

# Gang-gang

March 2011

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

## MARCH MEETING

7:30pm Wednesday 9.3.11

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

For the first presentation **Dejan Stojanovic** will present on his Ph D research into the “**Life history, spatial ecology and population viability of the Swift Parrot**”, a species threatened across its range by ongoing habitat loss.

The main presentation will be by **Ian van Tets**, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Alaska Anchorage, on “**Sunbirds: nutrition, pollination and the challenges of nectarivory.**”

Ian grew up in Canberra and started working on nectar-feeding birds and small mammals as a PhD student at the University of Wollongong in 1992 - a period that included a one-year stint as warden at the former BA bird observatory at Barren Grounds in 1992/93. He later moved to South Africa, Israel and now Alaska.

*(Continued on page 2)*

## What to watch out for this month

During February the **Eastern Koel** phenomenon seems to have continued almost unabated, with the species still widely reporting as calling up to the *Gang-gang* deadline in the last week of the month, including several at Nicholls/Gungahlin Pond. One in my local patch of Chapman/Rivett was still being heard then, up to seven weeks longer than previously recorded. This includes both calls which observers have clarified can be made by the same bird in quick succession. Surprisingly there was a further observation of copulation (as well as an attempt to do so) in early February, a time when you might expect most of the species would have left the ACT. There have also been further reports of juveniles in Ainslie and Hackett, the latter an injured bird which was brought to the RSPCA but unfortunately did not survive. A third was photographed by one of Vivien Pinder's neighbours being fed by a **Red Wattlebird** in Kaleen.

Please keep reporting this species, as there seem to have been some very interesting developments in its status this season. This should include the dates of last calling, noting that at least in my area they seem to stop for a while, but then start again just when you think they've finally gone. Also keep reporting sightings of the **Superb Parrot**, though numbers have dropped they were still being reported up to late in the month. There were a number of reports of the **White-throated Needle-tail** with the heavy rain early in February, which stopped as things dried up, but as far as I'm aware no positive identification of the **Fork-tailed Swift**. Again keep reporting sightings of these species in March/early April if the wet weather continues.

After postings of dependent young **White-winged Trillers** from both Campbell Park and Callum Brae up to the end of January, there have been no further reports of this species, or of most of the other early departers I alerted readers to look out for in February. Exceptions are single records of the **Horsfield's** and **Shining Bronze-Cuckoos**, and of **Fairy Martins** mid-month. Any sightings of these species from now are very significant. Species that depart in the first week or so of March are the **Sacred Kingfisher**, **Dollarbird**, and **Rainbow Bee-eater**. There were earlier reports



Photo by Roger Williams

*(Continued on page 2)*

Everyone welcome

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(March meeting—continued from page 1)

**Sunbirds** (F: Nectariniidae), small honey-eater-like Passerines are found throughout Africa and Southern Asia and represented in Australia by a single tropical species, the **Yellow-bellied Sunbird**, *Nectarinia jugularis*. They typically occupy similar ecological niches to Honeyeaters (F: Meliphagidae) which, thanks to convergent evolution, they resemble in many ways.

Sunbirds are particularly common in the Fynbos biome of South-Western South Africa, which like the coastal regions of Eastern and South-Western Australia is home to a diverse range of Proteaceous plants whose large, nectar-rich inflorescences provide a easily obtainable source of nectar for much – and in some regions, all - of the year.

The nutrition of nectarivores is not, however, as straight forward as it seems. The Proteaceae of the Fynbos are typically more specialized with respect to their pollinators than their Australian counterparts. The physical location and structure of the inflorescences, the sugar composition of the nectar, and the birds' ability to meet its protein needs while feeding on or near the flowers combine to determine which proteas are pollinated by and help to sustain the sunbirds and which rely on other forms of pollination.

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of a good breeding season for these species, but there have been few postings on the COG chat line in February. The first two often move into gardens for a day or more on their way out, with immature **Dollarbirds** with lighter bills typically staying the longest. (The last species can often be observed high overhead on return migration (listen for their characteristic pee-pee calls and flight with orange wings).

Others species that leave by the end of March/early April are the **Leaden** and **Satin Flycatcher** (lots of reports of the former this season, including widespread breeding, but very few of the latter), both **Gerygone** species, the **Mistletoebird** and the **Australian Reed Warbler**. The **Rufous Fantail** is another passage migrant in Canberra during this period on its way down from the mountains. There have been very few records of this bird, and of the other wetter forest breeders this year, perhaps due to the poor access to the mountains because of the wet conditions.

