

Gang-gang

September 2009

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

September meeting

7:30pm Wednesday 9.9.2009

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 first talk will be by **Dan Mantle** entitled '**Cracking the Cuckoo Code**' - a brief refresher on the main identification features and calls of the commoner ACT cuckoo species.

Stuart Rae, Visiting Fellow, School of Botany and Zoology, ANU will give the main presentation on "**Tawny Frogmouths - Masters of Camouflage.**"

They are all around you, you just don't see them. Or are they? Although well known to people due to often nesting in suburbia, there have been few studies of this enigmatic bird. In this talk Stuart will present some findings from a study of Tawny Frogmouths in the ACT, describing their numbers in different habitats, nest site selection and breeding success. Pick up a few tips on how to find these marvellous but overlooked birds.

Everyone welcome

What to watch out for this month

While August is still winter, the first spring/summer migrants arrive during this month. According to reports on the chat line the first of these, **Welcome Swallows**, **Tree Martins**, **Pallid** and **Fan-tailed Cuckoos** arrived during the second week of the month. The first two are often among the first arrivals, though the related **Fairy Martins** were not recorded until 3 weeks into the month. The early larger cuckoos were somewhat of a surprise, at least to me, in particular the **Fan-tailed Cuckoo** for which there were a number of reports in different areas, more so than in the past few years. In my local patch on the SW edges of Canberra this species used to be relatively common and conspicuous by its repeated calling (including at night) in late winter/early spring, often from the former Narrabundah Hill pine plantation. While numbers were already much lower before the fires, this species has been virtually absent since January 2003, and it will be interesting whether it will reach here this season.

The **Rufous Whistler**, **Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike** and **Grey Fantail** were also recorded during this week. It is always hard to be sure if they were the first arrivals of these species (perhaps from a slightly warmer spot only a short distance away) or had overwintered; checking the *Annual Bird Reports* indicates numbers of the first-named species in particular are usually very low during winter. Another surprise was a number of winter records from late July of the **Superb Parrot** in the Holt/Kippax area, this species has rarely been recorded over winter in Canberra before.

The short spell of settled, sunny, slightly warmer weather round 18 August brought with it a spate of first records of warmer season migrants including multiple sightings of the **Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo** and **Dusky Woodswallow**, as well as single records of the **Olive-backed Oriole**, **Clamorous Reed Warbler**, **Noisy Friarbird**, **Superb Parrot** (the first return?) and the **Western Gerygone**. All of these are at least a week or so earlier than I would have expected them, possibly the result of the mild temperatures. Of course these are the first records posted on the

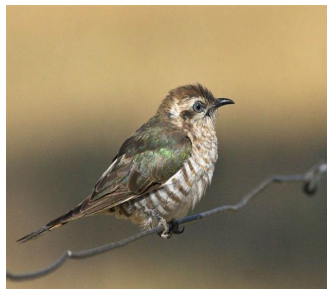
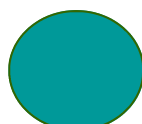


Photo by
Julian Robinson

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

(Continued on page 2)



(Continued from page 1)

chat line, and are not necessarily the first seen by COG members, or for that matter the first to arrive in the ACT this season.

Also recorded were just a few groups of **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** moving through, but to date only a single report of the **White-naped**. These were probably early arrivals of the return spring migration, usually less spectacular than the autumn one. Migrating **Red Wattlebirds** have also been reported, but like the **Striated** and **Spotted Pardalote** reasonable numbers of these species remain in Canberra over winter.

Therefore the portents are there for a significant influx of migrants this spring/summer, though in my local patch only four of the above named species had arrived by the Gang-gang cut off. So 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 Gerygone**, **Mistletoebird** and the **Leaden Flycatcher**, and perhaps by the end of the month some early **White-winged Trillers** or **Rufous Songlarks**. Indeed just before going to press there was a record of the last-named, possibly an overwinterer, as this species is very inconspicuous outside of the breeding/calling season, and there are some winter records for the ACT and region.

