

# Gang-gang

June 2007

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

## Monthly Meeting

**8 pm Wednesday  
13 June 2007**

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

The short talk will be given by **Bill Handke**: an update on the progress of the Canberra Indian Myna Action Group.

Our main speaker will be **Richard Hastings**, on "Noisy Miners: bullies of the bush?". Noisy Miners are not the favourite bird of many people, with their reputation of bullying and driving out other birds. This talk will look at the natural history and ecology of the Noisy Miner, and how human practices have allowed this fascinating cooperative and communal breeding honeyeater to flourish, to the detriment of its competitors. The talk will present the results of a four-year Masters research program into the relationship between wildlife corridors, Noisy Miners and small birds in the Southern Highlands, and will give recommendations on plantings that will most help small birds.

**Everyone welcome**

## The Powerful Owl – Canberra's Most Famous Bird?

As most Canberrans would be aware, Anthony Overs and participants in the May Beginners' Bird Walk in the National Botanic Gardens on 13 May located a young **Powerful Owl**, the first ever reported in Canberra. The report below draws on subsequent e-mails sent to the COG Chatline.

Anthony advised that it was only after several lengthy discussions with colleagues that it was decided to publicise the bird's presence. Reasoning was that as the bird was probably passing through, its presence should be advertised to give people the opportunity to see it. It was also concluded that if the bird became tired of being gawked at it would move. Subsequent publicity via the COG Chatline, in the *Canberra Time*, on radio and on the local ABC website resulted in a steady stream of visitors hoping for a look at this rare visitor.

Con Boekel advised that ANBG staff estimated that there were about 400 extra visitors to the gardens just to look at the Owl over four days. Although most people behaved appropriately, the behaviour of some caused some concern, in particular a number trampled on garden beds in order to get that special shot or a closer look and some children tried to make the Owl react by throwing sticks. COG representatives have subsequently had discussions with the ANBG to see if COG could assist in better managing any future similar events. Not surprisingly, dedicated horticulturalists can get upset when they see others trampling their work.

After four days the owl decamped but was sighted again on 24 May. The last report of a sighting to the Chatline was on 27 May.

Julian Robinson has stirred the possum somewhat by posing the question "is there any other single bird that has received as much attention as (i.e. been more famous than) the ANBG Powerful Owl, ever, in the ACT?"

Replies so far (to 31 May) have shown a range of opinions and although Julian seems personally convinced, the discussion may well have a way to go.

Photo by Ian Fraser



**Powerful Owl  
(*Ninox strenua*)**



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## Field Trip reports

### Tallaganda State Forest — Evening owl search — Saturday 28 April 2007

Twenty enthusiastic and well rugged-up COGites joined Anthony Overs for what may now have become an annual event. The weather was fine, slightly breezy and the sky moonlit with the temperature dropping from 12 degrees towards 4 degrees later in the evening. Our convoy, only once momentarily confused, drove along Captains Flat Road before diverting through Rossi to Forestry Headquarters on the edge of the Tallaganda Forest. Here Anthony gave a briefing on the science and practice of nocturnal bird-calling while Carole practiced performing voluntary movement under the substantial weight of the spotlight battery pack.

Our primary target was the **Powerful Owl** that had been seen in the area several times before, including during the previous COG owl search a year ago. April-May is the lead-up to the Powerful Owl breeding season and this makes it the best time of year for locating them. While preparing to nest they will vocalise for territory proclamation or social contact and, more significantly for us, will investigate possible territorial intrusions. The intention in playing the owl's call is to emulate such an intrusion and draw the owl to our location. The calling procedure was explained in suitable detail: stop quietly at site, listen for 5-10 minutes for calls, broadcast the target call for several minutes, wait a couple more minutes while watching for incoming flight against silhouetted sky areas, then check the trees by spotlight.

