



Gang-gang

July 2004

News letter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

JULY MEETING

Wednesday 14 July

Details pg 3

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Where to watch birds this month

Lake Ginninderra. 30 species in just over an hours stroll around the Lake on a recent Sunday morning, despite it being cold and windy.

The level of the Lake is now very low: somewhat below that at the end of the 1982-83 drought. This suggests some good **crake-rail** opportunities for the future since much bare mud exists. Also, many of the eucalypts seem about to burst into flower all round the Lake and there were many **Red Wattlebirds** and **White-plumed Honeyeaters** enjoying the first blossoms.

Field Trip Reports

GREEN CAPE

10-14 JUNE 2004

The June long weekend saw twelve COG-ites descend on Green Cape, the northern headland of Disaster Bay south of Eden.

Geographically, this coastal feature sits on the bend, one might say, between the Victorian and NSW coastlines. It is also a point of contact for northerly migrants making contact with the east coast of the continent.

Hence whales and oceanic birds were on the menu – for the feasting of the eyes.

Roughing it at Green Cape is a most pleasurable experience. The Cape is deep within the Ben Boyd National Park and sports a lighthouse dating from 1883. The lighthouse/park keeper lives in a lovely old home situated beside a duplex of houses previously occupied by the assistant lighthouse keepers. Each of these houses is fitted out to sleep six and provided accommodation for the dirty dozen from COG. The three houses, all of the same vintage as the lighthouse, are perched on the cliff overlooking the Tasman Sea. Breakfast on the verandah, under a warm morning sun, counting seabirds and whales, is pretty close to heaven.

The arrangements gave us three full days, plus the last morning, to drink in the ornithological and other delights. The first day was sunny but with sufficient wind to attract a good display of pelagic birds. The subsequent days were, in one sense, perfect and the envy of many a holiday-maker, but poor for sea-bird watching. Many albatross were seen, especially on the Friday and Saturday, with the large majority being **Yellow-nosed Albatross**. The estimated number seen on the Friday was 150,



Glossy Black-Cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus lathami* **Adult Male and Juvenile**
Photo courtesy **David Cook**

Letters to the editor

Please send letters, snippets etcetera intended for this column to the editor. Contact details are on page 12 of this *Gang-gang*. As with all sections of the *Gang-gang*, space allocated to this section each month will be limited. Therefore entries are more likely to be published if they are kept to a minimum length.

often sitting in rafts of 30 or more. These were supplemented by a sighting of one **Shy Albatross** and a small number of **Black-browed Albatross** sometimes sitting singly amongst a raft of Yellow-nosed Albatross.

Northern Giant-Petrels made several appearances, their dark heads labelling them as immature birds. The only other Procellariiformes sighted were **Fluttering Shearwaters** seen on three occasions.

Shifting orders, amongst the Laridae family, were sighted: **Pacific Gulls** (two took up residence on the rocks below our "home" for the weekend), **Silver Gulls**, **Crested Terns**, a **Common Tern** and small number of Brown Skuas (if you are one of the unfortunates who call these fascinating birds "**Great Skuas**", a weekend with Peter Fullagar will cure you forever). The incessant passerby from dawn until dusk of every day was the beautiful **Australasian Gannet**.

The Pacific Gulls were close to their northern limit but were not merely incidental. On the last morning, before sunrise, as we watched the ocean from our regular vantage point on the very tip of the Cape, we saw a flock of 32 Pacific Gulls fly over travelling north. In the darkness of early morning, it appeared that all but three were immatures and two of the three adults peeled off the pack to land on the rocks below. They were our neighbours, arriving on the morning bus. They obviously roosted in a colony further south.

The Skuas also provided delightful entertainment, terrorising gannets and other foraging birds. On one

occasion, a large pod of dolphins appeared to be herding a shoal of fish and the gannets, albatrosses and others engaged in a feeding frenzy. As is their wont, a Brown Skua was seen chasing a gannet, latching onto its tail and forcing it to drop its catch and to land on the water awaiting the departure of its tormentor.

Of the other coastal dwellers, the most interesting was a **Black-faced Cormorant** operating near the northern extreme of its range.

The final morning also brought our first whales. A "blow" on the horizon slowly turned into two pods of Humpback Whales moving northwards, blowing at about eight-minute intervals (according to one diligent observer) from the southern horizon to the northern.

Back on terra firma, the birding was far from mundane. Some of the more interesting sightings were a pair of **Striated Grasswren**, **Southern Emu-wrens** and a **Ground Parrot**.



Ground Parrot (*Pezoporus wallicus*)
Photo courtesy **Peter Fullagar**

The last-mentioned was, for many, the highlight of the trip. Far from living up to its reputation as a cryptic skulker, this bird gave us all prolonged and close-up viewings, revealing in detail its plumage and feeding habits. One evening after sunset, a collection of ten COG-ites could be seen (and I hope were photographed) standing in a circle of about 5 metres in radius at whose centre a Ground Parrot fed on grasses, seemingly quite unconcerned. A foreigner (to say nothing of locals) might have thought we were engaged in some religious ceremony.

This story concludes in praise of our group leader, Peter Fullagar. Peter was generous with his unparalleled knowledge and has the gift of a great teacher and story-teller.