In the last week or so of March keep an ear and eye out for the flocks of migrating **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters**. This migration has been very patchy over the past few seasons, so much so that COG seems to have given up holding its annual outing to see them conducted at least over the past 30 years. It will be interesting to see how the very much wetter conditions affects their numbers and migration pattern, so it will it will be very important to carefully monitor it again in 2011. Please report any major numbers, or the failure for any to appear when expected (remember the best migration conditions are on a clear still day after a cold night).

As can be seen, autumn is a time of considerable movement in the ACT's bird scene. One of the features is the mixed feeding flock (MFF). These can form anywhere and are often characterised by a number of smaller bird species feeding co-operatively in a very busy manner at all levels, such as on the ground, in the shrubs and in the tree canopy. While one or two species may be most conspicuous, keep a watchful eye on all the birds as often there may be one of two uncommon species quietly feeding in amongst the activity. A feature is how rapidly they can move through an area, with hardly a bird to be seen only an hour later. Despite the good conditions, a MFF consisting of **Yellow-rumped Thornbills**, **Weebills**, both species of **pardalote** and **Silvereyes** had already formed in my GBS site in mid February. After a period of absence **Red-rumped Parrots** have also been very conspicuous.

There has been further evidence of a very prolonged breeding season with a number of species raising at least two clutches. **Diamond Firetails** seem to have had a good season based on the number of immature birds reported, with a couple of instances of dependent young seen being fed. Despite the very different conditions, including flooding, the **Darter** and cormorant species seem to be breeding well at their now traditional sites along Molonglo Reach and near the mouth of Sullivan's Creek, but also in small numbers at new sites in Lake Burley Griffin and along the Molonglo River downstream of Scrivener Dam. **Australian King-Parrots** have been bringing their young into members' gardens to feed, re-kindling the old debate as to whether these can be recorded as dependent young on your GBS chart. Of particular interest to me has been the observation of dependent young **Eastern Spinebills** being fed in members' gardens. Quite a few seem to have stayed in Canberra over this summer, as they used to do each year in my garden in Chapman pre-fires. While lots of them were immature birds, I only can remember on one occasion when young were

Photo by David Cook



**Mistletoebird**  
( *Dicaeum hirundinaceum* )

being fed. I could hardly have missed them, they were the loudest begging youngsters for their size I've ever heard.

Again any breeding activity from now is significant, and should be reported for inclusion in the COG database, as should any significant observations of species mentioned above.

— Jack Holland

## Field Trip Reports

### 16 February – Wednesday Walk

25 members and guests gathered at the appointed spot off Florey Drive. It was particularly pleasing to have some people from the local Park Care group share their knowledge of the area with us.

Very shortly after getting down to Ginninderra Creek we encountered a patch of reeds with a mixed feeding flock. This included **Australian Reed Warblers** posing nicely in view (and feeding young) and a pair of **Leaden Flycatchers** and at least one juvenile being fed. Also in this area was the first of several flocks of adult and young **Red-browed Finches**, but for this species no food transfers were seen.

An **Australian Hobby** flew past on the other side of the Creek, giving our only raptor record for the day. A few water-birds were seen along the Creek (**Pacific Black Duck; Australian Wood Duck, White-faced Heron Little Pied Cormorant and Dusky Moorhen**).

Other breeding records were **Crested Pigeon** (On Nest) **Galah** (Dependent Young) and **Red Wattlebird** (Dependent Young). In total, we recorded 42 species before the Bureau of Meteorology proved the quality of its forecasts by having the rain start pretty much on time.

— 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.**

### 16 March — Wednesday Walk

The proposed venue for the March Wednesday Walk is London Bridge at the South end of Googong Dam. We should meet in London Bridge Rd close to the intersection with Burra Rd at 9am on 16 March and then proceed in convoy to the parking area.

