



PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2012-13

This is my first Report as President of COG and covers the 13 month period October 2012 to November 2013. It has been a very busy year as will be demonstrated by the range of activities reported on and many members have been very active in supporting COG during this time. A member-based organisation is only as successful as its members make it and I would like to extend a very sincere thank-you to all those who have actively contributed over the year.

COG Committee

COG has been very well-served by a dedicated and enthusiastic Committee and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the 11 members of the 2012-13 Committee for all their efforts. The Executive consisted of Chris Davey as Vice-president, Sandra Henderson as Secretary and Noel Luff as Treasurer. Jenny Bounds continued as Conservation Officer with help from Chris and me. Sue Lashko continued as editor of Gang-gang and meeting-room organizer and Outings Officer. Julian Robinson was co-opted recently on to the Committee to report on the development of the new Website. Lia Battisson and Sandra assisted with the Treasurer's responsibilities whilst he was absent. Neil Hermes has taken on the major task of coordinating and overseeing the COG 50th celebration and Bruce Lindenmayer and Stuart Rae have been stalwarts in their support.

COG Membership

There are currently 318 members of COG. We had 55 new members joining during the year and this was in part boosted above normal recruitment levels by people who joined up as part of the CSIRO functional connectivity study. However a number of those members haven't renewed their membership. As with any organisation we always have a loss of members including those who can no longer participate in COG activities, those who move away from Canberra, those who pursue other priorities, and some new members who find COG isn't what they were looking for. However to all our continuing members you are a vital part of our organisation and your support for COG is very much appreciated.

Forward Plan – 2013-15

The COG Forward Plan, published in the April 2013 Gang-gang for members' information, outlines the directions and priorities for COG over the period 2013-15. It has guided the Committee's activities during 2012-13 and there has been progress in a number of areas, including:

The COG website

Work on the new website for COG was started nearly two years ago following a couple of earlier false starts. The purpose of the new site is threefold – to update what is now an old style site to a more contemporary style, to add some new features and most importantly, to allow easier maintenance by non-IT experts. The current site has been maintained by basically one person – David Cook – and we

need to spread this work around a little more evenly. Of course our appreciation goes to David for the work he has done in maintaining the website.

COG contracted the main site development to a web design and development company, Link Digital, to produce the site early in 2012. The initial work was completed more than a year ago. However subsequent work to fix problems and bring the draft website to meet our specifications has taken a great deal longer and is still continuing. At the time of writing this work is a month past than the last agreed date and it is not clear when it will be completed. When this iteration is finally completed, a group of COG members will work for a month or so on final re-writing and re-structuring the site before it is commissioned. The current target date is in time for our 50th anniversary, that is, 1st January 2014, however more realistically, it is likely now to be the end of January.

I would particularly like to thank Julian Robinson for driving this project which has been complex, difficult and at time quite frustrating.

The COG database

This project continues to progress slowly, which has been rather frustrating for several members. It is a complex project which has had to play second fiddle to other matters such as the new COG website, ABR and so forth. However, some of these matters have usefully contributed to our understanding of COG database requirements. Steve Wallace, Michael Robbins and Chris Davey, and Paul Fennell and Julian Robinson when available, have met six times during 2013. The main work of this group has been to take input previously provided, plus any new input, and create a draft requirements document. With the appointment of Paul Sullivan, the new CEO at Birdlife Australia (BLA), who is interested in upgrading Birddata, we have seen recently some progress in discussions with BLA. There have also been useful discussions with Eremaea. Once the draft requirements document is completed, the intention is to discuss it with the wider group interested in the COG database who attended the presentations about Eremaea, Birddata and Atlas of Living Australia and/or provided input last year.

I would like to thank Steve Wallace, Michael Robbins, Chris Davey, Paul Fennell and Julian Robinson for their combined efforts in progressing this challenging task.

Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of COG in 2014

Neil Hermes has been very active in developing a program to celebrate COG's 50th Anniversary in 2014. The focus will be on raising awareness in the community about the valuable role that COG has played and will continue to play and also on activities to engage COG members in celebrating this significant event in our history.

