

# Gang-gang

May 2006

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

## Monthly Meeting

8 pm Wednesday

10 May 2006

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

Our first speakers will be drawn  
from the 'Africa sextet':  
Julie McGuinness  
Sue Lashko  
Tom and Jane Green and  
Martyn and Pat Moffat.

Their talk will be on **The Nyika  
Plateau: Birding in the Malawi  
high country.**

Our second speaker, back by  
popular request, is **Dr David  
Lindenmayer** of CRES, ANU.

David will update us on his recent  
research projects to protect  
woodland bird species.

**Everyone welcome**

## What to watch for this month

Once we reach May, the outwards migration season is nearly over. Most **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** will now have departed and any remaining flocks should be predominantly **White-naped**.

There are some species, however, which depart later than this, particularly the **Dusky Woodswallow** and **Olive-backed Oriole**. These are often still present in the second week of May, and also seem to be over-wintering in increasing numbers, particularly the former, and often near Lake Burley Griffin. Over-wintering is also not unusual for other migrants which, depending on the weather, may also stay here in small numbers. Examples are the **Yellow-faced** and **Fuscous Honeyeaters**, **Grey Fantail** and **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike**. Other birds don't go too far away and even stay inland where it is slightly warmer, I've seen a couple of big flocks of **Noisy Friarbirds** feeding in flowering gums in the Cowra area in the middle of winter.



Photo by David Cook

**Olive-backed Oriole**  
(*Oriolus sagittatus*)

The **Swift Parrot** is an example of a species that travels much further (from Tasmania) to over-winter on the mainland. Again, look for this in the local area where gums are flowering. They are noisy birds while feeding/flying so can be spotted relatively easily. However, it looks like the influx that happened in the Mt Majura area last autumn won't be repeated this year.

Other species are altitudinal migrants in that they spend the summer season in the higher country and over-winter in Canberra. Around Easter the first **Flame Robins** started appearing in the open paddocks to the west, numbers will gradually build up and the coloured males will join the brown birds that always seem to arrive first. Look for them on the ground or on low perches such as rocks, stumps and fences. The **Scarlet Robin** is less of a migrant, but does move round a bit, and pairs can be found in woodlands close to Canberra, though they generally avoid gardens. However, the **Rose Robin** likes gardens, and over the past 10 years or so has also often over-wintered, sometimes staying around for a number of days. The **Golden Whistler** is another altitudinal migrant that likes gardens: usually these are grey/brown birds, but if you're lucky a lovely male may sometimes stay around for a while. Of the honeyeaters, the **White-eared** will arrive round the beginning of April and, at

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least in the Chapman area, be quite conspicuous for a couple of months and then gradually become harder to find, before it becomes completely absent again during September. If you're lucky the **Crescent Honeyeater**, again a winter visitor, may come to your garden, particularly if winter nectar and water sources are available. The **Eastern Spinebill** is also a nectar feeder/water lover and mainly present in winter, though some do stay around all year, particularly in gardens in which flowering is continuous.

This will be my last "What to watch out for" column for several months as we're taking a break overseas. Enjoy your winter birding in the ACT, though there is less activity than in other seasons, it can still be rewarding if you find the right spots, and I look forward to alerting you to more local activity in the August Gang-gang when the first inwards migrants will be starting to appear.

**Jack Holland**

## Field Trip reports

### Autumn Woodland Surveys

#### Newline Survey - Friday 24 March

With cooler conditions settling in, small birds were already around in flocks at the Newline site, with large numbers of **Striated Pardalotes** and mixed flocks of **thornbills** and **Weebills**. In the front paddock, three **Brown Treecreepers** and three **Jacky Winters** were highlights, plus a much larger than usual number of **White-plumed Honeyeaters**. Between the dump and Site 5, **Double-barred Finches**, **Southern Whiteface**, **Red-browed Finches** and another **Jacky Winter** were recorded, plus a huge flock of **Red-Rumped Parrots** - 46 birds in total. Of the summer migrants, a **Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo**, a **White-throated Gerygone** and a couple of **Rufous Whistlers** were still around. It was fairly quiet at the quarry end of the site, with the usual larger species, **Noisy Miners**, **Crimson** and **Eastern Rosellas**, **Galahs** and **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos**, and a flock of 19 **Little Ravens** the only species of particular interest. A total of 43 species was recorded. **Jenny Bounds**

