



Gang-gang

October 2003

News letter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

OCTOBER MEETING

Wednesday 8 September

Details pg 3

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Where to watch birds this month

Silver Gulls Breeding on Moored Boats on Lake Burley Griffin

While at the Lake on 31 August, I accidentally noticed that there were about 7-8 Silver Gulls sitting on nests on the deck and superstructure of a moored yacht in Orana Bay, Yarralumla, with possibly some incomplete nests as well.

Burley Griffin had filled, it was predicted that Silver Gulls would nest on the islands that had been formed. However, in 1999 Steve Wilson noted in his book *Two Centuries of Change* that successful breeding on LBG still had not been reported.



Silver Gulls
(*Larus novaehollandiae*) Orana Bay
Photo courtesy **Alastair Smith**

I didn't realise the possible significance of this observation until I checked the literature on returning home. Over 35 years ago, after Lake

From the response I received after posting this observation on the COG-I chat line, it would appear that Silver Gull breeding on moored boats on LBG is a well known though poorly (if at all) documented event. For instance, the yachting fraternity considers them a real pest.

This prompted me to have a closer look at other boats the next day. Of 4 boats moored in Lotus Bay, one had two nests with birds sitting, two had single nests with birds on and the fourth had netting on it, obviously to prevent nesting. There were also several half completed nests

Letters to the editor

Dear Editor

I read with interest Doug Laing's lead article in *Gang-gang* of September 2003, and wish to comment on two statements in the first and second paragraphs respectively:

- i) Superb Parrot *Polytelis swainsonii* as 'clearly a farmland adapting species'; and
- ii) 'The animals ... were clearly able to share and prosper in a human modified habitat.'

Superb Parrots are able to find usable habitat on some farms, but continued loss of old hollow-bearing trees and patches of remnant bush means that much farmland provides neither nest sites nor food plants. The seeds of introduced pasture species and weeds, and grain provided for domestic stock, can not compensate for the loss of a wide variety of food-trees, shrubs and herbs. That most of the Superb Parrots now recorded are observed in farmland may indicate that this is now the predominant land use throughout their former range, rather than that this species is adequately conserved because it may appear to have 'adapted to farmland'.

That the animals observed on the Weddin Mountains trip 'were clearly able to share ... a human-modified habitat' could be said of all species at some stage prior to extinction. What I question is the extrapolation that because they are there they are prospering. Unless one were regularly weighing individual animals, it would not be possible to know how they were faring. It is also possible, and more probable in a drought, that the birds observed were less well fed than in other years.

The presence of an organism in a certain environment implies neither that it is actively choosing to be there (*i.e.* that there is other good quality habitat available) nor that it is necessarily doing well in that 'chosen' environment. It may be there for want of anything better.

Yours sincerely
Ms Isobel Crawford

Dear Editor

Why do birds sharpen their beaks?

Wondering of Kambah

Dear Wondering of Kambah

I regret that I have not had time to answer your question this month. If no-one else takes up the challenge, I will endeavour to explain why birds sharpen their beaks in the November *Gang-gang*.

Kind regards, Tanya (aka the Editor)



Silver Gulls

(*Larus novaehollandiae*) Orana Bay

Photos courtesy **Alastair Smith**

On Yarralumla Bay, of the seven moored boats two had single nests with birds on and again there appeared to be some half completed nests. Remarkably one boat had a nest with two downy chicks on it, or more often running around the deck, looking like chickens or ducklings. I wasn't aware silver gull chicks were semi-precocious, but HANZAB confirms that they are able to leave the nest on the second day after hatching.

Closer inspection of Orana Bay revealed 2 nests on another boat moored close by. The original boat seemed very neglected, perhaps forgotten or abandoned and appeared to be a good one on which to watch progress over spring/summer. However, weekly inspection has revealed nesting has continued in all 3 bays, with further nests built in Lotus Bay (7 in total on one boat on 22 September), and chicks seen on the decks/superstructure of boats in all 3 bays.

It's well worth a look. All are easily visible with binoculars from the shore, perhaps best from the small car park/picnic area at Lotus Bay (opposite the yacht club) where two



boats are moored very close (< 20 metres).

Jack Holland

Field Trip Reports

Burra Creek

Sunday 31 August 2003

Twelve intrepid people ignored gloomy weather forecasts and visited my Burra Creek hobby block close to the Tinderry Nature Reserve. The day turned out to be fine and sunny with relatively light winds.

The habitat is grassy woodland. The main Eucalyptus species are yellow box, apple box, snow gum, candlebark and broad leafed peppermint. There is a significant stand of *Allocasuarina verticillata* on a dry north-facing granitic ridge of rocks.

A total of 29 bird species were recorded including a first sighting on the block for this season of a **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike**. Other highlights included records for **Richard's Pipit**, **Flame Robin** and **Varied Sittella**. Records included **Brown-headed**, **Yellow-faced**, **Fuscous**, **White-naped** and **White-eared Honeyeaters** and **Eastern Spinebill**. Kookaburras seemed to be

in greater numbers than usual. No Glossy Black- Cockatoos were seen although there was plenty of evidence of their recent presence in the form of chewed remnants of casuarina seed cones on the ground. A **Glossy Black- Cockatoos had been** heard calling on the block quite early on the previous morning.

There were further bird "sighting" at lunchtime as we looked at photos of the recent bird trip to Namibia by COG members!

Other "sightings" as we were departing included close views of two Shetland ponies and their young riders on the neighbouring block as well as a roaming border collie - reminders of the mix of agricultural/ grazing pursuits with conservation of biodiversity in the Burra Valley today.

Ian Anderson

Notice of Annual General Meeting

The Annual General meeting of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc will be held at 8pm on Wednesday 12 November 2003 at the usual monthly meeting venue, the Canberra Girls Grammar School.