Flame Robins were clearly on the move during mid August, with large number of birds seen congregating in the Tidbinbilla area and the Orroral Valley, on their way to the mountains to breed. However, there were still a few brown birds observed much closer to the city, as were **Scarlet Robins**, which usually leave a little later. During early September the remainder of these robins will all have departed for higher altitudes or the mountains. The **Golden Whistler** often seems to linger the longest of the winter visitors, though some **Eastern Spinebills** will stay in gardens over summer if there is sufficient food available. Finally keep an eye out for the **Rose Robin** which can be found in winter in small numbers but also is a passage migrant. There have been a few records of this species over the past month.

By contrast there have been few reports of the commencement of breeding mainly related to the **Australian Magpie**, though a **Purple Swamphen** with very small chicks has been seen. During August at the NW end of Cooleman Ridge **White-winged Choughs** built a new nest about 25 m from that used last year and are now sitting.

Finally many thanks to all members and others who posted the above sightings on the chat line etc and allowed me to draft this summary. August/September is a time of change in the Canberra bird scene with the arrival of the spring and departure of the winter altitudinal migrants, and the commencement of the breeding season. As always please make sure all your significant sightings are provided to the Records Management Team and can be considered for the 2009/10 *Annual Bird Report*. — **Jack Holland**

Field Trip reports

No trip reports were received this month.

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 6 September — Mt Taylor Nature Reserve — Morning walk

Meet at 8am at the Colquhoun Street entrance to the reserve, which is off Sulwood Drive in Kambah.

We will spend the morning observing the birds of the remnant Yellow Box-Red Gum Grassy Woodland of the lower north-western section of the reserve, before heading up the mountain, where the habitat changes to Dry Shrubby Box Woodland. We will look at some habitat here that could provide food for the **Glossy Black-Cockatoo** (noting that this species hasn't been recorded here since 1996) and examine the effects of the 2003 fire on this sensitive area. Another focus for this walk will be noting any of the early migrants that have returned, and for those so inclined, enjoying the colourful spring woodland flowers. Medium fitness required as terrain is sloped. Bring water, sunscreen and morning

tea. To register or for further information, contact Matthew Frawley on 6155 1358 (work), 6296 1026 (home) or email: scallywags@effect.net.au.

Sunday 13 September Aranda Bushland Morning

Kaye Hahne will lead a spring morning walk through the Aranda Bushland. Meet at the old Aranda shops, in Bandjalong St, at 8.00am. Bring morning tea. To book please contact Kaye on 6251 1792 or hahnekh@pcug.org.au

14-18 September — Oolambeyan National Park mid week

Expressions of interest are invited for this mid week trip, staying in a comfortable homestead (shared bedrooms) at this large national park south of the village of Carathool off the Sturt Highway in the Riverina. COG had a successful visit there in 2006. Oolambeyan was primarily set aside as habitat for the endangered Plainswanderer. It is on the Riverina/Hay plain, with varied habitats including sand dune/Callitris, acacia/borree, rosewood/belar and black box woodland. At this stage, we have agreement for a small group who will be doing some bird surveys for the Parks Service, as part of our birding activities, and these places are tentatively filled. However, we expect to be able to take another 4-5 people if plumbing works are completed on time - this can't be confirmed until early August. Entry to the park is accessible to 2WD vehicles, but 4WD will be useful in the park. For more details or if you are interested in going on the list, please contact Jenny Bounds (ph 62887802).

16 September — Wednesday Midweek walk

It is planned to undertake a longer outing in September, to explore three Travelling Stock Reserves on Mountain Creek Road (Tinker's Creek, The Mullion, and Cavan Woolshed). As with our previous longer foray it will be possible for people to come to as many of the venues as they wish. In view of the extra distance I suggest we gather at Stromlo Forest Park (SFP) on Urriara Road for car pooling, aiming to leave at 9am. If people wish to arrive a little earlier we could spend a few minutes scoping out the **White-fronted Chat** situation at SFP before leaving. A map of the area, showing the location of the Reserves and SFP, will be posted on the chatline closer to the date

Sunday 20 September — Gorooyaroo NR — morning walk

This trip has been cancelled due to the lack of a leader.

Long weekend 2-5 October — Holbrook/Wagga Wagga area

Over the Labour Day long weekend we will be exploring the national parks and nature reserves of the Holbrook/Tarcutta/Wagga Wagga area. Destinations could include Kyeamba TSR, Mates Gully TSR, Livingstone NP, Nest Hill NR and Benambra NP.