I will be at Spotlight at 8:15 and those from Northside may wish to meet there for car pooling. Those from Southside may wish to pool from Calwell shops and come via the Monaro highway turning off at the Old Cooma Rd at Royalla and then Burra Road. I have in mind to make this an all day trip with two legs: first go across the top of the bridge to explore the woodland on the far side re-

(Continued on page 4)



**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)

**2-7 April 2011  
Laos**

**Bald-faced Bulbul tour**

**8 – 23 April 2011  
Sabah (Northern Borneo)**

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

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

**10 — 17 July 2011  
Alice Springs**

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

**3 — 22 September 2011:  
Strzelecki Track, Outback**

**13 — 22 October 2011  
Yorke Peninsula, Lake Gilles,  
Ceduna**

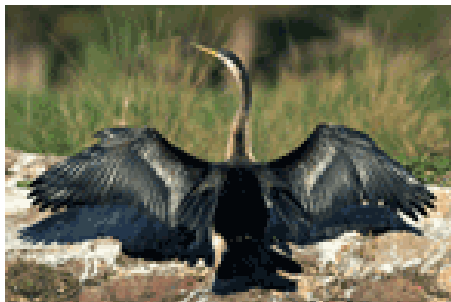
**Plains-wanderer Weekends 2011**  
26 & 27 November  
10 & 11 December  
New Year's Eve 2011 Plains-  
wanderer Weekend

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

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

turning to Tin Hut Dam and heading North for a bit after lunch. Those who only want a half day could easily leave after part 1! — **Martin Butterfield**

## Sunday 20 March — East Basin/Molonglo Reach — Electric/powering boat cruise



**Australasian Darter**  
( *Anhinga novaehollandiae* )

Photo by Julian Robinson

This will be the outing/cruise for 2010-2011 on the upper parts of Lake Burley Griffin (East Basin) and the adjacent Molonglo River Reach, where early autumn is the peak time for nesting, with three species of **cormorant** and **darters** known to breed there. The area is also rich in other water birds, and a variety of land birds can be seen on the banks. Though this year has seen much wetter conditions than in previous years, there have been reports of extensive darter breeding.

The boat trip will last about 2 hours from 8 am and will cost \$20, payable in cash on boarding. We propose to travel in the MV “Darter” which can carry 16 people, and though it has a motor is very quiet at slow speeds. If numbers exceed this the electric boat the “E.L. Cygnet”, which takes a maximum of 10 passengers, may also be used. The boats allow both a

quiet approach as well as access to landing adjacent to the car park in Bowen Park opposite the Landmark Apartments. This car park may be accessed off Bowen Drive (going either way).

If you are intending to join in this outing, please book your place on the boat with Jack Holland (on 6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on [jack.holland@environment.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@environment.gov.au)) as soon as possible. While at the *Gang-gang* deadline there were still plenty of spots, the boats usually fill up fast.

## 6-9 April 2011— Birds Australia Campout

The Canberra Ornithologists Group is pleased to be organising the BA Campout to be held from Wednesday 6 to Saturday 9 April 2011. The Campout will be based at the Bush Heritage Australia property ‘[Scottsdale](#)’ located off the Monaro Highway 83 km from Canberra and four km north of the township of Bredbo, NSW. There will be no Birds Australia Congress held in conjunction with the Campout in 2011.



The timing of the autumn campout has been arranged to coincide with the annual honeyeater migration. In addition to the spectacular number of **Yellow-faced** and **White-naped Honeyeaters**, many other bird species of interest are involved in the passage out of the Brindabella Ranges. Apart from observing the passage many other activities will be arranged which may include tours of Scottsdale, and outings to Namadgi National Park, Tallaganda State Forest, Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and the Tinderry Nature Reserve. Opportunities will be provided to become involved in bird sur-



veying for the Kosciusko to Coast (K2C) project on the Saturday morning.

Those COG members participating in the K2C survey are most welcome to join the activities on Friday evening and then camp at ‘Scottsdale’ overnight to be ready for the Saturday morning survey.

For those interstate members intending to spend the weekend in Canberra at the end of the Campout, local outings will be provided which may involve visits to the Australian National Botanic Gardens, Jerrabomberra Wetlands, Mulligan’s Flat Sanctuary and the International Arboretum. COG members are welcome to attend.

For registration, bird lists and additional information log onto the Canberra Ornithologists Group website (<http://canberrabirds.org.au/>). Follow the link to ‘BA Campout’ which will be regularly updated with additional information. For further details contact [bacampout@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:bacampout@canberrabirds.org.au). Please note that registrations are required by 18 March 2011. If intending to stay in Canberra over the weekend then you should arrange accommodation as soon as possible.

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Any COG member attending the Campout will need to register unless you intend to camp on Friday night to participate in the K2C survey.

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Black fronted Dotterel**  
( *Elseyornis melanops* )

**Photographed at Uriarra Crossing**  
by  
**Lindell Emerton, 29/12/2010**



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## **Field Naturalists Association of Canberra**

Well known local naturalist and COG member, Ian Fraser, will be guest speaker at the Field Naturalists Association of Canberra meeting on 3 March, 7:30 pm at ANU Building 116, in the Gould Wing, off Daley Road.

