

CANBERRA ORNITHOLOGISTS GROUP - President's Report for 2006-2007

It is a pleasure to provide my fourth and final President's report, this time on COG activities for the period October 2006 to the present.

Looking back on my term as President, it has been a period of consolidation and expansion of COG's strengths rather than of taking on many new or innovative directions. We continue to run very well attended monthly meetings, and a varied and popular field trip (outings) program. Our work on conservation matters remains involved and demanding, and our range of surveys and the databases into which these feed continue to provide extremely useful information to government, industry and the public. Our chat line has become an ever more popular vehicle for the exchange of information and views on a wide range of birding topics, for both members and non-members, and our ever expanding web site continues to be accessed by the public, in particular the very popular Photo Gallery.

Keeping our activities within bounds has been quite a deliberate policy on my part, as my experience is that it is quite easy to stretch a volunteer organisation beyond its capacity through the taking on of ambitious and time consuming projects. However, my biggest failure as President has been the inability to spend more of COG's large surplus of funds. This is despite my convening, together with Tony Lawson and Bruce Lindenmayer, a small group to revise COG's forward plan into a simpler one with some agreed priorities and to assign some tentative dollars to these tasks. I have to say that we were disappointed at the limited involvement by the wider COG membership, in particular the complete lack of any feedback when this plan was published. COG also continues to do very little specifically to attract younger members, including in the areas of education, and we still have limited ability to regularly partake in exhibitions. Maybe these are areas that the incoming President Chris Davey will give some priority.

Committee

I have again been very well supported by the Committee over the past year, and I thank them all. This year none of the present members will be standing down, though it continues to be important to attract "new blood" with fresh ideas and new enthusiasm.

While no-one is formally leaving the committee Barbara Allan, who retired as secretary last year, has over the past year relinquished some of her many involvements such as co-editor of Canberra Bird Notes and our Annual Bird Report, organiser of speakers for meetings and driver of the records management committee, though she still retains her roles of secretary of the Rarities Panel and organiser of our bird blitz. On behalf of everyone I again offer our sincere thanks to Barbara for all the work she has done for COG, her efforts have been most appreciated.

Again many members not formally on the committee have helped COG in its daily activities, making a huge contribution to the success of the organisation. It is not possible in this report to individually thank all, and I apologise to those I have inadvertently, or for reasons of space, neglected to mention.

I would, however, like to make a special mention of Tom Green's contributions to COG activities, and to record how his untimely passing earlier this year shocked and affected so many members.

Members as at 30 June 2007 were 367 "subscriptions", including a number of family memberships, 11 BIGnet exchange organisations; and one copyright deposit organisation – in terms of actual individuals, this equates to a membership of over 500.

Conservation

Jenny Bounds continues in her role as COG Conservation Officer, with assistance from other members on a project basis. As President of the Conservation Council for the SE Region and Canberra, she also represents the interests of birds in that forum.

Responding to the Molonglo Valley urban development plans is a significant current issue for COG and other environmental groups, with submissions on the Preliminary Assessment for the Central and East Molonglo areas due at the end of November. While COG has not opposed urban development within

the degraded (former) pine forests, the loss of significant bird habitats in the central Molonglo Valley area (around 655 hectares of grassy woodland), and a group of Brown Treecreepers, is a particular concern. We are also concerned about the potential loss of raptor species from the Valley.

In September 2006, COG nominated the Little Eagle to the ACT Flora and Fauna Committee, as a vulnerable species in the ACT. The submission was drafted by Jenny Bounds, with input from two raptor experts. The nomination was timely given the proposed Molonglo Valley development plans, as the Little Eagle's last two known breeding territories occur in the Valley. While we await an official announcement, we understand that the nomination has been recommended to the Minister.

Over the year, COG provided submissions/input on the following:

- the Jerrabomberra Wetlands Nature Reserve Draft Management Plan 2006
- the Lower Cotter Catchment Strategic Management Plan
- the ACT Government about water extraction from Yerrabi Pond and impacts on Musk Duck breeding
- the Preliminary Assessment for the proposed Feral Proof Fence at Mulligan's Flat NR (part of the research project in the reserve)
- the ACT Planning System Reform Project (review of planning legislation); the main concern being the need for improved environmental assessment processes where bird habitats are impacted
- amendments to the Domestic Animals Act, supporting measures to protect birds/wildlife from roaming domestic cats
- a joint letter with the Conservation Council asking the ACT Government to develop a cat containment policy for the ACT; this follows on from the introduction of the first cat containment suburbs in Forde and Bonner adjacent to the Mulligan's Flat NR
- the proposed four new firetrails for Namadgi NP (for fire management); the ACT Government has since announced that three of these will not go ahead as proposed due to the significant environmental damage to the park
- suggested text for the birds segment of the 2007 ACT State of the Environment Report.