We will stay at the comfortable, renovated shearers' quarters at 'Glenfalloch' station which is off the Hume Highway a little north of Holbrook. This is bunk-bed accommodation, with shared cooking and ablution facilities. Participants will bring their own food, drinks and some bedding, and we will have an optional pot-luck shared dinner on the Saturday night. The accommodation has been booked from the Friday afternoon until the Monday morning.



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enquiries@philipmaher.com

Plains-wanderer weekends 2009 season

14/15 November, 28/29 November
12/13 December 2009
2/3 January 2010

2010

February 2010

SW Western Australia
Christmas Island
Tasmania

March 2010

Thailand

May /June 2010

New Guinea

June 2010

Top End
Alice Springs

4 —22 September 2010

Strzelecki Track Outback Tour

Tour itineraries, bird lists, checklists
and latest news are on the website.

www.philipmaher.com

Registration for this field trip is essential, and participant numbers are limited. To register, please contact the trip leader, David McDonald, at telephone 6238 3706 or email david.mcdonald@socialresearch.com.au. He will provide further details including costs and driving instructions to 'Glenfalloch'. Car-pooling for this trip is encouraged.

10-11 October — Mittagong revisited — overnight accommodated/camping

This will be a reprise of the COG outing in September 2007, with perhaps some differences, including that local COG member, Pamela Morse-Evans will be absent overseas. We expect to be travelling down round lunchtime on Saturday, staying in Mittagong overnight and returning latish on Sunday afternoon, fitting in waterbirds at the Cecil Hoskins Reserve (if conditions are right) and exploring the Box Vale and other tracks to the north of the town where a range of birds including the **Origma** (Rock Warbler), **Pilot Bird** and **Bassian Thrush** are likely to be seen. Another attraction will be the spring wildflowers, this visit is a month later to ensure the Waratah is flowering.

The exact program will be decided once a recce is done, but in the meantime please register your interest with Jack Holland on 6288 7840 or jack.holland@environment.gov.au, who will be able to provide further information including on the range of accommodation available, from which participants will need to make their own bookings. It is recommended accommodation is arranged as early as possible as it will be just after tulip time in the Southern Highlands, with advance bookings already expected to be significant. There will again be the opportunity for a meal together on Saturday evening in a local restaurant. Participation in either the Saturday or Sunday program will also be possible.

Sunday 18 October Tinderry Nature Reserve extended morning walk

Ian Anderson will lead an extended morning walk to Tinderry Nature Reserve. Meet at 8.00am at the garage at Williamsdale on the Monaro Highway. Some car pooling is possible there before we travel on to Michelago and the walking track off the largely unsealed Michelago to Captain's Flat Road, close to Big Tinderry mountain. **Lyrebirds**, **Wonga Pigeons** and **Crested Shrike-tits** have been reported from this area in the past. Participants should bring morning tea and perhaps lunch with them. Food and drinks can be purchased in Williamsdale and Michelago. To book, please contact Ian on 6281 0609 or iananderson@grapevine.com.au.

Notice of COG Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc will be held at 7.30pm on Wednesday 14 October 2009, 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 2008 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 2009-2010
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, (see page 13) and forms will be available on the night of the AGM)
10. Other matters for which notice has been given.
11. Close of meeting

Committee news

- A revised outings policy will soon be made available on the COG website, as part of COG's responsibilities under the recent affiliation with BOCA.
- A nomination for listing of the **Glossy black cockatoo** in the ACT was submitted at the end of July. There have also been some discussions with relevant people about the planting of drooping casuarinas in the arboretum and at Mulligans Flat.
- COG has suggested some changes to the current proposal for sealing of the Mulligans Flat road.
- Further clearing of willows is proposed by the government, in the area between Black Mountain Peninsula and Acacia Inlet. The area proposed has been inspected, with no nest trees identified.
- There is some concern over a proposal to relocate the Kingston substation to a site close to the Fyshwick sewage treatment works.
- The 2011 Birds Australia campout will be held at Scottsdale. Later this year a COG subcommittee will be convened to start planning this event.
- COG's survey sites at Callum Brae have now been marked. It's becoming a well-studied site, with kangaroo and other survey markers also in place at present.
- Chris Davey will represent COG at the BIGNet meeting in Mittagong in September.
- If you have not yet paid your 2009-2010 subscription, this issue of *Gang-Gang* will be the last one you receive.
- Survey sites at Callum Brae have now been marked, and those visiting that reserve will also notice

Volunteers required

Return of the Fauna: Brown Treecreeper Reintroductions into Eucalypt Woodland

Help bring back the vulnerable **Brown Treecreeper** to Mulligans Flat and Goorooyaroo Nature Reserves. This unique project will involve transporting family groups from the Murrumbidgee region in New South Wales to two reserves in Canberra from mid-November this year. This will be followed by daily radio-tracking and monitoring until mid-February.

