

# Gang-gang

July 2006

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

## Monthly Meeting

**8 pm Wednesday**

**12 July 2006**

*Canberra Girls Grammar School  
corner Gawler Cres and Melbourne  
Ave, Deakin. The meetings are held in  
the Multi-media Theatre at the School.  
Enter off Gawler Crescent using the  
school road signposted as Gabriel  
Drive. If that car-park is full, enter  
using Chapel Drive.*

**Dr Peter Fullagar**, long-time COG member and former CSIRO staffer, will give the short talk on the progress of the Superb Lyrebird research he and Chris Davey have been conducting at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve.

Our main talk will be by Drs **Erik and Veronica Doerr**, who are now based at CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems, engaged in work focusing on dispersal strategies in fragmented landscapes. Their talk is entitled 'The Days of Their Lives: what the Brown Treecreeper soap opera can tell us about cooperation, scientific methods, and the future of Australia's woodland birds'. Small and brown though they may be, Brown Treecreepers lead the most extraordinary social lives. From single motherhood to philandering by both sexes to mafia-style dynasties and turf wars, they can tell us a great deal about why any species (including humans) tries to cooperate, and why cooperation seems to go hand-in-hand with conflict. Their habitat requirements and dispersal strategies can help us understand what is going wrong with Australia's temperate eucalypt woodlands and what we can do to help ensure they have a future.

**Everyone welcome**

## Field Trip reports

### Barren Grounds -

Kathy Walter and John Goldie organised a delightful outing for 16 Coggers to the Jamberoo Valley. The trip concentrated on Barren Grounds Nature Reserve and nearby 'Ben Ricketts', the property where we stayed in modest but comfortable cabins. Our walks accessed rainforest, tall eucalypts, coastal heathland and presented stunning views of the Illawarra coastline.

Barren Grounds heathland produced sightings of many target birds. There were fleeting looks of the long tail and bright green of a **Ground Parrot** and the brown and light blue of an exquisite **Southern Emuwren**. There were extensive views of the breath-taking **Beautiful Firetail** and the furtive Eastern **Bristlebird**. A **Grey Goshawk** circled above as we approached a lookout. The **Yellow-throated Scrubwren**, **Green Catbird**, **Red-browed Treecreeper**, **Brown Gerygone**, **Brown Cuckoo-dove**, **Superb Lyrebird** and **Large-billed Scrubwren** were the feature sightings of the rainforest and tall eucalypt. Forty seven bird species were identified on the trip.

Those who donned winter woollies and braved the exposed heathland in the predawn light in the hope of a glimpse of the **Ground Parrot** were in for an unexpected surprise. Our cold hands and runny noses were instantly forgotten as the stars of the weekend trip were revealed to us. Jamie Harris from Wollongong, carrying out research for his PhD through surveying mammals, proudly showed us his target species - **Pygmy Possums**. There was a young female, an adult male and a pregnant female possum. They are about the size of a mouse but display possum faces, curling tails and adapted paws. As everything hunts the Pygmy Possum healthy numbers of them are a sign of a healthy bushland. The by-catch, a **Brown Antechinus** and a **Sugar Glider**, also impressed us.



### Vale Dr Ian Currie

COG lost one of its valued long-time members on 26 June, Dr Ian Currie. Our deepest sympathies to Jean and the family, from all their friends in COG.

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## Batemans Bay — 10-12 June

Despite a miserable weather forecast, 16 birders turned out to see what the greater Batemans Bay area had to offer.

On the Saturday we visited Pedro Point south of Moruya Heads. Pedro Pt offers a mix of coastal Banksia scrub, Spotted Gum forest and some large swamps. On the way back we stopped at Toragy Point for some seabird watching and were rewarded with good views of **Australian Gannet**, **Black-browed Albatross**, and a **Giant Petrel**.

We finished with a visit to the oyster lease near South Head where we saw some good birds including **Eastern Curlew**, **Whimbrel**, **Bar-tailed Godwit**, **Striated Heron**, and **Pied Oystercatcher**. Distant views of **Double-banded Plover** were a bonus.

Sunday started with a walk up Bevan Lane behind the Barlings Beach Caravan Park. Even in cold and windy conditions this is a productive area and we saw 28 species in a couple of hours. The best sighting was of a pair of **White-headed Pigeons**. These pigeons have only recently extended their range to the south coast.

We also visited Burewarra Point where we looked from the cliffs for **Black-browed Albatross** and **Fluttering Shearwaters**.

In the afternoon several parties walked on the beach and enjoyed close views of **Fairy Prions** skimming over the breaking waves.

Monday morning dawned clear and very frosty. Our first stop was the Eurobodalla Botanic Gardens where the entry path was slippery with ice. After a foray into the freezing shadows of the creek that yielded very few birds we retreated to the sunniest garden beds where **Superb Fairywrens** kept us entertained. Morning tea seemed like a good idea so we retreated to the sunny forecourt of the visitors' centre. Those of us who lingered over their coffee had lengthy views of a pair of **Bassian Thrushes** as they fed on the lawn.

