

Gang-gang

June 2009

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

June meeting

7:30pm Wednesday 10.6.2009

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

The short presentation will be by **Martin Butterfield**, GBS co-ordinator who will cover a few reminders about the **Garden Bird Survey** Rules, outline some analyses using the data; and provide an update on the system redevelopment.

The main presentation will be by **Matt Cameron** from the NSW Dept of Environment and Climate Change on "**The Impact of Global Warming on Cockatoos**". The impact of climate change on cockatoo resources will be discussed, including the effect of widespread and extreme fire on foraging and nesting habitat. Matt studied **Glossy Black-cockatoos** in central NSW for his PhD and is the author of the CSIRO Publishing Australian Natural History Series title '*Cockatoos*'.

Everyone welcome

What to watch out for this month

The coming of June means the start of winter, which is traditionally the quietest time on the ACT bird calendar. Certainly judging from the very low rate of postings on the COG chat line, the last couple of weeks have been a very quiet period for Canberra bird watchers, despite the mild weather. The latest posted observations of the last summer migrants to leave, the **Dusky Woodswallow** and **Olive-backed Oriole**, were on the second weekend of May, almost exactly when I predicted. Any further sightings of these or of any of the other species I mentioned in my May article may be deemed to be overwintering birds.



Photo by David Cook

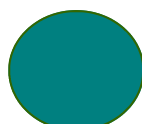
Olive-backed Oriole
(*Oriolus sagittatus*)

For much of the past eight months the focus of this column has been on migrants. As noted during chat line discussions there are other species that move around, but don't do so in a regular pattern and aren't usually labelled migrants. A number of species have regular daily movements, and for many years I've watched the **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos** fly over my house from the Cotter direction into suburbia in the morning, and the reverse in the evenings. Currently these are only a small percentage of the large flocks seen feeding in the inner South of Canberra. Interestingly **Galaha**s have the reverse pattern, preferring to roost in the suburbs.

Before the 2003 fires the evening roost flight of many **Australian King Parrots**, particularly in winter over Duffy, to their favoured site on Mount Stromlo, was spectacular. Up to 200 **Pied Currawongs** also used to fly over my Chapman GBS site in winter at sunrise from their Mount Stromlo roost, but this had stopped well before the fires. A more recent post-fire phenomenon observed over a number of years is the **Red-rumped Parrot**, which have been roosting on the edge of suburbia in Rivett or Duffy, with up to 80 seen flying out together just after sunrise to feed in the Coleman Ridge/Cotter direction.

In my experience very few Australian species are truly territorial in that they defend a territory all year round. Even the best known example, the **Australian Magpie**, forms large loose non-breeding flocks of up to or over 30 birds, which can often be seen on ovals or large open spaces where nesting trees are absent. Even during the breeding season, I regularly see magpies

Continued page 2



What to watch out for (continued) flying high and straight over, making me wonder exactly how high a territory is. While they breed within my GBS site, for the past couple of years I have seen out of season groups of up to 10 birds gathering together within a few square metres and getting along fine with each other.

Finches have been a topic of both observations and debate in chat line postings over the past few months, including the “Finch Central” outing over the weekend. I find it interestingly that the *2007-2008 Annual Bird Report (ABR)* records that the number of reports for the three most common species was down on 2006-2007. However, they seem to be very conspicuous this year, particularly in my local patch of Cooleman Ridge/Narrabundah Hill (actually W of Duffy, rather than in the suburb with which it shares a name) where numbers of the **Diamond Firetail** have been at historic highs in 2009, with up to 25 seen together. This species has been a feature in the area post-fires, whereas the **Double-barred Finch** has really only been present for the past couple of years, and only in similar numbers to the Diamond Firetail this year. Sightings of the **Red-browed Finch**, after not being recorded for several years post-fires, have also dramatically increased. A feature of these sightings is that you can't find them reliably in the same spot, they seem to move around, presumably following food sources, and just when you think they've left the area, they pop up again somewhere else. Likewise the **Scarlet** and **Flame Robins**, so prominent when they first arrived in March/April, have moved around locally, often in mixed feeding flocks with the above and other species.

Two other autumn visitors are noteworthy in this regard. One is the **Restless Flycatcher**, which is a species I regard as relatively sedentary and can often be reliably found in the same locality. However, as noted by the ACT Bird Atlas, some of the population does wander widely in autumn/winter, and a bird has been in my local area during April and May. Again it has been seen at a number of different places, with the only regular spot being my neighbour's red box

where it has been heard (much harder to see) late evening on successive nights on two well separated occasions, and where it seems to have roosted in the shrubbery below. The other is the **Yellow-tufted Honeyeater**, which again the ACT Bird Atlas records as sometimes visiting suburban gardens in winter where they may remain for a week or two (or sometimes longer in my experience if there is a favourite food source which they may defend very vigorously).

