

President's Report 2007-08

It is with pleasure that I present my first President's Report covering the period October 2007 to September 2008. This past year has been a major learning curve for me as I slowly get to know the membership better and as I get to know Canberra Ornithologists Group's (COG's) many areas of interest.

First, I would like to thank Jack Holland for all that he has done. Jack took on the role of President for three years and then, as no one stepped forward to take his place, he accepted the position for another year whilst I as Vice-president learned the ropes. In October last year we swapped roles and for the past year his guidance and experience has been invaluable. Throughout this period Jack had to rebuild his home and garden yet business at COG has continued without missing a beat. Jack will now stand down from the Committee but like the old trooper that he is I am glad to say he will, for a while, continue to find speakers for our monthly meetings and continue to write his monthly contribution to Gang-gang.

Forward Plan

The Committee's activities are guided by the Forward Plan that was agreed to last year and published in the May 2007 Gang-gang. As I am sure the Plan has been avidly read and digested by all members I do not need to remind you that it, taking into account core COG objectives, recognised two categories of tasks; major and minor.

Of the major tasks, progress has occurred on various fronts:

- 1) Review of the first 25 years of the Garden Bird Survey. This has been completed. I would like to thank Martin Butterfield, Michael Lenz and Nick Nicholls for all their hard work on this project. The major items to come from the review were that the survey was well supported by the membership although sites are not evenly distributed over the urban area, with Gungahlin and Tuggeranong in particular requiring participants. Professional statistical expertise will be required to examine the dataset and that will need to be paid for. The survey is now in its 28th year and the report recommends that appropriate expertise be sought with the view to analyse a representative set of species after year 30; the final product being suitable for a peer reviewed scientific publication. In addition, there was a recommendation that the GBS database be redesigned with appropriate documentation. Again, this will require professional, paid expertise. Finally, it was recommended that a new edition of the publication 'Birds of Canberra Gardens' be produced with the additional 9 years of GBS data. The production of this new edition is now in hand with the formation of a steering group consisting of Paul Fennell (Database Manager), Kathy Walters (design), David Cook (photographs), Martin Butterfield (GBS Coordinator) and Chris Davey.
- 2) Develop sets of display material. Julian Robinson has kindly offered to examine ways to improve and expand on the COG display material and he will report back to the Committee with recommendations on what needs to be done.

- 3) COG database update. It is intended that whilst a consultant examines the possibility of redesigning the GBS database, consideration will also be given to examine the General Observations database in particular with the aim of improving the documentation.
- 4) Support for the Mulligans Flat/Goorooyarroo Ecological Community research project. Members of COG continue to participate in the project's bird survey and financial assistance has been provided to support the research project that aims to re-establish a viable Brown Treecreeper population in the area.
- 5) Support for the Common Myna research project. The Committee is pleased that a Ph.D. student has now been appointed and looks forward to supporting any research into the impacts of the Common Myna on native birds in the local region.
- 6) ACT Bird Atlas- an update. To date there has been no scoping study conducted to examine the feasibility of updating the ACT Bird Atlas. It has now been 19 years since the end of the survey period that culminated in the publication of the Atlas. This project desperately needs someone who would be prepared to lead the scoping study. The study would determine whether coverage over the past 19 years has been extensive enough to provide meaningful supplementary data.

Of the minor tasks:

- 1) Updating the COG pamphlet on bird-attracting garden plants is still required and again I would urge anyone with an interest in this area to come forward to help with this project.
- 2) The CD 'Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT' continues to sell well but there is a need for a second CD that will complete the series. Funds have been made available and recording equipment purchased to progress this project. Peter Fullagar has compiled a list of recordings that need to be made and all equipment is now available to be lent to anyone with the appropriate expertise who wishes to collect some of the required material. I urge anyone who may be willing to participate in this project to contact any Committee member.
- 3) New members/ visitors packs are available at the Sales Desk but the idea of members wearing name tags at meetings still needs to be encouraged.
- 4) The first of the Bird Route brochures has been developed and is now available on the Web. I would like to thank Sue Lashko and Geoffrey Dabb for making this brochure available. There are now an additional two brochures in the pipe-line.