#### Mulligan's Flat Survey- Sunday 26 March



Photo by Anthony Overs

It was a beautiful fine, mild and calm morning for the autumn survey. Mixed feeding flocks of small birds were apparent across the reserve, with sightings of altitudinal migrants, **White-eared Honeyeater** and **Golden Whistler**, a sure sign of the cooler months approaching. However, both **Gerygones** and **Rufous Whistlers** (spring/ summer migrants) were still around. Quite a large number of **Spotted Pardalotes** (20+) in one flock on the western ridge was an interesting record. **Scarlet Robins** were recorded at eight sites across the reserve, including some of the more sheltered sites; they are usually recorded in good numbers at **Mulligan's Flat** in the cooler months. (One day when I have some time, it would be interesting to look at the Woodland database records for **Scarlet Robins** and the habitat correlations at the reserve.)

**Rufous Whistler** (*Pachycephala rufiventris*) Other interesting sightings were a **Sacred Kingfisher** at one site on the eastern side of the reserve, a pair of **Hooded Robins** near sites 21/22 (this is on the edge of a known HR territory) and one dark coloured **Wedge-tailed Eagle** which flew along the western ridge from the reserve into trees in the new suburb of Forde where infrastructure development is proceeding. A total of 44 species was recorded. **Jenny Bounds**

#### East Basin/Molonglo electric boat cruise, Sunday 2 April 2006

A full boat of COG members and their guests accompanied me on this crisp morning's visit to check on the nesting activity of darters and cormorants in Molonglo Reach. Despite it being well into autumn there was still considerable breeding activity, in fact this was more extensive than when we last checked in mid January. There were still many **Darters** nesting with over 55 adult birds (with good numbers of males in breeding plumage though many were immatures indicative of a very good season) seen and well over 20 nests (again some on the north bank) spread out along the Reach up to the water skiing area past the bridge on Dairy Road. These were still at all stages of breeding from

birds sitting tight, to smallish chicks in the nest to large chicks sitting on or near the nest. There was also significant cormorant breeding activity with **Little Black Cormorants** (about 35 birds in total and over 10 nests, again at all stages of breeding) at the usual spot where the river widens appreciably. In amongst these were around 10 **Great Cormorant** nests, with young seen in several. This is only the second time that we've confirmed this species nesting in three years, and follows other reports of their breeding, for example at the Queanbeyan sewerage works. As for January, **Little Pied Cormorants** were low in number, but two nests were noted, one of which contained two young, at either end of the breeding activity.

In keeping with the mid-autumn timing, there was lots of other activity with a total of 43 species either seen or heard. The undoubted highlight of these was a mature **White-bellied Sea-eagle**, which we first saw high over being pursued by an **Australian Raven**. Some minutes later it was flushed from a tree close by the most prolific cormorant nesting spot (HANZAB confirms this species as commonly recorded taking juveniles from colonial nesters such as cormorants and darters). We also had good views of some of the dozen or so **Cattle Egrets** feeding close to stock on the banks of the Jerrabomberra Nature Reserve. **Silveryeyes** seemed to be everywhere along the banks. Other birds not often seen along the Reach were a **Fan-tailed Cuckoo**, an **Olive-backed Oriole** and a number of **Grey Teal**. Several **Double-barred Finches** were also heard. There were also 3 **Australian Shelduck** loafing on the eastern shores of East Basin, and several male **Mallards** in amongst the birds being fed with bread on our arrival back provided quite a contrast from the other noticeably smaller ducks we'd been seeing.

Yet another very successful COG trip up the Molonglo River, and this now completes three years of these trips. In all of these there has been significant breeding, now confirmed for the main four species. With all the activity it was one of the busiest in the more than six trips that I've led, and one of the most enjoyable. Certainly there will be more opportunities for those members who haven't yet been, or would like a repeat next season. Jack Holland