Ian has long championed the act and surrounding region as a treasure trove for naturalists. He has joined with celebrated wildlife artist Peter Marsack, to create a magical book with wonderful tales and scientific secrets of dozens of favourite local species. Peter's paintings bring the subjects to life, thoroughly complementing and enhancing Ian's words.

There are ten stories for each month of the year.

[Copies of their book, *A Bush Capital Year: A Natural History Of The Canberra Region* will be on sale at COG's March meeting, RRP \$49.95, members price \$32.00 — see page 10.]

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## 2011 — 2013 COG Forward Plan

The Forward Plan for 2011 – 2013 takes into account the core COG objectives of:

- a) Encouraging an interest in the birds of Canberra and region;
- b) Increasing our knowledge of the local birds; and
- c) Helping to conserve our native birds.

Realistically, the Forward Plan also takes into account the capacity of COG to undertake projects, and recognises the many activities already being undertaken by COG members, including surveys, data recording, the Website and Discussion List (Chatline), publications and conservation, as well as the monthly meetings and outings.

The Forward Plan includes both projects to be undertaken by COG members, and also financial support to other projects which are in accord with COG's objectives.

The Plan recognises two categories of projects – major and minor. Major projects are likely to need more manpower and or money to come to fruition. Smaller tasks should be completed relatively quickly and are likely to need only modest resources.

### Major tasks/funding

1. Update the COG Website
2. Encourage the recording of local bird calls to be made available on the COG Website
3. Revise the ACT Bird Atlas — undertake a scoping study which would identify the financial and manpower requirements to produce a new Atlas or equivalent that will provide reference material on the distribution and abundance by habitat type of birds in the ACT.
4. Continue to improve sets of display material that can be used primarily for COG exhibitions — but would also be useful for educational purposes and for interesting young people and the public in general in birds
5. Organise Birds Australia Campout- Autumn 2011
6. Nominate those species in decline in the ACT listed as *threatened* in New South Wales but not listed in the ACT
7. Redesign the 'COG Observation Record' data sheet. In particular, remove reference to COG grid. This will affect both hard copy and the on-line data sheet

### Smaller more immediate, less expensive projects

1. Develop pamphlets/brochures for the reserves making up Canberra Nature Park, and other popular bird watching venues – using a three-tiered approach:
  - Pamphlets (similar to that for Mulligans Flat) for a small number of key sites such as Campbell Park, Callum Brae, Jerrabomberra Wetlands, and the ANBG;
  - Fact sheets including bird lists and maps, for other sites, to be made available on the website; and
  - Bird route pamphlets for some of the key areas of the ACT, following the examples produced by other bird clubs.
2. Support for CIMAG initiatives to reduce populations of Common mynas (and Starlings and Spotted doves)
3. Members nametags - name tags are to be issued to each member and their use at COG meetings strongly encouraged.
4. Update the COG pamphlet on bird attracting garden plants
5. Improve user friendliness of map support features for COG atlassing
6. If required, identify financial and logistical support to update the 'COG Observations Record' data sheet input program

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## Birdline ACT

There was an item posted to the CanberraBirds email list (Chat-line) in mid January 2011 concerning the formation of Birdline ACT.

Birdline-ACT is associated with a bird reporting website called Eremaea. The Eremaea website can be found at <http://www.ereamae.com>. As described on the Eremaea webpage the site has been primarily designed for those interested in reporting unusual sightings and is a portal for those who are generally interested in 'twitching' but there is a facility provided whereby those interested in providing bird lists can do so. Eremaea is privately owned. Data to them can be sold with proceeds then donated to conservation issues

Birdline ACT is a site for reporting rare or unusual birds seen outside their normal range, unusually high or low numbers, early or late arrivals or departures for migrant species and interesting behaviour or unusual habitat usage. It joins similar birdlines for all other Australia's states and territories.

