

# Gang-gang

September 2008

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

## Monthly Meeting

**8 pm Wednesday  
10 September 2008**

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

The **short presentation** for this month will be by *Michael Lenz* entitled "**Big birds need breakfast - survival of Japan's winter birds**", based on some of Michael's observations during his recent 6 months stay in Japan.

The **main presentation** will be by *Alastair Smith* entitled "**A Record of the First Big Year in the ACT**". Alastair will talk about the planning and execution of his 'Big Year', when he observed 208 species of wild bird within the geographical boundaries of the ACT during the 2006 calendar year.

**Everyone welcome**

## What to watch out for this month

Due to the continuing cold weather during August there doesn't yet seem to have been a major influx of migrants, and **Flame** and **Scarlet Robins** seem to have lingered longer than usual. Close to the end of the month there were the first reports of the arrival of **Noisy Friarbirds**, **Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoos** and a single **Pallid Cuckoo**. To date there have only limited reports of **White-naped** and **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters**, and no reports of **Dusky Woodswallows**, **Clamorous Reed Warblers**, **Olive-backed Orioles** and **Rufous Whistlers**.

Continue to keep an eye and ear out for these earlier arriving spring migrants, particularly those above which haven't come in any numbers so far, as well as the **Shining Bronze-Cuckoo**. Other migrants to arrive during September are likely to be the **White-throated** and **Western Gerygone** (one report of the latter already), **Mistletoebird** and the **Leaden Flycatcher**, and perhaps by the end of the month some early **Rufous Songlarks** or **White-winged Trillers** will have arrived.

There have been reports of the commencement of breeding of the **Masked Lapwing** and the **Australian Magpie**. During August at the NW end of Cooleman Ridge **White-winged Choughs** refurbished a nest abandoned after building last year and are now sitting.

As noted last month please make sure that all your significant sightings and breeding records are provided to the Records Management Team so they can be considered for the 2008-2009 Annual Bird Report.

- **Jack Holland**

**Horsfield's  
Bronze-Cuckoo**  
(*Chrysococcyx  
basalis*)

**David Cook**



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## COG agreed nomenclature—Christidis and Boles

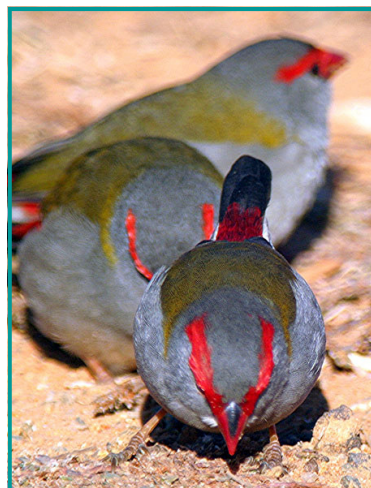
At its August meeting the Committee agreed to adopt the new list of Australian Birds, as set out in Les Christidis and Walter M. Boles, 'Systematics and Taxonomy of Australian Birds', CSIRO Publishing, 2008. This list was adopted by Birds Australia (BA) in July and is being used by other large groups such as BOCA. COG makes use of BA atlas data in compiling its Annual Bird Report, and in turn COG's data is supplied to BA. So it makes sense to be working from the same list of birds. A copy of the new list, as well as a large table showing the changes from previous list is available on the BA website at <http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au/birds/checklist.html>.

In the next month or so a new list of the birds of Canberra will be put up on the COG website, and the new list will be gradually adopted for any COG publications and data bases such as the CBN, ABR, GBS, COG data sheets, the Woodland and other surveys, starting with this issue of Gang Gang.

If you want to get a flavour of the changes, Bruce Ramsay listed them in a Chatline email headed 'COG Checklist - Probable Name Changes' which was sent out on 21 July 2008.

Apart from the name changes there have also been some changes to taxonomic families and orders to which birds are classified. The biggest changes, however, are to the numerical order in which the birds are listed. As well as the name changes, COG will also use the new numerical order of the birds.