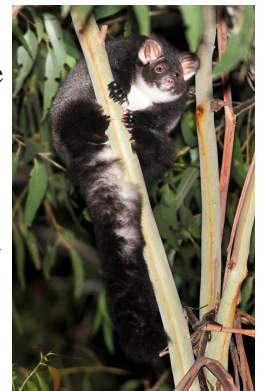


Ring-tailed Possum

Photo by Julian Robinson

We put this into practice at several sites including where the owl was seen last year and at the Lowden Forest picnic area adjacent to the water wheel. The results were not as we might have hoped; however we did find prime 'owl food'. At one location we had splendid views of a **Ring-tailed Possum**, while at the picnic area a **Greater Glider** entertained during our hot drinks and photograph break. Despite the presence of its favoured foods we neither saw nor heard a Powerful Owl. In fact the only birds recorded were a far-off **Boobook** calling and a collection of **Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos** overheard while we were at Forestry HQ.

Although lacking owls, it was an interesting and extremely enjoyable trip with the mammals being the definite highlight. Thanks go to Anthony for organising and educating and the impressive audio hardware.



Greater Glider

Photo by Julian Robinson

**P.S.** — The irony of the spontaneous appearance two weeks later of a Powerful Owl at the Botanic Gardens, very central Canberra, has not been lost on anybody. — **Julian Robinson**

## Future Field Trips

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

### 9-11 June, Far South Coast, long weekend campout/caravan park/accommodated

For this long weekend COG will visit the far south coast, and our stay will be centred on the town of Merimbula which offers a variety of habitats for bird watching. We will be undertaking some joint outings with the Far South Coast Birdwatchers, notably visiting and learning about the Panboola Wetlands and Heritage Reserve, in which they have a key management and maintenance role. We may also sample either of the two bird routes they have developed, walk along the Merimbula boardwalk and/or bird watch on some private land. Overall the proximity of a number of National Parks/reserves and the mix of habitats ranging from open grasslands, bush, forests and heath, to beaches, lakes, rivers, dams and swamps, as well as the sea/ocean should ensure a large variety of birds are seen over the weekend.

However, one problem is that it is the weekend of the Merimbula Jazz festival and accommodation bookings are already heavy. While there are two caravan parks close to the centre of town, as well as a range of other accommodation such as

motels and apartments, COG will be staying at the Scrymgeour's property, "Timbarra", near Wyndham outside of Merimbula. This has plenty of camping spots, as well as some basic, more sheltered accommodation, an outside toilet and a communal BBQ. Intending participants who prefer to stay in more comfortable accommodation in town are strongly advised to book now - Jack Holland (6288 7840 H or [jack.holland@environment.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@environment.gov.au)) can provide some details of options.

Another problem is that while Jack Holland is currently organising this trip, he will be away from late April until shortly before this event. So if you are able to help organise or lead, he'd be very keen to hear from you.

### Wednesday 20 June - Midweek walk

The Wednesday walk for June will be to the area near Coppins Crossing where numbers of robins and finches have been observed recently. An area with good access is available, and if time permits we could go further along the Pipeline Road to look for raptors in the Molonglo Valley. Meet at 9:00 AM at the parking area 100m North of the Crossing. (NB: Parking in the immediate vicinity is a bit limited so carpooling would be good.)

### Sunday 7 July – Commonwealth Park – Ducks Plus 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 for both new and experienced members. Join Peter ([chifley@fullagar.com](mailto:chifley@fullagar.com) or 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.

### Organisers/leaders needed

Please note, we are still looking for a venue and leader for a morning outing on Sunday 22 July as well as for some other identified trips and unidentified venues for local or mid distance day or overnight trips. Please contact Anthony Overs (6254 0168 or [anthony.overs.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:anthony.overs.reps@aph.gov.au)) if you have any ideas.

