

Gang-gang

September 2011

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

SEPTEMBER MEETING

7:30pm Wednesday 14.9.11

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.

At 7.15 pm, before the usual meeting starts, Michael Robbins will run a short demo of an interactive map showing some possible COG Gazetteer locations, associated with redesign of the COG Observation Record, and discuss potential implications of this approach.

This month's short talk will be by **Geoffrey Dabb** on the **Koel and Channel-billed Cuckoo**, entitled: **Did Alexander the Great ever hear a koel? An arm-chair chat about cuckoos, books and people, lavishly illustrated with maps, diagrams and photographs from real life.**

The main presentation will be by **Dr Naomi Langmore** of the Research School of Biology, ANU on **"Coevolution between Australian cuckoos and their hosts: mimicry, crypsis and other sneaky tricks"**.

The Australian bronze-cuckoos and their hosts are locked in a coevolutionary arms race that appears to have escalated further than any other cuckoo - host interaction. For every defence evolved by hosts, cuckoos come up with another trick to fool their hosts into rearing their young. Naomi will describe some of the entirely novel tricks that Australian bronze-cuckoos have evolved, and discuss why the arms race has reached such an advanced stage in Australia.

Everyone welcome

Notice of COG

Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc., will be held at **7.30pm on Wednesday 12 October 2011**, 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 2010 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 2011-2012
9. Election of office-bearers (President, Vice-president, Secretary and Treasurer) and ordinary committee members (a nomination form is on page 11 and forms will also be available on the night of the AGM)
10. Other matters for which notice has been given.
11. Close of meeting

NOTE: Neither the President nor the vice-president will be seeking re-election. For information on these positions contact Chris Davey—phone 6254 6324

What to watch out for this month

The warmer, drier, final week of August (and also of winter) brought a noticeable increase in reports on the COG chatline of the return of the spring/summer migrants, compared with only isolated reports earlier in the month. These included some of the species which seem to most commonly stay over in winter, the **Grey Fantail**, **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike**, **Olive-backed Oriole** and the **Dusky Woodswallow**. While it's always difficult to tell whether they are truly the first returns, very few of the last two in particular seem to have over-wintered this year.



Superb Parrot
(*Polytelis swainsonii*)

Photo by Geoffrey Dabb

Of the species that are considered complete (or close to) migrants, the **Noisy Friarbird** seems to have been the most widely reported to have returned so far, with few other migratory honeyeaters observed to date, including the **Yellow-faced Honeyeater**. So watch out for the return of this species and the **White-naped**, though their inward migration is always less spectacular than the outward in autumn. The **Superb Parrot** also seems to have arrived early, with up to 15 having been seen in its usual spots to the N or NW of the ACT with, I understand, at least two appearing to have overwintered at the Belconnen Golf Course. There have also already been a few early reports of the **Eastern/Pacific Koel**; will there be a continued increase in numbers of this species this spring/summer, as well as in the length of their stay?

Otherwise it appears to have been a pretty slow start to the season, as there have only been single or just a couple of postings of some of the earlier arriving spring/summer migrants (**Welcome Swallow**, **Tree and Fairy Martins**, and the four cuckoo species), as well as of a few species expected to

arrive a little later, such as the **Australian Reed-Warbler**, but none so far of the **Rufous Whistler**. 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. Other migrants to arrive during September are likely to be the **Western** and **White-throated Gerygone**, **Mistletoebird** and the **Leaden Flycatcher**, and perhaps by the end of the month some early **Sacred Kingfishers** or **Rainbow Bee-eaters**. However, if the good conditions out west are maintained I suspect that there will again be few **White-winged Trillers** or **Rufous Songlarks** arriving in the ACT this season.

August is also the time that the altitudinal winter migrants depart, but there have still been some reports of the **Flame** and **Scarlet Robin**, **White-eared** and **Crescent Honeyeater**, and **Golden Whistler** during the month. This is at least in my local patch, where the **Eastern Spinebill** is still very conspicuous and may stay for most of the summer, as it does in some gardens. In keeping with its reputation as a passage migrant, the **Rose Robin** has been observed a number of times during August with some images of the lovely male posted on the chatline. The **Fuscous Honeyeater** is also often viewed as a passage migrant and a few have come through my local patch this month. There have only been a few reports of the **Swift Parrot** this winter in our area, as they have been much more scattered due to the much wider availability of flowers.

Most prominent on the chatline over the past month has been the spate of postings of observations of **Barn Owls**, with the attention of the reporter often drawn to their mobbing by currawongs, magpies and other species. This has also been my experience when I've seen this species locally. Why other birds see them as such a threat is unclear to me, particularly as their main food is the house mouse. Indeed they have been reported in very large numbers further out west where house mice have been in plague proportions, and they are probably spilling over into the ACT either due to the drying up of their food supply as winter has progressed or by the mice available locally. Very interesting was the posting by Marg Peachey that round this time of year the RSPCA always gets lots of **Barn Owls** handed in, and that this species may therefore not in fact be present in higher numbers this year. Given that other birds usually alert you to their presence, it's hard to understand why they would be under-reported in previous years. By contrast there have been only a few postings of observations of **Black-shouldered Kites**, another species that prefers the house mouse, particularly for feeding to its young.

Spring is traditionally the main breeding season, and there have already been a number of reports of activity including raptors such as the **Nankeen Kestrel** and **Australian Hobby**, an **Australian Magpie** already with young in the nest, and less of a surprise **Crested Pigeon** fledglings (their ability to breed pretty much all year round is one reason for their spread and increased presence locally). **Spotted Pardalotes** have also been observed building their burrows in a garden.

As usual please record the last and first sightings of the above species, as well as all breeding activity, and ensure all significant observations are reported for inclusion in the COG database.

