

Gang-gang

November 2007

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

Monthly Meeting

**8 pm November
14 November 2007**

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

Dick Schodde will give a presentation on the *Melithreptus* honeyeaters, which locally include the common **White-naped**, the often overlooked **Brown-headed**, and the **Black-chinned Honeyeaters** found to the west of the ACT.

The main presentation will be by **Professor Andrew Cockburn** of the ANU on "**Climate change and the tribulations of fairy-wrens: when twenty years of data is hardly enough.**" The ANU study of **Superb Fairy-wrens** in the Australian National Botanic Gardens began in 1988, and has become what is arguably the most intensely monitored population of birds in the world. During that time we have experienced wet (= good conditions), a horrendous but short term drought in 1994, and the slow withering of the landscape over the last decade. Andrew will demonstrate how the prolonged drought has sequentially affected social organisation, population dynamics, and finally fundamental evolutionary processes driven by female preference for male characteristics. He will also discuss the importance of long-term monitoring and the usefulness of common species as indicators of the manifold damage caused by our assault on the natural world.

Everyone welcome

What to watch out for this month

By the end of October most of the spring/summer migrants had arrived, with the only regularly visiting migrant species I've haven't seen or heard reported being the **Rufous Fantail** and the **Cicadabird**. The continuing drought has also lead to an influx of **White-browed** and **Masked Woodswallows**, though unlike last year most seem to be moving through or over quickly, rather than to attempt to stay and breed. Perhaps this reflects that with the ever deeply biting drought breeding conditions in the ACT region this year are not suitable for them. Certainly from observations in my local area, and from feedback from the blitz etc, species numbers seem to be well down this spring. The grim conditions are reflected by the observation of species usually found much further to the west, firstly the **Black-eared Cuckoo**, and then a number of **Red-backed Kingfishers**, over the past month. The **Painted Snipe** seen at Kelly's Swamp may also reflect the extremely dry conditions inland, as do the records of the **Black-tailed Native Hen**. Both are consistent with the news that water levels in the Murray Darling Basin are at record lows, with consequential very low waterbird populations.

The rate of observations of "unusual" birds in the ACT has been so high over the past couple of years that it makes you wonder whether this has been solely due to the drought. Certainly the numbers of members actively birding, and the much faster and widespread method of communicating the sightings through the chat line, is a factor too. I also suspect the use of photography to gather and publish evidence is very important, particularly for those who may otherwise have been reluctant to publicise sightings and subject them to the scrutiny of the COG Rarities Panel. It does make you wonder what will turn up next; anything seems possible and I'll refrain from making any predictions.

The drought also clearly seems to be having an effect on local breeding. Nesting activity in my local patch in NW Chapman is presently very low, with even the annual nesting pair of **Pied Currawongs** having deserted after building as usual in my GBS site. Species and numbers here seem to be the lowest since moving back after the fires, despite there now being a completed garden to attract birds. (continued Page 2)

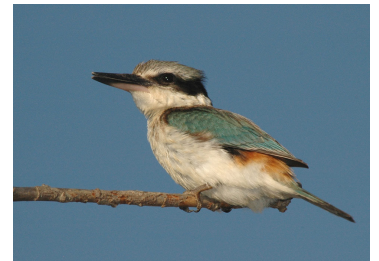


Photo by Stuart Harris

**Red-backed Kingfisher
(*Todiramphus pyrropygia*)**

(continued from Page 1)

For those that haven't done so to date, and also for previous attendees, I'm strongly recommending participation in the Nest Workshop at Campbell Park on Sunday 18 November. This will be the fifth time this workshop will be held, and is the only event on the COG calendar that focuses on breeding. As an annual feature on the COG calendar it is also now starting to allow a comparison of the breeding success of nesting seasons under different conditions, yet another example underlining the importance of keeping regular records in order to be able to monitor trends. We need to recognise that under the current drastic conditions, even birds considered common are not immune to serious declines in their population levels. Remember that the **Passenger Pigeon** was once considered as probably the most numerous bird on earth, but has now been extinct for nearly 100 years. — **Jack Holland**