## News from the Committee

- Members who read the canberrabirds online discussion list, or who have visited the Botanic Gardens recently, will know that a memorial seat has been placed between sections 9 and 11, facing a small watercourse frequented by Crimson Rosellas and other birds. The plaque on the seat on the seat reads:  
**IN MEMORY OF TOM GREEN 1944 - 2007  
BIRDWATCHER AND FRIEND OF NATURE  
(Donated by the members of COG)**
- Barbara Allan is relinquishing many of the roles she has filled in COG over many years. One of these is the production of *Canberra Bird Notes*. Anthony Overs has indicated he is prepared to take on this important role after the June issue of CBN, which will be Barbara's last as editor.



### 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)

### 2007 Birding Tours

22 — 28 July 2007

#### New Caledonia

Including Ouvéa & Lifou Islands  
Stunning birds and flora

### Plains-wanderer Weekends

24/25 November &

1/2, 15/16, 29/30 December 2007

### 2008 Birding Tours

#### February

**Tasmania Birding & Mammal Tour**  
includes pelagic & Melaleuca flight

#### 12-30 March

#### Thailand

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

#### 10-28 August 2008

#### Strzelecki Track Outback Tour

See other 2008 tours on our website

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

- The recent meeting of the Rarities Panel considered a large number of reports, most of which were endorsed.
- Jenny Bounds represented COG at a recent meeting with the Government to discuss proposed fire trails in Namadgi NP. COG members may have seen some press coverage of this issue, with many community groups concerned about a proposed road along the Orroral Ridge.
- At future COG meetings you should see Committee members and some other people (such as Bruce and Esme at the Sales Desk) wearing name badges, to make it easier for members to identify them when needed.
- A joint letter from COG and the Conservation Council has been drafted to encourage the ACT Government to now develop a cat containment policy for the ACT, following on from the initial decision on cat containment for the new suburbs of Forde and Bonner in Gungahlin. This is particularly important with the Molonglo Valley greenfields development not far off
- The Conservation Council's Biodiversity Group has been developing a response to the possible lake proposal downstream of Scrivener Dam; expert advice has been obtained on impacts on the integrity of the river corridor (all very negative impacts), and more sustainable options for dealing with urban run-off and water quality.
- The Committee agreed to support the Conservation Council's appeal for funds by publicising it in Gang-gang (see pages 6-7).

## Other activities of interest to COG members

### Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve- Superb Lyrebird survey - Saturday 23 June.

Since the January 2003 bushfires Peter Fullagar and Chris Davey have been monitoring the return of the Superb Lyrebird to an area of the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. They wish to get an idea of the present distribution within the Reserve and are asking COG members to join them for a morning's survey. They are calling for expressions of interest to join them at 8:30 AM to walk the trails and to record the location of calling birds. Depending on the trails walked the survey should take about three hours.

This outing will be a repeat of the very successful surveys conducted in 2004, 2005 and 2006. If interested and for further details please contact Chris Davey on 62546324 (h), email [chris\\_davey@aapt.net.au](mailto:chris_davey@aapt.net.au).

### Mulligan's Flat Survey - Sunday 24 June

Regular volunteers please note the winter survey will be on Sunday 24 June, meeting at 8:15 AM (winter time) at the gate to the reserves off the old Gundaroo Rd. Wear sturdy shoes, bring clipboard, pencil, eraser and mug for morning tea. I will email a reminder nearer the time.

### Cowra Woodland Birds Program



Cowra Woodland Birds Program (CWBP) is a series of projects aimed at helping to reverse the decline of woodland birds in the Cowra district. The projects are focused on scientific research and the management of birds in their woodland habitats. The CWBP was launched in July 2001 by members of *Birds Australia Southern NSW & ACT Group* and local landholders and land managers.