How you can contribute:

- You can help by spending some time in Wagga Wagga from 12 November to 6 December catching and banding bird groups to transport to Canberra (accommodation and equipment supplied). At least one R or A-class bird bander is required during this period, although you can still help if you don't have this experience.
- Help monitor the newly released birds in Mulligans Flat and Goorooyaroo Nature Reserves. Releases will be from mid-November with birds being radio-tracked daily for approximately nine weeks, followed by daily observations. Help is accepted any time, but particularly required through December and January. It would be great if you had experience radio-tracking, although this is not necessary. I would prefer you to commit to at least a week of volunteering, or commit to helping on a regular basis.

To register your interest or for more details on the project please contact Victoria Bennett, PhD Scholar, at the ANU at the following: e-mail victoria.bennett@anu.edu.au or phone (02) 6125 6775 or mobile 0401 883 567

COG'S BIRD BLITZ 2009

Yes, it is on again, on the weekend of 24-25 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 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 two-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, two-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. Some assistance with fuel costs may be available this year.

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 two 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 at least 20 minutes
3. 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 on COG's "unusuals" list, 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.

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 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.

— Barbara Allan

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Vale Alastair Morrison 1915-2009

Members may have noted the passing of Alastair Morrison (CT 5th and 8th August). Alastair was known to many COG members as a friend of nature and generous in his support for the environment.

Although not widely known Alastair supported financially the publication of the *Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT* written by McComas Taylor with graphics by Nick Day; a must-have publication for all those interested in the birds of the ACT.

We thank Alastair for his generosity and extend our condolences to his family.

Proposed Gungahlin Superb Parrot survey

As I am sure many are aware there has been a recent increase of the sightings of the threatened **Superb Parrot** in the ACT with breeding now reported from Goorooyarroo Nature Reserve and observations of birds hollow inspecting in other areas.

COG has been concerned that this change may not be reflected in the management plan for the species in the ACT, in particular, we have been concerned about the lack of information in the Gungahlin area.. I am please to say that the Department of Territories and Municipal Services (TAMS) has agreed to our request to conduct a survey in the area this coming breeding season.

This is an exciting prospect for it will allow us access to areas in parts of the northern ACT that we know little about. Although the primary aim of the survey will be to determine the extent of breeding activity of the Superb Parrot in the area it will also allow us the opportunity to gather information on other species.

Details have now been finalised with the first on-ground survey set for Saturday 12 September. Many thanks to those who have put their hands up to help on that date and I trust that you have by now received an email with details. Following surveys will be held on Saturday 17 October, 14 November and 12 December. For further details see the August 2009 Gang-gang.

This is a great opportunity for COG to have a major input into the management of a threatened species in the ACT, we will be relying on members to help with the survey and I urge as many as possible to put their hands up to help. If anyone is interested to participate in these surveys and has not already contacted me could they please let me know. My email is chris_davey@aapt.net.au, telephone 62546324

Congratulations

On behalf of COG I would like to congratulate Margaret Leggoe for winning first prize in the Annual Projected Images Portfolio competition run by the Canberra Photographic Society with a portfolio of eight small birds photographed in the ACT.

CHANGE OF DATE — Meeting to discuss the 2010 Outings program

During September each year the Outings program is decided for the following year. The program is a most important part of COG's activities and, although well attended, these outings are run by a few enthusiastic individuals.

Anyone interested in the Outings program is invited to a general meeting that will be held at the Conservation Council, 3 Childers St, Civic, starting at 5.30 pm on Wednesday 23 September 2009. At the meeting we will discuss the program for 2010. The COG committee would appreciate as much input from the membership as possible.