#### **Oolong Property, near Dalton NSW - Sunday 9 April 2006**

Although it was a pleasant still day, this trip did not attract a lot of interest from the membership. One (yes, just one) COG member and I met at 7.45am and tootled off via Gundaroo and Gunning to arrive at about 9.00am. The property caretaker, Lewis, was there to meet us, and we soon departed on a walk that roughly circumnavigates the property. The birds were not very enthusiastic either, there not being very many feathered friends around. Although we tallied up 35 species, there did not seem to be many more than 35 birds seen the whole morning. The property was much the same as COG had seen it on the previous visits, with some varied vegetation, accessed by a track. Although much of the property is an 'island' in grazing land, there are other patches of woodland and light forest nearby, one of which was connected to Oolong by a corridor of vegetation. It was a very pleasant three-hour walk on Oolong, and the participants thank Gianni D'Addario for allowing us to visit his property once again. The species we observed were: **Wedge-tailed Eagle, Nankeen Kestrel, Brown Falcon, Australian Magpie, Red Wattlebird, Striated Pardalote, Spotted Pardalote, Grey Butcherbird, Welcome Swallow, Noisy Miner, Masked Lapwing, White-eared Honeyeater, White-plumed Honeyeater, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Common Starling, Magpie-lark, Eastern Spinebill, Crimson Rosella, White-throated Treecreeper, Buff-rumped Thornbill, Striated Thornbill, Brown Thornbill, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Weebill, Grey Fantail, Superb Fairywren, Rufous Whistler, Galah,**



### **Australian Ornithological Services P/L**

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

#### **2006 Birding Tours**

##### **New Caledonia**

1 — 8 August  
includes Lifou & Ouvéa Islands

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

##### **Regular Plains-wanderer weekends**

December 2 & 3, 9 & 10,  
16 & 17 and 30 & 31

#### **2007 Birding Tours**

##### **Tasmanian Endemic Bird and Mammal Tour**

18—24 February  
Bruny Island, Melaleuca, pelagic

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

##### **Thailand**

7—24 April  
co-led with Uthai Treesucon

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

**Strzelecki Track**  
August 2007

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

**All above tours are accommodated**

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



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**Laughing Kookaburra, White-browed Scrubwren, Silvereeye, Speckled Warbler, Black-fronted Dotterel, Willie Wagtail, Scarlet Robin.**

**Alistair Bestow**

### **Honeyeater migration survey 8 and 23 April**

Thanks to all who participated in the two honeyeater migration surveys.

**Saturday 8th April** was the first good day after a significant cold snap, however the numbers of migrating honeyeaters were surprisingly low. At the different locations along the river, the totals of honeyeaters migrating were:

- Smiths Rd (instead of Angle Crossing) – 1680
- Tharwa Sandwash – 109
- Point Hut – 31
- Pine Island – 60
- Kambah Pool – 131
- Casuarina Sands – 321
- Shepherds Lookout – 20

The vast majority of birds were **Yellow-faced**, with some sites recording no **White-naped**, although perhaps 5% of the total at Smiths Rd were **White-naped**. There were occasional **Red Wattlebirds**, **Noisy Friarbirds** and the odd **Spinebill**. Interestingly at Smiths Rd there were about 40 **White-eared Honeyeaters** seeming to move with the flocks and a few small groups of **Spotted Pardalotes**. The Smiths Rd/Angle Crossing area again proved to be the major route.



Photo by Geoffrey Dabb

**Yellow-faced Honeyeater**  
(*Lichenostomus chrysops*)

on

Just for comparison, in 2003 (3 months after the fires) we held a similar survey 6 April in good weather conditions, with a total of 13,700 counted across the same sites (8,400 at the old Angle Crossing site). The migration seems to have started a bit late this year, perhaps because of the warm, dry March.

**On Sunday 23 April** the weather was ideal, but perplexingly the number of honeyeaters migrating was again disappointingly low. The numbers moving on Saturday 22nd, a day of almost identical weather, seemed to have been much greater. In previous years I would have thought Sunday's weather would've guaranteed large numbers. Maybe 2-3 seasons of poor breeding in the mountains is now showing up. However, at least it was a beautiful morning to be out.

As expected there were larger numbers of **White-naped Honeyeaters** than two weeks before; some flocks were composed mostly of this species. Almost no **Red Wattlebirds** were recorded. Compared to recordings on 8 April, the honeyeaters I observed at Smiths Rd were much more purposeful in their speed and direction, arriving with little calling and setting off across the barren wastes of the former Ingledene pine plantation with little hesitation. Results from each site were:

- Smiths Rd – 1794
- Tharwa Sandwash – 84
- Point Hut – 2
- Kambah Pool – 460
- Casuarina Sands – 445
- Shepherds Lookout – 437

Only a few years ago COG used to have the annual honeyeater outing to Point Hut. This year it was a total non-event there, but fortunately the observers enjoyed some other good sightings including a juvenile **White-bellied Sea-eagle**.