Nomination form page 15

October Meeting

8 pm

Wednesday 8th

Canberra Girls Grammar School cnr Gawler Cres and Melbourne Ave, Deakin

The **bird of the month** will be Beach Stone-curlew, illustrated with a video by **David Rees**.

Our **main talk** will be 'The New Bird Atlas', given by **Dr Geoff Barrett**, who ran the Atlas project for four years, after being at the helm of Birds Australia's Birds on Farms survey before that. Geoff is now working with CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems as an agricultural ecologist.

Oolong

Sunday 7 September 2003

A select but wildly enthusiastic group of members (and a visitor for the UK) gathered on a mild morning near the Griffin Centre, before pushing off north towards Gunning. The car trip takes about an hour to Gunning, where at a comfort stop we noted our first bird of the trip. A **Wood Duck** was very pleased to see us from the top of the chimney of the Gunning post office. Dalton, a village ten kilometers further on was nearer our destination of Oolong. The former ostrich farm is owned by Gianni D'Addario and is in the early stages of being rehabilitated for conservation purposes. The caretaker, Lewis, as well as the brilliant, mild, still conditions welcomed us -perfect for bird watching.



Glossy Ibis
(*Plegadis falcinellus*) Kelly's Swamp
Photo courtesy **Geoffrey Dabb**

Since COG was here last year, some of the invasive cassinia had been cut back to enable several walking tracks to be established. Before we set off, we were all impressed by the glossy emerald green of a **Shining Bronze-Cuckoo**, which was just finishing its breakfast, while on a fence wire. The group of seven, spent the next three hours or so, walking to the eastern side of the property along the firetrail through dry woodland comprising red stringybark, with a shrubby understory. The range of thornbills were there along with **Striated Pardalotes**, **Scarlet Robin**, **White-browed Scrubwrens**, **Grey Shrike-thrush** and **Weebill**. A flock of **Straw-necked Ibis** circled over head.

There were goods views across the paddocks, before we climbed up a steep path to near the top of the property. The honeyeaters were calling including the **Yellow-faced**, **White-plumed**, and **White-eared** varieties, and we had great views of the village and surrounding district. On the descent to the northern end fo the property, the vegetation opens out to low shrubs and bushes, perfect for **Babblers**. Indeed they were there. We found them in the cassinia making their usual chatter as we approached. An **Australasian Grebe**

was spotted on a small dam, which unlike last year was full of water, as well a family of **Superb Fairy-wrens**.

Along the rocky track near the northern fence line **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes** were seen doing their well-known wing shuffle after they landed in the trees. The chatter of the common rosellas

was heard, along with the bubbling call of the **Olive-backed Orioles**. Towards the car parking area, near the end of our walk, there was one particular tree playing host to **Red-rumped Parrots**, **Diamond Firetails**, **Red-browed Firetails**, **Double-barred Finches**, **Crimson Rosellas**, **Australian Magpies**, and a **Pallid Cuckoo**. **Richard's Pipit** was seen on the open paddocks. As we arrived back for our lunch, the **Shining Bronze-Cuckoo** was then tucking into some lunch on the same fence as before. Over a pleasant lunch our only bird of prey was recorded, being a **Brown Falcon**. The complete bird list, description of the walk and map are now on Gianni's web site at www.pcug.org.au/~gianni, under News.

All together we noted 61 species for the day, before thanking our host, and moving on to the Dalton cemetery. Why? I hear you ask -for a quick look for any local remnant vegetation, which is often interesting and undisturbed in a cemetery. This time it wasn't -BUT we found a handkerchief piece of road verge opposite the cemetery, having a local prostrate grevillea in full bloom. Further along the road in some remnant vegetation we flushed an **Australian Owlet-nightjar** and had excellent views of the complete bird sitting on a branch.

The troupe made its way back to Canberra in the late afternoon after a great day out. Thanks go to the energetic Jenny Bounds for co-leading the walk, and for preparing the bird list, field notes for Gianni, and the map.

Alistair Bestow

Tuggeranong Homestead **Saturday 13 September 2003**

About 10 members and guests spent a very pleasant afternoon accompanying 3 members of the Minders of Tuggeranong Homestead (MOTH) and me to learn more about the historical significance and cultural values of the Tuggeranong Homestead. Though less well known than some of the other historic properties in the ACT, it has important links with our cultural history, both aboriginal and European. Some of the existing buildings as well as those that could only be discerned by a remaining mound or a line of hand made bricks were shown and explained to us. We also were shown the remnant grassy woodland site that MOTH is restoring, as well as the remainders of the cold plain (Tuggeranong Plain) grassland.

Despite the increasingly windy and drying conditions during the afternoon we managed to see a total of 21 species. Most were relatively common in Canberra and unfortunately the Common Myna and Common Starling were easily the most conspicuous and numerous, particularly favouring the local chook run as a food source. Interestingly the former was not on the bird list supplied from the COG database only 10 years ago. The most unexpected was an **Olive-backed Oriole** initially in the foliage of a planted pine and then foraging in amongst some dead blackberries, in both cases fairly untypical habitat. My first **Noisy**



Royal Spoonbill

(*Platalea regia*) Kelly's Swamp

Photo courtesy **Geoffrey Dabb**

Friarbird for the season was also seen quietly sheltering from the wind.

Over a cup of afternoon tea and cakes at the Homestead cafe we were able to compare the species list with that published by Charles Barrett in 1922 as the first paper in the literature about the birds of the then Federal Capital Territory (written after visiting the war historian C E W Bean there). While not a fair test due to the windy conditions, he recorded at least 8 species that are now rare or threatened in the ACT region, most notably the **White-browed Babbler** and the **Red-capped Robin**. Also interesting were some of the names he used such as Black and White as well as White-shafted Fantails, White-shouldered Caterpillar-eater and the Yellow-tailed tit-warbler!

All in all a very enjoyable couple of hours seeing some birds and learning some history made for an especially a nice social occasion. This is part of the mix that we've been aiming for in COG outings for 2003. Once again

many thanks to Rebecca Lamb and her friends from MOTH for inviting us, making us so welcome and taking the trouble to explain the Tuggeranong Homestead's many features.