Field Trip reports

Frogs' Hole Creek, Frogmore, 13-14 October, overnight camp-out

It's a common fallacy to expect that the second time you visit a spot it will be exactly the same as last time, and certainly it was somewhat disappointing to arrive and start setting up at our campsite in the deep gully at the south end of this property to find it very much quieter than in September 2006. It was therefore very appropriate that we took up Richard's invitation to join him for a late afternoon walk in the NE corner of the property, where he had been seeing lots of activity on his afternoon walks with the dogs. This proved a very good decision and excellent views were obtained of a number of species, highlights being a male **Hooded Robin**, a **Restless Flycatcher** performing its scissor grinder call both while hovering low above the ground or most commonly while perched (first time I have seen this display in ages), and a flock of over 200 mostly **White-browed** but also about 10% **Masked Woodswallows**, often on the ground but also rising to give their "Check Check" calls high above us.

Despite the quiet camp site the early morning chorus was certainly very loud (though perhaps somewhat less than last year) and when I got up shortly after dawn I was able to add many species to the list from having listened to all the calls in my sleeping bag. Very few additional were added following a long and slow circle around the camp site, in fact the best birding happened when I returned to my tent where there were several species including a **White-throated Gerygone** in the tree above.

After breakfast we again did a long circuit around the property, with birding initially slow and highlights being lovely views of a male **Red-capped Robin** (a species missed last time) as well as of another red, white and black male, the **Mistletoebird**. However, the activity did not pick up until we reached the active spot of the previous evening where among the up to five male **White-winged Trillers** in a small dead wattle we located a **Black-eared Cuckoo**, and later a second. Both birds were so obliging that after some initial caution we were able to approach them to within focal length. This was a real thrill as it was a new species for me at Frogmore, the first anywhere for over 2 years and the first for much a longer time while I've been leading a COG trip.

After this, participants noted we had not obtained good views of **Superb Parrots** and as soon as we detoured slightly to where some had been seen the day before one flew past to join another two males in a nearby tree, and then dropped to the ground. As we slowly approached this male kept on feeding unconcernedly as it also moved towards us, affording the most magnificent full frontal views. For many this was the highlight of the trip, surpassing even the above cuckoos.

Another great weekend at this magnificent property, even though the list of species at 64 (66 if we count two more seen just outside) was well down on the 80 seen 13 months previously. Amazingly this now included nearly all the expected migrants and reflects the continuing and even more deeply biting drought. This was also reflected by the very little breeding activity recorded, just five species, and the much lower calling activity; for example, though trillers were very common in some spots, they hardly called with the males consorting together clearly indicating territories had not yet been set up, if indeed they would be this year. We only added one species to the property list, the cuckoo, though it had been seen earlier in the week by Richard. Other birds of interest were the **Leaden Flycatcher** seen near the campsite and the **Silvereye**, both of which are noted as being only seen once before on the property list, as were the **Cockatiels** also only seen by Stuart.

Once again COG is very indebted to Richard and his partner Angela for inviting COG back; we are already looking forward to our next visit. — **Jack Holland**

Coolleman Ridge — Saturday 20 October – joint bushwalking/birdwatching event for the public

My fears that this first (to my recollection) COG/National Parks Association (NPA) joint outing would be a disaster, first of all due to the low interest until mid week and then to hot, dry, windy weather, were dispelled when about 20 participants set off in warm but still conditions at 9 am for the first session. We travelled pretty slowly at first as the early parts of the 2.5 km walk, adapted from the Coolleman Ridge Nature Trail but avoiding the steeper ascents and descents, promised the most birds. A good variety was seen by all participants, before we picked up speed and also enjoyed the views, particularly the 360 degree views afforded from the top of Coolleman Trig. Despite the hotter conditions a much smaller second group which did the second circuit at 11 am also had very good views of a number of species, including a couple not observed by the first group.

In total over 30 species were seen for the morning in an area which most participants had not visited before. An early highlight was a **Wedge-tailed Eagle** high overhead, and both groups had good views of **Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrikes**, **Grey Fantails**, **Red-rumped Parrots**, and for the first group, two adult **Australian Wood Ducks** with week-old ducklings in the centre of a dam surrounded by black cattle currently being agisted. The second group had great views of a **White-plumed Honeyeater**, a **Noisy Friarbird** (only my third sighting for the area this spring) and a male **Rufous Whistler**. These are all common birds with which beginners may not be familiar. Less common birds seen were a number of **Dusky Woodswallows**, several **Southern Whitefaces** (two lots were seen by both groups at two spots) and **White-winged Trillers** (a female by the first and two males playing chase by the second).