If you have any queries about the new list please contact Tony Lawson at [tlawson@homemail.com.au](mailto:tlawson@homemail.com.au), who is implementing the changes.



Red-browed Finch (*Neochmia temporalis*)

Geoffrey Dabb

## Field Trip reports

### Robin Twitchathon — Sunday 20 July

The Robin Twitchathon was outstandingly successful in the face of cold, cloudy weather and an uncertainty of recent robins. Our eventual tally included six out of eight possible robin species (**Jacky Winters** included), or six out of five likely species. To this can be added excellent views of **Spotless Crakes** and **Bassian Thrushes**. AND the outing was directly responsible for some significant rain.

The party of 24 set out in two buses from the National Library for Tharwa Sandwash. By the time we reached this first destination we had **Flame**, **Scarlet** and **Hooded Robins** in the bag, mostly seen on the hill overlooking the river just before you descend to the Sandwash. There were both sexes of each although one group missed the female Scarlet. Also seen were a fair number of **Diamond Firetails** at the corner of Tidbinbilla and Point Hut Roads.

Then to Namadgi Visitors Centre where the entire group wandered out to the dam to see three immature **Spotless Crakes** fossicking in the mud in full view for a considerable time, for the most part oblivious to the antics of the crowd.

At the Botanic Gardens two smaller groups (but not everybody) saw **Yellow Robins**, and a female **Rose Robin** was seen high in a eucalypt by two participants. The **Bassian Thrushes** did their thing for as long as we wanted to watch, including one instance of one bird feeding the other.

After lunch we headed to Newline Paddock where the rain set in just as we spied a pair of **Jacky Winters** perched perfectly in front of the entire group. Those who did not head straight for the buses also saw two **Brown Treecreepers** before calling it quits and heading for home.

Thanks to Jack and Jenny for leading and driving on this enjoyable winter's outing.

— **Julian Robinson**

### Wednesday walk at Stromlo Forest Park—20 August

12 members and guests met behind the grandstand at Stromlo Forest Park on 20th August. The target species was **White-fronted Chat** but they proved to be unavailable. However we did see a lot of finches! In the area just to the north of the grandstand we estimated there to be at least 12 **European Goldfinches**, 12 **Diamond Firetails** (at least one carrying nesting material) and a large flock (minimum 50 birds) of **Red-browed Finches**. **Australasian Pipits** were

also common in this area and at least 2 birds made display flights. **Eurasian Skylarks** were flying all over, at various altitudes with some low enough to give those present a good look at them. In total we recorded 25 species.

## 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.**

### Sunday 7 September — Repeat Raptor Twitchathon — All day bus trip

The ambitious aim of this repeat outing is to observe as many as possible of the eleven bird of prey species that may be reasonably expected to be seen in the ACT in the one day. In particular we will be concentrating on the identification of raptors, which many members find difficult. Some material will be available to assist in this process, which will be based on the Bird of the Month presentation at the August 2006 COG meeting.

As we will be visiting several spots in the ACT where raptors are likely to be present, transport will be by two 12-seater buses. The point of departure will again be the National Library car park at 8 am where you can park your car for free. It will run until mid afternoon, so please bring morning tea and lunch. With the rising fuel prices and clarification of costs of bus hire and insurance, costs will be about \$18 per person, including the COG admin fee. This is payable on boarding the bus and will be dependent on sufficient numbers to fill both buses. At the Gang-gang cut off there were still a number of seats available. Would those still interested please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on [jack.holland@environment.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@environment.gov.au)) as soon as possible.

A draft route and the exact itinerary will not be determined until closer to the day, and will depend on recent reports of where these birds are, though there will be an attempt to stay within the ACT boundaries. If any member is aware where a particular species can be reliably found and viewed with such a big group, could you please let Jack Holland know.

### Wednesday 17 September - Midweek walk

This month's midweek walk, beginning at 9am, will be from Scrivener Dam to Deeks Drive, with a car shuttle to be organised amongst those living in the Weston/Woden area. Arrangements will be confirmed on the email chat line closer to the date.