Jack Holland

Future Field Trips

Weddin Mountains

Long weekend 4-6 October 2003
CAMP OUT

The October long weekend camp-out will be held at the Weddin Mountains National Park. This follows the very successful Easter 2002 COG visit when we saw over 80 species within 5 km of the Seaton's Farm Camping area, and many participants agreed that a visit in spring was highly desirable and could be even more successful. We propose to use the same area to camp, now renamed the Fuzzy Box Campground. Unfortunately this is still not completed, so we will be camping under identical conditions as last time. If preferred participants could stay in motel accommodation in the nearby Grenfell. Over the 3 days we expect to visit the callitris forest of the Bimbi State Forest, the ironbarks of Seaton's farm, Holy camp (perhaps again do a tranverse of the Weddin Range again), and also to visit Gum Swamp near Forbes where a further 40 species, including a range of raptors and waterbirds, were seen.

If you intend to participate please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au), who is organising and leading the camp-out, with help from Stuart Harris. Further details, including maps, bird lists etc will be made available to confirmed participants.

Kelly Road

Sunday 12 October 2003

MORNING WALK

Instead of going to the Mulligan's Flat as indicated in the 2003 Field Trips Program (which due to the fires was brought forward to March), there will be a further opportunity for members and guests to accompany me to my favourite bit of woodland at Kelly Road, which runs parallel to the Monaro Highway just outside the ACT border about 10 km north of Michelago. At our last visit in December 2002, participants had excellent views of the **Hooded Robin**, with two males seen at one spot and a female feeding young, with a young male nearby, at another. Close views of **Brown Treecreepers** (at least 6 birds in 3 different spots), **Restless Flycatchers**, **Diamond Firetail**, **Rufous Songlark**, **Dusky Woodswallows** and **Fuscous Honeyeaters** were also obtained.

Hopefully the bird life at Kelly Road will again be excellent this spring, 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@deh.gov.au) at the Williamsdale Service Station at 7.30 am, for car pooling etc prior to the 5-10 minute drive down 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.

Combined Shorebird/ Pelagic Outing Centred on Wollongong

18-19 October 2003

A combined shorebird/pelagic outing centred on Wollongong is being held on the weekend of 18-19 October 2003. Participants will drive down from Canberra on the Saturday morning, with shore bird watching around Lake Illawarra and environs that afternoon, and with a full day's seabird outing on Sunday

COG SALES

Finding Birds in Darwin, Kakadu and Top End
by Niven McCrie and James Watson. \$24.00.

The Birds of Prey of Australia Field Guide by
Stephen Debus, \$12.50 (Special Price)

Messant Calenders 2004, "Birds of Australia" and/
or "Australian Wildflowers", \$8.00.

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 Rottneest Island - by Denis Saunders &
Parry de Rebeira - \$15.00

Birds of Rottneest 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 - \$9.00

Birds of Queensland's Wet Tropics and Great Barrier Reef
by Lloyd Nielsen - \$25.00

Guide to the Bird Habitats of NSW (ACT)
NSW Atlasers - \$27.00

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

Field Guide to the Birds of Australia
by Pizzey and Knight - \$35.00

COG Birds of Canberra Gardens - \$25.00

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

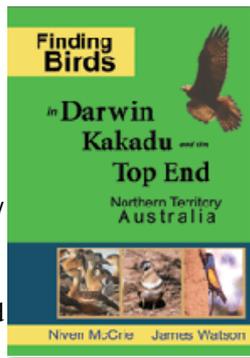
COG Badges - two colour versions - \$5.00

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 Bird Songs of Canberra - Cassette - \$10.00.

**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.**



(approximately 7.00 am to 4.30 pm).
The pelagic trip will be through the
Southern Oceans Seabird Study
Association Inc. (SOSSA), in their
vessel the Sandra K. Further
information on SOSSA may be
obtained from the following web
sites: <http://members.ozemail.com.au/~sossa/> or <http://sossa-international.org>.

While Julie McGuinness/Sue Lashko
will be the leaders on the day, Jack
Holland (6288 7840 (A/H) or by E-
mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au) is
co-ordinating the arrangements.
Please note that while **this trip was
previously advertised as full, a
couple of cancellations mean that
there is at least one space available
on the boat.**

Further information including several
options for accommodation (it is
expected participants will make their
own bookings) was provided to
participants in September. Due to
some confusion about the maximum
number of passengers and crew
allowed on the boat, we are now
limited to 21 participants and
therefore the costs have risen slightly
to \$68 per person (including the \$4
COG admin fee and the cost of two
guides and all burlies). **The
additional \$43 per person is due by
the 8 October COG meeting.**

**Monga National Park
Sunday 26 October 2003**

DAY OUTING

David McDonald will lead a day
outing to this area of wet forest just
before the escarpment around 20 km
east of Braidwood off the Kings
Highway. Target species include the
**Red-browed Treecreeper, Black-
faced Monarch, Pilotbird, Olive
Whistler and Bassian Thrush, not
to mention flowering waratahs.** Meet
at the Griffin Centre for carpooling at
07.30 am or, alternatively, meet at
09.00 am at the intersection of the

Kings Highway and River Road on the right hand side of the highway. Allow about 90 minutes for the journey from Canberra. A map and other details will be available at COG monthly meetings or directly from the leader. Bring lunch and drinks. Registration for this trip is essential; please phone David McDonald 6231 8904

**Campbell Park Sunday 16
November 2003 MORNING
NEST WORKSHOP**

This visit to Campbell Park, arguably the best bit of grassy woodland in Canberra, has been timed to co-incide with the peak of the breeding season. The morning will involve a short presentation including tips on how to find nests or nesting behaviour, followed some practical exercises. There will also be plenty of opportunity for bird watching. Lets hope this spring is as successful as last year was. Meet at 7.30 am at the picnic tables at the far end of the car park.