Conservation

Conservation activities continue to be one of COG's major priorities and it is pleasing to see recognition by government agencies and other organisations of the very valuable role that we play in this field. Jenny Bounds has continued in her role as COG Conservation Officer, with input from Alison Russell-French and Chris Davey as the other members of the Conservation Sub-Committee. As a Vice-President of the Conservation Council ACT Region and Chairperson of the Council's Biodiversity Group, Jenny has also represented COG's interests in that forum.

The major conservation issue for COG in the past year has been the Strategic Environmental Assessment of remaining developable lands in Gungahlin, particularly in the proposed suburb of Throsby adjacent to the Mulligans Flat and Goorooyarroo reserves, with potential impacts on the Superb Parrot nesting colony on Throsby Ridge. Early in 2013, COG had a meeting with officials from the Commonwealth Department of Environment managing the assessment process under the EPBC

Act. COG made a written submission with a recommendation for a good buffer for the parrots nesting area to extend to Horse Park Drive. While pleased that several parcels of land are to be reserved as offsets including Kinlyside woodland near Hall and much of Throsby, COG remains concerned about the 100 metres buffer only from houses in Throsby, and potential competition for nesting hollows from Common Mynas which will be drawn closer to the nesting site. COG provided \$10,000 funding to the Conservation Council to assist its work on the Gungahlin campaign.

COG has also provided comments/submissions of a number of other issues, including:

- Draft ACT Action Plan for Glossy Black-Cockatoo
- Solar farm proposals, including one proposed for the Central Molonglo with potential impacts on habitat and movement corridors for Little Eagles and Superb Parrots
- Senate Inquiry into the effectiveness of threatened species and ecological communities' protection in Australia
- Draft ACT Nature Conservation Strategy 2012-22
- Oolambeyan National Park – Draft Plan of Management
- East Molonglo/Molonglo River Park various urban development-related and ongoing management issues.

In May 2013, COG nominated the Scarlet Robin to the ACT Flora and Fauna Committee for consideration as a 'vulnerable' species. The nomination is based on a clear, long term declining trend from the COG woodland project data. Jenny Bounds researched and drafted the nomination.

Surveys and record management

The 13 month period October 2012 to November 2013 has been a very busy one for COG survey efforts. These are a very important part of COG's work and enhance our credibility as a valued source of reliable data and information about birds in the ACT and surrounding region. This year has also seen COG's expertise recognised and extended to engage us in survey work on Lord Howe Island.

Woodland Bird Monitoring Project

The COG Woodland Bird Monitoring Project has been running since 1998 and surveys (quarterly) are ongoing at 142 monitoring points in 15 locations in grassy woodlands around the ACT. Jenny Bounds has continued as Convenor of the Management Committee and coordinates this project, with Nicki Taws, Chris Davey and Alison Rowell. Alison Rowell continues to have a key role as consultant to the project. The next major analysis of project data is expected to be in 2016, when there will be 10 years of data at all monitoring sites (at end of 2015). We would like to thank all involved in this important project, particularly the location coordinators for their long-term commitment to the surveys. Many thanks to Jenny Bounds, Nicki Taws and Alison Rowell from the management group and to Helen Mason for data entry into the COG database.

Superb Parrot Surveys

A fourth survey of possible breeding habitat for the threatened Superb Parrot in the ACT was completed with help from eight COG members. A report titled 'Distribution, abundance and breeding status of the Superb Parrot (*Polytelis swainsonii*) during the 2012-13 breeding season, Throsby Neck, Throsby Ridge and East Throsby, ACT' was compiled by Chris Davey and provided to the ACT Government. A copy of this and other Superb Parrot survey reports conducted by COG members have been placed in the COG library.

Superb Lyrebird survey

The Superb Lyrebird survey at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, run to document the recovery after the 2003 bush fires, was held for the 10th year, as usual on the third weekend in June.