### Sunday 21 September—Mulligan's Flat morning walk

Join Anthony Overs for a spring morning walk through Mulligan's Flat Nature Reserve. Many of the spring migrants will have returned, and breeding should be well underway for some species. All members are welcome; however, Anthony will spend some time assisting beginners with bird identification (including identifying various calls). Meet at 8.00am at the main gate to the reserve (follow the signs from Horse Park Drive). We will wander around the reserve for about three hours. Bring your hat, binoculars, field guide and morning tea. Please contact Anthony to book ([anthony.overs.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:anthony.overs.reps@aph.gov.au) or 6254 0168 H).



### Australian Ornithological Services P/L

PO Box 385  
South Yarra 3141  
Victoria  
Tel: 03 9820 4223  
Mob: 04173 10200

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

## 2008

5 — 24 September

### Strzelecki Track Outback Tour

### 2008 Plains-wanderer Weekends

29 & 30 Nov; 6 & 7 Dec; 20 & 21 Dec  
2008; 3 & 4 Jan 2009

## 2009

22 — 28 February 2009

### Tasmania birding & mammal tour including pelagic & Melaleuca flight

17 April — 2 May 2009

### Vietnam birding tour co-led by Uthai Treesucon

3 May — 9 May 2009

### Thailand Pitta Tour co-led by Uthai Treesucon

12 May — 1 June 2009

### Borneo and Peninsula Malaysia co-led by Dennis Yong

8 — 26 August 2009

### Strzelecki Track Outback Tour

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



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## Long Weekend 4-6 October—Round Hill NR Camp-out

We regret to inform you that this field trip camp out is at full capacity.

### Bungonia; Saturday-Sunday 11-12 October - overnight campout on private property

As part of our continuing links and joint outings with the Goulburn Field Naturalists Society (GFNS), COG has again been invited to observe the birdlife on a private property belonging to GFNS members near the historic village of Bungonia. This is a large 300 ha property bordering Morton National Park, with a topography varying between flat, undulating and hilly. About 5 kilometres of Jacqua Creek flows through it. Half of this length was virtually totally logged and has been replanted and fenced off. The remainder of the creek is not fenced off, but does contain some former riparian vegetation and beautiful waterholes.

This time we will be camping on the property to ensure we pick up all the birds we missed out on last time when we did a morning circular walk taking in some of the varied habitats through the property, including the best parts of the Jacqua creek. In this time we picked up 50 species including **Sacred Kingfisher**, **White-throated** and **Western Gerygone**, **Brown-headed Honeyeater** and **Specked Warbler**. Birds seen on a preliminary visit included **Spotted Quail-thrush**, **Southern Whiteface** and several **Jacky Winters**.

Participants should arrive mid afternoon of the Saturday when after setting up we will do some birding around the house and other selected habitats, with a similar circular walk as last time planned for Sunday. Car pooling will be encouraged. If you're interested please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on [jack.holland@environment.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@environment.gov.au)). Participants are also welcome if they wish to join in only for the Sunday morning or Saturday afternoon/night events.

### Coolleman Ridge; Saturday 18 October –birdwatching/walking event for the public

COG will again hold an introductory event for beginners or those new to bird watching as part of Parks Week. This will take place from 9:00am at the NW end of Coolleman Ridge off Kathner Street, Chapman, where there are both good walking tracks and a good variety of birds. In particular the range of views of the Murrumbidgee Valley and the mountains beyond, or back into the city, is unrivalled in Canberra. Two sessions will probably again be held, at 9am and at 11 am. While this is mainly aimed at the public, new members or beginners in COG are also welcome. Please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on [jack.holland@environment.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@environment.gov.au)) to book your place.