Michael Lenz, who has surveyed this area for many years, and is an expert at finding nests or nesting activity, had agreed to lead the workshop. **Unfortunately due to work commitments he is now unable to do so, and another leader, who knows Campbell Park well, is sought.** If you are able to do so, please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 A/H or by E-mail jack.holland@deh.gov.au).

**Caloola Farm/Naas fire trail
21-23 November – weekend
ATLASSING EVENT**

This will be an atlassing event, with emphasis on obtaining data along the Naas fire trail. It will be over 2 nights, Friday and Saturday, staying

at Caloola farm within an hour's drive from Canberra, where there is cottage accommodation at very reasonable rates and some overflow camping sites available.

COG has atlassed the Naas fire trail before and it will be very useful to collect more data post fire in the Namadgi National Park. The Naas Valley is a particularly beautiful spot, and one of the few places that was not extensively burned in the January bushfires, and was untouched south of Horse Gully Hut. We will be walking to some places and also doing a drive along the fire trail south through Namadgi NP in an area usually closed to vehicles. Access has been approved for entry of up to four 4 WDs into the Park. We should record an excellent variety of bush and forest birds at a prime time of the year, and will be especially looking for some of the threatened and declining woodland birds, like

**Brown Treecreeper,
Diamond Firetail and
S o u t h e r n
Whiteface.**

Being based right at the top of the valley will optimise the time we can spend birding, and it should be a very relaxing and interesting weekend.

Accommodation will be in a comfortable farmhouse, at \$22 per head for the 2 nights, in shared rooms. You bring food, bed linen and towels. Communal sharing meals will be arranged where possible. If you are interested, and particularly if you can offer help with a 4 WD vehicle, please contact Jenny Bounds (6288 7802 A/H), who will be leading and organising this outing.

Members should note the change in dates as it was advertised for 8-9 November in the 2003 Field Trips Program.

**Brindabellas
Sunday 30 November 2003**

DAY OUTING

This date was included in the 2003 COG Field Trips Calendar for COG's traditional annual visit with Bruce Lindenmayer to the Blundells Creek/Warks Roads area of the Brindabellas, but as you all know this area was devastated in the 18 January bush fires. In spite of this it is planned that this outing will go ahead, as it will provide members an opportunity to see the fire damage and also to see what birds will be there this spring/summer. However, before this can happen the necessary permission for access to this still closed area needs to be obtained, which is being arranged. Further details will be in the November *Gang-gang*, in the meantime pencil this date into your diaries. If access is not possible, a visit to another fire affected area will be arranged.



Victoria's Triflebirds
(*Ptiloris victoriae*) Photo and image manipulation courtesy **Geoffrey Dabb**

**Wednesday walk – 15 October –
Campbell Park**

The mid week walk for October will be at Campbell Park to view the spring bird life at one of Canberra's best spots, including some expected nesting activity with perhaps some

special summer migrants. Easy walking. Meet at the northern end of the Campbell Park Offices car park at 9 am. Bring morning tea.

Longer trips

THREDBO; CANBERRA DAY LONG WEEKEND 13-15 MARCH 2004

This visit to Thredbo over the Canberra Day Long Weekend on 13-15 March 2004 is based on our experience with the Koscioblitz surveys. It will allow members to enjoy the early autumn atmosphere in Australia's highest country and also to see the birds that occur there. In particular it's one of the more accessible places close to Canberra where Pink Robins and Olive Whistlers can be reliably seen. There are also a number of walks of varying difficulty for members to enjoy.

As for the Koscioblitz surveys it is proposed we will stay at Boali Lodge and enjoy Michelle's legendary hospitality. We've been pencilled for a maximum of about 20 people, with the option of full board or bed and breakfast. The cost for the former is \$90 for the first night reducing to \$75 for the second (\$165 for 2 nights), and for the latter is \$105 for 2 nights (\$60/45 per night). A \$6 COG admin fee will need to be added to each.

If you're interested please register with Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au) as soon as possible. A \$25 deposit should be paid within one month of booking, to secure your spot on this outing.



Japanese (Latham's) Snipe
(*Gallinago megala*) Kelly's Swamp

Photo courtesy **Geoffrey Dabb**

COG GOES PLAINS- WANDERING TO THE MALLEE WITH EMU TOURS

**SUNDAY 28 MARCH TO
SUNDAY 4 APRIL 2004**

This will be a repeat of the highly successful Emu Tour of April 2003 (see write up in the May edition of *Gang-gang*), but with an extra day spent in the Grampians. While only a short trip it will involve visits to a number of different habitats and consequently a wide range of birds may be seen. These include the Terrick Terrick National Park (**Gilbert's Whistler, Chestnut-rumped Thornbill**), a day in the rugged sandstone escarpments of the Grampians (**Long-billed Corella and various honeyeaters**), 3 nights at Whimpey's Little Desert Lodge (**Malleefowl, Southern Scrub-robin, Shy Heathwren and Purple-gaped Honeyeater**), a visit to the Kerang/Tullakool wetlands (a variety of waterbirds/waders) and will culminate in 2 nights in Deniliquin where Phil Maher will again show COG members the **Plains Wanderer, Inland Dotterel** and his

many other special birds.

As an added incentive Emu Tours are offering this longer trip at the same price as last year. They will also operate it with as few as 8 and a maximum of 12 participants. The cost will be \$1366 per person, and is based on COG's field trip policy guidelines including a COG administration fee of \$16 per person.

Accommodation will be ensuite twin share throughout, with the possible option of single accommodation on some nights for a single supplement. All accommodation, meals, transport and guiding is included in the tour cost - with the exception of lunch on the first and last days, an a la carte dinner at Halls Gap, drinks, and items of a personal nature. Travel will be in 20 seater Coaster bus.