— **Chris Davey (President)**

NSW and ACT Twitchathon 2009

This year's Twitchathon aims to raise about \$20,000 to assist in the management of the far western NSW Important Bird Areas. Money is needed to establish a fund that will contribute to the cost of setting up appropriate monitoring sites and methodologies and to establish monitoring regimes at each IBA. In addition the money may be used to provide funds to volunteers to cover the cost of fuel and other essential items, so that they will be prepared to travel out to these locations on a regular basis to survey and monitor the sites. These IBA sites include some of the Paroo River lakes, some of the ephemeral lakes around Tibooburra, and the various reserves of the far west that sample the different habitats of the plains and mountain ranges of the Region that provide habitat for **Bourke's Parrot**, various **Grass-wrens**, **Quail-thrushes** and **Babblers**, not to mention **Freckled Ducks** and migratory shorebirds and indigenous waders like **Inland Dotterals** and **Banded Stilts**.

How to join the Twitchathon 31 October – 1 November 2009

Contact Pixie at the BASNA Office for your 2009 Twitchathon Kit

Form a team with two or even a dozen friends and family. You can travel anywhere in NSW and/or the ACT. See how many species of birds your team can find from 4 pm Saturday 31 October to 4 pm Sunday 1 November 2009.

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!

Prizes

There are prizes for the most species seen by two winning teams in the Main Race and the Champagne Race Sections, as well as prizes for the most money raised, the rarest bird seen by an individual, and prizes for children. There are also 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. Participants in the two main races are invited to record the distance travelled from 4pm on the Saturday to 4pm on the Sunday. Contact Alan for a full list.

Previous years

Last year we raised \$23,000, and the two years before \$16 000 & \$17000 respectively! In the past five years we have raised over \$78,000. 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 Discovery centre at Sydney Olympic Park, the Australian Bird Study Associations Research Fund, the Gosford Friends of the Bush Stone-Curlew and the Hunter bird Observers Club's Shorebird Roost Protection Scheme. I know that you will join me in making a fantastic contribution one way or another. So, do ask Pixies 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!

Contact

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

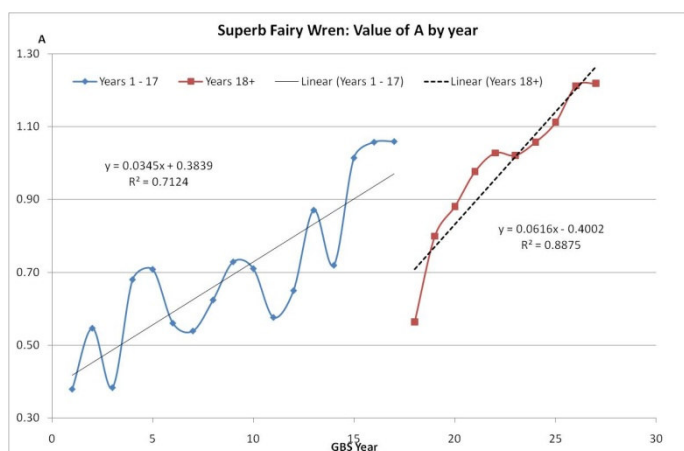
Tel: 02 9647 1033, Fax: 02 9647 2030, E-mail: basna@birdsaustralia.com.au

Garden Bird Survey Notes

There have been several Chatline postings that are directly GBS-relevant for the last few days of July to mid August, as expected, several relate to returning migrants.

- **Yellow-tufted Honeyeater** at Chapman and Ainslie;
- **Noisy Friarbird**, Ainslie;
- **Pallid Cuckoo** in Scullin and Carwoola; and
- **Western Gerygone** in Ainslie

Superb Fairy Wrens – going and coming



The value of A (average number of birds per active site-week) for **Superb Fairy-wren** rises reasonably steadily from Year 1 to Year 17 and then plummets to year 18 after which it rises again, at a slightly steeper, and more constant, rate than before.

The change between Years 17 and 18 seems to be a change in the population of birds, since most (856 of 1208 observed birds – 70%) is attributable to changes in numbers at sites reporting the species in both years. New sites added 35 birds and ‘abandoned’ sites reduced the count by 387.

The pattern after year 18 is difficult to explain. If my on-going investigations end up with a useful hypothesis I will post a message to the Chatline in the near(ish) future.

