of course, if this were true you would expect

several other local nests. I do know of another that was active in a nearby tree hollow and probably there are others I haven't noticed.

— Julian Robinson



Striated Pardalote
(*Pardalotus striatus*)
All photos by Julian Robinson



Editor's note: Photo Ops and AvIan Whimsy will alternate during 2011



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COG welcomes the following new members:

K Farley, Cook

J Carmody, Stirling

V Fanning, Burra Creek

NEXT NEWSLETTER

March deadline

Wednesday 24 February 2011

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.

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