CWBP's main activity is conducting regular (quarterly) bird surveys at many of the sites in the database, now in its sixth year. From the initial survey in May 2002 with 28 volunteers recording 122 species, the project is now up to 195 species and has had over 50 volunteer surveyors! Currently, surveys are done on about 60 sites and new volunteer surveyors are always welcome! **Survey dates for the remainder of 2007 are July 21/22 and October 20/21.** Anyone

interested in joining a survey should contact Malcolm Fyfe on 6253 0772 or [mfyfe@tpg.com.au](mailto:mfyfe@tpg.com.au)

### 'Bush on the Boundary' Project

I thought it was timely to give a brief update to members about this Project, managed by the Conservation Council and Ginninderra Catchment Group (GCG) with NHT funding through the ACT Government. This project (BoB) aims to engage/involve the Gungahlin community in the protection of their local nature reserves, in particular, Mulligan's Flat and Gorooyaroo which have endangered Yellow Box/Red Gum woodlands. Informing and educating the community to value their local bushland areas is a very important initiative, given the likely impacts of a large Gungahlin population on the nature reserves, and the significant investment in experimental research in the reserves. A full-time Project Officer is employed to undertake the community engagement work, with GCG coordinating some on-ground activities.

BoB has a Reference Group which draws together a number of stakeholders, including Delphin Lend Lease, the developers of the new suburb of Forde which will abut Mulligan's Flat, the ANU/ACT Government Experimental Research Project in the reserves, and Greening Australia which has been contracted to re-vegetate and rehabilitate the drainage line in Forde. I represent COG, as a community group with an active interest in the reserves, on the Reference group. The Reference Group meets regularly to collaborate on and coordinate, where possible, their particular activities.

Some work is being done to survey community attitudes to conservation and the environment, to better target information to the community. One collaborative initiative being developed is a new resident's pack for Forde residents. This suburb will be the first of the cat containment areas in which residents will have to keep their cats within their houses or in outdoor enclosures. Residents will be encouraged to take up the COG Garden Bird Survey and to become involved in a nature reserve support network. Various presentations have also been given to local groups, eg Gungahlin Community Council, and articles written for the Northside Chronicle as well as participation by BoB Groups in the Forde open day. Two "expos" are planned in the future, in which conservation activities in the reserves will be showcased to the community. — **Jenny Bounds**

### What's happening at Mulligan's Flat and Gorooyaroo NR

If you visit the Mulligan's Flat and Gorooyaroo reserves, you will notice quite a lot happening over the coming months. The ANU/ACT Government Research Project is steaming ahead, with the predator proof fence likely to be commenced within months. You may notice stockpiles of logs salvaged from drought affected dead/unsafe trees in urban Canberra; some 2000 tons of these logs will be put into the reserves, in selected areas, as part of the experimental research. Kangaroo exclusion fences are being constructed around some paddocks, eg near the carpark in Gorooyaroo, with the assistance of conservation volunteers, to enable the impact of these grazers to be determined. All these initiatives are being conducted carefully with a view to minimal impact on the reserves. I have been told that the Mulligan's Flat bird walk brochure and bird list, which was revised some time ago, is finally to be printed; hopefully COG will have some copies in June. — **Jenny Bounds**

### SONG

of the

### CRESTFALLEN PIGEON

The pigeon on my window-sill  
adores a bird of wood  
that gazes from this other side  
as if she understood.

Brought here from America,  
she wears a perky crest  
and feathers grey with olive tinge  
adorn her lovely breast.

The pigeon on the outer ledge  
believes he woos a dove  
and cannot comprehend the glass  
that keeps him from his love.

If only I could speak with him  
of love's elusive flame  
I'd cure his sad obsession with  
a bird he cannot claim.

All day he paces up and down  
and pecks upon the pane  
his dotting morse-code plea for sex  
like any featherbrain.

— Sue Edgar



**Crested Pigeon**  
(*Ocyphaps lophotes*)  
Photo by Geoffrey Dabb

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# CONSERVATION COUNCIL OF THE SOUTH EAST REGION AND CANBERRA

3 CHILDERS ST ACTON, GPO BOX 544 CANBERRA 2601

T:02 6229 3200 F:02 6248 5343 [info@consact.org.au](mailto:info@consact.org.au) [www.consact.org.au](http://www.consact.org.au)

**We are facing our  
biggest  
environmental  
challenges ever**

Dear COG member

**This is the most important year for the environment since the Franklin.** In this financial year we need you to support the environment as we face our biggest challenges ever. We need action to prevent dangerous climate change, to save our threatened species and conserve our precious resources now and for the future.