Another species that I have been seeing in places where it is usually absent is the **Noisy Miner**. Again, this is often regarded as a sedentary species, but in my experience does move about out of the breeding season, sometimes in sizable parties. So while it might be a relatively quiet time, there is still plenty of bird activity to look out for and record. And don't forget to make sure that any records which you believe are significant are entered into the

COG database. It is only in this way that our *Annual Bird Reports* will be a true and accurate reflection of bird occurrence and movement in the ACT.

— Jack Holland

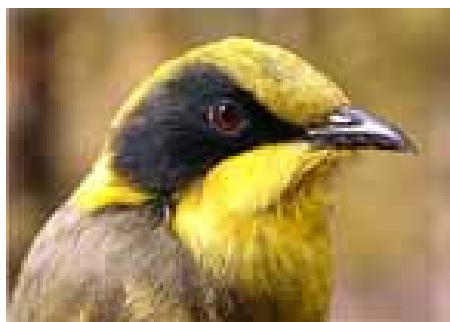


Photo by Geoffrey Dabb

Yellow-tufted Honeyeater
(*Lichenostomus melanops*)

Field Trip reports

Wednesday 20 May — Midweek Walk

23 members and guests gathered on Mackenzie St for a walk on the SW slopes of Mount Majura. Our target species was **Glossy Black-cockatoo**. We didn't manage to find any of these birds, and judging by the number of cones still on the she-oaks (and the unchewed nature of those on the ground) they haven't been in the areas we visited any time recently. The lower slopes were very quiet as we set off, but a clearing above the second dam had a good number of the usually suspected species (including all the local **thornbill** species) in a loose mixed feeding flock.

At the high point we were intrigued by some very strange calls which none of us could immediately identify. After some minutes pursuing the calls we concluded we had heard a raptor call, closely followed by a 'panic-call' from a **honey-eater**, but without visual evidence could not be more specific. **White-plumed, Yellow-faced** and **White-eared Honey-eaters** were all in the vicinity. In total we recorded 30 species.

— Martin Butterfield

Monday 25 May — “Finch Central”

Thirty members and guests gathered at various parts of Coppins Crossing for a walk to “Finch Central”. The early arrivals were greeted by a flypast of four **Australian King-parrots**: a good omen for the rest of the day. Those who met at the southern car park also saw the first **Red-browed** and **Double-barred Finches** for the day. On transferring to the start of the pipeline service track a **Nankeen Kestrel** was observed sitting on the powerlines above the road. A large number - 27+ - of **Common Starlings** also graced (disgraced?) the lines. **Eurasian Skylarks** were heard ascending over the farmland to the north of the track, and on getting to the point where we moved down towards the Molonglo a group of five of these songsters was visible. By the time we actually got to Finch Central the species tally was up to a respectable 20.

Three **Australian Pipits** were seen near the track and the first **Flame Robin** of the day - a very colourful male - appeared adjacent to the fence around the old poo-pits. On moving through the area we saw all four 'expected' finch species: **Red-browed**, **Double barred** and **European Goldfinches** and a pair of **Diamond Firetails**. Several of the groups of **Red-browed Finches** were in the vicinity of roost-nests and the **Diamond Firetails** were carrying grass, mostly likely for construction of such a nest.

Our second raptor species was a **Wedge-tailed Eagle** soaring over the paddocks and the second Robin was an **Eastern Yellow Robin** heard adjacent to the Molonglo.

As we moved towards the end of the walk a family group of **Flame Robins** was seen on the barbed wire fence below the service track. There was some discussion of whether the brown birds were females or juveniles. One member of the group has subsequently consulted a vintage (if not aged, coming from 1974) copy of *Bird in the Hand* which comments that "'First year or 'brown' males cannot yet be reliably separated from first year or adult females on plumage characters alone; both may have some colour on the underparts. It is not yet known when a 'brown' male attains full adult body plumage." Unless banding theory has moved on, this suggests there is no chance of sorting out the demographics of brown birds some 20m away!