While the morning was successful, the main purpose of the joint exercise, to introduce members of the public to both birdwatching and bushwalking was less so, as the majority of participants were either COG or NPA members. Nevertheless it's an ideal spot for the bird watching/walking combination and worth repeating during the next Parks/National Bird week, perhaps with some wider publicity. My thanks go to the NPA, particularly to Beverley Hammond, for the help in organising and running this event.

Bird Blitz Update

As of 1 November, I had received 82 datasheets, covering 43 grid cells in total, from 24 named participants (and a few nameless ones). 144 species of bird were recorded, with 52 species breeding. Many thanks to those who have already sent in or dropped in their datasheets. And a gentle reminder to those who haven't, *please* do so soon, or bring them to the November COG meeting. I shall cut off this year at the end of November and exclude from analysis any datasheets which straggle in late. Again, many thanks to all participants. The bubbling enthusiasm for the event expressed by so many has been heartening. Not all sites proved as rewarding or as pleasant as last year, but on the other hand, Dunlop/Macgregor H11/I11 has been this year's standout so far. — **Barbara Allan**



**Australian
Ornithological
Services P/L**
PO Box 385
South Yarra 3141
Victoria
Tel: 03 9820 4223
Mob: 04173 10200

enquiries@philipmaher.com

2007 Birding Tours

Plains-wanderer Weekends

24/25 November &
1/2, 15/16, 29/30 December 2007

2008 Birding Tours

25 February—2 March Tasmania Birding & Mammal Tour

incl pelagic & Melaleuca flight

12—30 March Thailand

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

July New Caledonia incl Lifou & Ouvéa islands

10—28 August 2008 Strzelecki Track Outback Tour

See other 2008 tours on our website

www.philipmaher.com

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.

11 November—Bellmount Forest—morning/early afternoon visit to private property

This will be a repeat visit to the property north of Gundaroo of long time member Pauline Wicksteed, following the very successful trip in 2004. Pauline also has a keen interest in plants, so that the focus will be on both birds and plants. We'll spend part of the morning looking at these on her property, which consists of natural woodland and planted areas. We'll also have another look at the nearby TSR 48, which usually supports a good range of declining species, before having a latish lunch. As it will be late spring all the summer migrants should have returned. Last time the highlights were **Painted Honeyeater**, **Red-backed Kingfisher** and **White-browed Woodswallow**, all inland species brought in by the drought, and with the continuing drought who knows what to expect this time.

To get there take the Federal highway to the Gunning turn-off, then through Sutton and Gundaroo towards Gunning. 13 km past Gundaroo Village you reach Bellmount Forest, continue on the main road a further 100 metres to where a 100 km speed sign is and the gate is directly opposite to the right, number 5202. Drive in and meet Pauline (Ph 4845 1174) at 8:30 am. The driving time from Civic is approximately 40 minutes. Members wishing to arrange car pooling should be at the Shell Service Station, Federal Highway, Watson by 7:45 am.

Photo by Geoffrey Dabb



Painted Honeyeater
(*Grantiella picta*)

18 November—Campbell Park—Sunday morning Nest Workshop

This will be a repeat of the very successful practical nest workshops held over the past four years at Campbell Park, arguably the best bit of grassy woodland in Canberra in spring. This very informal outing has again been timed to coincide with the peak of the breeding season. The morning will start with the usual very short presentation including tips on the types of nests built by different species of birds, and how to find nests or nesting behaviour. This will be followed by several hours putting this into practice, looking for signs of nesting etc, which will also allow plenty of opportunity for bird watching. Let's hope this year is as successful as the past four years have been.

This workshop is particularly suitable for beginners or those relatively new to birdwatching, though more experienced members are also welcome. We won't be walking very far as there is usually is a "hot spot" close to the car park where most of the nesting usually occurs. If you are interested in participating, please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 A/H or by E-mail on jack.holland@environment.gov.au), who would also be grateful for any tips on where birds are nesting shortly before the day.