Later in the day some of us visited the boardwalk north of Batemans Bay. Highlights here were a pair of **Sea-eagles**, a male **Rose Robin**, and a late season **Sacred Kingfisher**.



Photo by Rick Kuhn

**White-headed Pigeon**

( *Columba leucomela* )

## Wednesday walk — 21 June

We had intended to bird in Tallaganda State Forest but a heavy shower of rain began as we arrived so we backtracked to Stony Creek Nature Reserve. Stony Creek is about 5 km from Queanbeyan on the Captains Flat road.

Martyn soon found us a mixed feeding flock complete with a pair of **Scarlet Robins**. We wandered further into the reserve but that proved very quiet with only a few **Australian Ravens** and **Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoos** overhead. As we returned to the cars we bumped into the mixed flock again. We had good views of **White-eared**, **Yellow-faced**, **White-naped**, and **Brown-headed Honeyeaters**. We learned a little more about immature **Golden Whistlers** and **Eastern Spinebills**. Large flocks of **Striated** and **Spotted Pardalotes** blew through the treetops along with **Weebills** and **Striated Thornbills**. Several male **Scarlet Robins** were also present along with **White-throated Treecreepers**.

I recorded 18 species for the site, a respectable number for a winter's day.

**Tom Green**

## Winter Woodland Surveys

### Mulligan's Flat Survey - 18 June 2006

A large group of volunteers as well as Kim and Grant, Rangers from Environment ACT, joined us for the winter survey at the reserve. Although conditions were calm and sunny, it was quiet overall, with 35 species recorded. Highlights were two groups of **Varied Sittellas** and a number of **White-eared Honeyeaters**; the latter appeared to be in larger numbers than is usual in the winter. **Scarlet Robins** were around several sites, and a **Brown Falcon** was another good sighting on the eastern side of the reserve. The next survey date is likely to be Sunday 24 September, but this will be confirmed.

### Newline Woodland Survey - 28 June 2006

I picked a very good morning for the newline survey, and although cold and frosty early on, it was clear calm, sunny for

the survey. Highlights in a total species were **Fuscous** and **White-eared Honeyeaters** at several sites, quite a few **Red Wattlebirds** (feeding on lerp in Red Gum, 45 **Red-rumped Parrots**, and a **Collared Sparrowhawk** which stirred things up a bit. I heard **Double-barred Finches** near the dump, but did not see them, and did not record **Jacky Winters**. Looking back on my records, Jacky Winter has not been recorded on all the winter surveys, only in some years. After the survey, I tracked down 3 **Brown Treecreepers** at the southern end of the front paddock, interestingly feeding in the lower canopy leaves like honeyeaters, taking what looked like lerp or other insects. The Red Box is in bud and looks like it could flower soon.

### Other Woodland Sites

At **Majura Field Range** on 27 June, Alison Rowell and I found things rather quiet. The good news is that **Brown Treecreepers** are still near one of our sites at the southern end of the Range (this is not far from Newline); we did not have the opportunity this time to chase them down and confirm how many. The **Hooded Robins** were absent from the usual area - a disappointment for Elizabeth, the Defence Environmental Officer who accompanied us. **Fuscous Honeyeaters** and a group of **White-naped Honeyeaters** were recorded at a Red Box dominated site at the southern end - note, Fuscous also at Newline not far away. A **Wedge-tailed Eagle** was a good sighting later in the morning over the northern end of the Range.

At **Campbell Park**, I assisted Alison Rowell at some of the sites; highlight was a group of 7 **Varied Sittellas**. At **Gooroo South**, I did the four northern sites, with Steve Holliday and Prue Buckley doing the 5 southern sites - the northern sites were rather quiet, with a noticeable number of **White-eared Honeyeaters** around. Steve and Prue reported most sites were pretty quiet, but site 2, in a sheltered gully was jumping with small birds, and incidental birds included **Wedge-tailed Eagle**, **Speckled Warbler** and **Scarlet Robin**.

### Jenny Bounds

## Future Field Trips

The Guidelines for the conduct and advertising of COG field trips have been finalised and placed on the COG web site. Both trip leaders and members/participants should familiarise themselves with these guidelines. In particular, the Registration Form, which can be downloaded, should be completed during each field trip.

### Commonwealth Park: Ducks Plus — Sunday 7 July, morning

Or everything you ever wanted to know about ducks, plus more! Local expert Peter Fullagar will be sharing his vast knowledge about ducks in this outing, which is suitable to both new and experienced members. Join Peter (6161 4808) at Regatta Point at 9 AM for a stroll down to the ponds where we will be looking particularly at ducks and Peter will be pointing out aspects of duck behaviour. Depending on the level of activity we might move to other spots nearby where duck species are also known to gather.

### Wednesday walk – 19 July

The next Wednesday walk will be at the **Australian National Botanical Gardens**. Meet at the Bus Shelter at 9 AM on Wednesday 19 July.