Garden Bird Survey

The Garden Bird Survey is now in its 33rd year. Thank you to the many contributors and to Duncan McCaskill for managing the survey and for data analysis. Kay Hahne and Anne Hall continue with the difficult task of entering the GBS data.

Mulligans Flat/Goorooyaroo Surveys

The ANU survey that is conducted at Mulligans Flat/Goorooyaroo twice yearly in Spring and Autumn involves COG members assisting in data collection.

The COG Blitz

The Blitz was run for the 8th year this year, as usual over the last weekend in October, with Barbara Allan yet again managing this most valuable of surveys when so many additional observations are recorded onto the COG database. Our thanks are due to Barbara for her sterling efforts in making the Blitz both a valuable survey and source of enjoyment for all who enjoy bird watching.

Kosciuszko to Coast (K2C) bird surveys

Nicki Taws has again been responsible for running the COG contribution to the Kosciuszko to Coast (K2C) bird surveys in April and again in October covering 23 properties in the area between Williamsdale and Bredbo.

Lord Howe Island Survey

As part of the propose rodent eradication program on Lord Howe Island, COG has been asked to conduct surveys of the lowland terrestrial birds each year before the eradication, expected in winter 2016, and for three years after. The first survey was conducted over the week 7-14th September, a report to the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage is in the process of being prepared. Many thanks are due to the seven COG members who participated in the survey.

Silver Gull Breeding Survey

On behalf of COG, Peter Fullagar and Chris Davey have, since the 2010-11 breeding season, been responsible for a survey of the breeding of Silver Gulls on Spinnaker Island, Lake Burley Griffin. The survey is conducted to provide information to the National Capital Authority who in return provides a donation to COG.

Records Management

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, Tony Harding, Helen Mason and many others for data entry and to the members of the Rarities Panel consisting of Richard Allen, Jenny Bounds, Grahame Clark, Dick Schodde, Nicki Taws and Barbara Allan (Secretary), all who have offered to continue in their various roles.

Outings

Once again COG has been able to run a very comprehensive outings program in 2012-13 and I would like to thank Sue Lashko for her efforts in making this a great success for the year.

Our thanks also to those members who lead these trips and we would welcome new leaders with new ideas for the 2013-14 year There have been 35 outings this year plus a Wednesday walk each month and with the Blitz this makes 48 in total. These ranged from morning outings, to full day, weekend or

long weekend camping, or accommodated for the longest outing, Monday to Friday, at Green Cape. This year there were several new destinations including:

- a weekend at Wallaga Lake with a climb up Mt Dromedary,
- a weekend staying at St Clement's Monastery in Galong and some wonderful birding on private property,
- October long weekend camping at Stackpoole Nature Reserve near Griffith.

and a return to some old favourites including Green Cape, Ben Ricketts near Barren Grounds, and the first visit since the 2003 fires back to Micalong Swamp in the Brindabellas.

In addition to the scheduled outings, the ad hoc group who have organised the Wednesday walks have once again operated most successfully and have managed to attract a most enthusiastic and intrepid group of followers with outings taking place each month of the year, notwithstanding some very testing weather conditions. On behalf of COG members our thanks to Martin Butterfield, Michael Robbins and others for organising these events.

Gang-gang

Firstly, a huge thank-you is extended from us all to Ian Fraser for writing 100 AvIAN Whimsies. He may have lamented the fact that he received very little feedback but I know that his column each month was a highlight of Gang-gang for many readers. I would like to thank Jack Holland for his monthly "Where to Watch Birds", those who wrote up trip reports and all the other regular contributors of articles, reports and wonderful photos that all go to make up Gang-gang.

Many thanks are also due to Sue Lashko, Jeanette Lenz, Gail Neumann and Mary Bomford for their excellent efforts in the editing and publishing of our newsletter. Gang-gang is a great source of information and news to members who may not be aware of the work that goes into producing the newsletter every month. In particular, I would like to express our appreciation to Gail Neumann and Mary Bomford who stepped in and mastered the Lay-out Editor task so quickly and at short notice. I would like to thank Brian Fair and helpers for doing the distribution of the newsletter and Canberra Bird Notes and Dianne Davey for recently taking over this task.