### Sun 19 October Taylors Creek Morning atlassing opportunity on private properties

Taylors Creek catchment lies between Tarago and the east side of Lake George. In October 2004 and again in March 2006 COG conducted a blitz-style outing for the Taylors Creek Landcare Group whose members were keen to know of the birdlife on their properties. Birds were surveyed in more than 30 two-ha sites on eight properties across 11 rarely-visited COG grids in a variety of woodland and forest types, plus wetlands and grasslands. The outing in 2008 is in spring again and will visit the same sites and follow the same format, i.e. small survey teams will each visit a number of sites on different properties during the morning. We will finish with a lunch provided by the Landcare group, and a roundup of the findings for the morning. Anyone is welcome to attend, and each survey team will have an experienced birder to form the nucleus of the team. If you are interested in joining this outing, exploring some new territory and meeting some enthusiastic landholders, please contact Nicki Taws, on 6251 0303, Mobile 0408 210736 or email [ntaws@bigpond.com](mailto:ntaws@bigpond.com).

### Sat-Sun 25-26 October Bird Week blitz all day atlassing

Yes, it is on again, on the weekend of 25-26 October - COG's annual effort to record over one spring weekend all species of birds present in the ACT across as wide a variety of habitats as possible; and to record any breeding activity. All COG members are warmly encouraged to participate, so that we can cover as much of the ACT as possible. COG members are encouraged to "adopt" one or more grid cells, and those already adopted will be shown on our website and updated from time to time. But don't be perturbed if your favorite location has been taken - multiple surveyors per grid cell are quite acceptable, though it would be good if you took on at least one unclaimed site as well. Think about giving an unknown area a try – it might prove exciting. In order to claim a grid cell, please put in your bid to Barbara Allan, the blitz organizer, on [allanbm@bigpond.net.au](mailto:allanbm@bigpond.net.au) or phone her on 6254 6520.

If you are very familiar with a site and regularly survey there, or do Birds Australia-registered two hectare surveys there, you would probably be the best person to survey that site for the blitz if you can. But if last years' sites were boring or unpleasant or bird-free zones, pick somewhere new this time. Or better still, do a 2-ha 20-min survey to "cover" the grid cell, then move on to somewhere more interesting. If you are a beginner, probably the easiest way to participate is to do a survey in your local park – but remember only to record the birds whose identity you are absolutely sure of. And if work or family commitments preclude you from doing much at all, be sure to try and do at least a 20-minute, 2-ha survey of your own backyard and environs, just to support COG's blitz.

As usual, depending on the weather and Namadgi National Park management, we hope to be able to conduct surveys beyond the locked gates in the Park. The organizer is looking for more 4WDs and competent drivers to tackle the fire trails. Please contact Barbara if you'd like to be involved and/or if you have room in your vehicle to take passengers.

It would be really good if we recorded some night birds this blitz weekend. If you have experience in call playback surveys and would like to be involved in an organized survey, please contact Anthony Overs on [Anthony.Overs.Reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:Anthony.Overs.Reps@aph.gov.au) or 6254 0168.

All standard Birds Australia survey methods are acceptable – just indicate on the electronic or hard-copy datasheet which one you used:

1. a 20-minute survey over 2 hectares (rectangle of 100 m x 200 m; or circle or radius 80 m)
2. a survey within 500 m of a central spot, time unlimited but 20 mins or more

a survey within 5 km of a central spot, time unlimited (though please stay within the one grid cell).

Remember to record the abundance of each bird species seen – e.g. 2 Laughing Kookaburra; plus any indication of breeding using the following codes: ih (inspecting hollow); co (copulating); nb (nest building); ny (nest with young); cf (carrying food); dy (dependent young). *Only* record species you are sure about. If you see a bird species not listed on the datasheet, take a photo of it, if at all possible; take copious field notes of all the details you observe and any features you didn't see; then either submit a completed "unusual bird report form" (available on the COG website) with your hard-copy datasheet or email it to [rarities@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:rarities@canberrabirds.org.au).