To book your place on this very exciting tour please contact Jack Holland [6288 7840 (A/H) or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au], who can also provide further information, including a fuller itinerary. A \$100 deposit will be needed within a month of booking to ensure your seat on the bus. Deposit cheques should be made out to Emu Tours and sent to Treasurer COG, PO Box 301 CIVIC SQUARE ACT 2608.

Booking and Cancellation Policy

Emu Tours cancellation policy will apply. Refunds of monies are only made if a replacement can be found to take the vacant place or if the tour is cancelled. Travel insurance, including cancellation cover, is strongly recommended.

Other surveys/ Activities of Interest to COG Members

Volunteers needed Monitoring the Boreal migration

As summer draws to a close in the Canadian boreal forest north of Lake Superior, the first migrating birds begin the journey south to escape the long winter.

At the foot of the Sleeping Giant, a peninsula that juts out into the lake, staff and volunteers of the Thunder Cape Bird Observatory monitor the passage of the birds and capture and band as many as possible.

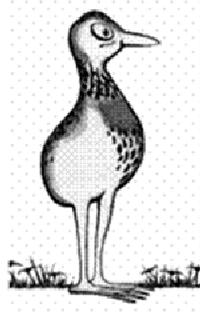
The observatory is one of the most northerly of a chain of twenty that crosses Canada from Vancouver Island to Nova Scotia.

The programme is a long-term commitment – already in its eleventh year – designed to find out why populations of many migrating species which breed in the boreal forest are in decline.

A recent report from another long-term Canadian study has shown that breeding success in the northern forests remains good, so the cause of the decline must relate to conditions at the wintering grounds in Central and South America, or on the migration itself.

The work at Thunder Cape relies on volunteers and applicants from overseas are welcome, especially those who can identify a good proportion of the birds of the region or who have some experience banding.

The Fall (autumn) season begins in



Australian Ornithological Services Pty Ltd

PO Box 385 South Yarra Victoria 3141
Tel: 03 9820 4223 mobile: 0417310200
E: enquiries@philipmaher.com

2004

- ◆ 17—22 March **Tasmania** (optional Melaleuca flight on 23 March)
Accommodated tour seeking all Tassie endemic birds plus mammals such as Tasmanian Devil, Southern Bettong, Eastern Quoll, Eastern Barred Bandicoot. Includes pelagic trip.
- ◆ 9—13 April Easter camp **Oolambeyan National Park (NSW)**
Good food and birding at one of the Riverina's newest national parks. Starts/finishes in Deniliquin
- ◆ 20—30 April **Mallee Parks and Reserves of Vic and SA**
Camping tour through Victorian and South Australian mallee parks en route to Gluepot Reserve. Starts/finishes in Melb
- ◆ 22 May — 6 June Top end endemics tour **Darwin Kakadu NP**
Kununurra. Accommodated tour seeking all the top-end endemics such as Black and White-throated Grasswrens, Gouldian Finch, Hooded Parrot and Banded Fruit-Dove. Starts/finishes in Darwin.
- ◆ 11—22 June **Gulf of Carpentaria Tour**
Accommodated tour from Cairns west to Queensland's Gulf country through Georgetown, Karumba, Burketown, Mt Isa and Cloncurry. Key birds include Carpentarian and Kalkadoon Grasswrens, Purple-crowned Fairy-wren, Black-throated Finch and Flock Pigeon. Starts/finishes in Cairns.
- ◆ 20 Aug —7 September **Strzelecki Track Tour**
Accommodated outback tour seeking all the inland specialities such as Plains-wanderer, Inland Dotterel, five spp. of Grasswren, Bourke's Parrot and Hall's Babbler. Starts/finishes in Melbourne.
- ◆ 18—28 September **Forests and Woodlands of Central NSW**
including Bird Routes of Barraba & Baradine districts. New accommodated tour taking in the best of the forests and woodland of central NSW such as Gillenbah State Forest near Narrandera, Goonoo State Forest near Dubbo and Pilliga Scrub and the Warrumbungle Ranges near Coonabarabran. Starts/finishes in Melb.
- ◆ 30 Oct—17 Nov **South East Australia**, optional Tasmanian endemics extension. Comprehensive birding tour of SE Australia and Tasmania seeking 300+ spp. Key birds on the mainland include Powerful Owl, Pilotbird, Spotted Quail-thrush, Plains-wanderer, Superb Parrot, Malleefowl, Striated Grasswren and Rufous Bristlebird. Takes in the full spectrum of habitats in SE Aust.

www.philipmaher.com

August and runs through to the end of October.

August is dominated by **warblers**, **September** is the big month for **Black-capped Chickadees**, while **October** sees large numbers of **Dark-eyed Juncos**, far-northern migrants and bigger birds such as **woodpeckers**.

From mid-September a **Saw-whet Owl** trapping programme operates at night.

The observatory also opens for six weeks in May and June for the northerly movement and although far fewer birds are caught, this is a good time for antipodean visitors because the birds are in their breeding plumage.

In return for their efforts, volunteers get meals, accommodation and pick-up from the nearest city, Thunder Bay. For more information catch me at a COG meeting or check the website "<http://members.shaw.ca/sanomat/tcbotbfn.htm>".

Adam Leavesley

Kooragang Wetlands



Estuary Tours

Come see why hundreds of migratory wading birds flock to the Hunter Estuary each summer. Why not view them from the best spot in town, on the water. While relaxing on the Lady Joy hear about these fascinating birds and why they keep returning; learn how humans have shaped the estuary and in turn, been shaped by it.

Kooragang Wetlands is running five estuary tours this summer.