GBS Redevelopment

The redesigned system is being used, very successfully, for entry of Year 28 records.

!!!! Charts and Thanks!!!!

At present we have a certain 78 Charts in Year 28, compared to 72 Charts for the past 2 years. There may be one or two more, depending upon people’s situations. It looks as though we will have at least 78 Charts for Year 29.

Thank you to all those who have contributed to either of these results.

Thank you also to Rob and Chris Cannon who are leaving Canberra. They have been valuable contributors to the GBS for 27 of the 28 years of the Survey.

CHANGE OF MONTHLY MEETING TIME

Remember the September Members’ meeting will start at 7.30pm NOT 8.00pm.

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,

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.

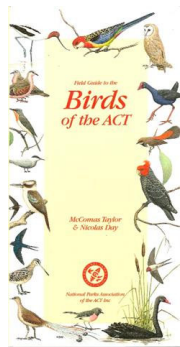
Bird watching is possible from the comfort of a chair on the front or back deck, while for the more energetic, Guerrilla Bay and Burrewarra Point are within walking distance. The wetlands at Barling's Beach are only a few kilometres away. Rich birding is available in almost any direction.

Contact Greg or Sallie Ramsay

6286 1564 or

gramsay@actewagl.net.au

COG SALES

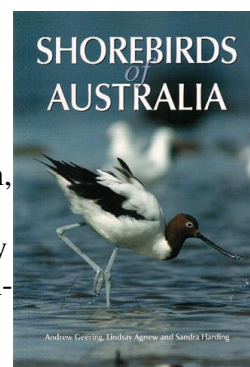


Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT (Taylor & Day) - \$16.00 — Bird identification in the ACT has just become much easier! Here are all the birds of the ACT in colour, with easy-to-follow text and key biological data, in a compact field format that will fit easily in your pocket.

Shorebirds of Australia (Geering, Agnew & Harding)

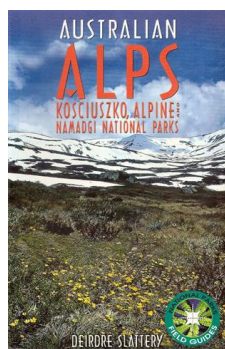
\$33.00 — This title brings to-

gether the latest information about the evolution, ecology and behaviour of shorebirds and how they are distributed in Australia. This is a highly sought after title in the popular "CSIRO Publishing" series.



Birdwatching on the Far South Coast (see

<http://www.thebegavalley.org.au/6224.html>) This spiral bound title is well presented, easy to read and is available from the Sales Desk for \$16.00. The inside front cover provides a quick guide to the towns and localities referred to in the text. All sites have been tried and tested and it is recommended that the guide be used in conjunction with a district map.



Australian Alps: Kosciuszko, Alpine & Namadgi National Parks (Slattery) - \$16.00 — This guide is your key to the secrets of the three national parks that stretch over Australia's spectacularly beautiful rooftop - Kosciuszko in New South Wales, Alpine in Victoria and Namadgi in the Australian Capital Territory. Ideal for field trips, this guide will make a wonderful memento as well as a great reference for future trips.

Watching Wildlife (Chris) - \$24.00

Why Don't Woodpeckers Get Headaches? And Other Bird Questions You Know You Want To Ask (O'Connor) - \$13.50

CD: Bird Calls of the ACT (Fullagar & Slater) - \$12.00

LIMITED STOCK: Messent Bird Calendar 2009 - \$8.00

All these items (and more) plus COG T-shirts and Polo shirts are available at the monthly meeting sales desk

Avian Whimsy - No. 76 — Hummdingers

It was a bizarre experience, watching birds pollinating Tasmanian Blue Gums. I know it doesn't sound too unusual – honeyeaters and lorikeets do it all the time – but these were **hummingbirds** in the Andes of southern Peru, a good 1000 metres higher than the highest point of Australia. My lungs were working hard to enable me to stand still, and the rest of me was feeling decidedly squiffy, but these extraordinary birds were working at a level that I find it hard to even imagine.

Watching hummingbirds induces a strange sense of unreality. They don't seem to 'move' in any normal sense, they just sort of flick more or less instantly from one place to another and park in mid-air in a most disconcerting fashion. (Not quite "in exactly the same way a brick doesn't", as Douglas Adams beautifully put it – they do it rather more elegantly than that implies.) But effortless as it looks, it's actually the absolute opposite, as I suggested in the previous paragraph.