— Jack Holland

Field Trip Report

Saturday 27 August - Kambah Pool to Red Rocks

14 COG members and one guest took advantage of the weather to enjoy a pleasant morning walk.



Grey Butcherbird
(*Cracticus torquatus*)
Photo by Rhonda Hansch

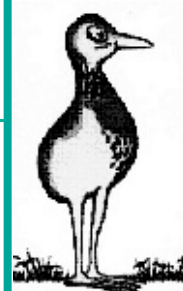
It took half an hour to get out of the Kambah Pool carpark, and the group only left then because two **Grey Butcherbirds** seemed to have caused the **Yellow-tufted Honeyeater**, three **European Goldfinch**, several **Yellow-faced Honeyeater** and **pardalotes** to fly from the dead tree in which they were quite visible. Given the group had also seen three **Satin Bowerbird**, had discussed the difference between **Spotted** and **Striated Pardalote** calls, and had an interesting discussion about the ID of some rapidly disappearing **Red Wattlebirds**, everyone seemed well pleased.

The next interesting discussion was of the differences between **Brown Goshawk** and **Collared**

Sparrowhawk. We agreed that, given the size at the estimated distance, and what we could manage to see of tail shape (even if we couldn't see their toes), we'd record two **Brown Goshawk**. The **Wedge-tailed Eagle** proved much easier to ID. Neither did we have any trouble with the **Weebill**, **Yellow-rumped Thornbill**, **Buff-rumped Thornbill**, **Brown Thornbill**, **Superb Fairy-wren**, **Common Starling**, **Crested Pigeon**, **Welcome Swallow**, **Grey Shrike-thrush**, **White-throated Treecreeper**, or **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike**. However, we had to work a bit harder to see our first **Grey Fantail**, **Red-browed Finch** and **Striated Thornbill**.

We finally reached Red Rocks, where we saw a **Nankeen Kestrel** harassing a **Brown Goshawk** or **Collared Sparrowhawk**, but decided the size of the hawk was not so much larger than the kestrel, with neither the tail shape (nor toes) obvious enough to identify it. However, one of our party got a clear view of a **Collared Sparrowhawk** on the walk back to Kambah Pool. The rest of the party didn't see any further raptors at Red Rocks, and had to make do with three people getting a brief view of two **Brown Quail**.

— Michael Robbins



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2011 tours

Plains-wanderer Weekends

26 & 27 November 2011
New Year's Eve 2011

2012 tours

9 — 25 January
New Zealand

4 — 11 February
Tasmanian bird & mammal tour

Mid May Gulf Country
Cairns, Georgetown, Karumba,
Gregory R, Cloncurry & Mt Isa

1 — 13 July Top End
Darwin, Kakadu NP, Kununurra

17 — 23 July
Alice Springs/MacDonnell
Ranges

6 — 25 September
Strzelecki Track, Outback

31 Oct — 7 Nov
New Caledonia

11 — 19 November
SW Western Australia

**Check our website
www.philipmaher.co**

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 11 September Lake Road (near Bungendore)

Lake Road runs along the SW corner of Lake George at the foot of the escarpment. We will bird along the road which gives access to the forested slopes as well as the lake edge. Past outings have produced a wide variety of species, including several **honeyeater** species, **raptors**, **finches**, **Speckled Warbler** and other woodland species. There is very limited parking in the section where we will be birding, so meet Sue Lashko at 8.30 am at the southern end of Lake Road (turn off Bungendore Rd and park just around the corner on the left where the road is reasonably wide). We will carpool from there, but if you could carpool from Canberra, that would be even better. Bring morning tea, hat and sunscreen.

Saturday 17 September Bald Hill Fire Trail (morning walk)

Martin Butterfield will lead this trip exploring the Bald Hill Fire Trail in Tallaganda National Park, from the Mulloon Trail to Palerang Road. Suitable habitat in the area supports such special birds as **Spotted Quail-thrush**, **Olive Whistler**, **Red-browed Treecreeper** and **Wonga Pigeon**. Approximately 50km of the excursion will be on dirt trails and it is recommended that after car-pooling everyone travels in suitable AWD/4WD vehicles. The first meeting point will be in the Spotlight carpark in Queanbeyan at 7.30am before meeting the rest of the group at the junction of Briars-Sharrow Road and Plains Road at 8am. Full details are available on Martin's website at <http://franmart.blogspot.com/2011/07/proposed-cog-outing-to-bald-hill-fire.html>

Wednesday 21 September Narrabundah Hill

For this month's Wednesday walk, meet at 9am at the corner of Hindmarsh Drive and Eucumbene Drive Duffy.

Monday-Saturday 19-24 September Green Cape NSW

Built in 1883 and perched on the edge of a peninsula, Green Cape Light Station is the tallest and most southerly lighthouse in NSW. Its octagonal tower juts out from a square base in dramatic contrast to the low-lying landscape

surrounding it. It looks across Disaster Bay – the site of many shipwrecks.

Accommodation — Two cottages that were previously the assistant keeper's residence have been carefully restored to offer superb 3.5 star heritage accommodation. Each cottage contains a fully equipped kitchen, dining room, bathroom, master bedroom (with queen-size bed), second bedroom (with two single beds) and family/lounge room (with sofa bed). Linen is available for hire. Each cottage can accommodate up to six people. We have booked for five nights from 19 September to 24 September – that is to arrive on Monday (after midday) and depart on Saturday morning.

Costs — The commitment is for a 5-night stay – no concession for shorter stays. The total accommodation costs will be in the order of \$250 per person but Daniel Mantle will contact all participants closer to the date about final costs and how to pay. There is also a \$7 fee per car per day to enter Ben Boyd National Park. This can be paid at a self-registration booth on arrival.