David Rosalky

Wednesday Outing 16 June 2004 Goorooyarroo Nature Reserve

A cold morning and some confusion over dates meant that only four members set out on the first ever COG outing to this new reserve. A circuit of about 5km devised by Tom Green took us through a variety of

habitats in the reserve's south. Parched ground, a complete absence of understorey and freezing conditions did not promise well, but we quickly came upon a party of about 30 **Yellow-rumped Thornbills** feeding jerkily in leaf litter. A noisy party of **Crimson Rosellas** chased each other, tails fanned, through the trees. Two **Scarlet Robins** perched nearby.

The summit of Burnt Stump Hill afforded fine views of Civic and the snow capped Brindabellas, but no birds.

Descending to the Pipeline

Track we found **Brown-headed Honeyeaters** feeding in a flowering eucalypt, notably vocal **Weebills**, and

a **Willie Wagtail**. The southern stock dam added an **Australasian Grebe**, a party of **White-winged Choughs** and a **Golden Whistler**. Another dam under Old Joe Hill was devoid of birds.

On the way back to the car park we found **Noisy Miners**, solitary **Yellow-faced** and **Fuscous Honeyeaters**, and an **Eastern Spinebill** feeding in mistletoe. On arrival, a **Wedge-tailed Eagle** was being mobbed by two **Australian Ravens** overhead. The intrusive and insistent bleep bleep call of the Great Yellow Caterpillar Tractor reminded us of the ever advancing new suburbs. 22 species were seen. All present agreed that Goorooyarroo (map available on COG website) was a scenic and interesting addition to Canberra's reserve system which promised even better birding in spring and summer after some much needed rain.

Trevor Lipscombe



Glossy Black-Cockatoo
(*Calyptorhynchus lathami*) **Adult Male**
Photo courtesy **David Cook**

Glossy Black-Cockatoos **Saturday 26 June 2004** **Mount Majura**

11 COG members met in Mackenzie St, Hackett, late on a cold Canberra afternoon. Our purpose was (hopefully) to watch Glossy Black-Cockatoos drinking at one of 2 dams below the southern slopes of Majura, where they had been regularly seen for 6 months or more. We arrived at

the lower dam at about 4.10pm and as previous visits indicated the birds usually didn't start arriving until about 4.30pm, we decided to have a look at the second dam, 100 metres further up the valley. This proved to be a good decision, as two Glossies flew in, calling, as we approached the site. They conveniently perched in the open in a dead tree, which gave everyone great views. A third bird appeared, and then 10 more including a flock of 8. Eventually we saw 9 birds drink, with 4 still waiting their turn when we left just after 5pm. All appeared to be unfazed by our presence and all were still in the trees around the dam when we departed. As well as seeing the Glossies, we saw good numbers of **Australian King-Parrots** flying through the valley, possibly to roost in the nearby pine plantation. Late stayers were also treated to the sight of a **Brown Goshawk**, and brief views of a **Peregrine Falcon** zooming over.

Steve Holliday

TOP END TOUR WITH **THE MAHERS 22 May - 6** **June 2004**

Five member of COG joined with one other for Philip and Patricia Maher's Darwin – Kakadu – Kununurra Birding Tour of the Top End. We all flew to Darwin, and started the tour 22 May, during what

should have been the end of the Wet in this Monsoon Rainforest area. But this year it kept raining occasionally, hence the very high humidity along with the heat of approx. 32° C each day. Because there was more water about there were still a lot of mosquitoes also. We came prepared with an assortment of Aerogard, Rid and Bushman's Deet!

The Darwin Botanical Gardens soon revealed the magnificent Rufous Owl, exactly where it was supposed to be. The mangroves provided us with many species including the elusive

July Meeting **8 pm** **Wednesday** **14 July 2004**

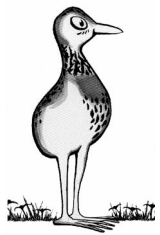
*Canberra Girls Grammar School
cnr Gawler Cres and Melbourne
Ave, Deakin*

Our **short talk** for the evening will be Dr Dominique Homberger, Professor of Zoology at Louisiana State University and currently visiting scientist with CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems in Gungahlin and working at the Microscopy Centre of the CSIRO Black Mountain Laboratories. Dominique, who last spoke to COG on a previous visit in 2000, will this time discuss *Gang-gang* Cockatoo feeding techniques, as illustrated by a Geoffrey Dabb video.

Our **main speaker** will be Dirk Platzen, a doctoral candidate under Dr Rob Magrath's wing at the Australian National University. Dirk will outline his work on vocalisation in the White-browed Scrubwren.

Brave the cold and come along! It should be a varied and stimulating evening showcasing local and imported talent.

Chestnut Rail, Striated Herons, Mangrove Robin and Mangrove Grey Fantail. We saw **Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos** on our first day and every single day thereafter. Other species which seemed to be everywhere we went (even though we



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**2004
Plains-wanderer Weekends**

- ◆ 27 and 28 November
- ◆ 4 and 5 December
- ◆ 11 and 12 December
- ◆ 18 and 19 December

18–28 Sept **Forests and Woodlands of Central NSW including Bird Routes of Barraba & Baradine** New accommodated tour taking in the best of the forests and woodland of central NSW. Starts/finishes in Melbourne

2005 Birding Tours

12 -28 March: New Zealand
NZ options: 11 Feb pelagic for **NZ storm-petrel**; 1-2 March Kapiti Island for **little spotted kiwi**

9–14 March: Tasmania

16–23 March Kangaroo Island

24–30 April: New Caledonia

18–29 May: Gulf Country Q'ld

4–19 June Top End incl Kununurra

8–26 August: Strzelecki Track

Plains-wanderer Weekends 2005

26 & 27 March (Easter)