Datasheets are available at COG meetings; from the organiser; or from the COG website under "forms" – the COG observation record sheet is the general-use form. This year you may also use COG's electronic input option for your blitz records, using the standard ABA code not a specific blitz one. [This means that any ACT bird record entered over the blitz weekend will be treated as if it were a blitz record]. If you aren't already a user of the online data entry system and would prefer to enter your blitz records this way, please contact Paul Fennell our database manager for details – [ptf@grapevine.com.au](mailto:ptf@grapevine.com.au) or 6254 1804. If you use hard-copy datasheets, please mail them to COG blitz records, PO Box 301, Civic Square ACT 2608; deliver them to Barbara; or hand them in at the 12 November COG meeting.

While most of us find the act of going out and recording birds rewarding enough in itself, it is good if we can offer modest incentives such as participation "lucky draw" prizes. If you are prepared to donate books, wine, DVDs, native plants or anything suitable as a blitz prize, the organizer would love to hear from you!

There will be regular blitz updates on the COG website, including "how to" details, and lists of unloved sites awaiting adoption, so do check it out. And join us for a fun weekend of birding for a cause.

## UNDERSTANDING BIRDS

*Learn to think like a bird!*

An ANU  
Centre for Continuing Education course  
with COG member and  
'Avian Whimsy' author, Ian Fraser



Six two-hour sessions covering evolution, structure, ecology, behaviour, habitats, bird-watching tools and techniques.

For beginners and experienced birders; lots of slides.

Discussion of the issues encouraged!

Tuesdays, 6.30pm, plus 2 x 3-hour field trips.

30 September to 4 November.

For further details and bookings contact the CCE on 6125 2892 or [enquiries.cce@anu.edu.au](mailto:enquiries.cce@anu.edu.au)

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## Sun 9 November Callum Brae Extended morning

Details in the October *Gang-gang*.

## Committee news

### HELP WANTED

We remind members of the AGM on Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> October. Several committee positions will need to be filled with the vice –president and treasurer both stepping down. These two important positions urgently need to be filled. If interested please complete the enclosed nomination form.

In addition, we would welcome volunteers to take on a variety of jobs including helping with outings and helping the editor of *Canberra Bird Notes*.

If you wish to find out more about any of these tasks please contact our president Chris Davey on 62546324 or [chris\\_davey@aapt.net.au](mailto:chris_davey@aapt.net.au).

- This will be your last Gang Gang and/or CBN if you are no longer a financial member of COG.
- If there are any members willing to be a backup if our Sales Desk manager is unable to get to a meeting, please contact Chris Davey.
- Many old issues of *Canberra Bird Notes* have been digitized in recent months by Alastair Smith. Webmaster David Cook is working on adding these to the website.
- The Parliamentary Committee looking at the Molonglo development has released its report.
- The Committee has had some preliminary discussions on preparation of a new edition of *Birds of Canberra Gardens*.
- Members with an interest in joining the COG committee in the coming year should contact Chris Davey to discuss this.
- The Committee endorsed a proposal to become a sponsor of School Science Projects.
- Sue Lashko has been leading a project to develop bird route brochures for Canberra. A draft of the first brochure was tabled at the last committee meeting.

## Notice of COG Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc will be held at 8pm on Wednesday 8 October 2008, in the Multi-media Theatre, Canberra Girls Grammar School, corner of Gawler Cres and Melbourne Ave, Deakin.

### Agenda

1. Opening
2. Apologies
3. Confirmation of minutes of 2007 AGM
4. President's report
5. Adoption of president's report
6. Presentation of annual statement of accounts
7. Adoption of annual statement of accounts
8. Appointment of auditor for 2008-09
9. Election of office-bearers (President, Vice-president, Secretary and Treasurer) and ordinary committee members (a nomination form is printed in this issue of *Gang Gang*, and forms will be available on the night of the AGM)
10. Other matters for which notice has been given.
11. Close of meeting

Mistletoebird  
(*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*)  
Geoffrey Dabb



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# COG Committee Nomination Form

I hereby nominate

\_\_\_\_\_

for the position\* of

\_\_\_\_\_

on the 2009 COG Committee.