## Australian Ornithological Services P/L

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

[enquiries@philipmaher.com](mailto:enquiries@philipmaher.com)

### 2006 Birding Tours

#### New Caledonia

1 — 8 August  
includes Lifou & Ouvéa Islands

**Plains-wanderer Weekends**  
**Good Food PW Weekend**  
18 & 19 November 2006

**Regular Plains-wanderer weekends**  
December 2 & 3, 9 & 10,  
16 & 17 and 30 & 31

### 2007 Birding Tours

**Tasmanian Endemic Bird and Mammal Tour**  
18—24 February  
Bruny Island, Melaleuca, pelagic

**South West Western Australia**  
27 February — 7 March

**Thailand**  
7—24 April  
co-led with Uthai Treesucon

**Gulf of Carpentaria**  
June 2007—Cairns return

**Strzelecki Track**  
August 2007

**Central Coast NSW inc nearby national parks**  
November 2007  
Barrington, Gloucester & Copeland  
Tops, Munghorn Gap and several others parks

All above tours are accommodated

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



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### **Molonglo Valley Minibus Ecotour — Sunday 23 July**

The Molonglo Valley provides a variety of habitats for thirteen species of birds of prey, most of them breeding. It is one of the richest areas for birds of prey in our area, and unique in being so close to a major city. Some of the Molonglo Valley is proposed for housing development, and this tour will also inform members on these issues. The focus of the day will be looking for and recording birds of prey/raptors, with possibilities including Wedge-tailed Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, and Little Eagle which is becoming rare in the ACT. Our tour will visit Woodstock Nature Reserve on both sides of the Murrumbidgee/Molonglo Rivers, some lookout areas such as Shepherd's Lookout near Holt and Mt Stromlo, Coppins Crossing, and Uriarra Crossing where we will have lunch. There will be some walking so participants need to be sure-footed - an easy 600 metre loop on a graded track down to Shepherd's lookout and back up again, and an undulating walk of about 4.5 km return on a fire trail (moderate grade, includes up and down some slopes). Bring lunch and drinks for the day. Wear sturdy shoes or boots, and appropriate gear for the weather; carry waterproof jacket or raincoat if rain is predicted. It is proposed to use 1 or 2 minibuses for this tour; cost will be in the order of \$17-\$20 per person, depending on final numbers. Meeting time will be 8.30am, at Cooleman Court Shopping Centre in Weston Creek where car parking is available (meeting details and actual cost will be provided later to participants). Tour will finish at 4pm. Jenny Bounds will lead the tour, with Jack Holland driving a second bus if we have the numbers. Seats on the bus are still available. For bookings contact Jenny Bounds, ph 6288 7802.

### **Lake Ginninderra: Waterbirds for beginners — Sunday 6 August**

This is the second of our bird walks in 2006 that is aimed specifically at beginners or new members. Meet Anthony Overs (6254 0168 AH or email on [anthony.overs.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:anthony.overs.reps@aph.gov.au)) at 8.30 AM in the car park at the western end of Diddams Close on Ginninderra Peninsula (also known as Diddams Close Park (see Yellow Pages Map 38, ref A9). We will walk the shores of the peninsula around to the eastern side, then back to the carpark along Diddams Close. We should be able to view several species of waterbirds up close, focusing on the identification features of the common species such as the various ducks, "waterhens" and cormorants. A variety of bush birds are also likely to be seen. Please don't forget to bring your binoculars and field guide.

### **Local Nature Park: Saturday 19 August – morning outing**

Details of this morning walk are still to be finalised. If you have a favourite spot, and particularly if you are able to lead such a walk, please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on [jack.holland@deh.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@deh.gov.au)).

### **Raptor Twitchathon: Sunday 3 September – all day bus trip**

The ambitious aim of this outing is to observe all of the eleven bird of prey species that may be reasonably expected to be seen in the ACT in the one day, and is modelled on the very successful Robin Twitchathon held last year. In particular we will be concentrating on the identification of raptors, which many members find difficult. Some material will be available to assist in this process.

As we will be visiting several spots in the ACT where raptors are likely to be present, transport will be by 12-seater buses. The point of departure will be the National Library car park at 8 am. This is quite central, close to where some species are expected to be, and where the parking is free. It will run until mid afternoon so that the buses can be returned late that afternoon, so please bring morning tea and lunch. Costs will be \$17-20 per person, including the COG admin fee, depending on the number of buses and participants. To get a better idea of numbers could those interested please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on [jack.holland@deh.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@deh.gov.au)) as soon as possible. This will determine whether one or two buses or some tag-a-long vehicles will be required.

A draft route and the exact itinerary will not be determined until closer to the day, and will depend on recent reports of where these birds are, though there will be an attempt to stay within the ACT boundaries. If any member is aware where a particular species can be reliably found and viewed with such a big group, could you please let Jack Holland know.