26 & 27 November

3 & 4 December

10 & 11 December

17 & 18 December

31 December & 1 January

www.philipmaher.com

didn't note them for 1 or 2 of the 16 days) were: **Black and Whistling Kites, Masked Lapwings, Peaceful**

and **Bar-shouldered Doves, Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, Rainbow Lorikeets, Rainbow Bee-eaters, Magpie Larks, Willie Wagtails, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes and Torresian Crows.**

Our early boat trip on Yellow Water, 7-9:20 am, was a definite highlight. We had one boat and one guide all to ourselves, so we had plenty of room, information, shade, views from either side, and no mosquitoes! The birds were not as numerous due to the amount of water still around, but we scored 53 species, including land birds in the vegetation along either side of the South Alligator River. A **Crimson Finch** had a nest low in a Pandanus, and two **White-bellied Sea-Eagles** were building a nest high in a dead tree. Several species of Kingfishers, Egrets, Herons, Ibis and both **Whistling-Ducks** were present. Unfortunately the cane toads *Bufo marinus* have arrived, plus there were several wild pigs including piglets, one monstrous water buffalo (they are getting fewer and the pigs greater in numbers), a Merton's Water Monitor (an aquatic goanna), a tree snake swimming and several Estuarine Crocodiles *Crocodylus porosus* which are so much more enormous than their Freshwater cousins *Crocodylus johnstoni*.

At Gunlom (Waterfall Creek), still in Kakadu, we scrambled up a steep, rocky slope up to and beyond the inviting rock pools. We kept going over boulders and through long grass and were rewarded with long views of three bouncy little **White-throated Grasswrens**. What a delight they were to observe as they investigated, chirruped and scolded – never still for a moment. They were “cheeky, with an air of self-importance” as Slater states. Indeed!

Sewerage Ponds were always a good venue, and Phil knew just where to find them! They sported such finds as dozens of **Pied Herons** in breeding



Australian King-Parrot
(*Alisterus scapularis*)

Photo courtesy **Lindsay Hansch**

plumage, many **Whiskered** and one **White-winged Black Tern**, a pair of **Radjah Shelducks** with a raft of eleven downy ducklings, stately **Black-necked Stilts**, elegant **Black-winged Stilts** and busy **Red-kneed** and **Black-fronted Dotterels**.

Eventually, west of Victoria River, we started to see our first Boab trees *Andansonia gregorii*. What fascinating shapes and sizes they are! The Timber Creek area gave us even more finches. The day before we had spotted the beautiful red-faced **Star Finch** plus the **Yellow-rumped** and **Chestnut-breasted Mannikins** in long grass; next it was good views of **Masked** and **Long-tailed Finches** on the roadside together. And yes! At long last! the colourful red-faced phase of the **Gouldian Finch**, along with lots of duller immatures. That was a very special find for all of us.

We spent four nights at Kununurra, WA with a variety of episodes. During our early am trip on Lake Argyle we were rewarded with views of fat **White-quilled Rock-Pigeons**,

the beautiful echoing song and sight of two **Sandstone Shrike-thrushes**, lots of **Australian Pratincoles**, Northern Nail-tailed Wallabies *Onychogalea unguifera*, huge Garden Orb spiders and their extremely strong silvery webs, and just before we returned – the **Yellow Chats** appeared at the 11th hour!

To the local airport by 05:00 on 4 June, a one-hour flight in a 10-seater aircraft, landing on a grassy runway, and then ferried by an open, no doors, 5-seater helicopter to the Mitchell Plateau – in the middle of nowhere! We were after **Black Grasswrens**. The big boulders were too daunting for half of us, but those who persisted had a good sighting of five eventually. Those of us who were too tired to continue got to see Mertens Falls from the top and cool our feet and legs in the water before it plummeted over the edge. It was an exhausting trip, especially with the heat and humidity, but very rewarding with many new birds, flowers, trees, rainforest, mammals and reptiles seen, plus waterfalls, gorges, cliffs, rivers, lakes, ocean beaches and mudflats. In all, a wonderful experience.

Kay Hahne

Woodland Survey Sites

Winter Survey

Mulligan's Flat Survey

Sunday 27 June 2004

A cold and foggy morning with only 27 species in total was one of the quietest days we have had in the 10 years of the survey. However, low records are still important to a long term project like this. There were a few **Scarlet Robins** around and the usual mix of common (winter) species, **Spotted Pardalote**, **Striated Pardalote**, **Weebill**, **Buff-rumped Thornbill** (one flock around 50 birds), **White-eared Honeyeater**, **White-throated Treecreeper**, but