**Nicki Taws**

### **Wednesday walk – 19 April – Kelly Road**

The April Wednesday walk was to Kelly Road just off the Monaro highway south of Williamsdale. 17 members and visitors attended. The birding was good despite windy conditions. Our first stop was just over the railway line where we found a large flock of perhaps 60 **Diamond Firetails** and good numbers of **Southern Whiteface**. **Brown Treecreepers** and a pair of **Hooded Robins** were other highlights. A **Wedge-tailed Eagle** soared overhead. We then walked down the road near the TSR where strong wind made birding harder work. For our efforts we were rewarded with excellent views

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of **Willie Wagtails** and **Restless Flycatchers** in the same tree. We also compared **Fuscous** and **White-plumed Honeyeaters** in the trees overhead and recorded a total of 37 species for the morning. **Tom Green**

## Future Field Trips

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

### **Botanic Gardens — Sunday 14 May – Bush Birds for Beginners morning**

This morning walk will be the first for 2006 aimed specifically to help beginners and new members identify birds and to learn about their behaviour and calls. The Botanic Gardens are especially suitable for such an outing, as they allow the opportunity to observe a range of local bush birds in a variety of habitats. Due to the available food supply they are also a relative haven for birds during late autumn/winter. Anthony Overs will lead this outing, which will consist of a stroll through this lovely part of Canberra for several hours from 9.30 am, meeting at the bus shelter. Please book your place with Anthony (6254 0168, or by E-mail to [anthony.overs.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:anthony.overs.reps@aph.gov.au)), who will be happy to discuss whether this outing is suitable for you. Please also don't forget to bring your binoculars and field guide.

### **Wednesday Walk – 17 May – Tidbinbilla**

The May walk will be to Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. Meet at the visitors centre at 9 am. We will target the robins.

### **Jamberoo Valley/Barren Grounds NR — Friday night - Sunday, 26-28 May**

This trip is fully booked but a waiting list is open in case of any cancellations. If you want to be placed on this list, or for any other information please contact Kathy Walter or John Goldie on (H) 6241 7639. Full details of the trip were in April's *Gang-Gang*.

### **Eurobodalla Nature Coast — Saturday –Monday 10-12 June**

COG will be visiting a number of birding spots on the Eurobodalla Nature Coast during the weekend, with members of the Eurobodalla Natural History Society (ENHS), including the Eurobodalla Botanic Gardens (very good for birds in winter), a mangrove boardwalk, coastal and forest areas. There are also other attractions (distractions!) like the popular Moruya markets on Saturday morning. Jenny Bounds (Ph 6288 7802) and Tom Green (Ph 6247 0630) are sharing the job of organising the accommodation and activities for this weekend, with assistance from local birders in ENHS.

COG will be based at the Broulee Beach Holiday Park, 6 Lyttle St, Broulee (Big 4 Holiday Park). This is a small park in a quiet area of the coast, north of Moruya, adjacent to Broulee Island and a long quiet beach/foreshore. COG has booked a couple of two-bedroom units next to each other in a quiet part of the park, from Friday to Sunday night inclusive - 3 nights. Units are spacious and have all facilities including crockery, cooking and eating utensils, stove, microwave and dishwasher, en-suite bathroom and balcony/outdoor seating area, plus barbecue area. A Queen bedroom for two people is available in each, with a single bed and bunk bed in the second bedroom for three people. For details of cost and to reserve a room/bed in the units, phone Jenny Bounds on 6288 7802. Powered sites in a grassed area adjacent to the units are available for those who have camper trailers, caravans or tents. Please phone the Holiday Park direct (Ph 02 4471 6247) to reserve a powered site (COG has not booked these). Early booking for both units and powered sites is recommended.

All participants on this weekend are asked to register with Jenny Bounds, phone above, including those staying privately in other accommodation, or at the Holiday Park in powered sites. As usual on COG weekends, we will arrange shared/communal meals on Sat and Sun nights - one night a barbecue.

### **Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve – Superb Lyrebird survey – Saturday 24 or Sunday 25 June depending on weather**

Since the January 2003 bushfires Chris Davey and Peter Fullagar 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 who are familiar with the calls of the Lyrebird to join them for a morning's survey. They are calling for expressions of interest to join them at 8:00 am to walk the trails and to record the locations of calling birds. At this stage they envisage the survey will take about three hours. This outing will be a repeat of the very successful surveys conducted in 2004 and 2005. Further details will be announced at the May/June COG meetings.