All told we saw 30 species. — **Martin Butterfield**

Future Field Trips

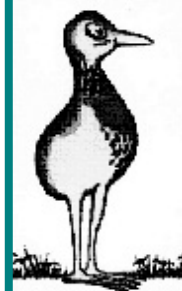
The **Guidelines for the conduct and advertising of COG field trips** are published on the COG web site. Both trip leaders and members/participants should familiarise themselves with these guidelines. In particular, the **Registration Form** should be completed for each field trip.

6-8 June - South Coast - long weekend campout

Unfortunately this outing has been cancelled due to a lack of interest.

Wednesday Walk, 17 June 2009

The plan is to start at the Namadgi Visitors Centre (NVC) — with carpooling at Kambah Village for those who wish. Meet at Kambah at 9am and start birding at the NVC at 9:30. Depending upon how long we spend there we could further consolidate carpooling and go to Naas Valley and, if time and enthusiasm permit, check out the area around Glendale Depot. It is intended that people



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STOP PRESS!

Strzelecki Track/outback tour

8 to 26 August 2009

Two places have become available
on this long booked out tour
5% discount applies.

Alice Springs

1 to 5 July 2009

best birds: dusky grasswren & grey
honeyeater, slaty-backed thornbill

Plains-wanderer weekends

2009 season

14/15 November, 28/29 November

12/13 December 2009

2/3 January 2010

2010

February 2010

SW Western Australia
Christmas Island
Tasmania

March 2010

Thailand

May /June 2010

New Guinea

June 2010

Top End
Alice Springs

4 —22 September 2010

Strzelecki Track Outback Tour

Tour itineraries, bird lists, checklists
and latest news are on the website.

www.philipmaher.com

should be able to drop-out at any stage but if the full range of possible activities is undertaken to make it a full day trip. Members may wish to bring lunch (or pig-out on ice-cream at NVC).

Saturday 20 June — Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve — Superb Lyrebird survey



Superb Lyrebird
(*Menura novaehollandiae*)

Photo by David Cook

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 8.30am 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 at this time of the year since 2004. If interested and for further details please contact Chris Davey on 62546324 (h), email chris_davey@aapt.net.au. Please note that if the weather is inappropriate on the Saturday we would try to run the survey the following day.

Saturday 27 June — Proposed outing to the International Arboretum

At the April COG meeting Sherry McArdle-English (President, Friends of the International Arboretum) gave a presentation on the Arboretum and offered to arrange a tour of the site for COG members. A show of hands at the meeting indicated that the audience was keen to visit the area. Tentative arrangements have been made for a two hour trip on Saturday 27 June starting at 10.00am. A 34-seater bus will cost \$13 whilst a 44 seater will cost \$11 per passenger. Anyone interested in participating in the tour please contact Chris Davey 02-62546324 or email chris_davey@aapt.net.au so that the appropriate arrangements can be made.

Sunday 5 July – Local nature park – Morning

We are looking for someone to lead this outing. Please contact Anthony Overs on 6254 0168 or anthony.overs@gmail.com if you have any suggestions.

Sunday 19 July — Canberra's Winter Birds — Day bus trip

Each autumn/winter a number of bird species come down from the mountains and higher areas around Canberra to spend the colder parts of the year in the suburbs or surrounding areas. Examples of these are two species of red-breasted robins (**Scarlet** and **Flame**) plus two species which are much less common (**Rose** and **Pink**), a number of species of honeyeater including the **White-eared**, **Fuscous**, **Brown-headed**, **Crescent** and the **Eastern Spinebill**, and the **Golden Whistler**. Several other species such as the **Dusky Woodswallow**, the **Grey Fantail** and the **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike** will overwinter in the ACT in small numbers. The aim of this outing is to learn about them and to try to observe as many of these species within the ACT in the one day. Several of them will be the subject of the July COG meeting Bird of the Month talk.

As is best suited for these types of outings, transport will be by two 12-seater buses. This involves a total of 24 people, and a decision has been made not to allow tag-a-long vehicles, otherwise the outing becomes logistically very unwieldy. 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 about \$20 per person, including the COG admin fee, subject to filling both buses. This will be payable on boarding the bus. To book please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@environment.gov.au).

We will be visiting several spots in the ACT where these species are likely to be present. The exact itinerary will not be determined until very close 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.

Saturday 8 August — Lake Ginninderra Waterbirds for beginners — Morning

This is the second of our bird walks in 2009 that is aimed specifically at beginners. Meet Anthony Overs (bookings essential on 6254 0168 or anthony.overs@gmail.com) at 8.30am 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 car park 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. Bring your binoculars and field guide.