COG SALES

- **The Long Paddock** - a Directory of Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves in NSW' by Rural Lands Protection Board - \$31.00
- **The Birds of Western NSW: A Preliminary Atlas** - NSW Bird Atlasers - **reduced** to \$5.00
- **Finding Birds in Darwin, Kakadu and Top End** by Niven McCrie and James Watson. \$24.00.
- **Wet and Wild** - A Field Guide to the Freshwater Animals of the Southern Tablelands and High Country" by M Lintermans and W Osborne, \$28.00 (RRP \$34.95).
- **Wildlife on Farms** - by David Lindenmayer RRP \$29.95, **special price** for COG members - \$25.00.
- **Where to Find Birds in NE Queensland** - Joe Wieneke - \$16.00.
- **Reptiles and Frogs of the ACT** - Ross Bennett - \$13.00.
- **Native Trees of the ACT** - \$6.50.
- **Birds of Rottneest Island** – by Denis Saunders & Parry de Rebeira -\$15.00
- **Birds of Rottneest Island** – a check list - \$1.00
- **Grassland Flora** – a Field Guide for the Southern Tablelands (NSW and ACT) – by David Eddy et al. - \$13.00
- **Our Patch** – Field Guide to the Flora of the ACT Region - \$13.00
- **The Nestbox Book** – Gould League - \$9.00
- **Birds of Queensland's Wet Tropics and Great Barrier Reef** by Lloyd Nielsen - \$25.00
- **Guide to the Bird Habitats of NSW (ACT)** NSW Atlasers -was \$27, **reduced** to \$15.00
- **Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT** – by Taylor and Day \$14.00
- Simpson and Days' **Birds of Australia CDROM** Version 5.0 **special price** - \$45.00
- COG Atlas - \$12.00
- COG Car Stickers - \$2.00
- COG Birds of Canberra Gardens Poster - \$4.00
- COG Garden Bird Survey Chart (New Version) - \$1.00
- COG Badges – two colour versions - \$5.00
- COG Birds of the ACT – Two Centuries of Change – by Steve Wilson - \$25.00
- COG Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the ACT - \$1.00
- COG Bird Songs of Canberra – Cassette - \$10.00.

COG T-shirts, Polo shirts, all above and other books on local flora and fauna available at the monthly meeting sales desk or by contacting Carol Macleay (for post and packing costs) on 02 6286 2624.

otherwise no species of interest such as the local decliners. The highlight of the morning was a large flock of **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos** in the reserve; around 30 were seen in the woodland near the Large Dam and another 20 flying at another location, with a couple of observations of pairs flying over; we cannot be sure of the total number, it may have been around 30 or could have been around 50. Interestingly, on the winter survey last year, a flock of around 100 of these cockatoos was around the western ridge and northern end of the reserve. The distribution patterns for this species have certainly changed radically since the January 2003 bushfires, with groups of these birds foraging widely in and around Canberra's urban and woodland reserves. Some of the large Yellow Box trees have budded up, so maybe this spring we might get some flowering!!! Thanks to Noel Luff, Martyn Moffat, Steve Holliday, Kay and Horst Hahne, Suzi Bond, Jack Holland and Sue Lashko for doing the surveys with me.

The next survey date is Sunday 26 September 2004 - regular volunteers note your diaries.

Newline Woodland Survey

Sunday 20 June 2004

I recorded a similar number of species on this survey, 27, as at Mulligan's Flat, but with a rather different mix. Again a flock of **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos** was a highlight with 12 birds in the front paddock, some tearing at dead limbs on trees searching for grubs. Two threatened species, **Brown Treecreeper** (4 birds in the front paddock as usual), and **Varied Sittella** (3 birds at site 1 in the front paddock) were recorded. **Spotted** and **Striated Pardalotes** were numerous, and several species of honeyeater were around the front paddock (Fuscous, Yellow-faced and White-naped), but

not in the numbers which had been recorded by some people there a few weeks prior. There seems to be no flowering there so these birds must be feeding on insects or passing through.

South Gooroo Woodland Survey

Thursday 24 June 2004

Steve Holliday and Dave Cook did the surveys at this new woodland site in the southern half of the new Gooroo reserve, on a cold and increasingly windy morning. They reported plenty of small bird activity, with over 30 species seen or heard. Highlights were one **Brown Treecreeper** at the usual location at the southern end of the reserve (this seems to be the sole surviving Brown Treecreeper in the whole of the 1500 odd hectares at Mulligan's Flat/Gooroo Reserves!), male **Flame Robin**, **Speckled Warbler** and **Southern Whiteface** all at the BTC site, (site 1), **Varied Sittellas** in the woodland near the car park off Horse Park Drive, **Yellow Thornbill** (first time since we started the surveys) and a **Brown Goshawk**. Thank you Steve and Dave.

Jenny Bounds

Report of the June COG Meeting

The short talk was given by Martin Butterfield on changes to the GBS form for 2004-2005. These are explained in Martin's column elsewhere in *Gang-gang*.

The main speaker was Nick Nicholls from CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems on the topic, 'Methods of Surveying Birds'. Some of us survey birds simply for enjoyment, but others want to answer questions about distribution, population dynamics and avian biology, while still others are interested in habitat preference, behaviour and breeding. The fact that two atlases have now been published shows the importance

of long-term data collection. However, there is no acceptable process for getting consistent counts because we are dealing with highly mobile subjects.

The four main categories of census methods are:

- Mapping territories or nest sites
- Transect counts, where the surveyor walks along a line and counts within a certain distance of that line
- Interval point counts, where the surveyor sits at one point and counts within a fixed or variable radius of that point
- Mist net captures, which are used to answer questions about biology rather than count. This method is useful for cryptic species or in dense vegetation.

But how effective are these methods when counts vary depending on a variety of factors, including season, time of day and weather?

Nick concluded by saying that surveying birds is a 'can of worms'; his advice was to survey to suit the question you are trying to answer.

Sue Lashko



Swift Parrot (*Lathamus discolor*)
Photo courtesy **Geoffrey Dabb**

Future Field Trips

Wednesday Walk

There is an informal walk on the third Wednesday of each month (ie the

wed. after the COG meeting. These are gentle outings to nearby places starting at 9 am and finishing by lunchtime.