Catering — Each person/couple will be asked to cater for one evening meal for 6 people. Bring your own food for breakfasts and lunches – and BYO wine/beer/spirits. Please note that there are no shops nearby so bring all food and drink items with you.

Activities — There will be ample opportunity for good seabird watching from the cape, and the heathlands surrounding the cottages are excellent for birds including Ground Parrot, Southern Emu-wren, Striated Fieldwren, Tawny-crowned Honeyeater and other typical eastern Australian coastal heathland species. COG has made two previous organised visits to Green Cape and details are at:

http://peter.fullagar.com/2005_10_01_archive.html

http://peter.fullagar.com/2007_10_01_archive.html

For more information consult the National Parks and Wildlife Service website at: <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/NationalParks/parkAccommodation.aspx?id=N0003>

www.environment.nsw.gov.au/NationalParks/parkAccommodation.aspx?id=N0003

Those interested in being part of this year's trip please contact Peter Fullagar on 02 6251 4672 or at peter.fullagar@gmail.com to confirm your booking. A personal telescope and tripod would be very useful at Green Cape.

THERE IS ONLY ONE SPACE STILL AVAILABLE FOR THIS TRIP.

Sat-Mon 1-3 October – Buddigower Nature Reserve – Bird banding – Change of venue

As a recent inspection of the access tracks show that they are almost impassable to conventional vehicles this trip will be moved to the nearby and more regularly used Charcoal Tank Nature Reserve. Other details remain the same, viz., accommodation will be camping with a strict 'bring everything in, take everything out' policy. There are NO facilities in the reserve. If people are still interested in attending please contact Mark Clayton on 0419 482341 or chollop7@bigpond.com.

Sunday & Monday 2-3 October – Capertee Valley Tour (led by Carol Proberts)

Carol Proberts (a professional bird and wildlife guide in the Blue Mountains) will run a short birding tour for COG members over the early October long weekend. To enable everyone to have a leisurely drive there on the Saturday, the tour will start on Sunday morning (~7am, unless everyone is keen to start at dawn) and continue till lunchtime on Monday. The cost of the tour will be dependent on the number of people attending and is likely to be less than \$70 per person.

Accommodation can be either camping (on Carol's property with minor fees for amenities) or at local guesthouses. The closest locations recommended by Carol are Binalong self-catering (contact April Mills – 02 6379 7326) or Oskas Cottage (9713 5344). For further non-camping options see Carol's webpage (<http://www.bmbirding.com.au/valley3.html>). Please contact Daniel Mantle (danmantle@hotmail.com or 0413 554 500) or Michael Robbins (mrobbins@home.netspeed.com.au) to book your place.

UP TO THREE SPACES NOW AVAILABLE AGAIN.

Saturday 8 October – Lyrebird and Cascade Trails, Tidbinbilla (morning walk)

This will be a morning walk in Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve along the Lyrebird and Cascade Trails that have been rebuilt after the 2003 fires. We will be looking for the birds that are using the rapidly regrowing wet forest of the eastern slope of the Tidbinbilla Range. Please note that registration for this trip is essential as the number of participants has to be limited. Bookings may be made by phoning the trip's leader David McDonald on 6238 3706 or by emailing him on david@dnmcdonald.id.au. Registered participants should meet David at the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve car park (adjacent to the Visitor Centre) at 8.00am. The usual vehicle entry fee to the Reserve will apply. Come prepared

for changeable weather conditions. Bring morning tea if you wish; we will finish well before noon.

Sunday 16 October – K2C bird surveys, Bredbo region.

COG will continue with the K2C surveys that have been running since April 2010. The surveyed properties have healthy populations of many of the rarer woodland birds such as Diamond Firetail, Hooded Robin and Speckled Warbler. We will be visiting the same sites to continue the monitoring and see if we can add to the property lists with spring-summer migrants. The surveys will be undertaken in 'blitz' fashion; that is, observers in small groups will visit a number of sites on one or more properties before regrouping for lunch and a sharing of the survey's findings. Less experienced observers are welcome to join in the survey as each team will have at least one experienced observer. Anyone interested in participating is asked to contact Nicki Taws. Email: ntaws@bigpond.com or PH. 6251 0303, mob.0408 210736.

Saturday & Sunday 22-23 October – Eden Pelagic (two single day trips)

As there is sustained interest in the Eden pelagics, two further single day trips have been organised for October. These will again be run from Eden Harbour with Freedom Charters. As usual we will travel to the edge of the continental shelf in search of seabirds, cetaceans and seals.

October is one of the peak months for seabird migration off the east coast of Australia and we hope to see a wide diversity of seabirds. We will meet at Eden Harbour early each morning (time to be confirmed) and aim to return to dock by 3pm, thus leaving enough time to drive back to Canberra on Sunday afternoon. Organising travel and accommodation will be each individual's responsibility but no doubt there will be opportunities for car-pooling and an informal get-together for dinner/drinks in Eden on the Friday and Saturday evenings.

As with all boating activities the trip will be weather dependent and rough seas could lead to the cancellation or postponement of the trip. Seasickness pills or other remedies are recommended for those prone to seasickness. All participants should bring water, lunch, and sunscreen. More detailed instructions will be available closer to the day. The cost will be \$100 AUD per person.

To book a place on this outing, please contact Daniel Mantle (0413 554 500 or danmantle@hotmail.com) who will co-lead this trip with Anthony Overs. Both trips are restricted to 12 participants and filled on a first reply basis.

FOUR SPACES NOW AVAILABLE FOR THE SATURDAY TRIP.

Vale Alison McKenzie

Alison McKenzie died peacefully on 4 August 2011, aged 83 years, after suffering a stroke in March.