There is plenty of well-illustrated material out there showing how hummers hover, but in very brief it involves rotating the wings in shallow figure-8s, at speeds so high that it hurts my shoulders just to think about it. Effectively they are pushing backwards at the same speed that they are pushing forwards, as well as balancing out gravity, so they can hang motionless in front of a flower. No un-hummingbird can push forwards against the air to achieve a reverse gear. All other birds drive only with the down (and back) stroke, the recovery stroke just being a passive action, pulled by elastic tendons. To our eyes, a hovering hummer's wings are a blur. While the **Giant Hummingbird** (these things are relative) lumbers away at 10-15 beats a second, smaller ones regularly whirr away at up to 80 strokes a second. In courtship flights up to 200 beats a second have been measured! Short distance chases in the wild have been timed at 150kph.

This sort of profligacy does not come cheap. A hummingbird's flight muscles comprise an astonishing 30% of its body weight, 50% more than that of any other hard-flyers. This introduces a tricky feedback situation – more muscle weight means more work to carry it, requiring more muscle, etc. Its heart is relatively five times the weight of ours, and beats over 500 times a minute at rest and double that under stress. A resting hummingbird takes some 300 breaths a minutes, approximately 20 times what we need. All of this requires a huge energy intake. To take in the required sugar hit, in the form of nectar, requires drinking over 1.5 times the bird's body weight of liquid per day, obtained from visiting up to 2000 flowers. That would be equivalent to me drinking 120 litres a day, which would strain my kidneys more than somewhat, and a hummingbird's kidneys have had to simplify greatly to cope.

While Australia apparently has a far greater diversity of pollinating birds than South America (and it seems that hummers arose in South America and only spread more recently and in a limited way to North America), it does not have the vast number of plant species relying exclusively on just one group of pollinators. It seems that the 330 species of hummers have the market so tightly sewn up that other bird groups had trouble getting a look in, and the tube flowers that 'fit' hummingbird bills also exclude most other birds. Hummingbirds drive the timing and quantity of nectar production of thousands of South America plant species.

It is curious that no equivalent specialists have evolved in such a major way in Australia; the two spinebill species do a fair job of hovering at flowers, and other species such as **gerygones** and **pardalotes** hover at foliage, but much as it pains me to say it, they are pretty rudimentary hoverers by comparison. Perhaps low nutrient Australian soils make risky the very high nectar flows necessary to support such an energy-profligate lifestyle. In Africa and southern Asia the 130-odd **sunbird** species are also obvious ecological analogues, but their skills are much more like those of **spinebills**. There seems little doubt that hummingbirds' closest relatives are **swifts**, but while it is tempting to see as obvious the relationship between two groups of such wonderful aerialists, they probably separated at least 65 million years ago, linked by a much more pedestrian ancestor. The timing of this separation, at the time of isolation of South America, seems very suggestive, but the recent recognition of 30 million year old German hummingbird fossils makes the story more complicated.

Uncomplicated though is the thrill and joy and watching the improbable hummers at work; if you get the opportunity to do so, don't miss it. It's one of life's humbly pleasures.

— Ian Fraser ianf@pcug.org.au

Photo by Ian Fraser



Green Violetear, Peru



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NEW MEMBERS

COG welcomes the following new members:

- B Fair, Queanbeyan
- M Jones, Deakin
- A Eldridge, Holder
- M Hicks, Kambah
- J Ryan, Lyons
- P Duke, Kambah

NEXT NEWSLETTER

October deadline

Wednesday 30 September 2009

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

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

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

COG info

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Vice President— TBA

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Civic Square, ACT 2608

Newsletter distribution
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
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

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 with the subject 'subscribe' without the quotation marks

Editor Canberra Bird Notes

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Gang-gang

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

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COG Committee Nomination Form

I hereby nominate

for the position* of

(*Positions: President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, General Members)

on the 2010 COG Committee.

(Name):

(Signature):

I second the nomination.

(Name):

(Signature):

I accept the nomination.

(Name):

(Signature):

Nomination forms may 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 2009. All nominees and nominators must be financial members of COG.