The next outing is on the 21 July at the Botanic Gardens where we will look for Crescent and New Holland Honeyeaters. Meet Tom Green in the carpark at 9 am.

Botanic Gardens; Sunday 11 July – Bush Birds for Beginners morning – note originally advertised for Saturday 10 July.

This morning walk will be the first for 2004 aimed specifically to help beginners and new members identify birds and to learn about their calls. The Botanic Gardens are especially suitable for such an outing, as they allow the opportunity to observe a range of local bush birds in a variety of habitats. Due to the available food supply they are also a relative haven for birds during winter. Anthony Overs will lead this outing, which will consist of a stroll through this lovely part of Canberra for several hours from 9.30 am, meeting at the bus shelter. Please book your place with Anthony (6254 0168, or by Email on anthony.overs.reps@aph.gov.au), who will be happy to discuss whether this outing is suitable for you. Please also don't forget to bring your binoculars and field guide.

Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve; Saturday 17 July or Sunday 18th July depending on weather – Superb Lyrebird survey

Chris Davey and Peter Fullagar, who have been monitoring the return of the Superb Lyrebird to an area of the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve since the January 2003 bushfires, wish to remind members that they are still looking for help with the Superb Lyrebird survey at the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve.

They wish to get an idea of the

present distribution within the Reserve and are asking COG members who know the call of the Lyrebird to join them for a morning's survey. They are calling for expressions of interest to join them at 8.00 am to walk the trails and to record the locations of calling birds. At this stage they envisage the survey will take about three hours.

Further details will be announced at the July COG meeting. If interested please contact Chris Davey on 6254 6324 (H) or Peter Fullagar on 6161 4808 (H).

Bungonia; Sunday 25 July – all day outing

A winter's day's birding is planned for the spectacular area around Bungonia Gorge. Hopefully many of the wildflowers will be in bloom by then and this should mean a big range of honeyeaters should be seen. While there in April the leaders also saw **Superb Lyrebirds** from the picnic table and a **Peregrine Falcon** gliding through the gorge – they saw over 30 species in the half day they were there.

After meeting at 9.15 am at the Visitor's Centre (\$7 Park use fee applies), we will head down to the look-outs to see the view (and birds) before heading off on one of the easy walks. After a picnic lunch, at a different lookout, we will walk along a woodland track where Koalas have reportedly been seen.

There is a good camping area at Bungonia (including a new camp kitchen etc) for those that wish to make a weekend of it (or sleep-in a little bit longer). Bungonia can be accessed via Tarago on dirt roads or it is approximately 30 minutes east of Goulburn on a sealed road. Contact John Goldie on 6241 7639 (H) for more details. The usual warnings about the weather, footwear etc apply for being out all day in winter.

NOTE – this outing is being advertised to the Illawarra Bird

Observers Club (IBOC) as an informal joint outing. A more formal shorebird outing based on the Shoalhaven is being planned for the weekend of 4-5 December. More details later, but in the meantime pencil this date into your diaries.

Lake Burley Griffin, Yarralumla Bay; Sunday 8 August - Waterbirds for Beginners

This will be the second of the outings for 2004 designed specifically for new members and/or beginners, in this case to learn about waterbirds.

Meet Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au) at 8.30 am in the car park of the Yarralumla Bay Swimming Area off Alexandrina Drive, just to the NE of the junction with Hopetoun Circuit (see Map 58 of the Yellow Pages). We will be walking (initially with the sun behind us) for a km or so along the southern shores of Lake Burley Griffin, perhaps a little way into Weston Park before retracing our steps. This is a good area for viewing waterbirds up close and the identification features of the common species such as the various ducks, "waterhens" and cormorants will be pointed out. We will also be on the look out for any early Silver Gull nesting activity on the boats moored in the bays, as well as for any Black Swans and other species nesting in the fringing vegetation. A variety of land birds are also likely to be seen. Please don't forget to bring your binoculars and field guide.

Remnants and Reveg, Saturday 21 August - Morning outing

COG has been working with Greening Australia for the last 4 years documenting the habitat value of native revegetation on farms. This morning outing will visit a farm in the Gundaroo area where a large patch of revegetation is home to over

40 species of birds. Also on the property is a magnificent remnant woodland where we will be able to compare the bird community with that of the revegetation.

Meet Nicki Taws at the Shell Service Station on the Federal Highway, Watson at 8 am to pool cars. If you can't meet here, call Nicki (6251 0303, 0408 210 736) to get directions.

Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve— Sunday 5 September, morning outing – fire recovery

This outing is designed to allow COG members to see how the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, one of the places most devastated by the 18 January 2003 bushfires, is recovering and what bird species have remained or are returning. It will be led by members of Friends of Tidbinbilla, who have been regularly monitoring the birds there since the fires. More details of the leader, as well as the time and place to meet, will be in the August *Gang-gang*.

2005 Calendar 2005 Calendar

While only half of the year is over, it is already time to start thinking about the 2005 COG Field Trips Program. If you have any places that you think are worth visiting next year, favourite places that COG should visit, past outings that you think ought to be repeated, or comments on the types of outings that should be included in our program, please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au). Offers to lead outings in 2005 will also be gratefully accepted.

From the COG Committee

The Committee met on 16 June 2004 and considered, amongst other more routine business matters, the following items. If any COG member would like more information on any

of these issues, please contact the nominated Committee member.