Alison was a member of COG from 1989 to 2009. I came to know her when I was the field trip organiser in the 1990s. Alison was on the first two trips I organised for COG members to southern Africa in 1999 and 2001, and was always great company on these trips. She was to participate in many COG organised tours and field trips; indeed she did a lot of tours with professional guides, including Philip and Patricia Maher, Richard Jordan (Emu Tours) and Ian Fraser (with whom she did 100 tours). Alison's forthrightness, her down to earthness, her dry humour, her immaculate dress sense, and of course her passion for nature, especially plants and birds, are things people remember her for. Who will forget Alison's lolly bag on tours, where she insisted all contributions had to be wrapped? Alison was a unique lady.

Alison was in the first intake of volunteer guides at the Australian National Botanic Gardens in 1992. Not many people know that she was ACT Volunteer of the Year in 1996 in recognition of her leadership and support of the volunteer guides at the gardens. She was also passionate about having a native plants display at Floriade and oversaw its inception in 1994. When I became a volunteer guide at ANBG in 2008, Alison gave me her botanical dictionary - something I will treasure. In the last couple of years, Alison had health issues and this restricted her. As she said to me one day, matter of factly, "I'm wearing out". After she gave up guiding, she still maintained her connection with ANBG by volunteering at the seed bank, something she really enjoyed.

A number of Alison's COG and ANBG friends met recently at the gardens, a simple gathering, 'bring a plate to Tom's seat', where everyone had their story to tell. Alison was never one for fuss or ceremony, but I think she would have approved. We will miss her. — **Jenny Bounds**

Committee News

- Jenny has been seeking information on why Binya State Forest (near Griffith/Cocoparra NP) was not included in a recent review/assessment of forestry land proposed for reserve. Binya has been retained as state forest, while many other patches of old state forest are now national park, even though it is just across the road from Cocoparra and could be managed as part of that park. The issue has also been discussed with Birds Aust conservation officer Sam Vine, and is expected to be discussed at the conservation forum at the September BIGnet.
- The woodland habitat analysis work is proceeding well.
- COG will respond to the recently issued Draft ACT Pest Animal Management Strategy, indicating that the **Spotted Dove** should be included in the Strategy.
- Jenny is working on nomination of the **Scarlet Robin** as a threatened species in the ACT.
- The recent stocktake has unearthed a box of the old but excellent Steve Wilson book *Birds of the ACT: Two Centuries of Change*. These will be offered through the Sales Desk at a reduced price (\$10) at the September meeting.
- After four years as President Chris Davey will be standing down at the AGM to be held on 12 October 2011. The positions of both President and Vice-president will be vacant. COG members who would like to find out more about these positions please contact chris_davey@aapt.net.au or Tel: 02-62546324.
- Meeting to plan field trips for 2012 — A meeting will be held at the Conservation Council meeting room on 15 September 2011 at 5.30 pm to plan the COG field trip program for 2012. We would welcome your input. If you would like to contribute ideas and/or offer to lead trips please contact Dan Mantle on danmantle@hotmail.com or Chris Davey at chris_davey@aapt.net.au.
- Three volunteers are needed to help Chris Davey with a bird survey of the International Arboretum Sunday 11th September or Sunday 18th September, a repeat of a survey conducted in September 2009. Please contact Chris at chris_davey@aapt.net.au or Tel 62546324 if you would like to participate or to find out further details.



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Observe some of the 95 bird species that breed on the islands.
- **NZ South Island Wildlife & Wilderness** departs 4th February 2012
See three of NZ's national parks, the Catlins, the Otago Peninsula & Stewart Island.
- **Sri Lanka Wildlife, History & Culture** departs 11th March 2012
See the exotic flora & fauna in this enchanting island's national parks & rainforests.
- **Coral Coast Wildlife** departs 12th April 2012
Take in the highlights of the unspoiled coast between Perth and Exmouth.
- **Flinders Ranges & Lake Eyre Basin** departs 22nd May 2012
Visit some of Australia's most spectacular outback locations.
- **Tanami Expedition** departs 15th June 2012
Travel with a small group to explore Newhaven Station and Lake Gregory.
- **Kimberley Discovery** departs 2nd June & 26th June 2012
See the unique wildlife of one of the world's most remote wilderness areas.
- **Western Explorer** departs 21st July 2012
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Future Field Trips (continued)

Saturday 5 November – Braidwood

The Braidwood Landcare group has contacted COG to see if we would be interested in surveying five to six properties where some revegetation has been done. We will not only survey the revegetation sites, but also remnants and riverine areas. 10 to 12 surveyors are required for Saturday morning, beginning at 7.30am, and must be sufficiently experienced to undertake what we hope will become an annual survey. Please contact Sue Lashko on 62514485 or smlashko@gmail.com if you are interested and to receive further details.

Saturday & Sunday 10-11 December – Deniliquin Plains Wanderer Weekend

This year COG will return to the Deniliquin area to search for some of the special birds of the region, including the

enigmatic Plains Wanderer. The weekend tour will be led by Phil Maher in the same manner as his regular 'Plains Wanderer Weekends' and will incur similar costs (\$270 per person). This early notice is to advise those interested that accommodation should be organised shortly as there are limited local options and they will likely be busy in early December. One recommended option is the Deniliquin Riverside Caravan and Cabin Park (03 5881 1284).

This weekend outing will be limited to 14 people and will be filled on a first reply basis. A deposit of \$50 will be payable upon registering for the trip. Please contact Daniel Mantle (danmantle@hotmail.com or 0413 554 500) or Michael Robbins (mrobbins@home.netspeed.com.au) to book your place.