Committee

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the 2007-08 Committee. This year two Executive positions become available. The Treasurer, Lia Batterson, will stand down, having filled the position for the last three years. Lia has brought great professionalism to the job with her dedication and an eye for detail. I am pleased to say that she leaves the books in a healthy state. The Vice-president, Jack Holland, will also stand down this year but as already mentioned I am delighted that Jack will continue to support the Group in other ways. I am pleased to say that Sandra Henderson, Jenny Bounds, Anthony Overs, David Cook, Sue Lashko and Tony Lawson have all agreed to remain for another year.

Conservation

Conservation concerns within our area continue to increase and during the past year COG has had an input into many of the issues. Jenny Bounds has been extremely busy in her role as Conservation officer and also as President of the Conservation Council of the ACT Region. COG has had an input into many issues including the following:

- Submission and subsequent provision of evidence to the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment on the Draft to Variation to Territory Plan # 281, Molonglo and North Weston.
- Successful nomination of the Little Eagle as a vulnerable species in the ACT.
- Location of the proposed gas power station and data storage hub off Mugga Lane.
- Concerns about the proposed selling of Defence land at Newline Quarry.
- Concerns about willow clearing and nesting cormorants along Molonglo Reach.
- Successful listing of Lake Bathurst as an 'Important Bird Area (IBA)' and input into the management plan for the area.
- Input into the management of White-fronted Chats at Stromlo Forest Park.
- Submission to the Googong Foreshore Management Plan.

In addition, COG has had an input to the ACT National Resource Management Council, is a member of the Stakeholders Forum, ACT Parks, Conservation and Lands and is associated with the 'Bush on the Boundary' project run by the Ginninderra Catchment Group. A Memorandum of Understanding between COG and the Department of Territories and Municipal Services has been updated and renewed. COG was represented on a committee set up to provide advice to Conservation Volunteers Australia and the Sanctuary Project at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve.

Outings

Once again COG has been able to run a very comprehensive outings program with Anthony Overs taking over from Jack Holland. In addition, the ad hoc group of 'Wednesday Walkers' with a life of their own, have been most successful in providing outings for those fortunate enough to not be working. Overall, since October last year there have been 40 outings. Of these, 10 have been outside the local region ranging as far as Green Cape, West Wylong, Ulladulla, Lady Elliot Island, Chiltern Forest, Jervis Bay, Round Hill Nature Reserve and Bungonia State Park. There have been six specific purpose outings including the Blitz, Nest workshop, Bush Birds for beginners, Waterbirds for Beginners and the Robin and Raptor twitchathons. There have been outings to seven of the local nature reserves with the remainder of the outings to local hot spots. I would like to thank the many organisers and leaders and those who write up the trip reports for Gang-gang.

Communications and Publications

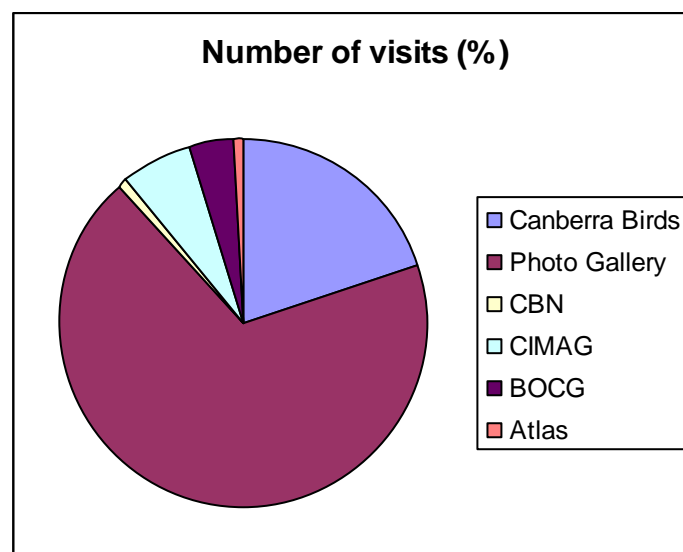
Gang-gang. Greg Ramsey and Sue Lashko have continued with editing and publishing our newsletter. On occasions Tanya Rough has stood in for Greg when he was away. Also, I would like to thank Judy Collett and helpers for the preparation and mailing of the Newsletter. I would particularly like to thank Jack Holland, Ian Fraser, *Tyto alba* and *Acrocephalus stentoreus* for their regular contributions over the

past year. I note that under the new Christidis and Boles taxonomy both latter contributors will need a name change and that one has already done so!