After lengthy and detailed consideration the COG email lists, currently hosted by Topica, will be moved to Quadra Hosting. (David McDonald 6231 8904)

Artwork for the Birds Australia Pocket Guide is close to completion and a meeting has been arranged for the following week to agree on the labels before sending the draft guide to the designer (Jack Holland 6288 7840).

The COG Observation Information System was formally presented to COG on 7 June 2004. As part of this presentation COG received the system and detailed user and administration manuals. The system is still in the testing stage but looks to deliver all that was required and more. (David McDonald 6231 8904)

Committee agreed to decline the offer of office space in the new Griffin Centre (yet to be built) on grounds of expense, and lack of suitability. We will maintain our current office for some time and are investigating storage possibilities in the new centre. (Barbara Allan 6254 6520)

Other surveys/Activities of Interest to COG Members

The next **Swift Parrot/Regent Honeyeater survey** is over the weekend of **31 July/1 August**. If anyone is interested, please contact Debbie Saunders (swiftparrots@yahoo.com.au or Freecall 1800 66 57 66). In particular members who participated in the survey as part of the COG outing on 16 May may be interested in participating.

PASSIVE SOLAR HOUSE

South Rosedale

Arupingi is a passive solar house situated in a peaceful bushland setting in South Rosedale. Birdwatching is possible from the comfort of a chair on the front or back deck. For the more energetic, Guerrilla Bay and Burrewarra Point are within walking distance. The wetlands at Barling's Beach are only a few kilometers away. Rich birding is available in almost any direction, the Eurobodalla Botanical Gardens are a favourite spot. The front beach at Rosedale is patrolled by the resident white sea-eagle. Tariff - \$50 per night; \$250 per week (\$300 per week in school holidays); 3 night weekend \$125; 15 December to 31 January - \$400 per week.

Further details contact – Greg or Sallie Ramsay, 31 MacRobertson St, MAWSON, ACT 2607, phone 6286 1564 or e-mail at greg.ramsay@argel.com.au

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MUDBRICK COTTAGE

Mallacoota

Our mudbrick cottage is available for rental for all those nature lovers out there!! It is set amongst the trees in Mallacoota, Victoria (approximately 4 hours drive from Canberra). It is only 10 minutes walk to the beach, 5 minutes walk to the golf course and about 15 minutes walk to town. It sleeps 4-6 upstairs and there is a sofa bed downstairs. It is fully self-contained with a kitchen and laundry. Please contact Barbara de Bruine (02 – 62583531) for further information.

Help with frequently asked questions please

As COG secretary, I am constantly amazed at the steady stream of questions that are asked of COG, by phone or email. Being a researcher by trade, I could normally cope with them, given time, but time is not always available. So how about lending a helping hand and pulling

together information on one or more of the following topics (analysis not necessarily required, just hard data, not anecdotes) so that COG can have useful files to refer to when the question next pops up? Let me know which issue you'll take on board. Some are dead simple, others more challenging. No set timeframe. All contributions most gratefully received. Any source ok but please acknowledge and date contributions. And if you can think of other topics we're sure to be asked at some stage, and you'd like to research, please let me know.

Do cat bells work?

Do bird shapes on window glass stop birds flying into it?

How can I stop birds attacking ... windows/car windows/verandas/posts/

Is there a local supplier of nest-boxes?

Who do I call to get a parrot out of a wall cavity? a magpie released from fishing wire etc etc (i.e. local rescue services current contact details, hours of operation, species they won't bother with, etc etc)

How do I treat a sick/injured bird?

Which birds are kept/bred in captivity in the ACT? Relevant associations, publications, contact details.

List of birding holiday/accommodation websites, recommendations

Up to date contact details, personnel, operating hours, for other environmental groups in the ACT

Which birds are particularly susceptible to nesting disturbance? Ethical birding around nesting birds generally.

What, when and if one should feed wild birds

Birdlists for (any region)

Where's the best place to get binoculars repaired?

A guide to the most 'suitable'

binoculars for birdwatching.

What are the laws governing birds in Australia?

Suitable educational videos on Australian birds.

Good local, overseas, birding websites and their coverage.

Barbara Allan

Notices Notices

Adopt-a-Bird

Over time, various COG members have, as it were, taken a local avian species or two under their wing for a variety of reasons: inherent interest; access to useful observation sites or sources of information; formal study, etc. Many of those members have been gently persuaded to provide written accounts of their special bird, its abundance, location, breeding, endearing or not so endearing habits, et cetera. Others have been encouraged to share their enthusiasm via a short talk at a monthly meeting. For fairly obvious reasons, I'd love to encourage more of this! So, how about adopting a local bird? No commitments need to be entered into concerning papers or talks, but those options would generally be available (i.e. I'll keep trying).

Past publishing activity suggests that the following species or families are already 'adopted':

Satin Bowerbird – Jack Holland

Honeyeaters (migrating) – Muriel Brookfield; Elizabeth Cumpston

Gang-gang Cockatoo – Geoffrey Dabb

Painted & Regent Honeyeater – Jenny Bounds

Spotted Turtle-Dove – Harvey Perkins

Common Myna – Chris Tidemann

Waders – Michael Lenz

Australian King-Parrot breeding in CNP – Chris Davey

Hooded Robin – Bill Graham

Darter – Barbara Allan

Common Koel – Barbara Allan

There are many potentially interesting avian developments going on in our local area: for example, the apparent proliferation of corellas; the rise and rise of the Crested Pigeon; the apparent decline of the House Sparrow; and the recent presence of Glossy Black-Cockatoos. How about 'adopting' one of these? No expertise required, just a willingness to take a particular interest in one of our local species, to pull together information and think about what it all means.