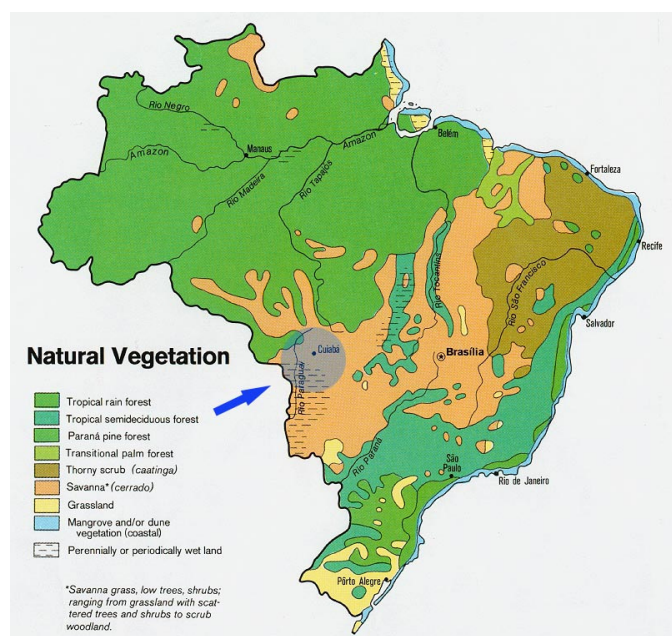
UP TO 5 SPACES NOW AVAILABLE AGAIN.

Short eyebrows and long moustaches — or is birding better than sex?

When our group of eleven gathered to birdwatch in Brazil's Pantanal – all foreigners attending the International Ornithological Congress in Campos do Jordão in September 2010 – we eyed each other somewhat warily.

As a novice, my first thought was what would I do while everyone else was 'doing their thing'. I was neither a scientist nor a birder. Would the others regard me with disdain or, perhaps worse, would I be bored?

Over the next five days in the dusty savanna grasslands, I was intrigued to discover four types of birders: the Rider, the Wannabe, the Common Birdwatcher and the List Ticker.



The Pantanal region of Brazil

1. The Rider

This type (also known as the Time Passer) is easily recognised by its bright clothing, minimal technological aids, sociable and inquisitive nature, tendency to be distracted by flowers, mammals, cloud and shadow-light patterns and a pronounced aversion to field guides and bird lists.

The Rider is easy to distinguish from the other types: its vocalisations are marked by long silences interspersed with whispered conversations or short bursts of guilty laughter. The Rider's lack of distinctive birding accoutrements – or their clumsy use when offered – and predilection for lip-stick and jewellery (in females) and bright clothing and man bags (in males) set the Rider apart from the other types.

Highly distractable and possessing a wide repertoire of random vocalisations, the Rider has a tendency to loiter glazed-eyed, shrugging and grunting when approached. These distinguishing characteristics indicate that this type is along for the ride and to fill in time – faking it until they make it.

A notable example of a Rider sighted in the Pantanal was a renowned professor of avian endocrinology from Edinburgh University, replete with diagnostic leather man bag, red jacket and red-and-black striped socks. His relief in finding another Rider in the group – a lipsticked, bejewelled individual – was palpable.

With sufficient exposure to birding, however, some Riders can actually morph into Wannabes.



Developing Neck Crick

2. The Wannabe

Care should be taken not to confuse this type (also known as the Try Hard) with the Common Birdwatcher. Beware: it is a clever imitator. The Wannabe adopts the Birdwatcher's predilection for grey, sand or khaki camouflage clothing, mimics their behaviour and vocalisations and has most, if not all, of their accoutrements.

Shyer Wannabes are usually found near other Wannabes. However, bolder ones do venture close to the Common Birdwatcher and, occasionally, even interact with the guide – albeit with thinly veiled earnestness or bravado, depending on personality.

Distinguishing characteristics are a highly vigilant state, a wide-eyed look alternating with a sheepish expression, frantic riflings through the field guide, much lifting and lowering of binoculars, and looking over other people's shoulders.

Typical vocalisations are 'Where? Which tree/shrub?' Although unable to tell a eucalypt from a cecropia, the Wannabe tends to repeat the sighted bird's name (usually in garbled form) to disguise lack of knowledge. Their ready

agreement with the guide that the bird did indeed have a rufous rather than a chestnut breast, and admission that they had actually seen the short eyebrow or long moustache are easy to utter with feigned casualness. However, the alert observer will do well to remain sceptical about such claims.

Bold Wannabes tend to announce triumphantly that they have seen the target bird. However, the 'sighting' more often than not turns out to be a falling leaf. The desire for acceptance as a Common Birdwatcher is the Wannabe's diagnostic characteristic, hence the Try Hard appellation frequently used to describe this type.



Screaming Southern Screamer in Piuva tree

3. The List Ticker

List Tickers (also known as Twitchers) share several characteristics with Birdwatchers, but the former do everything faster, longer, harder, louder – with great persistence and bravado, but no observable joy. They are avian conquistadors and, as such, remain aloof and vocalise their demands stridently until satisfied: 'But what about that Manikin?' – a pointed reminder to the hard-working guide. 'And we still haven't seen the Mato Grosso Antbird' – a petulant complaint.

Afflicted with *collectivitis*, List Tickers travel far and wide in search of conquest, their raison d'être being to collect ticks and images of sighted birds. When sightings fail, they often award themselves ticks for hearing birds. Faced with possible tick deprivation, they have been known to dispute, somewhat heatedly – especially towards the end of a day's birding – the guide's adjudication.

Lacking modesty, they shamelessly display their accolades and bird lists to all and sundry, even tugging one's uncarving arm to gain attention. Entering as many ticks as fast as possible is the name of the game. Although it is said that rules and integrity govern the list ticking game, these rules have been known to be bent in the quest for the greatest

number of ticks. A soupçon of desperation – even a death wish – encircles Twitchers wherever they go.