Canberra Bird Notes. There have been three editions of CBN produced by Anthony Overs as Editor. Major publication items include the 2006-07 Annual Bird Report and articles on the Black-chinned Honeyeater, Pied Currawong, Whistling Kite, Little Eagle and the 2007 Canberra Bird Blitz.

Annual Bird Report. I would like to thank Paul Fennell for being responsible for the 2006-07 ABR published in Volume 33, March 2008 Canberra Bird Notes. Thanks to the ABR compilers Barbara Allan, Con Boekel, Grahame Clark, Paul Fennell, David McDonald, Ian McMahan, Harvey Perkins, David Purchase and Nicki Taws with each contributor, as usual, responsible for a group or groups of species. The 2007-08 ABR will need to reflect the name changes that have resulted in COG's adoption of the Birds Australia recommended names.

Website. David Cook continues to provide an excellent website. Over the year there have been 169,224 visits to the site and 115,474 visits to the very popular photo gallery. Additions to the site over the past year include a link to the Canberra Bird Conservation Fund as appropriately highlighted by a Dollarbird. Thanks to Alastair Smith, volumes 1 to 4, 8 to 16 and 32 to 33 are now available on the Web. I would like to acknowledge the considerable effort that Alastair has put into this project. The volumes are text searchable and it is intended that all will be made available in this way. Due to the efforts of Harvey Perkins we now have available on the web indices covering CBN volumes 21 to 28 and partial coverage of volumes 29 to 32. Past indices have been made available through CBN. COG continues to support the Canberra Indian Myna Action Group website. They have received 10,521 visits to date and I now understand that their membership is approaching 450.



Discussion list and email announcements. COG's chat-line 'Canberrabirds' continues to be managed by David McDonald. The membership to the list stands at 232, an increase of 12 from the previous year. The chat-line is an excellent forum for the latest sightings, points of interest and provides an invaluable starting point for those wishing to discuss their unusual sightings.

Other communication issues. COG continues to be an active participant in BIGnet, the network of bird clubs in NSW. Meetings are held every six months to discuss issues of concern and it is a particularly important venue through which the various clubs are able to learn from each other and if necessary act jointly on particular issues. COG held a most successful meeting at the Botanic Gardens in April and it was pleasing to see the Chief Minister join us for our outing to Mulligans Flat. Since then COG has been represented by Jenny Bounds and me at the September meeting run by the Blue Mountains Bird Observers.

A progress report on the Woodland surveys has been provided to the State of Australian Birds Report produced by Birds Australia which I understand will be found in the next edition of Wingspan. Also to be found in the forthcoming issue will be a report by Michael Lenz on some aspects of the waterbird surveys at Lake Bathurst.

The President attended the opening of the BASNA Discovery Centre at Olympic Park in Sydney during May and was able to take the opportunity to make arrangements for back issues of CBN to be sent to the BASNA library. These additions have now completed their holdings of CBN.

Surveys and record management

COG continues to be active in the important area of collecting and recording data on the birds within our area of concern. In the ACT State of Environment Report (2007) it was recommended that "ACT Government agencies work with qualified community groups (such as the Canberra Ornithologists Group) to ensure data collected are made available for use in planning and managing the Territory's natural resources."

Fifteen woodland sites continue to be surveyed once a season to document the species in the threatened Yellow Box/Red Gum grassy woodlands. Data on threatened species have been provided to the ACT Government. This coming year we will be seeking funds for a major analysis of the data as most sites have now been surveyed for 10 years. I would like to acknowledge the hard work of all the site coordinators and participants and to Jenny Bounds and Alison Rowell for administering the project. I would also like to welcome Helen Mason to the project. Helen is responsible for data entry.

The GBS is now in its 28th year under the enthusiastic leadership of Martin Butterfield. I particularly commend his regular input to Gang-gang on interesting aspects of the data. I would also like to thank Kay Hahne and Anne Hall for their help in entering the GBS data. Kay really deserves a medal as she has now put her hand up for this job for over a decade.