(Name)\_\_\_\_\_

(Signature)\_\_\_\_\_

I second the nomination

(Name)\_\_\_\_\_

(Signature)\_\_\_\_\_

I accept the nomination

(Name)\_\_\_\_\_

(Signature)\_\_\_\_\_

Print and fill out. Forms can be submitted any time up to immediately before the AGM at the October meeting. Nominations can be submitted by mail to COG at PO Box 301, Civic Square, ACT 2608. Forms submitted by mail must arrive in the PO Box by 30 September 2008.

All nominees and nominators must be financial members of COG.

*\*Positions: President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, General Members*



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## NSW and ACT Twitchathon 2008

**Proceeds to go jointly to the Gosford LGA Friends of the Bush Stone-curlew Group and the Hunter Bird Observers Club Mangrove Removal Programme at Milhams Pond, Ash Island.**

This year there will be two recipients of our fund raising conservation efforts. For the past two years Gosford City Council in conjunction with the Friends of Bush Stone-curlews, has been surveying and monitoring the 8-9 resident pairs of Bush Stone-curlews in the Brisbane Water Area and a small amount of funds are made available annually for this purpose. The Friends Group have sought additional funding to supplement Council's funding for radio-tracking of fledgling and resident birds, provide equipment for on-site management of breeding habitat in the form of shade cloths, fencing, infra-red cameras, petrol and colour-leg bands, and funds to increase the number of community play-back surveys. Gosford City Council has agreed to manage the Funds. Inkind support will come from NPWS, Gosford & Pittwater Councils as well as consultant for the project, who will provide his services free of charge.

The Hunter BOC Mangrove Removal programme will be centred on Milhams Pond, Ash Island because mangrove encroachment is destroying foraging habitat for shorebirds. The Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project (KWRP) has a permit from NSW Fisheries to remove mangroves from this area. HBOC & KWRP have received grants to remove mangroves from the shorebird habitat on Ash Island and have successfully cleared mangroves from Swan & Wader

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ponds and half of Milhams Pond. They are seeking additional funds to complete the removal of mangroves from Milhams Pond and install a mangrove propagule exclusion device on the feeder creek during the period of seed dispersal. It is estimated that between \$20-30,000 is required to complete the removal of mangroves from Milhams Pond and install the exclusion device. Our funds will contribute to this cost.

This Twitchathon Project aims to raise about \$8,000 for each project, \$16000 altogether.

## **How to join the Twitchathon 25-26 October 2008**

Contact Alan Morris for your 2008 Twitchathon Kit

Form a team with one or even a dozen friends and family and go birdwatching over this October weekend. You can travel anywhere in NSW and/or the ACT. See how many species of birds your team can find from 4 pm Saturday 25 October to 4 pm Sunday 26 October 2008. Note the starting and finishing times have changed because Daylight Saving has been extended in NSW and will commence earlier than previously.

Get sponsors. In the weeks before this event, persuade family and friends to sponsor you so many cents or even dollars for each species your team sees. You just need either lots of little sponsorships or a few big ones!



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There are prizes for the most species seen by two winning teams in each section, as well as prizes for the most money raised, the rarest bird seen by an individual, a prize for the team that sees the most birds in the shortest distanced travelled in the Main Race & Champagne Race Sections and prizes for children. The prizes include Trophies, a weekend in a motel at Leeton with a personal guided tour of the Ramsar Internationally famous Fivebough Swamp Wetlands (sponsored by the Fivebough & Tuckerbil Wetland Trust), accommodation prizes at beautiful locations in NSW, a pair of Helios 8x40 wide angle binoculars, books, book vouchers, champagne, wine, special “T” shirts and other prizes to go to the winners in the various categories of the Twitchathon. Contact Alan for a full list.