Hunting an elusive tick, a Twitcher with advanced *collectivitis* was seen to hurtle into a wasps' nest, face first. Despite the painful swellings, the greater pain was the tick that got away. A double breakfast only partly assuaged this Twitcher's chagrin – a condition that evoked a mix of pity and dismay in his fellow birders.



A conclave of Yellow-billed Cardinals

4. The Common Birdwatcher

Universal consensus – in Brazil at least – deems the Birdwatcher to be the paragon of birder types. Key behavioural traits are pronounced curiosity, voyeurism, optimism and *collectivitis*, together with a capacity to endure hardship and a perturbing willingness to undergo deprivations of the pleasures derived from food, drink, conversation, laughter, sleep and sex – not necessarily in that order.

Even a cursory encounter with this inherently modest type confirms that the Common Birdwatcher is driven by a desire for knowledge – of birds, their behaviour and environment – and a generosity in sharing their knowledge and accoutrements with the less well-endowed.

Unlike the timid Rider, the Birdwatcher is not fazed by distance, extremes of temperature, thick dust or mist, or threat of snakes, ticks (the bloodsucking kind), spiders, mosquitoes or other forms of pestilence in pursuit of avian knowledge and experience.

The Birdwatcher is highly vigilant and usually agile, has excellent peripheral vision and tends to keep its head well up. Consequently, this type has been known to walk into low-hanging branches, trip over exposed tree roots and rocks, or twist an ankle in rutted paths in pursuit of such knowledge.

Frequent finger pointing, peering and rushing into bushes, disappearing from view, expert rifling in the field guide distinguishes the Common Birdwatcher from the other types. So, too, does its predilection for brand-name camou-

flage clothing, top-of-the range binoculars, cameras, sound recording equipment and iPads, and latest edition field guides and bird lists.

At times, however, this type displays alarming behaviours. In the forest below Mirante Lookout, our Brazilian guide, Rafael, suddenly grabs his head, his knees buckle, back arches, face flushes, and he gasps for breath. Concerned, we rush over to him. 'What's the matter? What's bitten you?' 'Is **Pheasant Cuckoo**,' he croaks in ecstasy. Is first time I've seen.' This moment of discovery is awesome, sacred. Several minutes later, his voice still quivering, he describes the **Great Antshrike**.

As in other spheres of endeavour, pain often accompanies pleasure: common ailments are Neck Crick, Birder's Back, Knee Niggle, eyestrain, and chronic fatigue, sleep and sex deprivation.

Unlike the other types, the Common Birdwatcher merits the appellation Connoisseur because it displays dedication, determination and a high degree of resilience. Importantly, it shows no signs of obsessive collection – except perhaps with a camera. Furthermore, Connoisseurs are known to make excellent mentors.

Mating habits

Birders rarely mate during the birdwatching season, which extends for most of the year. They absent themselves from the nesting site to migrate to other habitats to indulge in their voyeuristic and collecting behaviour, often abandoning their mates.



The four types in action (Chris Davey far right)

Distribution

World-wide. Species not endangered. Numbers growing.

© Helen Topor, text 2011

© Peter Fullagar, pictures 2011

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rockinmel@harbousat.com.au or birdsofthebush@yahoo.com.au

www.birdsofthebush.com

COG Committee Nomination Form

I hereby nominate

for the position* of

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

on the 2012 COG Committee.

(Name):

(Signature):

I second the nomination.

(Name):

(Signature):

I accept the nomination.

(Name):

(Signature):

Black-fronted Dotterel
(*Elseya melanops*)

Photo by
Margaret Leggoe



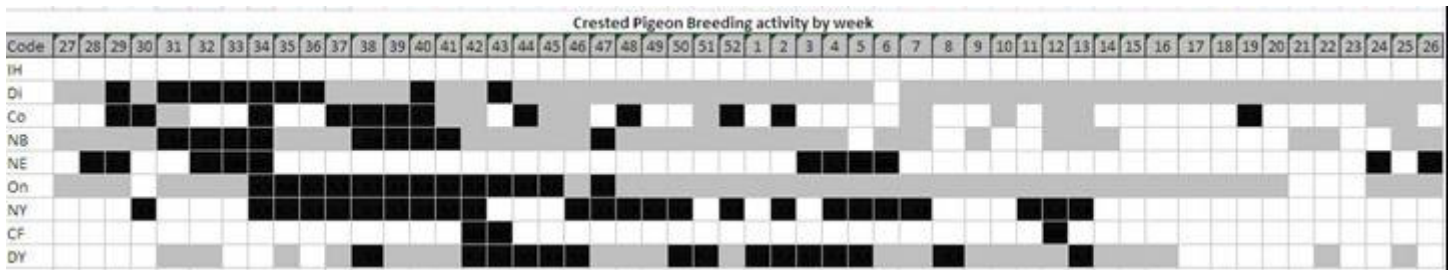
Garden Bird Survey Notes

The chatline has had several GBS sightings in this period!

- **Barn Owl** – probably different birds - in Florey, O'Connor and Greenway;
- **Red Wattlebirds** travelling through Hoskinstown 'with intent';
- **Satin Bowerbirds** in Wanniasa;
- An interesting migratory mix of **Rose Robin** and **Pallid Cuckoo** in Wamboin;
- **Noisy Friarbird** and **Olive-backed Oriole** in Ainslie.