- Birdline ACT is similar to the CanberraBirds email list insofar as it is a place for advising interested people about observations, but differs from CanberraBirds in that (1) it is focused specifically on rare and unusual bird observations rather than broader reporting and discussion and (2) one must visit the website to see the reports, rather than having it delivered by e-mail as occurs with the Canberrabirds list. (That said, there is a facility for the Birdline ACT reports to be delivered by e-mail on a weekly basis, but not more frequently.)
- Eremaea Birds has a separate facility for entering survey data in a structured format ('lists'). Birders who are registered with Eremaea Birds, and are also registered Birds Australia atlassers, can submit their data to Birds Australia through Eremaea Birds and can be confident that those data will be passed on to COG in due course.
- Birders should be aware that reports submitted to Birdline ACT will not necessarily be recorded in COG's nor Birds Australia's data bases. The same applies to reports submitted to the CanberraBirds e-mail list.
- Canberra region birders, while welcome to send reports to the CanberraBirds e-mail list and/or Birdline ACT, should ensure that they also fill in a COG data sheet or enter the data into COG's online database, otherwise their observations may not be captured and made available for the *Annual Bird Report*, research, monitoring, et cetera.

COG members who report unusual sightings on CanberraBirds e-mail list may find they have been placed on Birdline ACT. — **Chris Davey (President)**

## *What Makes a Good Farm for Wildlife?- CSIRO Publishing*

This recent ANU Fenner School publication is dedicated to COG volunteers who have carried out bird surveys over the last decade and also the many farmers who have made their properties available for study. The book has some 14 authors, mainly scientists and higher degree students, but including a fifth generation landholder from Gundagai.

The book deals with the importance of remnants and replantings, paddock trees, rocky outcrops, dams and waterways, native grasses, understorey plants, dead trees, leaf litter and fallen timber, and where and what to plant to maintain a range of habitats and types of wildlife. As well as birds, impacts on mammals, reptiles, frogs and fish are discussed.

There are major issues in balancing production and conservation and co-operation between adjacent landholders on feral animal and weed controls. There are several examples where landholders have successfully integrated these principles into their farm management. Hundreds of farmers are now participating in the various ANU projects.

This book should be of particular interest to COG members on rural properties. The text is augmented with numerous colour photographs and diagrams. Lead author, David Lindenmayer has agreed to talk to a future COG meeting on the subject.

Royalties from book sales will go to environmental education. — **Bruce Lindenmayer**

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## Preliminary outcomes of COG's 2010 bird blitz

The highlight of the 2010 blitz was undoubtedly the **Channel-billed Cuckoo**, a "first" for the blitz surveys, seen at The Pinnacle Nature Reserve by Sue Mathews and John Brannan, and later recorded by Jack Holland in Chapman.

At the January COG meeting, prizes [kindly donated by Steve Stephinson, Vivien Pinder, Margaret Aston, Susan Robertson and Bob Digan ] were awarded in various categories, as follows:

<b>Datasheets received: 255</b> <b>(192 hard-copy; 63 electronic)</b>
<b>Named participants: 85</b>
<b>Grid cells covered: 92</b>
<b>Species recorded: 157</b>
<b>Species recorded breeding: 79</b>

- Lucky draw for participation in every blitz so far (a copy of *Water-birds*, by Theodore Cross, donated by Bob Digan): **Bruce Lindenmayer**
- Lucky draw prize for two days' blitzing or more than 10 datasheets in 2010 (a painting by Vivien Pinder): **John Brannan**
- Lucky draw prize for recording a vulnerable species (a framed photograph by Steve Stephinson): Roger Curnow
- Lucky draw prize for recording the most unusual bird, the **Channel-billed Cuckoo** (prize a bottle of wine from Margaret Aston): **John Brannan**
- Lucky draw prizes for participants in the 2010 blitz (packs of greeting cards or assorted books): Lia Battison, Terry Bell, Darryl Beaumont, Jenny Bounds, Muriel Brookfield, Erin Brown, Jean Casburn, Geoffrey Dabb, Chris Davey, Eva de Kool, Marthijn de Kool, Paul Fennell, Peter Fullagar, Jim Graham, Horst Hahne, Kay Hahne, Roy Harvey, Jack Holland, Anne Holmes, Alison Mackerras, Paul Mackerras, Peter Milburn, Gail Neumann, Vivien Pinder, David Rees, David Rosalky, Ros Walcott and Louise Wangerer.

Special commendations also to:

- **Con Boekel**, for his nighttime surveys recording **Boobooks**;
- **Dan Mantle**, for tracking down **Chestnut-rumped Heathwren** and **Painted Button-quail**;
- **Geoffrey Dabb**, for remembering the **Peacocks**;
- **David Landon** and **Jeannie Gray**, for recording the only **Crakes** of the blitz;
- **Roger Curnow**, for braving Yowani golfers to reach the **Ibis** and **Cormorant** breeding colony; and
- **Peter Milburn**, for taking time out from banding to record high country specialties.