Meet at 8:00 am at the picnic tables at the far end of the car park. Take Northcott Drive up to the start of the Campbell Park Offices, where you take the right fork and keep to the outside of the very large car park, skirting it until you get to the end. Intending participants might also like to look at the map on the COG web site under the Maps, Forms and Lists button.

23 to 25 November—Naas Valley weekend at Caloola Farm—accommodated

This will be a weekend outing commencing with dinner on Friday night, at a lovely rural retreat, only 30 km south of Tuggeranong Town Centre. At the head of the Naas Valley, the property borders Namadgi National Park, with areas of grassy woodland and dry forest. There is a good diversity of birds in this area, including species becoming scarce closer to Canberra, like **Brown Treecreeper**, **Hooded Robin** and **Diamond Firetail**. When COG was there four years ago, we even got a **Painted Honeyeater**!!

There will be opportunities for walks on the property and into the National Park, and for relaxing on the verandah over a glass of wine. We have booked a comfortable farmhouse with several bedrooms; group size will be 10-12, shared rooms with a mix of single and bunk beds; the cottage has good facilities including bathroom. Accommodation cost is \$30 a

EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST SOUGHT FOR COG TASKS

Secretary, Rarities Panel

This is a secretarial position only. The incumbent has no input into the Panel decisions, though may be required to provide background information on request. Nevertheless a reasonable knowledge of the local avifauna, and of COG and its members would be helpful; experience gained from submission of unusual bird report forms would be highly desirable.

Duties

- receive, acknowledge and organize unusual bird report forms;
- convene quarterly meetings of the Rarities Panel;
- inform observers of the Panel's decision; undertake any follow-up required;
- prepare the Endorsed Lists and Rarities Panel News for *Canberra Bird Notes*;
- ensure records are entered into the COG databases;
- maintain the unusual bird report files;
- respond to general rarities queries; and
- prepare background information relating to the status of birds in the COG region, for the Panel's consideration.

Coordinator, Annual Bird Report

This position requires a good knowledge of the birds of our region, an ability to liaise with a wide variety of people, editorial skills, project management skills and basic statistics – but above all, a close attention to detail. The current incumbent will assist for the handover year, if required.

Duties

- liaise in early December with the database manager and the GBS coordinator for the preparation and preliminary checking of the yearly data dumps;
- distribute data and agreed policy issues to the team of eight writers;
- check datasheets for, and/or check with observers, and correct any anomalies raised by the writers;
- receive, check and edit as required copy prepared by writers and return it to them for a final check; discuss any issues arising;
- insert species entries into the Systematic List; prepare Introduction, Methodology; Weather, etc and circulate to interested writers for comment; and
- provide final copy to editor, *Canberra Bird Notes*, for printing and distribution by end March.

If you are interested in either of the above positions, please contact COG president, Chris Davey, on 6254 6324 or email: chris_davey@aapt.net.au.

head for the two nights. You bring your own food, linen and towels. We expect to organise communal dinner meals, with everyone bringing a contribution; you bring your own breakfast and lunch supplies. This is a good opportunity to learn about our local woodland and forest birds. Contact the leader Jenny Bounds for more details, Phone 6288 7802.

2 December—Kelly Road—Sunday morning walk

For those who missed out on going to Lady Elliot Island, there will be an opportunity for members and guests to accompany the retired President to one of his favourite bits of woodland at Kelly Road, which runs parallel to the Monaro Highway just outside the ACT border about 10 km north of Michelago. On past trips, participants have had excellent views of the **Hooded Robin, Brown Treecreeper, Restless Flycatcher, Diamond Firetail, Rufous Songlark, Dusky Woodswallow** and **Southern Whiteface**. It is also one of the best spots close to Canberra where very close views of **Fuscous Honeyeaters** can be obtained.

Hopefully the bird life at Kelly Road will again be excellent early this summer, in particular the 200 metre stretch at the southern end of TSR 36. Meet Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@environment.gov.au) at the Williamsdale Service Station at 7.30 am, for car pooling etc prior to the 5-10 minute drive to the start of this outing. **The main part will involve a 1-1.5 km easy walk along this quiet road and is suitable for all members.** Bring morning tea.