This is the year for action. As the Director of the Conservation Council, I am writing to ask for your urgent support at this critical time. Please help us to achieve that action by making a donation to support our campaigns.

The Conservation Council has continued to campaign for greater environmental protection, stopping the destruction of threatened species by urban sprawl, action on climate change, improved transport alternatives and the wise use of water and other precious resources.

With the financial contributions from our supporters we have succeeded in stopping the building of a new dam in the Naas Valley, mobilized 3000 people to take to the streets for the Walk Against Warming – the biggest ever mobilization on climate change in Canberra - and provided a voice on local environmental issues to government and the community.

In 2007, the Conservation Council will work to protect the woodlands, grasslands and threatened species of the central Molonglo Valley from destruction. We will again ask Canberrans to join the mass movement of people calling for action on climate change by organising Walk Against Warming. This year we are aiming to have at least 10,000 Canberrans taking to the streets. I know that we can win this campaign. We still have time to act to reduce greenhouse emissions below levels that will cause dangerous climate change.

We can't do it without you. The Conservation Council depends on your support to fund our campaign work, as we no longer receive any Federal funding for awareness raising, policy development and advocacy.

We are your voice here for the local environment.

**Your support is vital at this time. Please support our appeal to raise \$25,000 by making a tax deductible donation.** The Conservation Council has been the community voice for the environment in Canberra since 1979 and we will continue to speak out for environmental protection and conservation! Please make a donation to support our important work.

Kind regards



Trish Harrup  
Director

Please accept my tax deductible gift of my choice  \$\_\_\_\_\_  \$100  \$250  \$500 or  \$1000

Enclosed cheque / money order to the **Bogong Fund**

Please debit my  Visa  Mastercard

Name on card \_\_\_\_\_

Card No. \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Name & Postal Address for receipt \_\_\_\_\_

Please add me to the monthly email bulletin @ \_\_\_\_\_

We respect your privacy and will not share your personal information with any other organisation.

You can donate on line through [www.ourcommunity.com.au/ccserac](http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/ccserac)

**Post your donation to: Conservation Council  
GPO BOX 544  
Canberra ACT 2601**

**WHIPBIRD**  
by Suzanne Edgar

If you will sit like patient stone  
among the damp leaf mould  
and watch the whipbird working through  
layers of litter to unfold

a meal of beetles, slaters, worms -  
then, in a sudden shaft of light  
you might be lucky to observe  
in feathers sleek and dark as night

the merest hint, on back and tail,  
like something painted there:  
a subtle, gleaming olive wash.  
It gives the bird a certain air

of unexpected elegance  
down where leeches lie in wait  
and mozzies seethe above the pools  
that slowly dwindle and stagnate.

## HAVE YOUR SAY

In addition to the usual request for articles and trip reports (see page 12) the Editors invite members to contribute shorter pieces for publication in Gang-gang.

Share your experiences, the good and the bad, in prose or poetry.

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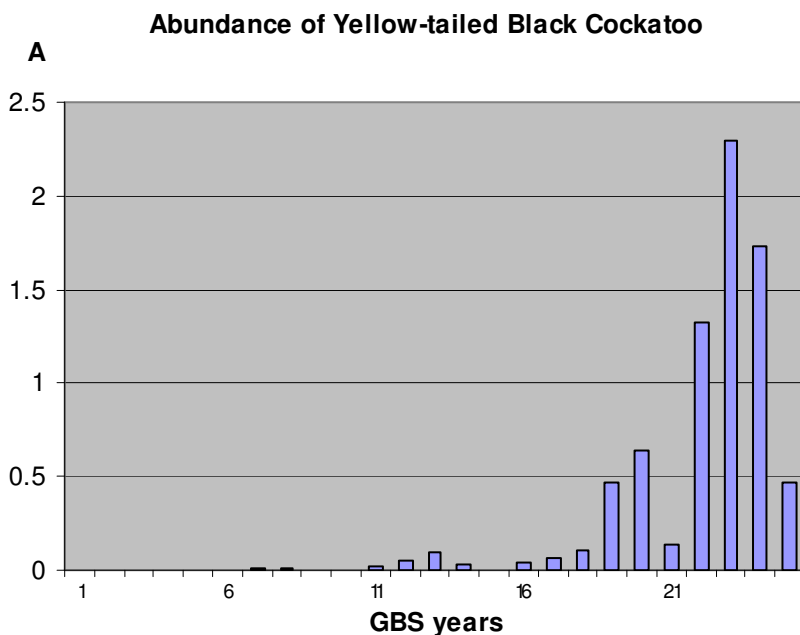
## Garden Bird Survey Notes