Tour Highlights:

Newcastle Harbour
History treasures of the Estuary
Birds resting along Kooragang dykes, waiting for the tide to fall
Tranquility of the Hunter River
The majesty of Mosquito Creek
The internationally important Hunter Estuary Wetlands

DATES

TIMES

Co-commentator

Thurs November 27 2003 ,
10.30 am

Ann Lindsey (Hunter BOC)
Thurs December 11 2003
9.30 am

Alan Morris (Birding NSW, CCG)
Sat February 7 2004
9.00 am

Alan Morris (Birding NSW, CCG)
Mon March 8 2004
9.00 am

History interest
Sun March 21 2004
8.30 am

To be decided

Tours depart from Queen's Wharf, Newcastle aboard the Lady Joy and journey up the north arm of the Hunter River for three hours.

Cost: (includes GST and a delicious morning tea of scones, jam and cream).

Adults	\$30
Concession	\$26
Group(20 or more adults)	\$26
Children (under 12yrs)	\$20
Children (under 4yrs)	FREE

Bookings are essential. For enquiries and bookings call (02) 4964 9308

Early morning walks during Australian Ornithological Conference (AOC) December 2003

In conjunction with the 2nd Australasian Ornithological Conference (AOC), which will be held in December at the ANU, COG is organising some early morning walks in the Australian National Botanic Gardens (ANBG) and the ANU. These will run from about 6.30 am for round 90 minutes, and are proposed for the ANBG on the mornings of 11 (Thursday) and 13 (Saturday) December and for the ANU on Friday 12 December.

I am looking for assistance to help lead these walks and am in particular interested in volunteers who know the ANBG/ANU well, including those who may have early morning access the ANBG. As small groups of not more than 10 are proposed, it is expected that several leaders will be needed each day. If you can help please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au).

Draft Field Trips Program 2004

There still has been only a limited response to the request for suggestions for the 2004 COG Field Trips Program. So if you have a favourite spot/trip that you think should be included, or where you think COG should go to again, or any reasonable suggestion, **please** let Jack Holland know as soon as possible (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au). The draft program will be drawn up in the first half of October and published with the November 2003 *Gang-gang*.

"Shaping our Territory Options and Opportunities for Non-Urban ACT" August 2003

Implications for Threatened and Declining Birds

Recently the Non-Urban Land Study commissioned by the ACT Government, released its report on the possible future uses for non-urban land, eg pine forest, existing rural leaseholds, rural settlements and villages, focussing in particular on land affected by the January 2003 bushfires, including adjacent to the Murrumbidgee River corridor. This report has very significant implications for our remaining woodland birds, biodiversity generally and long term sustainability in the Territory as large landscapes are potentially involved. Among the issues canvassed in this report are changes in land use in rural leaseholds, which could allow developments such as agribusiness and horticultural holdings like as olive groves, (note: this is in a fire prone area as well as a future water scarce environment), various tourist type developments, more rural residential blocks (these are known to impact significantly on conservation values unless there are strict controls imposed on clearing and development) and larger rural villages.

COG has serious concerns about deficiencies in the report in relation to the ecological resource conservation matters canvassed generally and as they relate to threatened and declining birds. We believe the report is inadequate and

misleading about the impact of the fires on, or the proposed land uses canvassed in, the report on birds and other biodiversity. As an example, there is no mention in this report about the two resident and threatened birds listed as vulnerable

in the ACT (**Brown Treecreeper** and the **Hooded Robin**). These species are already known to be in decline, and will potentially be further impacted on by these kinds of changes in the landscape, not to mention the effects on a range of other declining woodland birds.

The report is available on the web at www.bushfirerecovery.act.gov.au/inquiries. Public comment was invited and many community groups have put in submissions, including COG. Unfortunately, only a very short period was allowed for responses on a report which has enormous implications for the environment if accepted.

The submission made in response to the report by the Conservation Council for the SE Region and Canberra, which I on behalf of COG have provided input to on bird related issues, says amongst other things in a response covering about 20 pages on a range of issues including water resources, recreational uses, tourism, rural residential villages, rural leases and agriculture, transport and municipal services:

"It is of great concern to the Council that the report makes little mention of the biodiversity impacts of the fire, and recovery in relation to particular species of fauna affected, and what information is presented is not integrated with the rest of the report. In addition, virtually nothing is said of species of flora and fauna potentially affected by the land use options proposed, with information presented being deficient, and misleading in terms of the impacts of proposed options on threatened species. The Council notes that information relating to the **Painted Honeyeater** is misleading, and that the report makes no mention of the key, resident threatened bird species. There appears to have been little or

no consultation with key Conservation Council stakeholder groups on issues raised in this chapter. Overall, this is a particularly disappointing aspect of the report because many of the recommendations for land use are a direct assault on what is left of our biodiversity, our most precious natural asset."

Jenny Bounds

BIGnet – Meeting 13/14 September 2003

On this weekend, I represented COG at this meeting in Tamworth, hosted by the Tamworth Birdwatcher's and Birds Australia Northern NSW Group. BIGnet is the Bird Interest Groups Network, and it meets every six months. Various bird and naturalist clubs and government agency representatives attend.

The theme for the recent meeting was 'Conservation Values of Travelling Stock Reserves (TSRs)', and there were various speakers on this topic. North-eastern NSW is quite rich in these reserves, which have become havens for threatened and declining species of birds, provide corridor linkages between native remnants, as well as refuges for rare native plants. The endangered **Regent Honeyeater**, for example, regularly utilises these areas in this region. TSRs, which are around 4.9% of land in NSW, represent a very important crown land holding that protects biodiversity. Many Shires and bird clubs in the north-east region now have brochures with bird routes to encourage bird watchers and naturalists to visit the area and provide an eco-tourist focus – some of the well known ones are at Barraba and Baradine, but there are others around Tamworth, Lismore and other shires.

A particular issue of concern is the

future of TSRs which are managed in NSW by local Rural Lands Protection Boards, under the auspices of the NSW Department of Agriculture. Boards are responsible for issues like fencing and weed control and have to raise funds for this, which traditionally has been done by short term agistment, allowing local farmers/graziers to graze their stock on the reserves. There is, however, a change occurring from intermittent stocking to set stocking and allowing long term grazing permits, in effect handing over these areas to local farmers to relieve a long term shortage of funds for management purposes. Farmers are then responsible for weed control and on ground matters, and often what happens is that overgrazing and degradation occur, especially in drought times. TSRs have also traditionally been sources of firewood; some Boards are now prohibiting the removal of fallen timber or the cutting down of timber.