2008 Field Trips Program

The draft 2008 COG Field Trips Program is published for members' consideration and comments separately in this edition of Gang-gang.

There are still a few organisers/leaders needed for some identified trips, as well as some unidentified venues for local or mid distance day trips. If you have any offers or comments to make please contact Anthony Overs (6254 0168 AH or anthony.overs.reps@aph.gov.au).

The final program will be published in the February 2008 edition of Gang-gang.

News from the Committee

- Lia Battison and Sandra Henderson represented COG with a small information stall at the launch of Parks Week in mid-October. Attendance at the event was disappointing (it was competing with Floriade, the Murrumbateman Field Days and other popular events) but there was some interest in COG's activities.
- COG was asked to assist with a survey of birds in and near the ANU on October 20, and several COG members took the opportunity to get involved. Feedback from the organiser is that the event was a success, and she's already planning another for early next year.
- COG will mount a display at the Bush on the Boundary expo in early December. COG is also providing some feedback on vegetation proposals for the new suburb of Forde, where a 50/50 mix of exotic and native trees has been proposed for street plantings. COG wants to stress the importance of complementing the vegetation of nearby Mulligan's Flat, and the importance of drought tolerance.
- Members who have not paid their 2007-08 membership have been reminded that they are now unfinancial. Many thanks to those members who've responded to this reminder.

Other Surveys/Activities of Interest to COG Members

Revision of the unusual birds list

COG's Rarities Panel has developed a draft revised version of the list of unusual birds in the COG area of concern. It is based on a sole criterion, namely, fewer than ten occurrences of probably distinct individuals or groups since the establishment of the Panel in 1984. Having viewed the results of this approach, the Panel is not totally convinced that it

has resulted in the best possible list. Any COG member who has an interest in the matter might wish to request a copy of the draft list from the secretary at rarities@canberrabirds.org.au. The Panel welcomes comments in writing on the draft list or on alternative approaches to the development of an unusual birds list.

ANU Mulligans Flat/Goorooyarroo Studies

The ANU is undertaking a massive and long term series of environmental experiments in the Mulligans Flat and Goorooyarroo Nature Parks in the northern ACT. These parks contain some of the best preserved low elevation grassy native woodland in south-eastern Australia. COG members have long recognised that they are great places for woodland birds, particularly in spring. The work is under the direction of the Fenner School's Dr Adrian Manning.

Already 2000 tonnes of logs from sites throughout the ACT have been strategically placed for the provision of an enhanced understorey environment, and plans are well underway for a feral proof fence, the removal and exclusion of pest animals, habitat changes and possibly experiments with burning and fire exclusion. Sites within the fence will be matched and compared with others in the parks outside it. COG's President Chris Davey and Steve Holliday have been actively involved in this work and in the identification and marking of habitat sites for bird and other studies.

The first round of six-day bird studies took place in 2006 (before the introduction of logs) and this year's round, last month. Whilst the birding was not quite as exciting as last year's (when we had a flock of **Little Lorikeets**, **Black Honeyeaters** and big populations of **Superb Parrots**) there was plenty to justify the very early morning starts.

In addition to the usual Canberra menu, we again had **Superb Parrot**, **Cockatiel**, **Red-capped Robin**, **Crested Shrike-tit**, **Australian Owlet-nightjar**, **Little Friarbird** and big numbers of both **White-throated** and **Western Gerygone**. Many thanks to volunteers Ian Anderson, Jenny Bounds, Peter Fullagar, Kay Hahne, Noel Luff, Martyn Moffat and Terry Munro who along with Chris, Steve and myself made up our red-eyed but happy-faced team.

This is world-class science, and It will be exciting to watch the transformation of these nature parks and their bird, other animal and plant populations into the future. — **Bruce Lindenmayer**

Birdfair 2007 — 15 to 18 November

The programme for Australian Birdfair 2007, organised by the Fivebough and Tuckerbil Wetlands Trust is on the Birdfair website, www.Australianbirdfair.org.au.

Report of October COG meeting

Following the short AGM, members heard two very interesting presentations on parrots – for some of us these were the second and third parrot talks of the day, after hearing an interesting presentation by Leo Joseph at lunchtime!