There have been few reports of rarities in GBS sites on the chatline. One report gave a near miss (by 50 metres) for **Swift Parrots** for a site in Kambah.

There have been other reports, through various ways, of Powerful Owl(s) in the metropolitan area including one in a non-member's garden in Campbell. Thus far the only record in the GBS was from a work site at Crace.

There was considerable discussion about an apparent increase in the number of **Weebills** seen in recent months. It will be interesting to see how this is reflected in the overall GBS data for year 26 when it is processed later in the year. Another topic covered on the chatline was the autumn migration of **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters**. Again, it will be interesting to see how this is reflected in the GBS results.

The *Annual Bird Report* for 2005/06 notes that the number of **Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos** (YTBC) reported in year 25 dropped compared with 2004/05. The chart below shows the values of A for each year of the GBS. The very low values in early years cause the writer to recall that in the early days of the (telephone) hotline one of the exciting topics was a flock of about 30 YTBCs near the Cotter pub!



New charts for 2007/08 will be available at the June meeting (for those who didn't pick them up in May). If contributors can't make it to the June meeting but wish to pick up a new Chart before the end of the year please contact me on email [martinflab@gmail.com](mailto:martinflab@gmail.com). Please note that to manage the survey it is most important that people advise their contact details when collecting their chart: a sign up sheet will be available at the meeting. — **Martin Butterfield**





## Limited Edition

### Framed and unframed Wild Bird Photographs

by Stuart Harris  
& David Cook

See our range at  
[naturefocus.com.au](http://naturefocus.com.au)

Email us at  
[stuart@naturefocus.com.au](mailto:stuart@naturefocus.com.au)  
or [david@naturefocus.com.au](mailto:david@naturefocus.com.au)



**Note: Special COG Prices**, with \$10 from every purchase being donated to the Canberra Birds Conservation Fund

## Gleanings from the Chatline

*A small selection of items from the COG Chatline which caught the Editor's eye*

*(NOTE: Reports of sightings of rare species have not been endorsed by the Rarities Committee)*

Major topics discussed on the Chatline last month included:

- The **Powerful Owl** in the Botanic Gardens (of course!).
- The abundance of **finches** and **robins** not far downstream from Coppins Crossing (dubbed "Finch Central" by some) and the likely impact on the bird life in this area of the proposed urban development in the East Molonglo/Coppins Crossing region. Details of the proposals are on the Conservation Council website [www.consact.org.au](http://www.consact.org.au) as well as the ACT Planning and Land Authority website [http://www.actpla.act.gov.au/topics/programs\\_projects/planning\\_studies/molongolo\\_planning\\_study/background](http://www.actpla.act.gov.au/topics/programs_projects/planning_studies/molongolo_planning_study/background). As the ACT Government will decide on the proposals soon, now is the time to let it know of any concerns you may have.
- The spread of **Nosiy Miners** in recent years.

Other sightings of note were:

- Frank Antram bagging his first ACT **Black Falcon**.
- Paul Taylor reported an **Australian Raven** flying past his office window at Russell carrying a golf ball in its beak.
- In late May, Peter Milburn observed a "huge" movement of **Silvereyes** which he roughly estimated at about 1,000 birds per hour over a number of hours.