Canberra Bird Notes now on the Web

All 34 volumes of Canberra Bird Notes (CBN), dating from 1968 to 2009, have now been scanned and loaded onto the COG web site as full-text searchable PDFs and are available to members and non-members of COG free of charge.

The scanned volumes can be found at <http://canberrabirds.org.au/>. Click on *Canberra Bird Notes* at the bottom of the screen page and from the left hand column choose the volume of interest. Once the volume is loaded it is possible to search for a specific item. A brief history of CBN is provided with instructions on how to download particular volumes. Indices for volumes 21 to 32 compiled by Harvey Perkins are also available.

Scanning of CBN has been a 10 month-long task of 150 volumes and some 5,100 pages undertaken by Alastair Smith. In March 2008 in discussions with Alastair it was decided that having the scanned text 'searchable' would greatly enhance the value of the digitised documents and so in July 2008 the COG committee approved funds for the purchase of much improved optical character recognition (OCR) software. This purchase greatly improved the speed and accuracy of the scanning process.

I would like to thank Alastair for the great job that he has done and all those interested in the birds of our local region owe him a debt of gratitude. The availability of CBN on the COG web site will allow a much wider audience to learn about and appreciate the birds of the ACT and surrounding regions. I would also like to acknowledge the webmaster, David Cook, who has been responsible for adding all of the scanned volumes to the website, and to Harvey Perkins for undertaking the thankless task of providing indices to the latter volumes. — **Chris Davey**

Committee news

- Chris Davey and Jenny Bounds met ACT government staff to discuss the proposed route for an upgraded bicycle path at the Jerrabomberra Wetlands.
- Chris also met ACT and federal government representatives about the Molonglo Valley development.
- COG applied for and was granted funds from the ACT Government Volunteers Program. The funds will be used to meet some costs for survey volunteers.
- Work has begun on entering into the COG database a large quantity of bird reports from the ANU Club for Women. The data goes back many years.

2009-2010 subscriptions

Members are reminded that membership fees are due at the start of each financial year. Many thanks to all who have already paid their subscriptions for the coming financial year. The cost of an annual subscription remains at \$35. Payment can be made by cheque or money order mailed to the COG mailbox (details on back page), electronic deposit (details are on the membership form which is downloadable from our website <http://www.canberrabirds.org.au>) or by paying at a COG meeting. — **Susan Henderson**

Recordings required

The CD *Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT* continues to sell well but there is a need for a second CD that will complete the series. Funds have been made available and recording equipment purchased to progress this project. Peter Fullagar has compiled a list of recordings that need to be made (see below) and all equipment is now available to be lent to anyone with the appropriate expertise who wishes to collect some of the required material. I urge anyone who may be willing to participate in this project to contact Peter at Chifley@fullagar.org

Darter	Peaceful Dove	Little Grassbird
White-faced Heron	Diamond Dove	Rufous Songlark
Great Egret	Common Bronzewing	Brown Songlark
Rufous Night Heron	Crested Pigeon	Speckled Warbler
Hoary-headed Grebe	Superb Parrot	Brown Thornbill
Australasian Grebe	Australian King-Parrot	Buff-rumped Thornbill
Pacific Black Duck	Rainbow Lorikeet	Yellow-rumped Thornbill
Pink-eared Duck	Little Lorikeet	Yellow Thornbill
Grey Teal	Swift Parrot	Striated Thornbill
Chestnut Teal	Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo	Weebill
Hardhead	Shining Bronze-Cuckoo	Varied Sittella
Maned Duck	Common Koel	Red-browed Treecreeper
Black-shouldered Kite	Barn Owl	Brown Treecreeper
Australian Hobby	Australian Owlet-nightjar	Mistletoebird
Brown Falcon	Rainbow Bee-eater	Crescent Honeyeater
Australian Kestrel	Tree Martin	Yellow-faced Honeyeater
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	Fairy Martin	Yellow-tufted Honeyeater
Wedge-tailed Eagle	Skylark	Fuscous Honeyeater
Stubble Quail	White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike	Brown-headed Honeyeater
Brown Quail	Rose Robin	White-naped Honeyeater
Painted Button-quail	Scarlet Robin	European Greenfinch
Buff-banded Rail	Red-capped Robin	Red-browed Firetail
Baillon's Crake	Hooded Robin	Diamond Firetail
Australian Crake	Crested Shrike-tit	Double-barred Finch
Purple Swamphen	Spotted Quail-thrush	Dusky Woodswallow
Dusky Moorhen	Leaden Flycatcher	White-winged Chough
Eurasian Coot	Satin Flycatcher	Australian Magpie-lark
Greenshank	Rufous Fantail	Australian Magpie
Latham's Snipe	White-fronted Chat	Grey Butcherbird
Feral Pigeon	Golden-headed Cisticola	Grey Currawong