Penny Olsen spoke about the wonderful (and not so wonderful) cast of characters associated with the story of the **Paradise Parrot**. The parrot, never common, was discovered in 1844 by John Gilbert, John Gould's collector in Australia. By the late 1920s the last confirmed sightings occurred and there have been no credible reports in the last 80 years, although several sightings have been claimed. The Federation drought, overgrazing and widespread use of the termite mounds they nested in as flooring and tennis court surfaces all contributed to its extinction. More information about Penny's work on the paradise parrot can be found in an article at <http://www.nla.gov.au/pub/nlanews/2005/mar05/article1.html> and in her recent book *Glimpses of Paradise*.

Stuart Cooney has been researching the **Hooded Parrot**, another of the species known to nest in termite mounds, and the only one still found in good numbers. *Trisyntopa neossophila* is a moth which occurs only in association with Hooded Parrots, and Stuart is trying to get a better idea of the relationship between the two species. It is clear that the moth benefits (its larvae eat the faeces of nestlings), but do the parrots benefit? Since there is a related moth species which inhabits the nests of **Golden-shouldered Parrots**, did a third species cohabit with the Paradise Parrot, and become extinct along with it? Those wanting to find out more can go to Stuart's website about the project at <http://www.anu.edu.au/BoZo/stuart/HPP.htm> — **Sandra Henderson**

Without your help another part of the Canberra we love will go

Can you imagine living in Canberra without the native woodland and grassland areas; with no woodland birds, nor birds of prey and no sweeping woodland landscapes ? This will be the future of Canberra if we don't change the current approach to planning, and nowhere is this **more urgent than in the Molonglo Valley**.

The ACT Government is planning to develop two areas in the Molonglo Valley for a population of 73,000. The plans are a direct assault on our biodiversity and they have to be opposed vigorously; personally I've been very disappointed with the same old unsustainable plans for land clearing – it's almost as if no-one has really been listening.

Molonglo Valley is a hot spot of biodiversity. We stand to lose the beautiful Little Eagle as an ACT breeding species, the nest sites and foraging areas of Wedge-tailed Eagles and Peregrine Falcons, a significant group of the threatened Brown Treecreeper, and more. We cannot justify to future generations the clearing of this land and the destruction of its natural values for yet more urban sprawl.

The Conservation Council does not oppose the development of the former pine plantation areas in east Molonglo, as these lands are largely cleared and degraded. However, **we cannot accept the clearing of hundreds of hectares of critically endangered yellow box red gum grassy woodlands** for the development of central Molonglo. We will not allow this development to destroy the vital corridors which provide connectivity for migrating birds and other animals.

We urgently need to raise funds to employ a campaigner to mobilise community action to stop this disgraceful development. Just as the environment triumphed over urban sprawl to see Mulligan's Flat saved from development when conservation groups fought for those grassy woodlands, we must convince the ACT Government to act to protect the Molonglo Valley.

Without your help another part of the Canberra we love will be gone. Please support the campaign to Save Molonglo Valley by completing the payment slip and sending to GPO Box 544, Canberra, 2601.

Yes I want to support the Conservation Council's Save Molonglo Valley Campaign

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

My cheque / money order to the **Bogong Fund** is enclosed or

Please debit my Visa Mastercard

Name on card _____ Expiry date _____

Signature _____

Postal Address for receipt _____

You can donate on line through www.ourcommunity.com.au/savemolonglo

Garden Bird Survey Notes — October 2007

Sightings relevant to the Garden Bird Survey mentioned on the chatline have included: **Red-capped Robin** in Florey; **Dollarbirds** in Ainslie; **Rainbow Bee-eaters** in Cook and Ainslie; and **White-browed Woodswallows** in Wamboin (and a near miss at my site at Carwoola).

The chatline has also included reports from non-GBS gardens in Reid (**Black-faced Monarch**) and Weston Creek (**Satin Bowerbirds**). If people wish to take up a Chart now for year 27 they would be most welcome; my email address is martinflab@gmail.com.

The Chatline included a reasonably sustained discussion of the frequency of sightings of **Gang-gang Cockatoos**. Looking at the information for 25 years of GBS observations, and fitting polynomial trendlines (4th order works fairly well, showing reasonable (approx 0.6) correlation coefficients for several regions) provides the following comparisons.