**This year we have introduced a new innovation whereas instead of offering 3<sup>rd</sup> prizes in the two main classes, we have tried to make people more environmentally conscious by offering prizes to the team that sees the most birds in the shortest distance travelled, providing that they see over 180 species in the Main Race and 130 species in the Champagne Race. Participants in the two events are invited to record the distance travelled from the time they start at 4pm to their finish at 4pm on the Sunday.**

So don't think that you have to be an A class birdwatcher to take part. Whichever method you chose for your Twitchathon – the laid back (ie the Champagne Race), the deadly serious, or the donor only version, remember it is all about educating others into the importance of nature conservation, particularly the conservation of Australian birds.

Last year we raised \$16000, and the two years before \$17 000 & \$14000 respectively! In the past five years we have raised over \$70,000. This is a great achievement and we have been able to make a significant difference for the birds in the Capertee Valley, the Cowra District, the Education Unit at Gluepot Reserve, the Australian Bird Study Associations Research Fund and provide educational equipment at the new Birds Australia Discovery centre at Sydney Olympic Park.. I know that you will join me in making a fantastic contribution one way or another. So, do ask Alan for your Twitchathon Kit **TODAY** or sponsor a Twitchathon team in your bird club or group! I can put you in touch with a team if you do not know of one in your area!

- **Alan Morris** Twitchathon Co-ordinator (For Birds Australia, Southern NSW & ACT)

Tel 02 96471033, Fax 02 96472030, Mobile 0418269482, Email Birds Australia - Sydney [basna@birdsaustralia.com.au](mailto:basna@birdsaustralia.com.au)

## August GBS Notes for Gang-gang

Some GBS-relevant highlights from the chatline, and other sources, for August include:

A **Scarlet Robin** in Chapman;

A juvenile **White-headed Pigeon** visiting, two **Tawny Frogmouths** roosting and **Australian Magpie** and **Australian Raven** nesting in Ainslie;

A summary of GBS information about **Rainbow Bee-eaters** was provided in response to a request through the chatline. A contribution was also made to answering a question about breeding for noisy miners

### The migrantz iz cumin!

In the July issue of Gang-Gang, Jack Holland commented on the return of migrants. To add a little spice to this I explored what the GBS can show about aspects of this process. It is not possible to go into detail for each species in a small amount of space, but in general I found that there is a considerable amount of variation between the first and last GBS-weeks of arrival of summer migrants recorded in the GBS. By way of example:

**Dollarbirds** are relatively “tight” with the first arrival in week 35 and the latest in week 42 ( a range of 7 weeks); but the earliest GBS arrival of **Sacred Kingfisher** has been in week 30 and the latest in week 46!

Should anyone wish to see the full details for 25 species, I can make this available on request.

### Year 27 Charts

We have now received 72 completed Charts. If there are observers out there who still have Charts could they please let me know by email ([martinflab@gmail.com](mailto:martinflab@gmail.com)) or phone (6238 2637, 0435 012 840) and we'll make some arrangements for collection.

## MUDBRICK COTTAGE

### Mallacoota

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

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

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

Contact:

Barbara de Bruine (02) 6258 3531, [barbdebruine@hotmail.com](mailto:barbdebruine@hotmail.com), or see <http://www.stayz.com.au/25595>.

## PASSIVE SOLAR HOUSE

### South Rosedale

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

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

Contact Greg or Sallie Ramsay

6286 1564 or  
[gramsay@actewagl.net.au](mailto:gramsay@actewagl.net.au)

# COG SALES

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**

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## Avian Whimsy #66 — Go West Young Bird!

One of the pleasures of visiting the south-west of Australia is the slightly surreal impression of being in a parallel universe, where everything is very familiar, but definitely different. As I'm about to head off there in a day or so, it's natural that I should be pondering it. We get a similar feeling in Tasmania, and also in South America, though here the differences are much more pronounced and the obvious similarities are mostly among the plants.