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If interested please contact Chris Davey on 6254 6324 (H) or Peter Fullagar on 6161 4808 (H).

### **Molonglo Valley Minibus Tour - Sunday 23 July**

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

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

In the February Gang-gang, we indicated that timing and arrangements for this tour were being negotiated with a preferred timing in November 2006. Following several months of discussion with guide Ian Hutton, the tour will now be in March 2007 (dates above), a week centred on a waders project, with expert guides Chris Hassell from Broome Bird Observatory, Peter Fullagar (COG member and seabird expert) and Ian Hutton (LHI naturalist). The tour will include the usual walks, talks, boat and beach activities which Ian offers on LHI, plus banding and related activities around waders. March is still very good timing to visit, with 13 of the 14 seabirds still on the island. Accommodation is likely to be at Somerset Apartments (see [www.lordhoweisle.com.au](http://www.lordhoweisle.com.au)). The group will be limited to 16 COG members. Final costing is awaited from Ian Hutton. I have contacted those who expressed earlier interest in a tour to LHI to offer them places on the March 2007 trip, and am still waiting on some responses. However, some places are likely to be available - please contact me if you are interested in going on the trip. Once we receive a costing, details will be provided to all on the expressions of interest list, a deposit will be payable and a booking form will need to be completed to confirm.

**Jenny Bounds**, ph 62887802 — email [jbounds@tpg.com.au](mailto:jbounds@tpg.com.au)

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

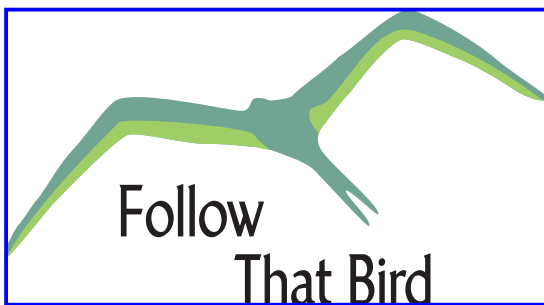
NPA(ACT) is organising a **Symposium, Caring for Namadgi - Science and People. 5-7 May 2006** at Vikings Town Centre Club (the old Tuggeranong Sports Club), Cnr Athllon Drive and Rowland Crescent, Tuggeranong, near the bus exchange. The Symposium aims to involve the general public and to bring together scientists and historians from different fields and organisations to deliver papers which will stimulate discussion about scientific research relating to Namadgi and its management. The Symposium will cover several themes including the park's natural history, its water supply, bushfire management, climate change, Aboriginal and European history, and the challenges that lie ahead. The theme "nature reserve or theme park" will also be considered. Speakers include local identities, Ian Fraser, Matthew Higgins, scientists, Alec Costin, Roger Good, staff from Environment ACT's Wildlife Research and Monitoring Unit and from the ACT Parks and Conservation Service. NPA is funding the symposium and the daily registration fees are set at \$10/person. You can register online for all or part of the Symposium and pay at the door. You can access the registration site as well as the draft program of speakers on the NPA website, [www.npaact.org.au](http://www.npaact.org.au).

**The National Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater survey** weekends for 2006 are on the **20-21 May** (3rd weekend in May) and the **5-6 August** (1st weekend in August). Survey forms can be obtained from Debbie Saunders, Swift Parrot recovery officer, ([debbie.saunders@environment.nsw.gov.au](mailto:debbie.saunders@environment.nsw.gov.au), ph: 1800 66 57 66), or David Geering ([david.geering@environment.nsw.gov.au](mailto:david.geering@environment.nsw.gov.au),



Photo by Harvey Perkins

**Swift Parrot** ( *Lathamus discolor* )



# CROWDY HEAD & COMBOYNE PLATEAU

22 - 26 JULY 2006

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Leader:** Alan Morris

## Summary

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

## Featured Birds

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

## Contact us for an itinerary

**Follow That Bird – Birds and Camaraderie**

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

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

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



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ph: 1800 62 10 56) or from the Birds Australia Swift Parrot web page (<http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au/birds/swift.html>). Volunteers are asked to contact either Debbie or David to nominate the areas they wish to survey or to get some survey area suggestions. COG does not have any organised activity on the first weekend, so why not get some friends together, enjoy the late autumn weather and survey some sites?