### **Nangar National Park— October long weekend**

**Nangar National Park** is situated off the Eugowra-Orange Road, approximately 15km east of Eugowra. The delightful amphitheatre-style campground has six wooden tables & benches, but there are plenty of grassy areas for campers not requiring tables. Despite the road being a bit rough on the way in, it's accessible to 2WD cars and camper-trailers. The

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Nangar-Murga range is a very distinctive landmark from all angles, and is a less-known area to Canberra birders. Terrara Creek, which runs through the park, is lined with rocky slopes rich in flowering shrubs and eucalypts including ironbark, tumble-down gum, and bundy. Geoff Butler compiled a plant list of over eighty species on a recent visit. The surrounding landscape has been cleared, leaving the park an oasis harbouring interesting birds including **Peregrine Falcons, Glossy Black Cockatoos, Barking Owls, Turquoise Parrots**, and many other species which rely on the cover and food the park provides. Mammals are plentiful, and the robust, shaggy-coated wallaroo is easy to spot grazing at the base of the hills.

The 'Dripping Rock' homestead ruins have been badly vandalised, but they still give us an insight into what it would have been like to live in such a dry isolated place. Birds hang around here, living off the remains of the garden and collected water. Given enough interest and 4WD's we'll do a 13km drive to the top of Mount Nangar which provides spectacular views to the north.

Apart from birding, walking, and night-time spotlighting, we'll adventure further to places such as **Back-Yamma State Forest & Gum Swamp** at Forbes. A special attraction will be a visit to 'Escort Rock', where Australian history was made, when the gang led by Frank Gardiner held up the gold escort coach and escaped with a huge amount of money. Included in the gang was the "infamous" Ben Hall. Sit in the shade and relive the moment.

Other highlights will include a 'happy hour' around a watering hole in the park, and on the way home a water-bird habitat near Eugowra and a couple of delightful stops on the Lachlan River.

Participants can camp with the leaders in the park, or alternatively stay in Eugowra at the caravan park, or a hotel. If camping in the park, you must be fully self-sufficient and carry adequate water. A 'composting' toilet is on site.

Join leaders Margaret McJannett and Charles Buer for an exhilarating long-weekend; this enigmatic park will have you hankering to go back again and again! To book; **phone** 6161 3450 or **email** [mcjannett9@hotmail.com](mailto:mcjannett9@hotmail.com)

### **COG Tour to Lord Howe Island — 17-24 March 2007**

This is a special package for COG, with a focus on a waders project, with LHI expert guide Ian Hutton, plus Chris Hassell from Broome Bird Observatory and Peter Fullagar (seabird expert and COG member). Some 13 of the 14 regular seabirds should be on the island, as well as the special LHI birds like the Woodhen.

The itinerary will be similar to the COG tour to LHI in November 2005 trip with walks, boat trips, talks etc, but include the wader study project, and Peter and Chris will give lectures on their specialities as well as Ian's LHI ones. Participants will be briefed on the aims of the project, participate under direction of Peter and Chris, and be mailed out results of project paper; plus any ongoing reports that follow on will be reported in COG magazine each year. It should be a very full and interesting week. Accommodation is at the comfortable Somerset apartments (see [www.lordhoweisle.com.au](http://www.lordhoweisle.com.au)). Evening meals are organised at a variety of restaurants.

Inclusive cost per person: \$2550.00 (inclusive of taxes) — 7 nights accommodation at Somerset apartments- 1 brm std twin/double share (separate bedroom with double bed and a single bed in the large lounge; transfers from the airport to accommodation; Ian Hutton Package of 6 x Evening Meals, Museum Dinner/talk night, Glass bottom boat, Round Island boat, 4 Museum slide shows, North Bay day (birds and snorkeling). Applicable taxes (Subject to change).

A number of places are available on the tour. Please contact Jenny Bounds for more information or to book (ph 6288 7802 or email: [jbbounds@optusnet.com.au](mailto:jbbounds@optusnet.com.au)). Bookings will need to be confirmed with a deposit of \$200 per person, cheques made out to Oxley Travel and mailed to Jenny at PO Box 403, Woden, ACT 2606.

Notes: Single bookings will need to be matched for shared accommodation. Single supplement may be available on enquiry at extra cost (likely to be in the order of \$600). Not Included: travel Canberra/Sydney/Canberra; breakfasts and lunches; Ian usually provides a barbecue lunch on the North Bay excursion.

## **Other Surveys/Activities of Interest to COG Members**

### **Viewing the Ducie collection**

At our March meeting Linda Groom, Pictures Librarian at the National Library talked to us about the First Fleet artworks by artist George Raper, how they came to be held by the Ducie family and how the NLA managed to buy them. We have now organised a special COG viewing of the collection in the Pictures Room at the National Library of Australia on **Wednesday 26 July**. There will be two sessions, one at 5 PM and the other at 6 PM, each accommodating 25 people. If you wish to attend, please email Barbara Allan at [allanbm@bigpond.net.au](mailto:allanbm@bigpond.net.au) with your preferred time. Do not just turn up – your slot will be confirmed by Barbara. If more people wish to attend than can be accommodated,

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we'll organise another viewing, NLA permitting. In fairness to the members who receive their Gang-gang in hard copy, 25 places will be reserved for e-mailers or callers (6254 6520) from Wednesday 6 July. If you successfully reserve a place, please assemble in the National Library foyer a few minutes before your viewing timeslot, to be escorted to the viewing area. Latecomers will miss out.