Area	Values of A	Comment on trend
Central Canberra	The highest values in most years: ranging from 0.5 to 2.09	There appears to be a cyclic pattern with a pronounced decrease in recent years.
Woden	Currently second highest and now a higher A value than Central.	Fairly steady growth in A which may have reached a plateau.
Belconnen	Slightly lower than Woden in most years.	Similar pattern to Woden.
Weston Creek	A few A values above 0.5 for years 16 – 22, but otherwise below that value.	The value of A grew until year 21 since when it has dropped noticeably. Possibly an effect of the bush-fires?
Northern	Close to 0.5	The “trendline” is rather flat, but showing a recent increase: the value of r^2 does not suggest great reliability.
Tuggeranong	Very few reports of the species.	Data quality insufficient to report.

The process of entering the data from the 69 Charts we have received so far for this year is complete. For Annual Report purposes the database has been closed off after the October COG Meeting and compilation of the statistics will commence very soon. (If any further charts are received they will be added to the database for historical purposes, but not included in the Annual statistics for year 26.)

Martin Butterfield

COG SALES

MUDBRICK COTTAGE

Mallacoota

Our mudbrick cottage is available for rental for all those nature lovers out there!!

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

It is fully self-contained with a kitchen and laundry. Contact Barbara de Bruine

(02) 6258 3531.

PASSIVE SOLAR HOUSE

South Rosedale

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

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

From 10 November to 10 February contact Georgia Ramsay

0412 910 576

The following items plus various pamphlets (most free) and membership application forms are available from the sales desk at COG meetings.

- **Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT** by Taylor and Day - \$16.00
- **Birds of the ACT: Two Centuries of Change** by Steve Wilson - \$25.00
- **Bird Calls of the ACT** – CD - \$12.00
- **Bird Songs of Canberra** – Cassette - \$10.00
- **COG Car Stickers** - \$2.00
- **COG Badges** – red or grey - \$5.00
- **The Long Paddock: A Directory of Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves in NSW** by Rural Lands Protection Board - \$31.00
- **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
- **Where to Find Birds in NE Queensland** by Jo Wieneke - \$16.00.
- **Grassland Flora: A Field Guide for the Southern Tablelands (NSW and ACT)** by David Eddy et al. - \$13.00
- **Our Patch: A Field Guide to the Flora of the ACT Region** - \$12.50
- **The Nestbox Book** by Gould League - \$12.50
- **Woodlands: A Disappearing Landscape** by David Lindenmayer et al - \$34.00
- **Feather and Brush: Three Centuries of Australian Bird Art** by Penny Olsen - \$50.00

A range of substantially discounted titles, mostly from CSIRO Publishing, is also available at meetings or may be ordered via email/telephone by COG members only.

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

Avian Whimsy #58

Trying Something Different (and achieving déjà vu)

The **Turkey Vulture** soaring easily overhead on the slopes of Orsono Volcano in Chile was a dead ringer for its African counterparts that I'd admired the previous year, down to the broad slotted soaring wings and bare red head. Clearly related, perhaps via the Gondwanan connection ... Wrong!!

It was Aristotle, some 2,300 years ago, who observed that 'nature abhors a vacuum'. He was talking about the physics of pumping systems, but it seems to apply equally validly (and probably more so) to biological systems. If there is a vacant niche available – be it an unexploited potential food item or foraging area or breeding site – then it seems inevitable that in time evolution will produce a species to fill that niche. In the process the species will have been led from its traditional lifestyle to try a new one, the advantage being that for now at least there is no competition. Since in general a bird (for instance) looks the way it does because that makes it good at what it does, this change of lifestyle will almost inevitably lead to a change in body form too. Paradoxically though, in the broader scheme of things this doesn't necessarily lead to a more diverse-looking world. In fact it often produces a feeling of déjà vu as we travel, because in two distant places unrelated species are likely to be filling the equivalent niche in each – and in the process they have probably come to resemble each other, at least superficially.