These important lands should be managed for their conservation values, particularly those with good biodiversity values, and have adequate funding provided to ensure the Boards do not sacrifice these reserves by allowing inappropriate long term grazing. Local communities can play a part in ensuring TSRs are managed for their conservation values, for example, by working with local Boards, providing community input, and assisting in their management and promotion as eco-tourist attractions for their region.

Other matters discussed at BIGnet were:

Conservation issues, in particular, a new steel mill development in the Hunter estuary (Newcastle) which has significant implications for wetlands birds and migratory waders. A Memorandum of Understanding for more cooperation amongst groups was signed by groups who attended; there will be initiatives coming out of

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. For the more energetic, Guerrilla Bay and Burrewarra Point are within walking distance. The wetlands at Barling's Beach are only few kilometers away. Rich birding is available in almost any direction, the Eurobodalla Botanical Gardens are a favourite spot. The front beach at Rosedale is patrolled by the resident white sea-eagle. Tariff - \$50 per night; \$250 per week (\$300 per week in school holidays); 3 night weekend \$125; 15 December to 31 January - \$400 per week. Further details contact - Greg or Sallie Ramsay, 31 MacRobertson St, MAWSON, ACT 2607, phone 6286 1564 or e-mail at greg.ramsay@argay.com.au

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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.

Please contact Barbara de Bruine (02 - 62583531) for further information.

this to be discussed next time, eg a common code of conduct for birdwatchers, guidelines on duty of care for field trip leaders.

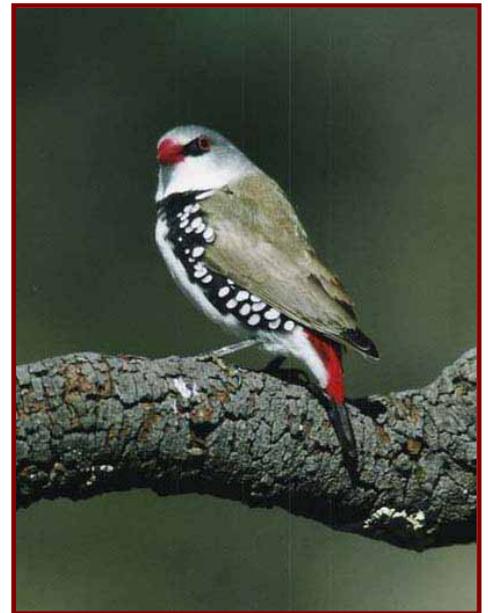
Public Liability Insurance which has been an issue for some clubs in the last couple of years

The Inaugural Bird Week Lecture in Sydney in October at Sydney Olympic Park.

The next meeting of BIGnet is expected to be close to Sydney in the Illawarra area, in March 2004.

Jenny Bounds

Avian Whimsy # 14 May Diamonds be Forever



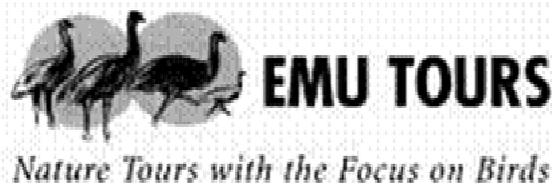
Diamond Firetail

(*Steganopleura guttatum*)

Photo courtesy **Helen Fallow**

“Perhaps Ian will do a Whimsy to accompany the photos [of Diamond Firetails] in the October edition?” It was with some discomobulation that I saw these words in *Gang-Gang* next to my last Whimsy. Am I to be reduced to a mere writer of captions to someone's photos (which, unfortunately, will doubtless be better than mine!)? Worse still, are the captions to be on a topic on which I am a mine of ignorance? (Neither HANZAAB nor *Handbook of the Birds of the World* has yet dealt with finches!) What I know about this exquisite and sadly declining woodland gem would fit onto a spot on its side. However, my editor has spoken, and how may I gainsay her?

The latest thinking on finches lumps them all - including sparrows and buntings, African weavers and Australian grass finches - into the one big family Passeridae.



Join Richard and Roz for their 2003-04 tour program

SPRINGTIME IN THE MALLEE

5 to 11 November 2003 \$980

We combine two popular favourites - hunting for the endangered Plains-wanderer with Philip Maher; then spending most of the tour in Gluepot tracking down all the Mallee specials at a time when the Reserve is bursting with life. Mainly camping.

A SNOWY CHRISTMAS

24 Dec 2003 to 1 Jan 2004 \$1180

Spend the festive season at a lodge high in the Snowy Mountains - then travel along the Snowy and Deddick Rivers. All Christmas/New Year festive fare included. Half camping/half accommodated.

EMU GOES TO LORD HOWE ISLAND

13 to 20 March 2004 \$1900

One of Emu's favourites as Ian Hutton, the island's expert naturalist, spends the week with us. Includes flights by Qantaslink. Excellent, centrally-placed accommodation with cooked breakfasts & some other meals included.

EMU GOES TO MALAWI AND ZAMBIA

13 to 27 June 2004 \$2900 ex Lilongwe

These tours to 'the friendly heart of Africa' are proving rightly popular. Travel with Richard and a local guide to the best birding areas - including the outstanding South Luangwa National Park in Zambia. Book early!

Richard Jordan & Roslyn Hemsley EMU TOURS PO Box 4 Jamberoo NSW 2533
Phone (02) 4236 0542 Fax (02) 4236 0176
emutours@ozemail.com.au www.ozemail.com.au/~emutours

Unsurprisingly, the first bird Linnaeus described was a sparrow, which he called *Passer, a percher!* The Family to which it belonged thus became Passeridae, and in turn the Order had to be Passeriformes. This happens to be the most recent and much the largest Order of living birds, so most of our garden birds are known as passerines.