### THE REFRESHMENT OF WRENS

A colony of wrens  
has migrated to my garden  
this hot unwatered year.

That they have settled in  
is an outcome I enjoy,  
a landfall to be boasted of

as if I had been knighted  
or received an O.B.E:  
I feel myself esteemed.

Before the day heats up,  
from the corner of my eye,  
I see their flicking tails

and often overhear  
the brittle tinny rattle  
of their chatty tittle-tattle.

But I mind my Ps and Qs -  
for if they should skedaddle  
I'd be so lowdown and blue.

— Sue Edgar

# COG SALES

## MUDBRICK COTTAGE

### Mallacoota

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

(02) 6258 3531.

## PASSIVE SOLAR HOUSE

### South Rosedale

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

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

(02) 6286 1564

or e-mail [gramsay@actewagl.net.au](mailto:gramsay@actewagl.net.au)

**The Long Paddock:** A Directory of Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves in NSW - Rural Lands Protection Board - \$31.00

**Wet and Wild:** A Field Guide to the Freshwater Animals of the Southern Tablelands and High Country - M Lintermans and W Osborne - \$28.00 (RRP \$34.95).

**Where to Find Birds in NE Queensland** - Jo Wieneke - \$16.00.

**Reptiles and Frogs of the ACT** - Ross Bennett - \$13.00.

**Grassland Flora:** A Field Guide for the Southern Tablelands (NSW and ACT) - by David Eddy et al. - \$13.00

**Our Patch:** A Field Guide to the Flora of the ACT Region - \$13.00

**The Nestbox Book** - Gould League - \$12.50

**Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT** - Taylor and Day - \$14.00

**Woodlands:** A Disappearing Landscape – Lindenmeyer et al - \$34.00

**Feather and Brush:** Three Centuries of Australian Bird Art – Penny Olsen **reduced price** - \$50.00

**Simpson and Days' Birds of Australia CDROM** Version 5.0 **special price** - \$45.00

**COG Car Stickers** - \$2.00

**COG Badges** – red or grey - \$5.00

**COG Birds of the ACT:** Two Centuries of Change - Steve Wilson - \$25.00

**COG Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the ACT** - \$1.00

**COG Bird Songs of Canberra** – Cassette - \$10.00

**COG Bird Calls of the ACT** – CD - \$12.00

**All these items plus COG T-shirts and Polo shirts and various pamphlets etc are available at the monthly meeting sales desk or by contacting Bruce Ramsay via email to [barkeramsay@velocitynet.com.au](mailto:barkeramsay@velocitynet.com.au) or telephone 02 6294 5881 (after 6.30 pm please)**

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## Avian Whimsy #53 — A Cook's Tour of Birds' Names

It's happened again. I was perusing the Australia bird list, planning something entirely different for this offering, when a name leapt out at me, demanding that I postpone my own petty plans in favour of *its* story. Sometimes I feel I'm just a conduit, so I've given up resisting. And I must admit that **Cook's Petrel** (*Pterodroma cookii*), an uncommon offshore visitor to eastern Australia, has a point. In commemorating the most-feted sailor-explorer of Australian waters it has managed what the entire flora of the country has failed to do. (Despite the regular response I get when I mention that not a single Australian plant is named for James Cook, I don't count the Cooktown Orchid...) There is no doubt that, subsequent hagiography and mystique notwithstanding, Cook was a truly brilliant sailor and leader, despite a pretty unlikely start as the son of a Scottish farm labourer working in Yorkshire. (His mother incidentally gave up a delightfully alliterative name when she married and ceased to be called Grace Pace.) Young James was labouring on the farm at age five and working in a haberdasher's at 12; at 17 though he was apprenticed to the coastal colliers and the rest, as they say...

But of course the 1770 voyage of the *Endeavour* was a discovery of the plants and animals of the great southern land, as well as of seaways and harbours. Sir Joseph Banks was of very different origins from those of his captain, landed, southern and wealthy. His passion for plants was real and apparently intrinsic; the first book he is said to have voluntarily read was his mother's herbal and he bought information from the local apothecary's herb collectors at 6d a secret! As a young newly-elected member of the Royal Society he badgered his colleagues into allowing him to sail with Cook (they were co-sponsors of the expedition); the fact that he could put up £10,000 of his own money was probably not a significant hindrance... His planning included obtaining large numbers of unbound copies of Milton's *Paradise Lost* to press plant specimens. And he made a mark on the Australian ornithological names landscape too, in the form of the magnificent **Red-tailed Black-cockatoo**, *Calyptorhynchus banksii*, bestowed by the English ornithological *eminence grise* John Latham. (The mark might have been rather greater had the push to name the country Banksia, led by no less a luminary than Linnaeus the younger, got off the ground!)

Banks' personal retinue also took wing. He employed the eminent young Swedish botanist Daniel Solander, who had come to England to teach botanists the new classification system of his own teacher, the already legendary Carl von Linnaeus. At sea, Solander described on small cards the specimens he'd collected; by the end of the trip he had 27 volumes of animal specimens and 25 of plants. 'His' bird is a close relative of Cook's Petrel. The **Providence Petrel** (*Pterodroma solandri*) breeds on Lord Howe Island; previously they had also bred on Norfolk Island, but had the misfortune to be joined in 1790 by a convict colony isolated from the outside world for three months. In that time soldiers and convicts alike fed on petrels, which were the difference between life and mass death for both humans and birds, though the results for each were very different. The grateful humans bestowed the Providence appellation, but by 1800 the birds were gone for ever from Norfolk.

The young draughtsman Sydney Parkinson was another Banks employee, who produced a wealth of plant and bird paintings, but who didn't survive the voyage. Like many before and after him he died miserably of dysentery contracted in the hellish port of Batavia. He too soars still above the southern waves, in the form of the unwitting **Black Petrel** (*Procellaria parkinsoni*). Sydney didn't enjoy the tropics at all, but the bird moves north in summer to the tropical Pacific.

When Cook sailed again in 1772, Banks was to be with him. What ensued sounds like a dummy spit, but I think it was more of a political bluff which backfired. Banks had an entourage of 13, including an artist and five domestic servants; among them were two French Horn players... With his dog and all the equipment, it was necessary to build an additional upper deck, with a cabin for the displaced captain! On the maiden voyage the pilot refused to continue for safety reasons, Cook ordered the superstructure to be removed, and Banks went off in a huff. He had always wanted a larger ship and perhaps he hoped that his withdrawal might achieve that. Instead he was replaced by Johann Forster, who curiously is described variously as "a Pole of presumed Scottish descent" and "a Prussian of Yorkshire ancestry"! Unfortunately both he and his son Johann George were so consistently obnoxious that the total experience made Cook swear never again to sail with an official naturalist. Meantime though the *Resolution* sighted the Antarctic mainland and Forster described no less than five new penguin species. Among them was one of the planet's most superb big animals, the 1.3 metre tall, 40kg **Emperor Penguin** *Aptenodytes forsteri*, on the Australian list by virtue of its sporadic sojourns to Heard Island. Why John Gray, the British Museum's Head of Zoology, chose to thus honour Forster is a bit of a mystery – no-one else seems to have had a good word to say about him!

Cook's journeys were the first to carry out a methodical scientific investigation of what became Australia. They were far from the last though and the great French expeditions which followed also left their names behind, attached to unconsulted birds. Watch this space... A bientôt!

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COG welcomes the following new members:

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Peter Holbery, Belconnen

David and Dianne Gardiner, Bega

Erika Guenther, Waramanga

Fivebough and Tuckerbil Wetlands Trust, Leeton

## Next newsletter

July deadline

Wednesday 27 June 2007

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

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

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

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### 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.

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### COG membership

2007-2008 memberships:

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### COG E-mail Discussion List

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