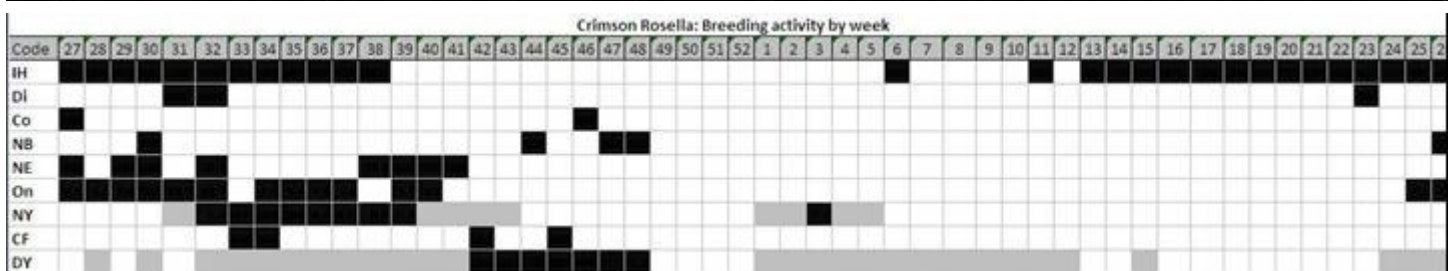
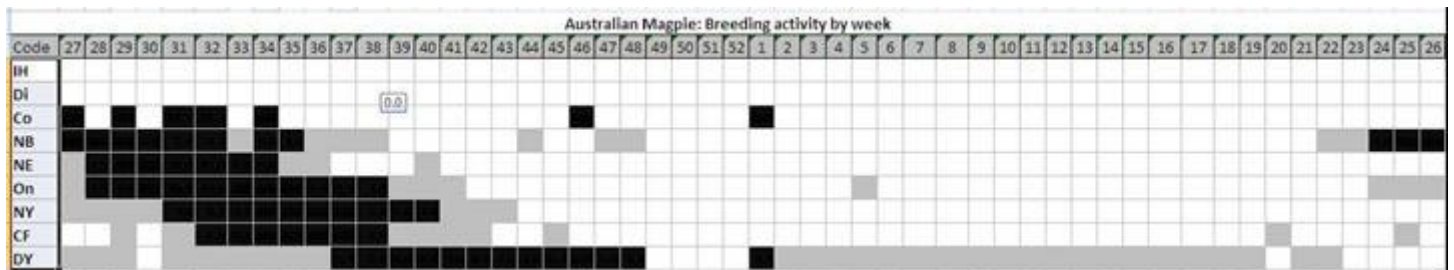
The breeding season is imminent!

A post to the chatline raised a question about a fledgling **Crested Pigeon** found during the month. This led me to develop a graphic presenting the timing of breeding through the year. The columns represent GBS weeks (week 27 starting on 3 July) and the rows represent the various breeding activities recognised by COG. A white cell indicates no activity, grey reflect low activity and black indicates a high level of activity.



Obviously this species breeds throughout the year. Not surprisingly they were not recorded inspecting hollows!

I was surprised to see that we have no records of display activity by the **Magpies** and the length of the period in which **Rosellas** inspect hollows. I hope to do some other species as a blogpost.



Years 30 and 31

75 charts have thus far been received for Year 30. **Could anyone who still has a chart contact me to make arrangements for collection.** Completed sign-up sheets and other notifications show some 86 Charts are being compiled for Year 31.

— Martin Butterfield

COG'S BIRD BLITZ 2011

Yes, it is on again, on the weekend of 29-30 October - COG's annual effort to record over the last weekend in October 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 locations or entire 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 location 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 blitz@canberrabirds.org.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 site, 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, 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 organiser 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 and are willing to take passengers.

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 of radius 80 m)
2. a survey within 500 m of a central spot, time unlimited but 20 mins or more
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 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 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 organiser would love to hear from you!

There will be regular blitz updates on the COG website, including lists of unloved sites awaiting adoption, so do check it out. And join us for a fun weekend of birding for a cause. Accounts of the outcome will be published in *Gang-gang* and *Canberra Bird Notes* in due course.

Barbara Allan

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, or
barbdebruine@hotmail.com
or see

<http://www.stayz.com.au/25595>.

PASSIVE SOLAR HOUSE

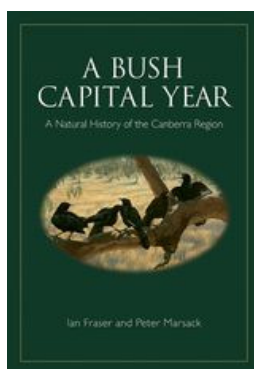
South Rosedale

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@grapevine.com.au

COG SALES

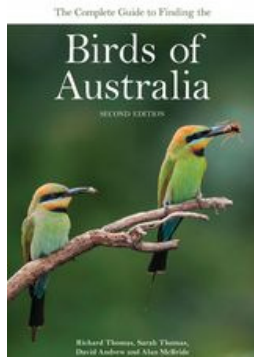


A Bush Capital Year: A Natural History of the Canberra Region Ian Fraser , Peter Marsack

A Bush Capital Year introduces the fauna, flora, habitats and reserves of the Australian Capital Territory and includes the most recent research available. It also emphasises often unappreciated or even unrecognised urban wildlife. For each month of the year there are 10 stories which discuss either a species or a group of species, such as mosses and mountain grasshoppers. While never anthropomorphic, many of the stories are written from the organism's point of view, while others are from that of an observer. Beautiful paintings complement the text and allow better visualisation of the stories and the subjects. Members price \$32

What Makes a Good Farm for Wildlife? David Lindenmayer

Based on thirteen years of intensive research, the book breaks the discussion into chapters on key environmental and vegetation assets and then discusses how to make these assets better for biodiversity. The work encompasses information on vertebrates and invertebrates on farms and their relationships with significant vegetation and environmental assets: woodland remnants, plantings, paddocks, rocky outcrops and waterways. A chapter is dedicated to each asset and how it can be managed. Members price \$27

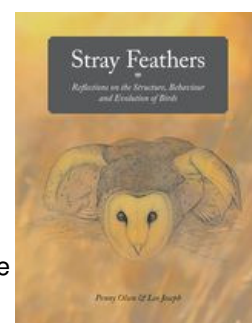


The Complete Guide to Finding the Birds of Australia 2nd Ed Richard Thomas , Sarah Thomas , David Andrew , Alan McBride

First published in 1994, this was the first ever book of its type in Australia – a complete guide to locating every resident bird species. This fully revised second edition describes the best-known sites for all of Australia's endemic birds, plus regular migrants such as seabirds and shorebirds. It covers all states and territories, and is the first guide to include all of Australia's island and external territories. A comprehensive Bird Finder Guide details site information on all Australian bird species, and the authors provide valuable travel advice. Member's price \$32 – expected for the April meeting.