Again, many thanks to all participants for their contribution to COG's blitz surveys. A detailed report on the outcomes will be available in *Canberra Bird Notes* later in the year. And please put the dates of this year's blitz in your diaries NOW – 29-30 October 2011. — **Barbara Allan, Blitz coordinator**

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## Australia Day Award

[The following news was just too late to make the February edition of *Gang-gang* but the editors believe the occasion should not go unmarked by COG.]

Dr Penelope Diane (Penny) OLSEN was created a Member (AM), in the general division of the Order of Australia in the Australia Day honours list, for service to the conservation sciences as an author and researcher, and through the study and documentation of Australian bird species and their history.

Full details of her citation are available on the Governor-General's website at <http://www.gg.gov.au/>



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## Help needed

I am a PhD student at the Australian National University and my project has involved the release of 43 **Brown Treecreepers** into Mulligans Flat and Goorooyarroo Nature Reserves just over a year ago. I am still monitoring the remaining birds in these reserves to track survival, however since there are no longer any functioning radio-transmitters and some birds have dispersed, such monitoring can be quite difficult. I am therefore hoping that you can help.

If you are out in Mulligans and Goorooyarroo and happen to come across a Brown Treecreeper or two, it would be great if you could let me know. Information on the following would be great: date and time — location — gps position if possible — coloured leg bands for identification (if possible) — if the bird seems to be by itself or with other birds.

I can provide maps of Mulligans and Goorooyarroo indicating where I know some birds are, or where some are suspected to be. Birds may be in other areas, so please let me know if you see them anywhere. Please note that all of my birds have leg bands attached.

You can email any sightings directly to me on [victoria.sheean@anu.edu.au](mailto:victoria.sheean@anu.edu.au).

Thanks for your help in advance.

Victoria Sheean (Bennett), PhD Scholar, Fenner School of Environment and Society.

Mob: 0401 883 567; Ph : +61 2 6125 6775; Fax: +61 2 6125 0757

Photo by David Cook



**Brown Treecreeper**  
( *Climacteris picumnus* )

## Committee News

- COG members intending to participate in the BA Campout at Scottsdale Reserve near Bredbo in April are reminded they need to register by March 18. Information about the campout and registration details are available on the COG website.
- Beth Mantle has resigned from the committee, but will continue to edit *Canberra Bird Notes*, and will continue to work on redesign of the COG website. The Committee expressed its appreciation for Beth's work as a committee member.
- There has been some discussion of the possibility of introducing additional weekday COG outings, since the monthly Wednesday walks are so popular, with close to 30 people attending the last outing.
- The second of COG's bird route brochures is now available on the website and printed copies will also be made available. This one covers the western end of Lake Burley Griffin and Callum Brae Nature Reserve. You can find the brochures on the Maps, Forms and Lists page of the website. Thanks are due to Sue Lashko for her work on these publications.
- A brief submission regarding the review of the ACT's *Nature Conservation Act 1980* has been drafted by Jenny Bounds. We have said that the current legislation has failed to protect important bird habitat and woodland-dependent species, and are recommending a complete re-write of the Act and a landscape-scale approach to nature conservation. COG will be supporting a detailed submission from the Conservation Council, which COG provided input to through a working group.
- The conservation group is discussing follow up action regarding the bike trails issue on Bruce Ridge, after receiving an unsatisfactory response from the ACT Government.
- COG has been asked to participate in a consultation group, regarding a Master Plan for the sewage works at Fyshwick.
- The next round of Woodland surveys is March 19-27th and site coordinators have been notified.

## 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  
(02) 6258 3531, or  
barbdebruine@hotmail.com  
or see

<http://www.stayz.com.au/25595>.

## PASSIVE SOLAR HOUSE

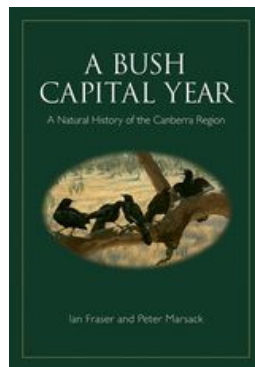
### South Rosedale

*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  
6286 1564 or  
gramsay@grapevine.com.au