Expert help will be provided as required. The COG email discussion list would always be a good source of information for starters. I'll maintain an 'adoptions' list and contact details [and publish them on our website and in *Gang-gang*] so that folk can advise you of specific sightings and items of interest.

Barbara Allan

Shorebirds of Port Stephens

Hunter Bird Observers Club has recently produced a detailed report about the shorebirds of Port Stephens NSW, considering both recent and historical perspectives. This includes the results of the February 2004 comprehensive survey of Port Stephens by HBOC, when over 2000 waders (14 species) were recorded and also nearly 2,500 other waterbirds. The results of monthly surveys at Worimi Nature Reserve since September 2000 are also described, and records from a large number of other sources dating back to 1971 have been analysed. 22 migratory wader species and 10 Australian waders are known to have been recorded around Port Stephens. The report clearly shows the importance of Port Stephens for some species of migratory shorebird (such as

Eastern Curlew, with at least 1.7% of the total population present each year) and also for some of the Australian resident waders (for example, Pied Oystercatcher). Copies of the 65 page report are available at a cost of \$20 each plus \$2.50 postage and handling (for 1-3 copies), by sending a cheque or postal order to:

The Secretary
Hunter Bird Observers Club
PO Box 24
New Lambton NSW 2305.

Frances Czwalińska
BIGnet Coordinator
5 Lipsia Place
Carlingford, NSW 2118
Tel/Fax (02) 9872 4185, Mobile
0414 776 475
Email:
secretarybird@bigpond.com

Conservation Council Seeking Assistance/Donations to promote environmental/conservation issues in ACT Election Campaign

The ACT Election will be held on 16 October. The Conservation Council is apolitical and does not support any particular party. However, as part of its work, the Council is actively involved in promoting environmental and conservation issues in the lead up to the election. Activities include communicating key messages to politicians, bureaucrats, member groups, and the community, and informing electors about which candidates are committed to environmental issues.

Election campaign working group. Council is seeing people interested in working in a small team on election related activities. Nominees have to be able to devote some time during the 12 weeks of the campaign, including attending fortnightly

campaign meetings.

Employment of a campaign officer for two days a week for three months to coordinate the Council's election campaign activities. Tasks include: editing issues papers, bi-weekly e-bulletins, organising an event with candidates, coordinating the media campaign.

Anyone interested in helping on the working group as a volunteer or applying for the paid campaign officer, contact Trish Harrup, Director, Conservation Council, phone 6247 7808.

Donations to the Bogong Fund to support this work are also being sought: Contributions over \$2 to the Bogong Fund are tax deductible. To make a contribution donors can either: send a cheque to The Bogong Fund, GPO Box 1875 Canberra ACT 2601, or direct deposit to CCSERAC Inc. Bogong Fund (BSB 062919) Ac # 10072428.

(Note: COG is an apolitical organisation, and as a member group of the Conservation Council, supports the Council's work on environmental issues affecting native birds and their habitats.)



Australian Pelican
(*Pelecanus conspicillatus*)

Photo courtesy **Lindsay Hansch**

Avian Whimsy # 22

“Where have all the waterbirds gone?”

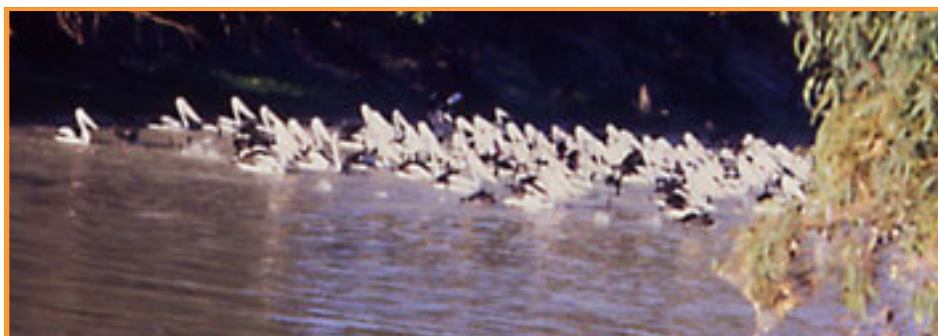
For some months now I've not been able to help repeatedly re-positing the question asked (more or less) by Pete Seeger way back in 1961. (43 years ago – is not that a scary thought?!)

In February I spent a week birding in the area between Cairns and Mt Carbine and I felt as though I was in a different world from the area I know well and have often birded. There were no waterbirds! I am used to the region's swamps and streams and dams flapping and raucous with life so the almost total dearth felt quite bizarrely unnatural. And I am not just talking about lower numbers; for those who know the place, try to imagine Centennial Lakes in Cairns without a single duck or ibis or heron. Lake Mitchell, normally needing a couple of hours just to peruse all the flocks to find the specials inevitably lurking amongst them, was as if a giant vacuum cleaner had descended on it. Abattoir Swamp had not even a Swamp Hen! And so on, for lake after dam after swamp. A local professional birdo reported that he'd never seen anything like it.

There wasn't much in the Riverina in May either. Where on earth – literally – had they gone?