### **Celebrate World Environment Day – Environment Benefit Dinner - Saturday 3 June 2006**

Celebrate this important event with like-minded friends, and help to support the work of the Conservation Council to achieve the highest quality environment for the ACT region. This is the Conservation Council's major fundraising event for the year. Last year's dinner was a sell out, so early bookings and payment are suggested. The dinner of four courses will feature locally produced and organic food, on an Asian theme, prepared by Consensus Productions. \$45 a head for i-members or early bird payment by 5 May; otherwise \$50 a head. Bookings can be made at the Conservation Council office, phone 6247 7808. Member groups of the Conservation Council are being encouraged to book a table or tables - I have booked a table (of 10) for COG members - if you would like to attend the dinner, phone the Council office (6247 7808) to book and mention you want to sit on the COG table. Alternatively, you can book your own table for 10 or individual seats on an unallocated table.. Local wine will be available for purchase by the glass or bottle. The dinner will feature a guest speaker. Please make payment by credit card on booking. Note: For early bird rate, payment must be made by 5 May. Jenny Bounds (ph 6288 7802)

Details: World Environment Day Dinner, 7pm to 11pm, Function Room, Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre, Civic. This is a large and modern function room, on the second floor, above Canberra Museum and Gallery, in London Circuit – enter from Civic Square opposite the fountain. There is car parking nearby.

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

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

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

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

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

## **ERRATUM**

Please note the corrections (in bold type) to the first paragraph of the article by Elizabeth and Bill Compston in the April *Gang-gang* which should have read as follows:

### **A SPECIFIC ROUTE FOR HONEYEATER MIGRATION OUT OF CANBERRA**

Muriel Brookfield (Brookfield **2001**) reported the movement of large numbers of Yellow-faced and other honeyeaters through an area on Jerrabattgulla Creek beside Warragandra Homestead, on the back road from Braidwood to Kain (Fig 1). They were flying across open ground from Tallaganda State Forest, resting briefly in willows and poplars along the creek before continuing in an easterly direction to the south of Bunnybee Hill. Brookfield (2000) had previously discovered a large **inward** springtime migration at the same place, the birds then flying west.



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# Twitchathon updates

From Alan Morris, NSW Twitchathon Co-ordinator

## Twitchathon 2005 — Report of 11 March 2006

Four Canberra teams took part in the 2005 NSW Twitchathon, the participants also being members of BA, and they did a great job. Overall, the 2005 Twitchathon was a wonderful success with the greatest number of species seen (229) on any Twitchathon since NSW went it alone in 1994 and the greatest amount of funds raised, viz \$14,979.25 gross (so far) with about \$14,000 available to be donated to the Gluepot Reserve Education Unit. On this occasion there were 92 registered Twitchers, with 11 Main Race, 13 Champagne and 6 Children's Teams taking part.

The Winning Main Race Team, the *Wacked-out Woodswallows* (229) led their nearest opponent, the *Hunter Home Brewers* by just two species (227), while the *Hunter Thickheads* & *The Black-necked Stalkers* tied for third with 201 species each.

The Champagne Race winners *Lesstictum phoradae* led with 147, from their nearest rivals *Trio Twitchin* (134) and the *Warbler Specklers* (127). In the Children's Teams, the *Elegant Eagles* with 127 species were well out in front of all others.

The winners in respect of raising the most funds were Keith Brandwood \$3,143 which was somewhat below his best year of \$3,900 in 1994; second was Tiffany Mason with \$1,639 and third was Carol Proberts with \$1,360. What a sterling effort these three people made in raising all these funds. Overall the Main Race Teams managed to raise about 70% of all moneys raised. Congratulations to all those people who took part. The prizes for the most funds raised were presented at the BASNA AGM on 25 March 2006 at Sydney Olympic Park.

Birds Australia and BASNA sincerely thank all those people and all the Bird Clubs who encouraged the Teams and helped with the fund raising. We look forward to your continued support in 2006

## Twitchathon 2006

In 2006, it is proposed that funds raised will go into the Australian Bird Study Association's Research Fund. Currently, that Fund has about \$25,000 invested, the interest on which is used annually to provide funds to research students studying Australian Birds. In 2005, the funds were awarded to a student at Charles Sturt University, Albury NSW, for Bush Stone-curlew studies in North-east Victoria, and for a student based at the University of New England studying thermal regulation in the Owllet Nightjar. If we can raise about \$15,000 in 2006, this will swell the Research Fund to \$40,000, the interest of which will in turn provide more funds for young Australians who wish to study Australian Birds. The BASNA Committee believes that to involve members of the Australian Bird Study Association in the Twitchathon should lead to tapping into a wider funding and sponsorship source and provide longer-term support for the Twitchathon from another BIGnet member.