The next **Cowra Woodland survey** will be held over the weekend of 15-16 July. If you are interested in participating please contact Malcolm Fyfe on 6253 0772 or [mfyfe@tpg.com.au](mailto:mfyfe@tpg.com.au).

The second **National Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater survey** weekend for 2006 is on the 5-6 August (1st weekend in August). Survey forms can be obtained from Debbie Saunders, Swift Parrot recovery officer, ([debbie.saunders@environment.nsw.gov.au](mailto:debbie.saunders@environment.nsw.gov.au), ph: 1800 66 57 66), or David Geering ([david.geering@environment.nsw.gov.au](mailto:david.geering@environment.nsw.gov.au), ph: 1800 62 10 56) or from the Birds Australia Swift Parrot web page (<http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au/birds/swift.html>). Volunteers are asked to contact either Debbie or David to nominate the areas they wish to survey or to get some survey area suggestions. COG does not have any organised activity on the first weekend, so why not get some friends together, enjoy the late autumn weather and survey some sites?

### **Barren Grounds - Ground Parrot Survey 9am to noon — Sunday 13 August 2006**

Ground parrot surveys at Barren Grounds have been conducted annually since the January 1983 fire. Volunteers from Birds Australia, COG, CBOC, Birding NSW, the University of Wollongong, NPWS and elsewhere have always come along to help. The results over the past few years have been quite erratic. What will happen this year? Why not dress in your stoutest walking gear, wet weather gear, sun bonnet, take a picnic lunch and find out for yourself? For more information, contact [Jack.Baker@environment.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Jack.Baker@environment.nsw.gov.au)

### **Inaugural Christmas Island Bird Week: 1-7 September 2006**

Over the past two and a half years, Parks Australia has been running an intensive Biodiversity Monitoring Programme (BMP) on Christmas Island. In collaboration with visiting scientists, they have been researching the abundance, trends and status of many of the island's native and introduced species, including bats, reptiles, crabs, insects and, of course, seabirds and land birds. During the inaugural Christmas Island Bird Week (1-7 September 2006), the BMP team and collaborating scientists will be showcasing aspects of their bird research. This will include the opportunity to join the team as they attach micro-electronic tracking devices to the enigmatic Abbott's Booby and Christmas Island Frigatebird, and band Red-tailed Tropicbirds, Brown Boobies, Common Noddies, Christmas Island Goshawks and Java Finches. Participants will get rare and intimate insights into the ecology and behaviour of these exotic island birds, and learn first hand about other aspects of the island's ecology and conservation issues.

Organisers are planning five days of scheduled activities for participants with the visiting scientists, plus nightly seminars on a range of topics and an opportunity to spotlight for the elusive Christmas Island Hawk Owl. Further information about the Bird Week can be found at [www.christmas.net.au](http://www.christmas.net.au)

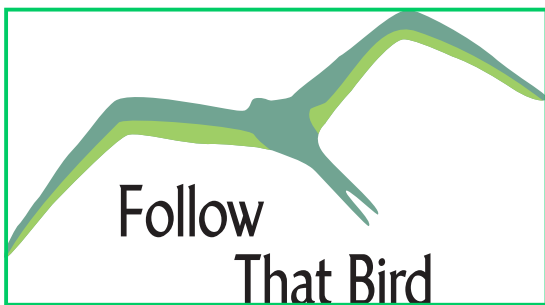
## **From the Committee**

### **Subscription renewal time again (second reminder)**

If you haven't renewed your membership for 2006-07 yet, please consider doing so soon. Join us for another great year's birding and friendship. Fill out an orange membership form from the June Gang-gang or download one from our website [www.canberrabirds.org.au](http://www.canberrabirds.org.au) and send your cheque in to COG, PO Box 301, Civic Square ACT 2608, or transfer the funds electronically, as per the instructions, especially making sure you tell us who you are. We have had a few anonymous transfers so if your next address label does not record that you are financial, and you believe that you are, let us know. Or you can always pay cash at the next COG meeting.

### **Garden Bird Survey**

A reminder that the current GBS period ends on Sunday July 2, so participants are asked to bring their completed 2006 charts to the July meeting or deliver them to David Rosalky or Barbara Allan. Begin your new charts on **Monday, 3 July**. Remember you are counting **all** birds that you see within 100 metres of your house. This equates to almost 3.2 hectares or 32 quarter-acre blocks. Members are therefore encouraged to not just observe birds in their own gardens, but



## **CROWDY HEAD & COMBOYNE PLATEAU 22 - 26 JULY 2006**

**5 DAYS/ 4 NIGHTS \$1495 PP TWIN OR DBLE \$130 SSUPP**

This trip has been especially designed to cater for Canberrans; starting and ending in Canberra with the aim to take you out of the July winter cold and into the Mid North Coast which is quite splendid and often overlooked. There is a generous diversity of bird life on the coast and as you move back to the moist forests around Comboyne with their 40 odd waterfalls.