# COG SALES

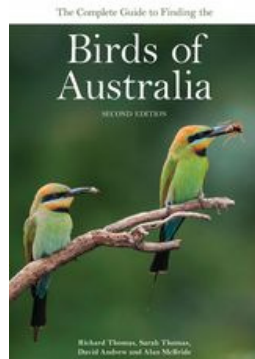


### **A Bush Capital Year: A Natural History of the Canberra Region** Ian Fraser , Peter Marsack

*A Bush Capital Year* introduces the fauna, flora, habitats and reserves of the Australian Capital Territory and includes the most recent research available. It also emphasises often unappreciated or even unrecognised urban wildlife. For each month of the year there are 10 stories which discuss either a species or a group of species, such as mosses and mountain grasshoppers. While never anthropomorphic, many of the stories are written from the organism's point of view, while others are from that of an observer. Beautiful paintings complement the text and allow better visualisation of the stories and the subjects. Members price \$32

### **What Makes a Good Farm for Wildlife?** David Lindenmayer

Based on thirteen years of intensive research, the book breaks the discussion into chapters on key environmental and vegetation assets and then discusses how to make these assets better for biodiversity. The work encompasses information on vertebrates and invertebrates on farms and their relationships with significant vegetation and environmental assets: woodland remnants, plantings, paddocks, rocky outcrops and waterways. A chapter is dedicated to each asset and how it can be managed. Members price \$27

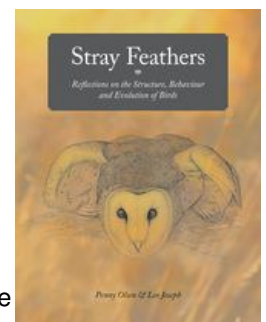


### **The Complete Guide to Finding the Birds of Australia 2nd Ed** Richard Thomas , Sarah Thomas , David Andrew , Alan McBride

First published in 1994, this was the first ever book of its type in Australia – a complete guide to locating every resident bird species. This fully revised second edition describes the best-known sites for all of Australia's endemic birds, plus regular migrants such as seabirds and shorebirds. It covers all states and territories, and is the first guide to include all of Australia's island and external territories. A comprehensive Bird Finder Guide details site information on all Australian bird species, and the authors provide valuable travel advice. Member's price \$32 – expected for the April meeting.

### **Stray Feathers: Reflections on the Structure, Behaviour and Evolution of Birds** Penny Olsen , Leo Joseph

*Stray Feathers* showcases some of the remarkable adaptations of Australian birds. A brief introduction describes how evolution shapes form and function, followed by a series of vignettes illustrating the wondrous variety of forms and functions shaped by evolution. For example, did you know that barn owls can hunt in absolute darkness and that cuckoos commence incubation before their egg is laid? Members price \$39 – expected for the June meeting



Also titles from CSIRO Publishing's *Australian Natural History* series (\$29.00 each for members): *Kookaburra*, *Australian Magpie*, and many more.

**At the March meeting only – remaining T-shirts and Polo shirts (limited sizes)**

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## Avian Whimsy #87

### Birds that Breed Together ... are probably Australian

The popular image of a bird family is one of mum, dad, and varying numbers of offspring – a nice avian nuclear family in fact. And at least in the temperate Northern Hemisphere that's not too far from the mark. As in so many things feathered however, Australia is different. A figure I've long had in my notes is that some 12% of Australian bird species have 'helpers' at the nest, at least some of the time. More tellingly, Rob Heinsohn points out in his essay on **White-winged Choughs** in the excellent *Boom and Bust; bird stories for a dry country*, that if we look only at the 'old Gondwanan' Australian birds the figure becomes closer to 20%. This compares with 2-3% for the world at large. Or put another way, some 6% of the world's bird species (if we consider all Australian birds) account for over 30% of the world's cooperative breeders.

It is not clear why this should be, though surely the answer is ecological. It has been suggested that an El Niño-driven climate dictates that hard breeding seasons will come about regularly, even outside the arid zones, and in such situations it might just be too difficult for naïve young birds to make their own way in their first year. Better perhaps to stay home, learn the trade – a young **chough** for instance has no idea how to build a mud nest – and wait for the chance to inherit the territory.

(It is possible too that in some areas – especially South America – the work has not been done, and there are more cooperatives waiting to be outed. Those of us who have worked desperately to catch – or not – a fleeting glimpse of any of the horde of skulking ant-birds, **shrikes**, **pittas**, **wrens**, **thrushes** etc, in the stygian gloom of the Amazonian understorey will roll our eyes at the concept of studying them at the nest.)