In each case of course the reason is simply that all those places were once linked, part of the same system, with nothing to stop movement of animals and even plants between them. (And yes, plants do move around, just not the stage of the life cycle which is attached to the ground!) South-western Australia was isolated from the north by the cold coastal currents which created desert right to the sea. It was also cut off from the rest of southern Australia 30 million years ago, partly by the increasing aridity of the land, and partly because the plants which had evolved on the acid soils of the ancient decaying granites were hemmed in by the alkali soils to the east, laid down as vast marine limestone beds. The animals which relied on those plants were also thus trapped. However the world is not a static place and gentler times returned; when that happened the woodlands to the north of the Nullarbor were moister and allowed passage between east and west. The cycle was repeated, perhaps several times. Each time the south-west corner was isolated from the rest of Australia evolution proceeded uninfluenced by what was happening elsewhere.

My favourite example of the result of this is in the yellow robins. (I've touched on this before, back in December 2003, but just in case it's not still in the forefront of your mind, I'll reiterate.) The ancestral yellow-breasted robin was found right across southern Australia – whether as long ago as 30 million years or during one of the more recent climate ameliorations is not something we can currently know. However during subsequent isolation the western population faded in colour, and more importantly changed sufficiently in behaviour and genetics so that next time its yellow relatives came west they didn't recognise each other. Another way of saying this is that a new species had evolved. The old westerners, the White-breasted Robins, had adapted to the wet Karri forests, dense coastal scrubs and moist creek lines. The newcomers, again cut off by climate change, also changed in appearance as time went by, the smart yellow breast fading to grey. These Western Yellow Robins specialised in the drier open forests and woodlands; it was this lifestyle which enabled them to subsequently spread east again as far as the Flinders Ranges when the time and climate were right. By now they had become the third species in the genus *Eopsaltria*. (It means 'the dawn harpist' incidentally! Well OK, a psalter wasn't really a harp, but it's close enough).

A similar story was played out among the black cockies too. Different incursions and subsequent adaptations to the unique conditions in which they found themselves led to a short-billed species (Carnaby's Black-cockatoo) whose broad strong powerful beak was adapted to crushing woody Proteaceous cones, such as those of Hakeas, Banksias and Dryandras and extracting the seeds, and a long-billed one (Baudin's Black-cockatoo). The elegant slim upper mandible of this Baudin's evolved to extract the tiny seeds from the big cup-shaped capsules of Marri (*Eucalyptus calophylla*). (I do wish that the Taxonomy Lords hadn't opted for those names; apart from any philosophical questions of naming animals for lesser beings – ie people – they are utterly useless in identifying them. I have to look up which is which every time.) Curiously, if we assume that the ancestral cocky had a yellow tail then both these species underwent similar fading to that experienced by the yellow robins.

The Marri proved to be a powerful evolutionary driving factor. A parrot closely related to the ancestors of the rosellas and ringnecks came west and also found its seeds irresistible; the glorious Red-capped Parrot, now altered enough from its grandsires and distant cousins to warrant its own genus, also has a hugely extended slender upper mandible to extract them.

Obvious east-west species pairs which arose in equivalent ways include Eastern and Western Rosellas and Spinebills, Beautiful and Red-eared Firetails, Brown and Rufous Treecreepers, Western and Rufous Bristlebirds, Western and perhaps Buff-rumped Thornbills. Blue-breasted, Red-winged and Variegated Fairy-wrens form another trio, like the robins and cockies.

I was going to muse too on the utterly arbitrary nature of defining when two populations have become separate species, but my word allocation has disappeared like rain into the Nullarbor or a Noisy Scrub-bird into a bush. Next time.

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



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## NEW MEMBERS

COG welcomes the following new members:

E Crowe, Isaacs

M Thompson, Queanbeyan

K Stagoll, Dickson

## NEXT NEWSLETTER

October deadline

**Wednesday 24 September 2008**

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

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

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

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Judy Collett and helpers

### *COG membership*

2008-2009 memberships:

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

### *Membership inquiries—*

Sandra Henderson ph 6231 0303  
[membership@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:membership@canberrabirds.org.au)  
for changed address or other details

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

### *COG website*

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

### *Office*

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

### *COG E-mail Discussion List*

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

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