Few people remain unmoved by the beauty and diversity of Crowdy Bay: the spectacular view of the broad sweep of Crowdy Beach, striking Diamond Head rising abruptly before dropping away gently to the wetlands and heaths of the coastal plain. Birds are prolific with well over a hundred species in the surrounding estuaries and national park.

Resident coucals at our accommodation right on Crowdy Head will delight with their lolloping walk. And below, beside the beach, Chestnut-rumped Heathwrens surprise with their inquisitive gaze while Figbirds yelp and then softly sing in the banksias.

Further inland Comboyne Plateau developed on the deep rich red loam derived from basalt. Large pockets of sub-tropical rainforest remain where Noisy Pitta, Logrunners, Fruit Pigeons and Eastern Whipbirds utilise these plant communities. Along the roadsides, Regent Bowerbirds and Scarlet Honeyeaters are expected to wow you with their spectacular colour.

**Dates:** 22 July to 24 July 2006—5 days /4 nights

**Leader:** Alan Morris

### **Summary**

- \* Escape the Winter Cold
- \* Spectacular Mountain Vistas
- \* Beautiful Beaches & Headlands
- \* Mountain Rainforest Birds

### **Featured Birds**

- \* Noisy Pitta
- \* Logrunners
- \* Regent Bowerbirds
- \* Figbirds

### **Contact us for an itinerary**

**Follow That Bird – Birds and Camaraderie**

**Tel** 02 9973 1865      **Fax** 02 9973 1875

**Email:**      [tours@followthatbird.com.au](mailto:tours@followthatbird.com.au)

**Website:**      [www.followthatbird.com.au](http://www.followthatbird.com.au)

their neighbours’ as well. Any evidence of **breeding** activity should also be recorded on your GBS chart **in accordance with the instructions on the chart**. **Members with queries about GBS records can call David on 6273 1927.**

## Report of June meeting

Dick Schodde’s short talk was on **True Quails** and **Button-quails**, which are as far apart from each other on the phylogenetic tree as “ostriches are from songbirds”. The three most common ACT species are all small and burst up from under your feet, making identification difficult. Dick’s talk is summarised in the table below:

	<b>True Quails</b>	<b>Button-quails</b>
<b>Most common in ACT</b>	Stubble Quail, Brown Quail	Painted Button-quail
<b>Distribution</b>	Many species . Most diverse in Northern Hemisphere	~15 species largely confined to Southern Hemisphere. Most diverse in Africa & Australia
<b>Habitat</b>	Stubble Quail – drier grassland Brown Quail – wetter, thicker grassland	Scrubby habitat, not grass, eg Mt Ainslie, Black Mt
<b>Appearance</b>	Male has brightest colour When flushed -Brown Quail – dull deep-ish brown; Stubble – paler, fawn with semblance of white or pale streaking on back; 3 forward toes, 1 hind toe, often little toe on back of leg	Female has brightest colour When flushed, rufous on back prominent; 3 toes all forward pointing
<b>Social system</b>	Female raises young	Female mates with many males, male incubates eggs and rears young
<b>Call</b>	Brown Quail – breeding call is repeated whistle; Stubble Quail – “chirchy wit” repeated	Sounds like Bronzewing in spring

Robert Gosford, from CRES at the ANU delivered the main talk entitled ‘ **A Central Australian Ornithorium: birds, country and culture in a central Australian desert**’, defining ornithorium as “the complex of notions about and practices concerning the avian world.” Robert’s study area is the Tanami Desert, home of the Warlpiri people. In the Warlpiri world view, birds have importance as a food source, for materials and medicine, and as part of their spiritual life. Robert has gathered information from various sources including reference books on birds, ‘classic’ anthropological texts, land claim evidence, Warlpiri paintings and Kirr Kirr, the interactive Warlpiri dictionary. 228 species of birds from 60 families inhabit the greater Tanami. Of these, he has found Warlpiri names and data for 102 species, as well as partial data on another 38 species. Some families, despite the presence of up to 5 species of each in the Tanami, are covered by a single Warlpiri name. These include the corvids, ducks, herons and egrets, and woodswallows. Most small, inconspicuous birds, such as pardalotes, thornbills, gerygones and whitefaces are not named. Visually conspicuous or common birds tend to have names; for example, **Zebra Finch** has a Warlpiri name, but the other four finches and the two manikins do not. **Wedge-tailed Eagle** and **Grey Falcon** are named, but most other raptors are not.



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One bird that is a cultural keystone species is the **Budgerigar** or **Ngatijirri**. It is the heroic ancestor related to all Warlpiri people; it is a food source; it takes human form, creates places in the landscape and controls mythological knowledge.

From his study of Warlpiri art, Robert has found 30-40 bird species painted, often only as footprints, but identified from the accompanying story. **Grey Falcon** and **Wedge-tailed Eagle** are popular subjects.