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor

*Though hunters shoot ducks in sport,
The ducks don't die in sport, but in earnest*

It was disappointing to read that, despite the dry conditions and contrary advice from competent authority, the Victorian Government approved a duck hunting season from 21 March to 8 May 2009. And in Tasmania the killing season will run from 7 March to 8 June 2009 (*The Bird Observer*, April 2009).

Although once an ardent hunter, I eschew shotguns, believing that even in skilled hands they inflict terrible collateral damage, to borrow a term from the handbook of a Pentagon media hack. Too often I've witnessed the tragic carnage left by hunters – ducks and other wetlands birds with broken wings, legs and bills shot away.

If anyone needs further dissuasion from duck hunting read the essay, *Southern Flight* included in an anthology *Old Songs in a New Café* by Robert James Waller (available from ACT Public Libraries) who wrote the spectacularly successful novel *The Bridges of Madison County*, and is a cogent voice on environmental concerns. *Southern Flight* is poignant to the point of harrowing, but delivers a powerful message, to the extent that one American goose hunter told Waller that after reading it he gave up his lifelong atavistic pursuit. Perhaps it should be mandatory reading for anyone seeking a hunting licence.

Finally, I've long admired the opening lines from Ralph Waldo Emerson's poem *Forbearance* viz:

*Hast thou named all the birds without a gun?
Loved the wood-rose, and left it on its stalk?*

To me, the first line primly addresses ornithologists who employ shotguns in lieu of binoculars, while the second is a pleasantly lyrical way of saying study and enjoy nature but leave undisturbed. Incidentally, Emerson was once a neighbour of Henry Thoreau, author of the celebrated *Walden*.

— John K. Layton, Holt

Dear Editor

(and I say “dear” simply as a matter of formality not wanting to imply any affection for an editor who would **STOOP SO LOW** as to deprive a **Rightful Winner** of his **Prize**).

I write to **COMPLAIN**, in the strongest terms, about the *Whimsy No. 71* competition result notified in the May issue of *Gang-gang*. Your notice is a **DISGRACE** and an **ABOMINATION**.

It is quite clear that I **WON** and I **DEMAND** that my prize be awarded to me **AS SOON AS POSSIBLE**.

In all my days, I have never seen a **Weaker Excuse** for withholding a prize than this. To suggest that the Author of the Whimsy has made an inadvertent mistake is **AN ABOMINATION**. AvIan **NEVER MAKES INADVERTENT MISTAKES**. His writing is **PERFECT IN EVERY RESPECT!** That means that the published mistake **THAT I IDENTIFIED AND REPORTED ACCORDING TO THE SPECIFIED PROTOCOL** must have been An Advertent Mistake. So I must be the winner!

I **DEMAND** that the June issue of *Gang-gang* include a **SUITABLE APOLOGY** to me, the winner, and to AvIan whose **REPUTATION AS AN AUTHOR** has been sullied by your Disgraceful Claim that he made an Inadvertent Mistake.

If your apology and my prize are not rapidly forthcoming then I will arrange for 1,000 pigeons, 5,000 Mynas and 10,000 starlings to take up residence at your home and coo and call and cackle and defecate on you day and night!

(Signed) **Disappointed** of Wamboin

Dear Disappointed

Having seen the error of my ways I propose to go immediately into exile and handover production of *Gang-gang* to Tanya Rough for the next two months. You may collect both your apology and your prize in person by visiting me in Canada anytime before 15 August. — The Editor.

CONFERENCES

Indian Myna Conference

On 13 May, the Canberra Indian Myna Action Group, (CIMAG) assisted by the Commonwealth's Envirofund, sponsored an all day conference in Nowra entitled *Towards Best Practice Indian Myna Control*; a conference which will be a stimulus for much wider control of mynas throughout NSW.

Around 80 delegates attended, representing 22 NSW councils, community & landcare groups, government agencies, and universities. The conference provided the opportunity to inform delegates about recent research on myna biology, ecology and control measures and to share knowledge on low cost programs for myna control.