BASNA is very grateful to the various bird clubs and mindful of how they support the fund raising efforts of the Twitchathon Teams, particularly HBOC, Birding NSW, Central Coast Group BNSW, Clarence Valley BOC, CBOC & COG. We would like to see this broadened in 2006, with Clubs such as COG, IBOC, ENHS, Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists and Tamworth BOC sponsoring teams and supporting the Twitchathon too. Mention should be made of the fact that the Fivebough & Tuckerbil Wetlands Trust will be sponsoring a prize in the 2006 Twitchathon and we hope that a local team from Griffith/Leeton will also take part.

Please feel free to discuss with me how your local Club could support a Twitchathon Team. I am anxious to have more Children's Teams taking part and seek help and encouragement from the BIGnet Clubs in addressing this issue.

**Alan Morris — Twitchathon Co-ordinator** — phone 02 4334 2776 — email: amorris@ceinternet.com.au

## MUDBRICK COTTAGE

### Mallacoota

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

(02) 62583531.

## PASSIVE SOLAR HOUSE

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

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

(02) 6286 1564

or e-mail

greg.ramsay@actewagl.net.au

## For Sale

**Nikon Fieldscope** 3a 60mm lens with 20-60 eyepiece and field cover (RRP \$2000)

**Manfrotto 190 Tripod** Black and 128RC head, excellent condition (RRP \$400)

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Total value \$2510, will sell for \$1500.

Try before you buy.

**Stuart Harris**

phone 6232 4998 or 0437 394 882

# COG SALES

- **'The Long Paddock** - a Directory of Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves in NSW' by Rural Lands Protection Board - \$31.00
- **The Birds of Western NSW: A Preliminary Atlas** - NSW Bird Atlassers - **reduced** to \$5.00
- **Finding Birds in Darwin, Kakadu and Top End** by Niven McCrie and James Watson. \$24.00.
- **Wet and Wild** - A Field Guide to the Freshwater Animals of the Southern Tablelands and High Country" by M Lintermans and W Osborne, \$28.00 (RRP \$34.95).
- **Wildlife on Farms** - by David Lindenmayer RRP \$29.95, **special price** for COG members - \$25.00.
- **Where to Find Birds in NE Queensland** - Joe Wieneke - \$16.00.
- **Reptiles and Frogs of the ACT** - Ross Bennett - \$13.00.
- **Native Trees of the ACT** - \$6.50.
- **Birds of Rottnest Island** – by Denis Saunders & Parry de Rebeira -\$15.00
- **Birds of Rottnest Island** – a check list - \$1.00
- **Grassland Flora** – a Field Guide for the Southern Tablelands (NSW and ACT) – by David Eddy et al. - \$13.00
- **Our Patch** – Field Guide to the Flora of the ACT Region - \$13.00
- **The Nestbox Book** – Gould League - \$12.50
- **Birds of Queensland's Wet Tropics and Great Barrier Reef** by Lloyd Nielsen - \$25.00
- **Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT** – by Taylor and Day \$14.00
- Simpson and Days' **Birds of Australia CDROM** Version 5.0 **special price** - \$45.00
- COG Atlas - \$12.00
- COG Car Stickers - \$2.00
- COG Birds of Canberra Gardens Poster - \$4.00
- COG Garden Bird Survey Chart (New Version) - \$1.00
- COG Badges – two colour versions - \$5.00
- COG Birds of the ACT – Two Centuries of Change – by Steve Wilson - \$25.00
- COG Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the ACT - \$1.00

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

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## Avian Whimsy #41 — A Tool to Fit the Bill

In a recent Whimsy (#37 December 2005) I referred in passing to ‘tool use’ in American Burrowing Owls, which collect mammal dung and spread it around their burrow. Studies have shown that they do so to attract dung beetles, an important prey item. As inevitably as they attract dung beetles, so I attracted an objection to this (and here the analogy with dung beetles and my correspondent ends, apart from the observation that both play vital roles). He felt that tool use implied something more active than this, such as conscious manipulation of an object to achieve an end. I am totally respectful of this argument – in fact Jane Goodall herself (see below) defines it thus. I prefer however the broader concept of externally using an object to alter the environment in a way not otherwise achievable, with the added proviso that the user can alter the use in response to the particular circumstance. This does not necessarily imply the construction or fashioning of the object, which I see as an ‘optional extra’. This is not to say that either I or the ever-helpful AI is right or wrong – it’s all a matter of semantics and sticking with a definition.