The COG database continues to expand with 461,551 observations from 30,110 datasheets in the General Observations database and 1.25 million records in the GBS database. The databases continue to be managed by Paul Fennell and Martin Butterfield. The on-line data entry system is now up and running and I urge more members to enter their observation in this way. With the inbuilt checks and balances the system greatly reduces the amount of checking required to ensure records are correct. Essential support for the COG database is provided through the Records Management Team and the Rarities Panel. I would like to acknowledge the

contributions provided by Nicki Taws as Records Officer, Harvey Perkins for his role on the Records Management Team, Tony Harding and many others for data entry and to the members of the Rarities Panel consisting of Richard Allan, Jenny Bounds, Grahame Clark, Dick Schodde, Nicki Taws and Barbara Allan (Secretary).

New technologies always throw up particular challenges and we still struggle to get many of the interesting observations recorded on the chat-line into the database.

One area that I am afraid we are all going to have to face this coming year concerns scientific and common name changes. Tony Lawson has been assessing the problems COG has in adopting the name changes which have now been accepted by Birds Australia. Although there are not many common names that will need to be changed, the ordering and changes to scientific names are more significant. COG has already adopted the changes and you may well have noticed the changes as you read Gang-gang. Changes will need to be made to GBS charts, General Observations datasheets and in the database, all of which will take some time. I ask for your patience as the next Committee slowly works through these issues.

Monthly meetings

Jack Holland has once again been responsible for a most interesting and varied program of speakers. Presentations have varied from those that concern our local species such as Melithriptis honeyeaters, Robins and Quail, Cormorants, Swift Parrots, Fairy-wrens and Regent Honeyeaters to those found or used to be found further afield such as the Beautiful Parrakeet, Hooded Parrot and the birds of Oolambeyan, birds of Jervis Bay, birds of Glue Pot Reserve and the Birds in Backyards.

In addition there have been presentations of a more general nature such as Evolution in Birds, Habitat Productivity and Conservation and Birds of Ecuador, the BIG ACT Twitch and Birds of Japan whilst Paul Fennell has reminded us about the on-line data entry system and Martin Butterfield provided a presentation on the GBS.

A feature of the monthly meeting continues to be the Sales Desk. Due to other commitments Bruce Ramsey and Esme Barker had to unfortunately relinquish the marvellous job they had done with the Desk after taking over from Carol Macleay. I would like to thank them for all their efforts and also to thank Roy Harvey who managed to step into the breach for a short while. The Desk is now being managed by Beth Mantle who has taken on the position with great enthusiasm.

A critical part of the monthly meetings is the raffle and the tea/coffee get together after the meeting. Many thanks to Julienne Kampad and Margaret Ashton who work quietly behind the scenes to provide the refreshments and to Sandra Henderson, helped by Jane Green, for taking on the responsibility of providing the raffle prizes and selling the tickets.

Canberra Birds Conservation Fund

There had been problems this financial year spending money from the Fund. Despite repeated contacts with universities and conservation groups and despite a couple of initial expressions of interest there were no applications for the financial period 2007-08. I am please to say that since the start of the present financial year the CBCF has

been able to provide a considerable grant to the Brown Treecreeper reintroduction project. As previously mentioned there is now a link on the COG website that provides details about the Fund and how to apply. It is hoped that this will encourage applications from individuals and organisations with project aimed at supporting COG's objectives.

So, where are we heading in the forthcoming year?

- The Forward Plan will need to be updated with outstanding tasks to be completed.
- We intend to make progress with a new edition of the publication 'Birds of Canberra Gardens'.
- We aim to seek ways to update and improve the COG database.
- An area of concern involves the COG publication Canberra Bird Notes. The publication has been reduced from four editions to three yet it is increasingly difficult to find articles that will fill each edition despite the first edition containing the Annual Bird Report. There may be reasons for this with Gang-gang and the chat-line's coverage of field outings, interesting observations and the general discussions on subjects of interest. I would appreciate the membership's thoughts on where COG should be heading with the CBN and how best to capture the chat-line observations for inclusion in CBN.
- We will continue to play a role to ensure that the environment is not forgotten when planners and developers consider the triple bottom line.
- We will continue to provide support to those activities that are important to the membership

Conclusion

I would once again like to thank the 2007-08 Committee for all their hard work. I look forward to my second term as President and finally I would like to thank you all for your support over the past year.

Chris Davey,
8th October 2008