With Aboriginal people now owning about half the land and 80% of the coastline in the Northern Territory, they are demanding a greater role in land management on and off Aboriginal land and are now involved in the joint management of 27 National Parks in the NT. By sharing our knowledge, we can all learn from each other.

## From the Archives

*(An occasional series to help the Editor fill the space available)*

**Last year, Cogger Martin Butterfield moved to New York. Following is an extract from the first of his *Yankee Doodlings*, which first appeared in the August 2005 *Gang-gang*.**

The most recent bird I saw in Australia was a **White-faced Heron**, alongside the runway in Sydney as we took off for the USA. The first US bird was a common crow in a similar position in Los Angeles.

Having got to New York we went for a walk the next day in a very warm Central Park but didn't take binoculars until we had sussed things out crime-wise. The place has changed dramatically since the early 1990s with people wandering through the Ramble quite openly. We've been back since and wrote down 20 species, before the warblers really hit their straps, when we nailed 40 species (about 15 warblers) in 2 hours.

Jamaica Bay was also visited with a lurid **Indigo Bunting** the hit for me. The locals were very excited about **Eurasian Widgeon** and a dark phase **Little Blue Heron**. The various other waterfowl here helped get the USA 2005 list up to about 83 at the time of writing.

A less commonly visited spot (just) on Manhattan is Fort Tyron Park which surrounds the Cloisters Museum. This gave us our first **Cardinals** for the trip. The next day they were common in Central Park, including a female incubating on a nest less than a metre off a very busy walkway. I could mention the male **Scarlet Tanagers** being verminous on 15 May but I won't. Why do I find these colourful birds so much more exciting?

The house list only really started after 4 weeks, when we moved to our longer term apartment. It began well with a **Canada Goose** on Roosevelt Island in the East River, visible from the kitchen window. It looked to go even better when Frances spotted a **Great Horned Owl** on the building across E 46<sup>th</sup> St. Unfortunately it turned out to be *Bubo virginianus wal-martii*, being a plastic imitation put up to keep the pigeons away!

I have commented to the chat-line about the 'window list' at work including turkey vulture and osprey. From their location both of these would be eligible for the house list: it will be interesting to put a height dimension to see how the list from the roof (35<sup>th</sup> floor) differs from the apartment proper (15<sup>th</sup> floor). I suspect the arrival of my telescope will greatly enhance both.

This first salvo concludes with the wedding in The Ramble of Central Park in the afternoon of 15 May. This was peak warbler season. Everyone in the wedding party, including the bride, groom and celebrant had their bins with them. Fortunately nothing dramatic came through at the crucial time! So, any Canberra birdos who reckon they are serious might wish to try to match that for dedication!

**Martin Butterfield**

*(The Editor looks forward to further contributions from Martin—and indeed any other Cogger—about their birding experiences, whether in the Big Apple, Burren Junction or anywhere in between.)*

## MUDBRICK COTTAGE

### Mallacoota

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

(02) 62583531.

## PASSIVE SOLAR HOUSE

### South Rosedale

*Arupingi* is a passive solar house situated in a peaceful bushland setting in South Rosedale.

Birdwatching is possible from the comfort of a chair on the front or back deck, while for the more energetic, Guerrilla Bay and Burrewarra Point are within walking distance. The wetlands at Barling's Beach are only a few kilometres away. Rich birding is available in almost any direction. Contact Greg or Sallie Ramsay

(02) 6286 1564

or e-mail

greg.ramsay@actewagl.net.au

## STOP PRESS

**A Grey-headed Lapwing was sighted at Burren Junction, west of Narrabri during June.**

**This was the first recorded sighting of the species in Australia.**

**Congratulations to those Coggers who made the 700 kilometre dash to the Junction to bag the bird.**

# 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 Atlassers - reduced to \$5.00
- **Finding Birds in Darwin, Kakadu and Top End** by Niven McCrie and James Watson. \$24.00.
- **Wet and Wild** - A Field Guide to the Freshwater Animals of the Southern Tablelands and High Country" by M Lintermans and W Osborne, \$28.00 (RRP \$34.95).
- **Wildlife on Farms** - by David Lindenmayer RRP \$29.95, special price for COG members - \$25.00.
- **Where to Find Birds in NE Queensland** - Joe Wieneke - \$16.00.
- **Reptiles and Frogs of the ACT** - Ross Bennett - \$13.00.
- **Native Trees of the ACT** - \$6.50.
- **Birds of Rottnest Island** – by Denis Saunders & Parry de Rebeira - \$15.00
- **Birds of Rottnest Island** – a check list - \$1.00
- **Grassland Flora** – a Field Guide for the Southern Tablelands (NSW and ACT) – by David Eddy et al. - \$13.00
- **Our Patch** – Field Guide to the Flora of the ACT Region - \$13.00
- **The Nestbox Book** – Gould League - \$12.50
- **Birds of Queensland's Wet Tropics and Great Barrier Reef** by Lloyd Nielsen - \$25.00
- **Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT** – by Taylor and Day \$14.00
- Simpson and Days' **Birds of Australia CDROM** Version 5.0 special price - \$45.00
- COG Atlas - \$12.00
- COG Car Stickers - \$2.00
- COG Birds of Canberra Gardens Poster - \$4.00
- COG Garden Bird Survey Chart (New Version) - \$1.00
- COG Badges – two colour versions - \$5.00
- COG Birds of the ACT – Two Centuries of Change – by Steve Wilson - \$25.00
- COG Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the ACT - \$1.00