The above gives a good picture of the very broad range of conservation issues COG faces.

Field trips

COG has continued to run a very active program of field trips, which have been well patronised. Anthony Overs has taken overall responsibility for management of the COG Field Trips, and the 2007 program was devised with the assistance of Jenny Bounds and me. The aim of the program, to offer a wide range of both local and further afield outings opportunities to attract a broad cross-section of the membership, was maintained.

Highlights included the Mallacoota, Far South Coast and Buddigower NR camp-outs, the accommodated trips to Lord Howe Island and Mittagong, and the day trips to the Monga NP and Hospital Hill in the Namadgi NP. Some places were revisited successfully such as Castle Hill and the Googong Dam and the overnight camp-out in the Bumbalong Valley. Boat trips on Lake Burley Griffin and the Molonglo River to view Darter and cormorant nesting, and the nest workshops at Campbell Park, have become annual features. We have continued our links with like-minded organisations, holding another outing with the Goulburn Field Naturalists Society with the trip to Marulan. My thanks again to all those who helped lead and organise outings during the year and who wrote up reports of trips for Gang-gang and on the chat line.

Communications and Publications

Greg Ramsay has continued the task of editing and publishing our newsletter, Gang-gang, very ably assisted by Sue Lashko, while Judy Collett co-ordinates the wrapping and mailing with her team of helpers. Thanks to all involved for ensuring COG's newsletter is prepared and distributed efficiently.

Harvey Perkins and Barbara Allan both stepped down as co-editors of *Canberra Bird Notes*, and Anthony Overs has taken over. Articles included the status of the Hooded Robin and the number of

breeding Little Eagles, and on what determines Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo numbers in Canberra. Thanks go to both Harvey and Barbara for their long reign as editors and to all contributors to CBN.

David Cook has maintained and continued to expand COG's web site, <http://www.canberrabirds.org.au>, and has updated all sections to present a consistent interface. The Gang-gang newsletters continue to be available on the website in PDF format, or viewable as Web pages; the online *Birds of Canberra Gardens*, courtesy of Paul Fennell, is now available through the COG website; and indices and abstracts for recent Canberra Bird Notes volumes 28 (2003) to 32 (March and June 2007) are available. There are now approximately 2,500 photographs of ACT region birds submitted by COG members on the Photo Gallery - requests for their non-commercial use continue to come in. There have been approximately 19,000 unique visitors making 26,000 visits to the Canberra Birds website in 2007 to date, and 77,000 unique visitors making 90,000 visits to the Photo Gallery over the same period. Thank you once again David for continuing to provide such an excellent service.

COG's email announcement and discussion list CanberraBirds, managed by David McDonald, continued to operate effectively throughout the year. The membership has remained fairly stable, at about 220, and continues to provide a very useful forum for COG members and friends to discuss topical issues relating to birds and birding in the Canberra region. It increasingly serves as an excellent way for members and non-members to rapidly disseminate reports of interesting sightings in the local region, as well as a useful medium to help less experienced birders improve their birding skills by benefiting from the advice and wisdom of the more senior subscribers.

Atlas, Woodland Survey, Garden Bird Survey, Waterbird Survey, Databases

COG continues to run a number of bird monitoring projects, some of which have been operating for many years. It remains very important to collect records for COG's area of interest, despite the New Atlas having been published in 2003. My thanks go to Tony Harding for the data input; and Nicki Taws, Chris Davey, Barbara Allan and Harvey Perkins for checking datasheets. The successful second blitz during Bird Week in October 2006, aimed at providing a snapshot of the birds present across the whole of the ACT over one weekend, was very helpful in raising the profile of the COG database. Data may now be submitted electronically, thanks to a program devised by consultant Tony Muzik-Smith and much hard work by COG's database manager Paul Fennell; many of our members have welcomed this development and now submit their data by this means, though of course hard-copy datasheets are still welcomed.

The COG Woodland Bird Monitoring Project has now been running since 1998, and we will reach 10 years data. There are now sites at 15 locations in grassy woodlands around the ACT. Some sites at Mulligans Flat have been surveyed continuously since 1995. The success of this long running project is due in large part to the significant commitment of the site coordinators, supported at some sites by regular volunteers. Again my thanks go to all involved in this important, long-term project for COG.