Initial papers presented included an overview of mynas as an invasive species (Prof Tony Peacock from the Invasive Animals CRC), research on trapping and removal of mynas in the ACT (Kate Garrock, ANU PhD Scholar) and in Blacktown Council area (Justine Clarke, Blacktown Council and Ricky Spencer, University of Western Sydney).

Chris Tidemann (ANU researcher, well known to COG members) presented papers on larger scale experimental trapping of mynas at roost sites and trials on the use of carbon monoxide for euthanasia; work which potentially offers a low cost, humane and practical solution for community action.

John Yim (Sydney University vet student) reported on initial research into whether mynas carry pathogens, which have been killing native birds such as Tawny Frogmouths in the Sydney region.

Several papers were delivered on the formation and building of groups, co-operation with local governments, maintaining enthusiasm, trap design and manufacture, trapping techniques and euthanasia. Speakers were CIMAG's Bill Handke, Central Coast Group's Matthew Whitehouse, and Anna Hernell and Rod Simpson from Shoalhaven.

Tony Peacock demonstrated a new interactive spacial mapping program (MynaScan) which (based on an existing program for rabbits) might be used to record myna densities, roosting and nesting sites.

The afternoon session involved discussions on ways for councils and communities to work together, trapping and public education, animal welfare, and constraints to more effective myna management. There was enormous enthusiasm to move forward and to share ideas.

Councils are reacting to pressure from ratepayers "to do something to control mynas", but have varied considerably in their responses. Shoalhaven City Council has been outstanding in setting-up and co-ordinating more than 30 voluntary groups throughout a large local area and working with men's sheds building traps. Other notable reports came from the Bega Valley, where volunteers have so far excluded mynas by targetting them along migration routes. An official from SA attended to learn how the State Government could prevent mynas entering SA from western Victoria. In Tamworth, the council has been highly successful in trapping at the local tip, whilst at Murrumbateman, Jaqui Stol and Chris Davey have been working effectively with the Murrumbateman Landcare Group in the vineyards.

CIMAG will publish proceedings of the conference and draft a "Best Practice Guide for Indian Myna Control" on which participants at the conference will have an opportunity to comment. — **Bill Handke & Bruce Lindenmayer**

Fivebough Wetlands — November waterbird conference — Call for papers

The conference *Wetlands and Waterbirds: Managing for Resilience*, organised by Fivebough and Tuckerbil Wetlands Trust, Charles Sturt University and the Waterbird Society.

The conference will be held in Leeton 9-13 November.

Delegates who wish to present spoken papers or posters should send a title and abstract of no more than 400 words to Dr. Iain Taylor itaylor@csu.edu.au. The initial closing date for abstracts will be 1 August 2009. More information is available at the website. <http://fivebough.org.au/wetlands-and-waterbirds-conference>. — Sandra Henderson

Garden Bird Survey Notes

Some GBS-relevant highlights from the chat line for the last few days of April and (most of) May include:

- **Yellow-tufted Honeyeater** in Gordon;
- **New Holland Honeyeaters** in O'Connor;
- a sub-adult **Olive-backed Oriole** in Ainslie (and four **Wedge-tailed Eagles** soaring overhead);
- a **Barn Owl** harassed by **Australian Ravens** at a different site in Ainslie (with **Pied Currawongs** and **Australian Magpies** observing the spectacle); and
- a **Grey Butcherbird** in Garran, the first in 43 years.

Is the sky falling?

This note was generated by an observation of four **Spotted Doves** at a Holder garden, which seemed to reflect an increasing incidence of this species.

GBS data to year 27 certainly shows the alarming picture presented in the graph. The faint 'bump' in years 20 and 21 reflects the large numbers reported at a site in Queanbeyan which was only active for those 2 years. Removing this site makes little change to the shape of the trend line, but increases the correlation to very high levels.

The issues raised by the invasion of **Spotted Doves** are well discussed in AvIan Whimsy #69 and its preceding *Gang-gang* article. This graph merely emphasises that the time for concerted action is NOW and that the answer to the question posed in the title is 'YES'.

Applications of GBS data

A range of observation data has been provided to the ANU PhD researcher concerned with **Common Mynas**. Data on **Superb Parrots** have been supplied to assist COG to contribute to a discussion under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act by the Australian Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. A request has also been received from a researcher at Deakin University for GBS data to assist with a PhD project investigating the impact of climate change on breeding patterns.