**COG 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.**

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## Avian Whimsy #43 — The Joy of Ignorance

I think the concept of compound ignorance is a significant one. I understand that it is an important concept in Islamic philosophy; eg “a state in which one not only does not realise his ignorance but considers himself to be knowledgeable”. A friend of mine put it more pithily “he doesn’t know that he doesn’t know”. If this were a more serious forum I might suggest that this is the cause of many of our global problems, but this is only a whimsy after all. I revel in all the things that I don’t know. That is not to say that I think that ignorance is bliss – I will lie awake gnawing at a question that I can’t think of a plausible answer to – but I do love being reminded of how much we in general and me in particular have to learn. Inter alia it helps me remember just how trivial I am in the overall scheme of things, and that’s a most important reminder.

For instance, I have wrestled for some twenty years with the question of why a **Mistletoebird** would waste most of the flesh of the berry, which passes through substantially undigested in as little as twenty minutes, and then place the dropping containing the seed directly on the branch. I can’t accept that the bird is planning for its descendants’ futures – evolution doesn’t work that way. Then some time ago I read that some closely related Asian flowerpeckers have been seen wiping their backsides vigorously on a branch, apparently irritated by the sticky dropping. Since then I’ve seen Mistletoebirds doing likewise; HANZAB describes birds picking adhered seeds off with their bills and wiping that on the branch. And just recently I read in the most recent volume of Handbook of the Birds of the World that it has recently been discovered that some berries

contain a laxative which ensures the rapid passage of the seed through the bird. That’s it! The system had to be driven by the plant rather than the bird to make evolutionary sense. But...I just remembered an inconvenient fact – the bird has entirely done away with a stomach (which is just a blind sac) and instead has effectively a straight tube from end to end to guarantee rapid seed passage. So, there’s still more to explain. And my frisson of exasperation is balanced by a sense of relief – there’s still something to wonder about!

Here are some others that intrigue me, just in case you haven’t got enough of your own to work on. (And of course the solutions to these conundra might well be blindingly obvious to you.) When the two eastern races of magpie meet, they of course readily interbreed, producing intermediate forms; why do Black-backed and White-backed Magpies then maintain essentially separate ranges, with only a narrow band of overlap, rather than form a spreading pool of blended birds? Why do White-throated Treecreepers sweep the surrounds of their nest hollow with a transparent material such as snake skin or insect wings? Why do Striated Pardalotes, which nest in burrows like Spotted Pardalotes elsewhere in Australia, always use tree hollows locally?

We’ve talked about migration previously, but there are many aspects of it that never fail to astonish and intrigue me. The obvious one refers to species such as Short-tailed Shearwaters where the chicks emerge from a burrow after the adults have left and fly, presumably unerringly, to their sub-Arctic feeding grounds. What sort of information is wired into their genes to enable this? (Plus associated questions which I’m sure occur to you too.) A recent study of some migrating Northern Hemisphere songbirds showed that they needed only a third of the sleep that they did while not travelling and were just as alert and competent in behavioural tests as for the rest of the year. They don’t do it by sending half of their brain to sleep (a known trick by some species in other situations) but we don’t know how they do it or why they can’t or don’t do it for the rest of the year. Needless to say a) there are oodles more examples I could mention and b) I’ve run out of space to do so.

Put simply though, there’s a whole very wonderful world to explore out there that that we still know very little about. And I think that’s great!

**Ian Fraser**

([ianf@pcug.org.au](mailto:ianf@pcug.org.au))



**Mistletoebird**  
(*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*)

Photo by Geoffrey Dabb



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### COG welcomes the following new members

Matthew Beaty, Narrabundah

Stephen Fakan, O'Malley

Sandra Henderson, Wanniasa

Chris Ikin, Canberra

Julie and Anton Lindner, Farrer

Maron family, Cook

Julian Robinson, Narrabundah

## Next newsletter

August deadline

Wednesday 26 July 2006

Please send updates, articles, advertisements etcetera to the

Editors of *Gang-gang*

gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au

or send c/- The Secretary

COG, PO Box 301

Civic Square, ACT 2608

Articles should be less than 500 words (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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### 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.

### Office

COG no longer maintains an office. For

all enquiries or access to COG's library

phone Barbara Allen on 6254 6520

### COG website

www.canberrabirds.org.au

### COG membership

2006-2007 memberships:

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

### COG E-mail Discussion List

COG has an email discussion list for members and friends: 'Canberra Birds'.

Join the list by following the links on the COG website or by sending an empty email message to [canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au)

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## Gang-gang

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