Charles Darwin wasn't much aware of bird extended families, but he worried over the concept of cooperation in insects, quite rightly seeing the problems this posed for his competition-based theories. The answer seems to be that bird helpers are nearly always related to the chicks being raised, often as siblings, so they have a definite genetic stake in a successful outcome.

As ever, nature is utterly uninterested in fitting into our little boxes, and there is a range of options for the cooperators. The **choughs** and related inland **Apostlebirds**, along with the unrelated **babblers** (which are also unrelated to 'babblers' elsewhere in the world) represent the acme of cooperative breeders. They virtually never breed in pairs, and fail if they do. Up to a dozen helpers assist in nearly all aspects of breeding, though the efforts of young **choughs** in nest-building are like those of children in the kitchen – more beneficial to themselves than to the product. As a rule of claw, two **chough** helpers are needed to support every chick, in addition to the parents. (In fact their feeding method, relying especially on locating and extracting underground grubs, is so exacting that it takes four years just to learn to do it well enough to produce excess to feed youngsters.)

Then there is a wide range of other Australian species, from **kookaburras** to magpies to **yellow robins** to **scrubwrens** and **fairy-wrens** which may successfully breed alone, but which often have helpers. When they do, the chances are that they will raise more chicks, and have a better chance of breeding twice in the season. There are many variables; for instance among **Laughing Kookaburras** big brothers are more effective helpers than are big sisters. **Fairy-wren** helpers are nearly always brothers to the chicks; brothers and uncles are common **scrubwren** helpers.

**Buff-rumped** and **Striated Thornbills** (and probably other **thornbills**) winter as a 'clan' of upwards of a dozen birds, and in spring break into pairs or small groups to breed. The pairs nearly always fail, and when they do, they join another clan grouping and help them. Presumably they are all related, but I'm not aware that the work has been done yet. A first brood of **Dusky Moorhens** will help feed their young siblings from a second clutch later in the season; I have read of the same behaviour in **Welcome Swallows**, but HANZAB doesn't confirm this.

**Miners**, **Noisy** and **Bell**, have breeding systems far too complex for mere humans to fathom. In a big colony are many 'clans' with around four males to a female, though both polygyny and polyandry are practised, and up to ten birds may visit a nest.

As we refine and broaden our ideas of what a human family can and should be, it should be no surprise that, in Australia at least, the birds are again way ahead of us. — Ian Fraser [ianf@pcug.org.au](mailto:ianf@pcug.org.au)



## WONGA

### Bawley Point

South Coast of N.S.W.

Two well equipped timber cottages in 50 acres. Damp and dry warm temperate forest, kunzea and rock provide for a diversity of birds and other animals. A short walk down the driveway leads to sand dunes and beaches, sea birds and Hooded Plovers. Close to National Parks, lakes and historic sites.

patricia.walker@bigpond.com  
phone 02 6251 3136

[www.visitnsw.com.au](http://www.visitnsw.com.au) (follow the links to accommodation and Wonga)

## COG welcomes the following new members:

R Dean, Kaleen

M Kingsford, Nicholls

A Reeson, Lyneham

R Letts, Bungendore

H Searcy, Braidwood

J Hopwood, Goulburn

## NEXT NEWSLETTER

### April deadline

Wednesday 23 March 2011

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.

## COG info

*President*—Chris Davey, ph 6254 6324

Email: [chris\\_davey@aapt.net.au](mailto:chris_davey@aapt.net.au)

*Vice President*—Matthew Frawley

Email: [frawley.matthew@gmail.com](mailto:frawley.matthew@gmail.com)

*Treasurer*—Noel Luff

Email: [noelluff@homemail.com.au](mailto:noelluff@homemail.com.au)

*Secretary*—Sandra Henderson 6231 0303

[cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au)

*Address for correspondence*

The Secretary  
COG, PO Box 301  
Civic Square, ACT 2608

*Newsletter distribution*

Brian Fair and helpers

*COG membership*

2010-2011 memberships:

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

*Membership inquiries*—

Sandra Henderson ph 6231 0303

[membership@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:membership@canberrabirds.org.au)

for changed address or other details

*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](http://www.canberrabirds.org.au)

*Office*

COG no longer maintains an office. For all enquiries or access to COG's library phone Barbara Allan 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](mailto:canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au) with the subject 'subscribe' without the quotation marks

*Editor Canberra Bird Notes*

Beth Mantle

[CBN@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:CBN@canberrabirds.org.au)



## Gang-gang

If undeliverable, please return to

Canberra Ornithologists Group, Inc.

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