We are looking for someone to write a regular column every second month and/or members to write occasional columns on bird related topics - a favourite species or family, a recent trip or some other item of interest to members. Please let Sue Lashko know if you would like to exercise your writing skills and add to the interesting contributions in Gang-gang.

Communications and Publications

Canberra Bird Notes.

Over the year there have been three editions of CBN produced by Michael Lenz as Editor. I would like to thank Michael for his work as Editor and all those who have contributed to CBN over the past year. Particular appreciation is also due to Paul Fennel and Steve Wallace for their work on the Annual Bird Report.

Website visitation.

David Cook continues to provide an excellent website. Over the year there were 185,796 visits to the site, a 15% increase on the previous year. This includes 136,176 unique visitors, 536,200 pages accessed and 8,151,887 hits overall. Some 31% of visits were to the photo gallery, 25% to the main CanberraBirds area, 20% to the Garden Bird Survey and 19% to Indian Myna Action.

CanberraBirds email announcement and discussion list

At the end of the year the CanberraBirds email announcement and discussion list had 272 subscribers. The number remains fairly stable from year to year, with only a small proportion of subscribers dropping off and new ones joining. The list, managed by David McDonald, continues to provide a useful forum for people to discuss the birds of the Canberra region, their environments, and COG's activities. New subscribers, including people new to birding who seek support from more experienced birders, are welcome to subscribe. During the year there were approximately 2,400 emails distributed over the list, an average of about six per day.

Monthly meetings

I would like to thank Jack Holland for arranging another most interesting year of both local and interstate speakers at the COG monthly meetings in 2013. Highlights include Sarah Pryke on her research on the Gouldian Finch, Michael Guppy's findings of some surprising answers for nest predation on the South Coast, Dejan Stojanovic's update of his research on the Swift Parrot including nest predation by the sugar glider, Jerry Olsen on Eagles in the ACT, Anna Lashko about her work on Albatross and Giant Petrels on Macquarie Island, Stephen Debus on Raptor Identification and David Watson on birds and mistletoes.

Our appreciation to Julienne Kampad with occasional assistance from Lia Battisson for the refreshments that follow the monthly meetings, and to Sandra Henderson for taking on the responsibility of providing the raffle prizes and selling the tickets. All of these add to the enjoyment of the occasions and provide opportunity for members to socialise.

Canberra Birds Conservation Fund (CBCF)

During the year, the Fund provided support to two projects that work towards achieving its conservation objectives.

The eleventh grantee, Ms Iliana Medina, was assisted to undertake research into the evolution of host defences in the Yellow-rumped Thornbill. The study is being undertaken at Campbell Park, and the funds have been provided to purchase equipment needed for data collection in the field and for data storage.

The twelfth grantee, Dr Kristal Cain, was assisted to undertake research on 'Consequences of environmental variability on social structure and reproduction in Superb Fairy-wrens'. The project is being conducted at the Australian National Botanic Gardens and at Campbell Park, comparing a watered environment with one subject to a more changeable environment. The funds are being used primarily for data management and analysis that is leading to the production of reports on the new environmental knowledge derived through this project.

The Committee of Management of the Fund (Penny Olsen, Geoffrey Dabb & David McDonald) continues to receive enquiries from people seeking funding support for projects that are consistent with its environmental objectives. Unfortunately, owing to the relatively low level of income over the past year, the Fund is not able to support as much activity as it would like. In fact, the Fund is now largely depleted and not in a position to support any further environmental activities until new donations are received. COG members are encouraged to promote the Canberra Birds Conservation Fund, encouraging friends and businesses alike to make tax-deductible donations to it in the interests of the birds of the Canberra region, and their environments.

Summary

2012-13 has been a busy and productive year for COG. I have enjoyed my first year as your President and look forward to a very good year in 2014 when COG can really celebrate its 50th year of operation.

Finally, I wish again to thank all those who have worked so hard in so many ways to provide services to members and who have assisted me in my role as President over the year.

Alison Russell-French