Stray Feathers: Reflections on the Structure, Behaviour and Evolution of Birds Penny Olsen , Leo Joseph

Stray Feathers showcases some of the remarkable adaptations of Australian birds. A brief introduction describes how evolution shapes form and function, followed by a series of vignettes illustrating the wondrous variety of forms and functions shaped by evolution. For example, did you know that barn owls can hunt in absolute darkness and that cuckoos commence incubation before their egg is laid? Members price \$39 – expected for the June meeting



Also titles from CSIRO Publishing's *Australian Natural History* series (\$29.00 each for members): *Kookaburra*, *Australian Magpie*, and many more.

Avian Whimsy #90 — Hunters and Gatherers

Have you ever wondered from whence come those cases and rows of stuffed museum birds? Have you any idea how many trays and trays of dead birds stretch into the dust-moted distance of the vaults of those museums and other research institutions all over the world? Perhaps you'll sleep more easily if you don't! But think just of type specimens – the original specimen from which a species was described, and which is the ultimate reference for any subsequent comparison which needs to be made by later researchers. Not only is there one for each of the 10,000ish bird species in the world, but for every one of the much more numerous sub-species too – and of all the sub-species which have been described but no longer recognised. Consider too the common situation where males and females – not to mention immature birds – are different, so different specimens are required for those; it was common practice in the past to describe a species from a series of specimens, ie 'syntypes'. For every type specimen however, there are probably hundreds or thousands of other specimens in collections across the planet.

Probably the heyday of the professional museum collector is past, though collecting has not finished. (I have been reliably informed, by a source very far from Canberra, that the circumstances in which the famous roadside ex-**Night Parrot** picked up by Australian Museum researchers out of Boulia in 1990 weren't quite as they are generally told; according to my source they were actually engaged – completely legally – in collecting babblers at the time.) And isn't 'collecting' a lovely euphemism?

In the 19th century very skilled people made livings by travelling remote areas with shotgun and stuffing gear, 'collecting' birds by day and meticulously preparing the skins by night. The best of them, such as John Gilbert (see Whimsy #35, October 2005) also kept scrupulous notes on behaviour, habitats, Aboriginal names etc. He was privately employed by John Gould, but others were freelance and yet others were employed by museums. An example of the latter was Western Australian John Tunney, born in 1871, who while labouring on the Eastern Telegraph Line from Albany to Eucla made natural history collections and sent them to the Western Australia Museum, which engaged him in 1895 and retained his services for the next 13 years. As another Western Australian birder later wrote, he "collected mammals, birds, snakes, butterflies and moths, the skulls of deceased Aborigines, fossils and native weapons". He travelled almost incessantly, in some tough country. His longest trip lasted from September 1900 to

December 1903, throughout the north-west and into the Northern Territory; that last was an add-on, organised for him by his boss, Dr Bernard Woodward, as a joint venture with Lord Rothschild's Tring Museum in England (who presumably made it worth the WA museum's while). On this extension Tunney collected the types of **White-throated Grasswren** and **Sandstone Shrike-thrush**, both of which were named for Woodward (not Tunney), by Rothschild's German ornithologist Ernst Hartert. Another Western Australian Museum collector was Frederick Whitlock, an Englishman who arrived in Perth in 1901 at the age of 41 and was soon taken on – ie these two, at least, were working simultaneously and more or less full time, at just one Australian museum.

Others came from across the world. Thomas Henry Bowyer-Bower (of **Bowers's Shrike-thrush** fame), was an English collector who came twice to Australia to acquire skins for the British Museum and was made curator of birds at the Western Australian museum. (Sadly he died of fever at Port Darwin 1886, aged just 24.) Harold Wesley Hall was a wealthy man who used his money to fund British Museum research, culminating in the five somewhat controversial Harold Hall Australian Expeditions as recently as the 1960s, whose unabashed aim was to shoot *lots* of Australian birds to replenish the museum coffers which had been depleted when they flogged their own Rothschild and Mathews bird collections to the United States. By then this was able to create quite some controversy in Australia.

Where Tunney was primarily a bird collector who dabbled, some were the opposite. Edward Spalding was an entomologist who undertook several insect-collecting trips to north Queensland before being employed as a taxidermist by the Queensland Museum; he collected the type specimen of **Chowchilla** in passing in the 1860s.

Kendall Broadbent and George Kearthland are other names of 19th – early 20th century collectors in what was still very remote and wild northern Australia, who were minor legends in their time; Kearthland worked as a Melbourne *Age* photographer and type-setter primarily to support his collecting trips.

Whatever we may think of their trade, they were all pioneers of Australian ornithology in their way, doing the necessary slogging that lay the basis for an important aspect of our modern understanding of birds, and all are largely forgotten. Few people deserve that.

Ian Fraser — calochilus51@internode.on.net



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phone 02 6251 3136

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

COG welcomes the following new members:

C Clutterbuck, Lyneham

R Howard, Campbell

NEXT NEWSLETTER

October deadline

Wednesday 28 September 2011

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.

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Newsletter distribution

Brian Fair and helpers

COG membership

2010-2011 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 Allan 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

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Gang-gang

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