I've been gnawing on it ever since, annoying anyone who'd listen to me worrying over it. I was convinced that the answer must lie in south-west Queensland, where the rains fell in January for the first time in four years. Finally it got too much, so at the beginning of June I rolled my swag (and put it on the roof-rack, not my back!) and headed off for a couple of weeks, in defiance of the logic of time and finances.

I love that part of the world; I'd last seen it two years ago, already two years into the drought that only broke this year. Clearly the rain had had an



'Bounty on the Georgina, June 1997'

Photo courtesy **Ian Fraser**

enormous impact – it was still having one in the Cunnamulla area where I managed to bog my 4WD on Bowra Station. Further north however the land was drying rapidly and birds were scattering. Budgies, Cockatiels, Zebra Finches, Diamond Doves and Crimson Chats were ubiquitous but other nomads were already conspicuously absent. There were very few Brolgas except in the south, and the same for other 'indicator' nomads such as Bustards, Pratincoles, Inland Dotterels, Orange Chats and Black-tailed Native Hens. At Welford National Park south of Jundah the vast areas of fleshy pink Portulaca were drying from the plains, but the last of the crop of Eremophila flowers was still attracting flocks of Pied Honeyeaters – I counted 18 in one small dead tree. Elsewhere in the same park I climbed one of the eastern-most dunes in Australia, drenched in melancholy from the incessant 'psee' of the Black Honeyeaters feeding on the strange big green pea flowers of *Crotolaria cunninghamii*. Further north again, Lochern National Park between Jundah and Longreach had just about entirely dried out again and the bird diaspora was almost complete. And to the east, at the Idalia National Park camp, Hall's Babblers still bounded through, but there was little evidence of the rain there at all.

But, of course all this is begging the key question – what of the missing waterbirds? Perhaps I can best answer that by saying that on day 10 I saw

my first White-faced Heron and Straw-necked Ibis of the trip... Singular, in each case (and in Blackall, for the record.) I saw Pelicans – mostly singles – on just three days out of 14. In any country, let alone the rich meandering channels and permanent waterholes of the Thompson and Barcoo Rivers and Billabong Creek, this is almost unthinkable.

So, where to now? Maybe further west again in the channel country of the Diamantina and Georgina? In winter of 1997 after the floods I was left reeling with the richness of the birding bounty there.

Part of me hates not knowing, but at the same time I quite like the idea that there are so many natural mysteries still out there. Still, if you've got any clues...

Ian Fraser ianf@pcug.org.au

GBS Central #3

Things have been rather quiet in my garden for the last month, but not in some others.

In one garden at least the quiet has been disturbed by a flock of mynas which have taken up residence. After a request to the chatline a number of methods for their removal were received by the garden's owner and are about to be implemented. Updates will follow.

A more pleasant report was of a dark-phase **White-bellied cuckoo-shrike**

(WBCS) in a yard in Hackett. One presumes the rarities panel will have no problem with a report of this rather distinctive bird!

There have been other pleasant reports of less rare birds. These have included **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos** continuing to turn up in gardens (and I saw some this morning in the vice-regal one, although he doesn't complete a chart – yet). The final observation item is that there have been two reports (from Kambah and Griffiths) of **Satin Bowerbirds** in the garden. As the Kambah report included a blue bird further reports are hoped for.

I've used data from GBS records to provide an insight into the timing of galah breeding for a researcher from Cornell U who will be coming here later in the year to do field work for her studies of the birds. I hope to turn out a brief note about this, and some data on magpie breeding data in the near future.

Also on the data utilisation front, Chris Davey has been using GBS data to study the declining abundance of house sparrows in Canberra (they are now a 'red-listed' bird in the UK) giving interesting results. He now wishes to extend his study to other species but would appreciate some help in undertaking some basic data manipulation. If anyone has time and



Grey Currawong (*Strepera versicolor*)

Photo courtesy **Martin Butterfield**

a computer to assist him could they contact him at
Chris.Davey@csiro.au.

Finally, can I give 2 reminders:

People who wish to complete one or more GBS charts for year 24 can pick them up at the sales desk at each meeting (or from my house – please email mfbutter@bigpond.com or phone 6253 1286 to make sure I'm home);

To help with the timely preparation of the GBS (following data entry by

the indefatigable Kay Hahne) could everyone please hand in their forms at the July Meeting or by contacting me as above.

Happy garden watching!!

Martin Butterfield

Next newsletter

AUGUST deadline
Wednesday 28 July 2004

Please send updates, articles, advertisements etcetera to
Tanya Rough,
Editor *Gang-gang*
rough.boden@apex.net.au
Ph: 6161 0151 (ah)

Articles should be less than 500 words (300 for reports of 1-day field trips; except by prior arrangement with the editor.
Print photographs with or without articles are encouraged and welcomed.

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and Sue Lashko

Newsletter distribution

Lia Battisson and helpers

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

<http://www.canberrabirds.org.au>

COG membership

2004-2005 membership: Individuals,
families and institutions: \$35. school
students (under 18): \$17.50.

Office (6247 4996)

COG maintains an office in room
G5, Griffin Centre, Bunda Street,
civic.

Office volunteers are not in
attendance for regular opening
hours.

Members access by prior
arrangement.

COG E-mail Discussion List

COG has an email announcement
and discussion list for members and
friends of COG: 'Canberra Birding',
also known by the nickname 'cog-1'.
Join the list by sending a blank
email message to canberrabirds@canberrabirds.org.au.



Gang-gang

If undeliverable, please return to
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