Tool making was until recently regarded as the sole domain of humans – in fact it’s been used as a definition of humanity. Then in 1960 came the recognition by the legendary Jane Goodall that chimpanzees have also mastered the art. She recorded them using fashioned sticks to extract termites, chewed leaf ‘sponges’ to mop up water from otherwise inaccessible hollows, scraping food out with sticks and even using empty cans to intensify a threat display. More recently tool use has been recognised in dolphins (using a sponge on the snout to protect it from stone fish spines while probing the sea floor) and sea otters (a stone used as an anvil for shellfish, carried on the chest).

Initially we reeled with shock – Louis Leakey suggested “Now we must redefine tool, redefine Man, or accept chimpanzees as humans”. I think we could just about cope though with the concept of our closest relatives doing what we could (as long as it was only a simplified version!). But birds?! When the reality of this struck in 1996, the blow was intensified by the revelation that New Caledonian crows not only used tools but manufactured them to suit specific requirements. They actually carried a small ‘tool kit’ of gadgets to extract grubs from hollows, from which they selected the most appropriate tool for the job. One such tool was a stick, carefully snapped just below a side twig to make a hook. Others involved a toothed ‘rake’ beak-cut from a stiff leaf, and even probes from moulted feathers. When offered wire they formed that into tools too.

Other crows are also very creative. European Carrion Crows are known to pull up fishing lines to remove bait or catch. In Japan the same species learnt to drop walnuts on the road when the lights were red, fly out of the way when the lights changed, and return to collect the crushed nuts! Back in 1980 a crow in a laboratory was recorded as using a cup to carry water to soften dried mash to make it edible. Crows are known to be intelligent birds, but they are not unique in tool usage. The Galapagos Woodpecker Finch has long been known to use a cactus spine for grub extraction, carrying a good one around with it for reuse. Nor are Australian birds just simple colonials – Sittellas, Crested Shrike-tits and Grey Shrike-thrushes have all at times been reported as making similar tools.

Striated Herons have been known to drop a small object onto the surface of the water as bait to attract fish to the surface. In Australia Black Kites are known to perform a similar trick. These kites also do something virtually inconceivable – only repeated and authoritative eye-witness reports could convince me of this one. They specialise in seizing small animals fleeing the flames from Top End fires, and are now known to collect burning material and drop them ahead of the fire front to spread it!

Evidence of other Australian tool use has emerged. Black-breasted Buzzards are known to use rocks to throw repeatedly at emu eggs to extract the contents. Choughs also use rocks to crack mussel shells. Palm Cockies make and use a ‘drum stick’ as a louder extension of their habit of stamping their feet on a display tree in territorial and courtship display.

All of which can lead to pretty dangerous territory – the definition of intelligence. I know my limitations though. Ask a raven.

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



Photo by Geoffrey Dabb

**Crested Shrike-tit**  
( *Falcunculus frontatus* )

(Many of the above Australian examples were drawn from an article by Chris Boland in *Nature Australia* Summer 2003-4)



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www.visitnsw.com.au (follow the links to accommodation and Wonga)

## Next newsletter

June deadline

Wednesday 24 May 2006

Please send updates, articles, advertisements etcetera to the

Editors of *Gang-gang*

gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au

or send c/- The Secretary

COG, PO Box 301

Civic Square, ACT 2608

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

Print photographs with or without articles are encouraged and welcomed.

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### Canberra Birds Conservation Fund

Donations to this fund are tax deductible.

Funds are used to support projects that protect and enhance native birds and the environments that sustain them.

### Office

COG no longer maintains an office. For

all enquiries or access to COG's library

phone Barbara Allen on 6254 6520

### COG website

www.canberrabirds.org.au

### COG membership

2005-2006 memberships:

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

### COG E-mail Discussion List

COG has an email discussion list for

members and friends: 'Canberra Birds'.

Join the list by following the links on the

COG website or by sending an empty

email message to [canberrabirds-](mailto:canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au)

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## Gang-gang

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