Jenny Bounds is Convenor of the Management Committee which coordinates this project and organises much of the operational work, with Nicki Taws and Jack Holland forming the other members of the Management Team. Alison Rowell, Environmental Consultant, continues to have a key role as consultant to the project, coordinating the quarterly surveys and data collection at sites, as well as providing a voluntary input.

In early 2007, Jenny Bounds, Nicki Taws and statistician Ross Cunningham completed an analysis and report on data collected from 1998 to the end of 2005, including some analysis for Mulligan's Flat and Gorooyarroo north sites. The report was published in CBN in June 2007 and is also available on the COG website. The next data analysis is likely to be undertaken once we have achieved 10 years of data at a majority of sites in the second half of 2008. While the analysis is providing interesting trends, and much clearer pictures for some species as time goes on, it has been difficult to determine clear trends for certain species of interest (those believed to be declining such as Diamond Firetail, Jacky Winter) due to low numbers at sites. We hope that improved statistical methods will assist with the analysis of these species in the future.

I'd like to thank David Rosalky who managed the Garden Bird Survey (GBS) until handing back to Martin Butterfield in January 2007. Also my warm thanks go to Kay Hahne for continuing to enter the data, a huge task, especially as the number of chartists increases. Thanks also go to Anne Hall for volunteering to join the team working on Year 26. This major project has now completed 26 years and

is COG's longest running monitoring project. Close to 70 Charts have been received for 2006-07 and approximately 70 charts have been distributed thus far for year 27. It is used increasingly by researchers and its results used to support policy submissions. However, it is clear that the potential use of the GBS data is largely untapped. With the "Silver Jubilee" year completed, a Review of the Survey, aimed at ensuring that it remains a members' survey whilst keeping up with developments in technology and science, is underway, with Chris Davey convening a team of experts who have long histories with the GBS. I look forward to the team reporting by the end of 2007, and that the report will include suggested strategies for expanding the scientific and community use of the data.

COG's Rarities Panel, comprising Richard Allen, Jenny Bounds, Grahame Clark, Dick Schodde and Nicki Taws, continued to meet quarterly to consider, and endorse for publication where appropriate, records of unusual species seen in COG's area of concern, and to continuously review the status of birds in our area. My thanks go to previous panellist Mark Clayton, who resigned during the year. We welcome back Dick Schodde and thank all panellists for their hard and often underappreciated work.

Annual Bird Reports

Thanks go to Paul Fennell and David Rosalky who extracted and collated the data for the 2005-06 annual bird report, which was compiled by a dedicated team of writers, Barbara Allan, Grahame Clark, Chris Davey, Michael Lenz, David McDonald, Ian McMahon, Harvey Perkins, David Purchase and Nicki Taws, who produced the species reports. Thanks to all those involved, for their work in getting this most valuable report out in a timely fashion.

Monthly Meetings

We again enjoyed a varied program of speakers at our monthly meetings. Topics ranged from "local" matters such as Noisy Miners, Grey Fantails and Superb Parrots, and the Holbrook revegetation study, to mouth-watering overseas destinations including the Galapagos Islands and Patagonia. Our thanks to Sue Lashko for continuing to facilitate our use of the Canberra Girls Grammar School venue; and to Carol Macleay for her lengthy commitment to the sales table. We welcome Bruce Ramsay who has now taken over this important function from Carol with great enthusiasm.

COG Administration & the COG Office

COG no longer maintains an office. For the time being, our records and library are housed by a former committee member. Access is by arrangement with the secretary or, in her absence, with any member of the COG executive. Our camping and display equipment and archival records continue to be held in storage in Belconnen and again may be accessed by arrangement with any of the executive.

Canberra Birds Conservation Fund

The Canberra Birds Conservation Fund receives tax-deductible donations from COG members and the general public, and uses the donated money on activities that help to achieve COG's environmental objectives, especially promoting the conservation of the Canberra region's native birds and their habitats. Members give generously to this fund and are encouraged to continue to do so.

During the year, the Fund's fifth grantee, Mark Clayton, was funded to purchase mist nets for use in monitoring the birds of the Kama Agistment, with particular emphasis on the frequency of breeding events prior to, during and following the Molonglo developments and with a special emphasis on the Brown Treecreeper. The Fund continues to welcome applications from individuals and organisations seeking support for activities that will help to achieve COG's environmental activities.

Conclusion

I would like to thank everyone else who has helped me over the past 4 years and, though I'm stepping down as President, look forward to many more years of involvement with COG.

Jack Holland

10 October 2007