It seems that finches arose in the great developing grasslands of Africa as the forests retreated with climate change some six million years ago. Three waves of grass finches appear to have arrived in Australia, though no-one seems willing to put dates on these arrivals.

First of all came the ancestral firetails, who crossed the continent, such that Beautiful and Red-eared Firetails adapted to the dense coastal heaths of the far south-east (including Tasmania) and south-west. Diamond Firetails took as their own the south-eastern woodlands and Painted Firetails even penetrated the rocky hills of the central deserts, albeit near permanent water. The second wave of finchy invaders included the Zebras, which followed the Painted Firetails into the drylands, and Double-bars. The most recent arrivals have substantially remained in the tropical north. All rely on grass seeds, though they will feed their young on insects, especially flying termites.

Courtship rituals are elaborate and (anthropomorphically!) romantic, involving him bowing, stretching his neck and dancing and offering her an often improbably long stem of grass, held at the end. They are monogamous and possibly mate for life, which would be unusual in such a small bird.

So far I've got away with generalising, but I'd better make this caption relevant to its photos. Diamond Firetails (or Diamond Sparrows in older texts) have gone by



Double-barred Finches
(*Poephila bichenovii*)

Photo courtesy **Helen Fallow**

a variety of names, including *Zonaeginthus guttatus*, *Tavistocka guttata*, *Emblema guttata* and *Stagonopleura guttata*. The latter has made a comeback to be the current name of choice. *Guttata* means spotted; *Zonaeginthus* is 'banded hedge-sparrow', *Emblema* is 'marked', as in emblem, *Stagonopleura* means 'drops on the side'. No idea who Tavistock was, I'm afraid.

I have read that Luis F. Baptista, "one of the world's leading experts on bird song, dialect, and language", believes that the Diamond Firetail's voice "sounds like some kind of woodwind, an oboe perhaps." I am ashamed to own that not once have I thought of Haydn's oboe concertoes whilst listening to Diamond Firetails, but I'm an uncultured fellow. A posting on an aviary discussion group mentions "low, snoring calls between birds during nest relief".

I learnt a lot on the internet from aviculturalists (mostly American), who are big fans of our Diamond Firetail. Not all of it was information

I coveted, mind you. For instance "Diamond Firetails apparently tend to pluck one another's feathers (especially on the head). Should this occur, it is best to remove the victim to isolation until it is repaired." I also discovered that they have "a tendency to carry excess fat if not given a large exercise area". ("Yes, a woodland" I responded pointlessly.)

A Texan keeper of Diamond Firetail reports that "I line my cages with several layers of newspaper. Preferably those featuring photos of President Clinton. My birds seem to enjoy the tapes of President Reagan's State of the Union Addresses I continually play, as the firetails are very productive and model aviary subjects." I have nothing to add to that.

Except that another cagebird-lovers' site featured advertisements from a cat food company, with the slogan "I am your cat. I like choices."

And if that doesn't persuade our editor of the folly of asking me to speak with even less knowledge than



Diamond Firetail (*Steganopleura guttatum*) Adult and juvenile
Photo courtesy **Helen Fallow**

usual, then I'm not sure what else I can do! (If this turns out to be my last Whimsy, thanks for reading!)

Ian Fraser ianf@pcug.org.au



Committee Nomination Form

Nominations for the election of officers and ordinary committee members should be submitted, in writing, signed by two members and the person nominated, to

The Secretary, Canberra Ornithologists Group
PO Box 301
Civic Square ACT 2608

by 5 November 2003.

We hereby nominate

for the position of

on the Committee of Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

Nominated by and

Donations to Birds Australia for HANZAB

Many of you will know of the fabulous HANZAB volumes being produced by Birds Australia. Six volumes of the seven volume series are now completed. The seventh is well underway.

Alas, Birds Australia is desperately short of funds to complete this important work. It has launched an appeal to raise \$800 000.

Send your donation - cheque (payable to Birds Australia Research Fund), or credit card (Bankcard, Visa or Mastercard) - to HANZAB at Birds Australia, 415 Riversdale Road, Hawthorn East VIC 3123.

You should include a note indicating that the donation is towards the completion of the final volume of HANZAB.

Next newsletter

**NOVEMBER deadline
Friday 21 October 2003**

**Send updates to
Tanya Rough,
Editor *Gang-gang*
rough.boden@apex.net.au or
Tanya.Rough@ea.gov.au
Ph: 6161 0151 (ah)**

Articles should be less than 500 words (300 for reports of 1-day field trips; 150 for Atlassing Snapshots), except by prior arrangement with the editor. Print photographs with articles encouraged.

COG info

President

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mobile 0412 484 728**

Vice President

Nicki Taws, ph 6251 0303

Treasurer

Joan Lipscombe ph 6262 7975

Secretary

Doug Laing ph 6287 7700 (h)

Membership inquiries

**Contact Alastair Smith 6281 3221 (h)
or 0401 993 381 for changes of
address or other details**

Address for correspondence

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

Gang-gang editor

Tanya Rough 6161 0151 (h)

Newsletter distribution

Lia Battison and helpers

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

<http://www.canberrabirds.dynamite.com.au>

COG membership

**2003-2004 membership: Individuals,
families and institutions: \$35. school
students (under 18): \$17.50.**

Office (6247 4996)

**COG maintains an office in room
G5, Griffin Centre, Bunda Street,
civic.**

**Office volunteers are not in
attendance for regular opening
hours.**

**Members access by prior
arrangement.**

COG E-mail Discussion List

**COG has an email announcement
and discussion list for members and
friends of COG: 'Canberra Birding',
also known by the nickname 'cog-1'.
Join the list at
<http://www.topica.com/lists/canberrabirds>
or by sending a blank
email message to canberrabirds-
subscribe@topica.com.**



Gang-gang

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