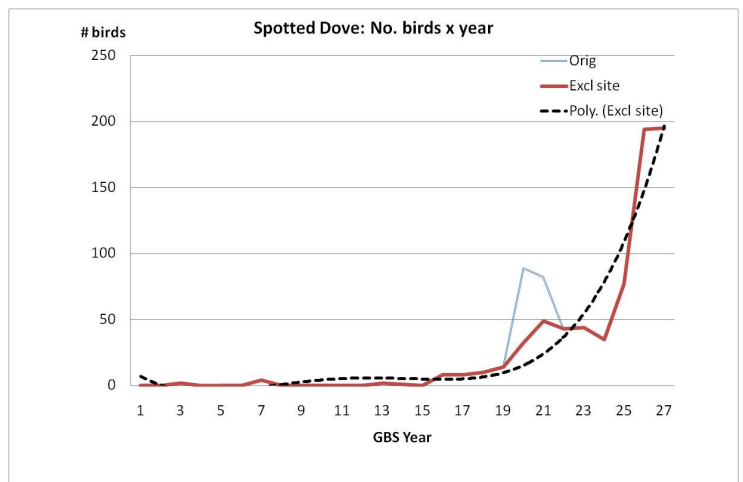
GBS Redevelopment

A prototype of the new data entry system has been demonstrated, successfully, to the data entry team. The new system will be available for data entry of Year 28 records.

— Martin Butterfield

!!!! New Charts !!!!!

Charts for Year 28 will be available for collection at the June Meeting!



CHANGE OF MONTHLY MEETING TIME

Remember the June Members' meeting will start at 7.30pm NOT 8.00pm.

MUDBRICK COTTAGE

Mallacoota

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

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

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

Contact Barbara de Bruine
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PASSIVE SOLAR HOUSE

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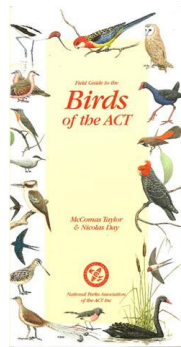
Bird watching is possible from the comfort of a chair on the front or back deck, while for the more energetic, Guerrilla Bay and Burrewarra Point are within walking distance. The wetlands at Barling's Beach are only a few kilometres away. Rich birding is available in almost any direction.

Contact Greg or Sallie Ramsay

6286 1564 or

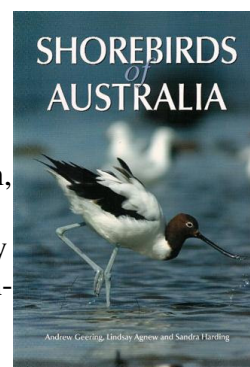
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COG SALES

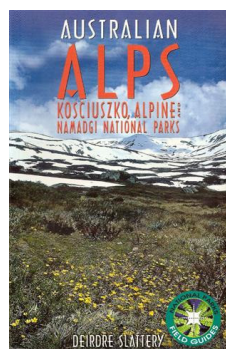


Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT (Taylor & Day) - \$16.00 — Bird identification in the ACT has just become much easier! Here are all the birds of the ACT in colour, with easy-to-follow text and key biological data, in a compact field format that will fit easily in your pocket.

Shorebirds of Australia (Geering, Agnew & Harding) \$33.00 — This title brings together the latest information about the evolution, ecology and behaviour of shorebirds and how they are distributed in Australia. This is a highly sought after title in the popular "CSIRO Publishing" series.



Birdwatching on the Far South Coast (see <http://www.thebegavalley.org.au/6224.html>) This spiral bound title is well presented, easy to read and is available from the Sales Desk for \$16.00. The inside front cover provides a quick guide to the towns and localities referred to in the text. All sites have been tried and tested and it is recommended that the guide be used in conjunction with a district map.



Australian Alps: Kosciuszko, Alpine & Namadgi National Parks (Slattery) - \$16.00 — This guide is your key to the secrets of the three national parks that stretch over Australia's spectacularly beautiful rooftop - Kosciuszko in New South Wales, Alpine in Victoria and Namadgi in the Australian Capital Territory. Ideal for field trips, this guide will make a wonderful memento as well as a great reference for future trips.

Watching Wildlife (Chris) - \$24.00

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

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

LIMITED STOCK: Messent Bird Calendar 2009 - \$8.00

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

Avian Whimsy - No. 73 — An Australian Bird Book: 101 Years On

Part 2 — Guiding the way

Last month, in this first-ever serialised Whimsy, I talked a little about John Leach, who wrote what was essentially the first comprehensive Australian bird field guide, *An Australian Bird Book*, in 1908, and Crosbie Morrison, who revised it for re-release 50 years later. However we didn't actually get to the books. I have a copy of the latter volume, but am relying on the ubiquitous web for the original (which had 4/- embossed into the cover, a not insignificant sum at the time, being roughly half a day's 'average' pay, or over \$100 in modern equivalence).

One thing that strikes us is how much more has changed in the last 50 years than in the 50 between the two publication dates, though this is probably exacerbated by Morrison's great respect for Leach in retaining much of his approach and style. This style is well illustrated by the conclusion to both editions, which includes:

“Australians! Your wonderful Lyre-Birds, your marvellous Bower-Birds, your gorgeous Birds of Paradise, your Mound-Builders, your flute-noted Magpies, your charming Whistlers, your beautiful and intelligent Cockatoos, your glorious Parrots – the pets of the bird world – your Superb-Warblers, your varied, valuable, and attractive Honey-eaters, and your giant Laughing-Kingfisher are here for your enjoyment and appreciation. No other people has your privilege of knowing these birds in their native state.”

Both the strong conservation message and the sometimes astonishing anthropomorphism comes through this bugle call loud and clear.

With regard to the former, Leach was already reporting with concern on the impact of **starlings** on hollow-nesting birds. He had some hope that the book, and the nature studies he introduced into the Victorian school curriculum, could change attitudes, especially among his ultimate *bête noir* – the schoolboy. “He [a male **fairy-wren**] soon falls a prey to one of his numerous enemies, of whom the small boy with a pea-rifle [later described as ‘these enemies of their country’] is probably the worst....However, Bird Day in the schools did much good...” Leach could only go on to trust that “the next generation of boy will probably have less of the savage in him”, while Crosbie felt optimistic enough to change that to “boys now protect birds”. He regarded cats as supplanting them as the “worst enemy of Australian birds”.

Leach in particular seized every opportunity to offer reasons to encourage people not to shoot birds, such as explaining that **quail** crops can be full of crickets or weevils, and calculating that a flock of **Straw-necked Ibis** in the Riverina ate 480,000,000 grasshoppers a day! He explains that **White-faced Herons**, as yabby-eaters, are “valuable allies of the irrigationist” and that **hawks** eat many more pests than they do chickens. He expressed the hope (while the **egret** plume trade was still rife) that “women of refinement and tender heart will refuse to wear the proceeds of human cruelty”.

The anthropomorphism is also ubiquitous; **Willie Wagtails** are ‘plucky but fussy’, **Laughing Kookaburras** have a ‘knowing look’, the **Regent Honeyeater** is a ‘glory’ (no mention of rarity), the **Jabiru** seems to ‘spend much of its time in a state of utter dejection’, the **Silver Gull** has a ‘bad character’, the **Red Wattlebird’s** call is ‘rough, disagreeable’ and that of the **Blue-winged Kookaburra** is ‘fiendish’. (Mind you the doyen of modern field guide authors, Graham Pizzey, described it as ‘appalling’!) Curiously, Crosbie makes mention of humans ‘attributing various characteristics of their own to birds’, but that doesn't stop him.

There are many accounts of personal encounters and reminiscences, which often make for interesting reading, but which would not find a place in a contemporary guide. Indeed there are already notably fewer of them in Crosbie's version than in the original.

Sometimes odd stories are passed on uncritically. For instance Leach reports on a widespread belief that **grebes** “wait for the flash of the cap and then dive before the bullet can reach them”, but does not commit himself. (Nor does he explain why anyone would want to shoot a grebe.) He suggests that six (unspecified) waders fly annually from Australia to New Zealand by following a recently submerged shoreline; of course he did not have the benefit of our knowledge of plate tectonics.

In fact overall it is easy to be wise with the benefit of a century's hindsight. In a year or so it seems that we will be in the extraordinary situation of having a choice of at least five front-line field guides in Australia! We might look somewhat disparagingly at the pioneering efforts of Leach and Morrison, but if it were not for an accident of birth we might have been relying on them too – and we'd have been very grateful. — Ian Fraser ianf@pcug.org.au



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NEW MEMBERS

COG welcomes the following new members:

J Amrichova, Page

M Mannion, Campbell

M Delahoy & S Blaik, Watson

B Howland, Fadden

M Sear, Rivett

NEXT NEWSLETTER

June deadline

Wednesday 24 June 2009

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

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

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

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Judy Collett and helpers

COG membership

2008-2009 memberships:

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

Membership inquiries—

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membership@canberrabirds.org.au

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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.

COG website

www.canberrabirds.org.au

Office

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

COG E-mail Discussion List

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

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Gang-gang

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