Some 50-60 million years ago when South America finally drifted beyond reach of the western islands of Antarctica (and thus also the conjoined Australia) it seems not to have been carrying members of the great world-wide family of **hawks** and **eagles**, the accipitrids. (It's possible too that the accipitrids were in South America all along, but simply didn't 'discover' the carrion-eating lifestyle.) It did however have **storks** and one of them, reminiscently of the somewhat Mordorian **Marabous** and **Adjudants** of Africa and Asia, left the waterways to take advantage of the herds of the great grasslands – or at least their corpses. It would appear that the best way to be good at that is to look like, well, a vulture, because the vultures and condors of South America (and thence North America in recent times), despite their evident vulturishness, really are modified storks.

On the other hand South America did have **falcons**, but not **crows**. In fact there are no 'black crows' at all in South America, and the few crows (forest-dwelling **jays**) that did penetrate from the north when the Isthmus of Panama joined it to North America a very few million years ago remain in the forested north of the continent. So to fill that under-utilised niche, one branch of South American falcons gave rise to the scavenging **caracaras**, a most unfalconlike thing to do from our perspective; the little **Chimango Caracara** scouts across the ground in flocks, exactly as we would expect **Little Ravens** or **Little Crows** to do.

In Africa one accipitrid has gone the other way, and in semi-arid areas the magnificent **Secretary Bird** plays the role of crane or stork, albeit with an eagle's beak, shuffle-mincing along on long legs as though wearing shoes too big for it.

The recognition of such relationships is a still-unravelling puzzle, though the DNA hybridisation work of Sibley and Ahlquist gave the tangle a good shake. Prior to that, the American vultures were placed among the Old World ones, and the Australian **treecreepers** firmly among the Northern Hemisphere creepers. Now, but only in the past very few decades, we recognise the treecreepers as a very ancient group of 'true Australians', not related in any meaningful way to their northern counterparts. But of course, if you're going to make a living by clambering around tree trunks and extracting insects from the crevices, there is an ideal form for that and evolution and time will ensure that practitioners converge on that form.

It does seem strange to us, with the benefit of hindsight, that such blinkered thinking could have prevailed, and impeded the proper understanding of Australian birds in particular for nearly two centuries. There were plenty of precedents after all. We already understood that it was no coincidence that the Australian **spinebills**, Old World **sunbirds** and New World **hummingbirds** are so mutually similar in appearance and behaviour; here the common factor is specialisation in extracting nectar from tubular flowers.

And there is a wealth of other examples. Water-birds for instance abound in them (think of the number of unrelated web-feet, or owners of blood-desalting glands in the bill). As ever the world proves to be an even more wonderfully complex and intriguing place when we look beneath the surface.

Ian Fraser 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 (follow the links to accommodation and Wonga)

New members

COG welcomes the following new members:

J Hyde, Holt
K Gowland, Braddon
R Sim, Reidsdale
R&P Pratt, Gordon
C Scialfa, Downer
J Thomas, Holder
T Norman, Macgregor
J Webster, Kaleen
B Mitchell, Kingston
C Tidemann, Murrumbateman
M McColl, Yass
S Robertson, Red Hill

Next newsletter

December deadline

Wednesday 28 November 2007

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

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

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

COG info

President

Chris Davey, ph 6254 6324
Email: chris_davey@aapt.net.au

Vice President

Jack Holland, ph 6288 7840 (home)

Treasurer

Lia Battisson ph 6231 0147

Secretary

Sandra Henderson ph 6231 0303
cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au

Address for correspondence

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

Newsletter distribution

Judy Collett and helpers

Membership inquiries

Sandra Henderson ph 6262 1481 (w)
membership@canberrabirds.org.au
for changed address or other details

Gang-gang editors

Sue Lashko and Greg Ramsay
ph 6286 1564
Email: gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au

Canberra Birds Conservation Fund

Donations to this fund are tax deductible. Funds are used to support projects that protect and enhance native birds and the environments that sustain them.

COG website

www.canberrabirds.org.au

Office

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

COG membership

2007-2008 memberships:

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

COG E-mail Discussion List

COG has an email discussion list for members and friends: 'Canberra Birds'. Join the list by following the links on the COG website or by sending an empty email message to canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au

Editor Canberra Bird Notes

CBN@canberrabirds.org.au



Gang-gang

If undeliverable, please return to
Canberra Ornithologists Group, Inc.
PO Box 301, Civic Square ACT 2608

SURFACE
MAIL

POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA