



Gang-gang

August 2004

News letter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

AUGUST MEETING

Wednesday 11 August

Details pg 3

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Yellow-faced Honeyeater *Lichenostomus chrysops* Photo courtesy **Lindsay Hansch**

Where to watch birds this month

Return to Chapman

We moved back to Chapman on 1 July, just in time to commence the 2004-2005 Garden Bird Survey (GBS) chart. The first few days back confirmed the impressions gained from shorter visits during the rebuilding that bird activity around our block was surprisingly high, and at least the equivalent to the two places in the Inner South where we had lived since January 2003. One reason may be that we're still very much on the edge of suburbia and our former GBS site was not totally destroyed, with about 40% estimated to have been left intact. Birds are, however, very much easier to see as many of the previous trees and shrubs as well as fences are gone.

While there has been plenty of bird activity it is clear that some of the numbers/patterns have changed. One of the most common species has been the **Crested Pigeon**, with up to 20 counted on the wires etc round a feeding tray in a neighbour's yard. Galahs too are attracted to this in large numbers, as have been the **Common Bronzewing**, though in much

smaller numbers than pre-fire (maximum of 4 compared with up to 12 before).

Many species still clearly seem to have retained their daily pattern of movement in and out of the suburbs during the mornings and evenings, despite the generally devastated landscape to the west. Surprisingly the **Little Corella** has generally outnumbered the **Sulphur-crested Cockatoo** so far; they can be heard from a long way off as they fly over towards the Cotter and back. However, there has been only one distant sighting of the **Major Mitchell's Cockatoo**, which was seen overhead a number of times in May and early June. Also we haven't yet seen any **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos**, the most visible casualties of the fires, which used to be regular visitors to our GBS site or flying over, though some were around their former stronghold of Narrabundah Hill pine forest in small numbers in the first few months post-fire.

While there appear to be lower numbers of the smaller birds I've seen nearly all those species I might

Letters to the editor

Please send letters, snippets etcetera intended for this column to the editor. Contact details are on page 12 of this *Gang-gang*. As with all sections of the *Gang-gang*, space allocated to this section each month will be limited. Therefore entries are more likely to be published if they are kept to a minimum length.

expect, including **Fuscous** and **Crescent Honeyeaters**, but have yet to see or hear a **Brown Thornbill**, formerly present all year round. The **Golden Whistler**, also a former regular winter visitor, does not appear to be present.

The most notable absentee from my GBS site has been the **Satin Bowerbird** with both the bower in my neighbour's garden destroyed, and the area of the roost site on Chauvel Circle completely gone. However, I have seen and heard a male close to an active bower in Monkman Street. This is now in the front garden as the rear, where two bowers were built previously, was destroyed in the fires. By contrast the former bower site in Burgan Place Rivett is looking very abandoned, though surprisingly it was 75% intact with several blue objects over Easter. .

In the first month of our return 31 species have been recorded in our GBS site and a further 14 within a km or so of the house, including several **Scarlet Robins**. Up to 11 **Flame Robins** (including 3 males together) have been observed on the edge of the former Narrabundah Hill pine forest and the adjacent horse paddocks. These are well known early colonisers of burnt areas but I have not seen them as consistently or in such numbers in the area for over 20 years. The **Willie Wagtail** also seems to be much more common than for a long time. The **Weebill** also seems more common than previously, probably no surprise given their fondness of young gum leaves. One other surprise was a **Wedge-tailed Eagle** circling over Coleman Ridge before heading back towards Kambah.

The big surprise has been the amount of nesting activity. The first weekend we located a **Crested Pigeon** nest in a *Melaleuca armillaris* (which seems to be a favourite nesting shrub) above our driveway, with the neighbour saying he was pleased it had moved from a hakea above his pool. A pair of Australian Magpies was also showing interest in a well formed nest in a gum above where the bower used to be, with one bird trying the nest for shape on several occasions.

However, the biggest surprise on the second weekend was to find **Red Wattlebird** nesting in full swing in the one gum tree that had been retained on our block. We were initially alerted by the birds repeated return to the same spot in this tree, and inspection soon revealed a nest there, though we were unclear at what stage this was (building or sitting on eggs), as one bird seemed to be on the nest for periods of time, though



Weebill *Smicrornis brevirostris*
Photo courtesy **Geoffrey Dabb**

often flying to it, without noticeably carrying nest building material or food. We dismissed the possibility of already young in the nest, as a quick

check of the references indicated this was clearly too early, even though the bird seemed to be feeding and we thought on a couple of occasions that we could hear chicks calling (which we dismissed as contact calling between the pair).

The puzzle was solved on the next weekend (17-18 July) when the parents were returning to the nest even more frequently, with a surprisingly large chick rising well out of the nest each time a parent arrived. All this could readily be seen through our new study window, less than 5 metres away, and surprisingly continued through the at first cold and then very windy weekend. That the chick survived this inclement weather was clear the following weekend as it could be easily seen at the top of the nest, still downy though with well formed wing feathers. The nest was empty late on 26 July and we thought it had perished, but we found it again in the same tree amongst the leaves about 3 metres from the nest the next morning. It was still very downy and had an extremely short tail, but later that day it was seen being fed on the ground or flying low clumsily round the garden. This would appear to be one of the earliest records of successful breeding in Canberra, with nest building likely to have taken place in late June.

The magpies seemed to be in less of a hurry to get started with signs of building another nest in this same tree only 25 metres from the original nest (last year's?), and at one stage were seen taking material from this to the new one. However, most of this blew away with the wind on 16-17 July, though at least one bird persisted, often disputing with two other birds, and a slightly more substantial nest was apparent the next weekend.

Progress with the **Crested Pigeons** was harder to follow, as this species in my experience is a rather surreptitious feeder of chicks, even though it could often be heard calling

from the nest site. However, it was clearly sitting much higher in the nest on 24 July, indicative of chicks under, and on the afternoon of the next day two well formed but smaller replicas of their parents, with incomplete crests, could be seen sitting on the nest. They too fledged late on 26 July and the four birds were seen preparing to roost in a bush about 7 metres away, where they were still huddled together the next morning, as well as that evening. This event was less unexpected than the wattletbird breeding, as this species is known to nest year round in the ACT.

We're very pleased to be back and to see such great bird activity, and will be watching with interest the changes or trends as the burnt areas recover and mature.

Jack Holland

Field Trip Reports

Bush Birds for beginners Sunday 11 July 2004

'Bush birds for Beginners' started as 16 of us gathered in the ANBG car park on a still Sunday morning. **Brown-headed, Yellow-faced & New Holland Honeyeaters** were there to usher us into the gardens under the tutelage of Anthony Overs and his 'trusted' assistant Stuart Harris.

Anthony provided valuable tips for the 'beginners' who came from far and wide with varying degrees of birding experience. A happy medium was found as we casually collected 35 species (and a couple of ring-in birdos) in our 2 ½ hour stroll through the various habitats.

A highlight for many was the comprehensive performance given by a vocal **Crescent Honeyeater** while some would no doubt rate their encounter with the **Bassian Thrush** just outside the rainforest gully as significant. We saw good numbers of

White-naped Honeyeaters go about their business, and had good views of a solitary female **Satin Bowerbird** above the lawns before the pleasant drizzle settled in.

Many thanks go to Anthony for sharing his knowledge of local bush birds, especially his acute skill in identifying their wonderful calls.

Stuart Harris

Bungonia all day outing Sunday 25 July 2004

The Sunday 25 July COG trip to Bungonia State Conservation Park, east of Goulburn, was described as an all day outing in winter with the option of staying over on Saturday night. Despite the forecast of showers and rain for the weekend six early arrivals, including our trip leader John Goldie, met at the camp ground on Saturday afternoon.

Arriving early had its rewards. Despite the light rain, the area around the camp ground yielded **Striated** and **Buff-rumped Thornbills**, **White-eared** and **White-naped Honeyeaters**, a pair of **Scarlet Robins**, a **Spotted Quail-thrush** and two Red-necked Wallabies. Before dark we drove to Bungonia Lookdown and during the short walk saw a Swamp Wallaby. After a convivial evening in the camp kitchen the group went on a spotlighting walk around the camp ground. Nothing else was stirring.

We awoke on Sunday to find the day grey and overcast and a small mob of Eastern Grey Kangaroos grazing quietly nearby. Two of the party also observed a male **Spotted Quail-thrush** about 15m up a tree calling repeatedly and displaying its pure white belly. After meeting the Sunday morning arrivals at the Ranger Station the total party of eleven drove to the David Reid car park, the beginning of the first of the scheduled walks for the day. Walking between the car park and Bungonia Lookdown we were delighted once

August Meeting

8 pm

Wednesday

11 August 2004

*Canberra Girls Grammar School
cnr Gawler Cres and Melbourne
Ave, Deakin*

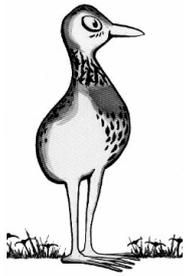
Our **short talk** for August will feature the **Spotted Bowerbird**, illustrated by another delightful Geoffrey Dabb video.

The **main talk** for the evening will be "**Afric(a)tlassing** - bird atlassing and watching in Tanzania" by Martin Butterfield, on the pleasures and perils of birding in Tanzania. It may include a brief Kiswahili lesson! Martin was in Tanzania on a two-year contract, funded by Statistics

Sweden, advising the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania on the conduct of the most recent census of population and housing. A far cry from his present 'job' of coordinating COG's Garden Bird Survey!

Brave the cold and come along! It should be a great evening!

again to see a pair of **Spotted Quail-thrush**, most people having good views. From the lookouts we could see Bungonia Creek and the Shoalhaven River, as well as the large scar of Marulan quarry. On the return walk toward the car park we were treated to the sight of a female



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2005 Birding Tours

12 -28 February: New Zealand
NZ options: 11 Feb pelagic for
NZ storm-petrel; 1-2 March Kapiti
Island for **little spotted kiwi**

9-14 March: Tasmania bird &
mammal tour, including Bruny Is-
land & pelagic trip

16-23 March Kangaroo Island, SA.
Great Ocean Road – Coorong NP

18-29 May: Gulf Country Q'ld
Cairns Karumba Georgetown Mt Isa

4-19 June Top End incl Kununurra

3-10 July New Caledonia

(rescheduled)

Comprehensive birding tour seeking
all endemic, plus the near-endemic,
species on Grand Terre and nearby
islands of the Loyalty group. Birds
include the incredible **kagu**, plus
cloven-feathered dove, **horned
parakeet**, **crow honeyeater**, **white-
bellied goshawk**, **red-throated
parrot-finch**, **NC imperial pigeon**

*A little bit of France in the tropics,
2.5 hours from Sydney, with reput-
edly the richest biodiversity per
square kilometre in the world.*

8-26 August: Outback trip
The 20th Strzelecki Track tour

Plains-wanderer Weekends

11 and 12 December 2004

18 and 19 December 2004

26 & 27 March (Easter) 2005

www.philipmaher.com

Superb Lyrebird scratching in
the litter. We were able to
observe her for several minutes
and so could note two spots on
her wings as well as the
colouring of her back and
underparts. When we disturbed
her she ran off into the scrub in
characteristic lyrebird fashion.
We were further delayed
reaching the start of the planned
walk by the proliferation of birds
in the trees around the car park.
As well as **Brown** and **Striated
Thornbills** and small brown
mice cunningly disguised as
Superb Fairy-wrens, the
highlight was the **Varied
Sitellas** and **White-throated
Trecreepers** displaying their
contrasting feeding habits.

Our walk then took us through
the karst area and a variety of
vegetation types to Mount Ayre,
where we enjoyed more views of
the gorge area. We continued in
a circle back to the parking area,
having seen only **White-winged
Choughs** and Eastern Grey
Kangaroos during the walk.
Moral: stay in the car park where
the best bird life can often be
found. On the way out, a **Pied
Butcherbird** was seen in the
campground.

The group saw a total of 29
species during the weekend, a
reasonable number given the
weather. Our thanks go to our
competent and knowledgeable
trip leader John, who was ably
supported by Kathy. John not
only lead the walks, but also
supplied the wood for the open
fire in the camp kitchen.

Margaret Robertson

Report of the July COG Meeting

Dominique Homburger and Geoffrey
Dabb collaborated to give a
fascinating short talk, illustrated with
photos and a DVD, on **Gang-gang
Cockatoos**, and **Yellow-tailed** and
Glossy Black-Cockatoos. We were
treated to high quality close-ups of
beaks and tongues, and methods of
seed extraction. Few of us knew that
the mandibles of Gang-gangs have
two corners on the sides and an
indentation in the middle, allowing
these birds to hold the fruit (of, in this
case, hawthorn), split it with their
very sharp upper beak and rake out
the seeds. We had wonderful views
of Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos
using their powerful beaks to twist
Radiata pine cones off the branch
before extracting the seeds, and
Glossy Black-Cockatoos crushing the
very hard cones of Casuarina to find
the seeds which they shell before
eating. Did you know that all three
species almost always hold their food
with their left foot?



Red-rumped Parrot

Psephotus haematonotus

Photo courtesy **Lindsay Hansch**

Dirk Platzen then entertained and
informed us with a very polished
presentation on the topic of his PhD
thesis, Vocalization of **White-
browed Scrubwrens** –or ‘Stories
about nest predation, feeding parents
and some bird calls you have never
heard before!’ White-browed
Scrubwrens are cooperative breeders

with about 50% of breeding pairs having a helper, which is usually not related to the female but may be related to the alpha male.

Dirk focussed on parent-nestling vocalization, in particular alarm and feeding calls. The use of alarm calls is very important because of nest predation. Predators might follow the female going back to the nest or hear nestling 'peeps' when parents are not around. As a result, while predators take only about 1% of eggs, about 4-5% of nestlings are predated per day. On average, they spend 13 days in the nest, and are also very vulnerable in their first few days out of the nest.

Pied Currawongs are the main predator but they only take nestlings when they have their own young. Both scrubwren parents and nestlings react in different ways according to whether predators are on the ground or flying overhead. Parents give a buzzing alarm call to ground predators, but give a high frequency trill to aerial ones. The nestlings can't be heard by flying predators, so they don't stop calling, but they do react to their parents' buzzing alarm calls when the danger is on foot.

Dirk's research on feeding calls has revealed that the adult birds call to stimulate the nestlings to beg. The nestlings' calls tell the parent which baby is hungry or sick (although beak colouration can also show this), and the sick nestling may not be fed if there is a food shortage. As nestlings get older, they call more and react to other stimuli.

Dirk has recorded 172 different calls and is still counting! How do White-browed Scrubwrens get so many calls? They may use transitional calls, fragments of calls or inverse calls; they may change the speed or frequency of calls or imitate other birds, such as thornbills. All of these different calls may be to avoid predators by confusing them, or it could be that it is for brain development. Dirk assured us that

COG SALES

- **The Long Paddock** - a Directory of Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves in NSW' by Rural Lands Protection Board - \$31.00
- **The Birds of Western NSW: A Preliminary Atlas** - NSW Bird Atlassers - **reduced** to \$5.00
- **Finding Birds in Darwin, Kakadu and Top End** by Niven McCrie and James Watson. \$24.00.
- **Wet and Wild** - A Field Guide to the Freshwater Animals of the Southern Tablelands and High Country" by M Lintermans and W Osborne, \$28.00 (RRP \$34.95).
- **Wildlife on Farms** - by David Lindenmayer RRP \$29.95, **special price** for COG members - \$25.00.
- **Where to Find Birds in NE Queensland** - Joe Wieneke - \$16.00.
- **Reptiles and Frogs of the ACT** - Ross Bennett - \$13.00.
- **Native Trees of the ACT** - \$6.50.
- **Birds of Rottneest Island** – by Denis Saunders & Parry de Rebeira - \$15.00
- **Birds of Rottneest Island** – a check list - \$1.00
- **Grassland Flora** – a Field Guide for the Southern Tablelands (NSW and ACT) – by David Eddy et al. - \$13.00
- **Our Patch** – Field Guide to the Flora of the ACT Region - \$13.00
- **The Nestbox Book** – Gould League - \$9.00
- **Birds of Queensland's Wet Tropics and Great Barrier Reef** by Lloyd Nielsen - \$25.00
- **Guide to the Bird Habitats of NSW (ACT)** NSW Atlassers -was \$27, **reduced** to \$15.00
- **Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT** – by Taylor and Day \$14.00
- Simpson and Days' **Birds of Australia CDROM** Version 5.0 **special price** - \$45.00
- COG Atlas - \$12.00
- COG Car Stickers - \$2.00
- COG Birds of Canberra Gardens Poster - \$4.00
- COG Garden Bird Survey Chart (New Version) - \$1.00
- COG Badges – two colour versions - \$5.00
- COG Birds of the ACT – Two Centuries of Change – by Steve Wilson - \$25.00
- COG Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the ACT - \$1.00
- COG Bird Songs of Canberra – Cassette - \$10.00.

COG T-shirts, Polo shirts, all above and other books on local flora and fauna available at the monthly meeting sales desk or by contacting Carol Macleay (for post and packing costs) on 02 6286 2624.

whatever they are saying, it is not, "Hello, children, dinner is ready. Today, I have a nice juicy moth for you but two of the legs are missing."

Sue Lashko

Future Field Trips

Lake Burley Griffin, Yarralumla Bay; **Sunday 8 August - Waterbirds for Beginners**

This will be the second of the outings for 2004 designed specifically for new members and/or beginners, in this case to learn about waterbirds.

Meet Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au) at 8.30 am in the car park of the Yarralumla Bay Swimming Area off Alexandrina Drive, just to the NE of the junction with Hopetoun Circuit (see Map 58 of the Yellow Pages). We will be walking (initially with the sun behind us) for a km or so along the southern shores of Lake Burley Griffin, perhaps a little way into Weston Park before retracing our steps. This is a good area for viewing waterbirds up close and the identification features of the common species such as the various ducks, "waterhens" and cormorants will be pointed out. We will also be on the look out for any early **Silver Gull** nesting activity on the boats moored in the bays, as well as for any **Black Swans** and other species nesting in the fringing vegetation. A variety of land birds are also likely to be seen. Please don't forget to bring your binoculars and field guide.

Remnants and Reveg, **Saturday 21 August - Morning outing**

COG has been working with Greening Australia for the last 4 years documenting the habitat value of native revegetation on farms. This morning outing will visit a farm in the Gundaroo area where a large patch of revegetation is home to over

40 species of birds. Also on the property is a magnificent remnant woodland where we will be able to compare the bird community with that of the revegetation.

Meet Nicki Taws at the Shell Service Station on the Federal Highway, Watson at 8 am to pool cars. If you can't meet here, call Nicki (6251 0303, 0408 210 736) to get directions.

Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve– **Sunday 5 September, morning outing – fire recovery**

This outing is designed to allow COG members to see how the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, one of the places most devastated by the 18 January



Gang-gang Cockatoo
Callocephalon fimbriatum

Photo courtesy **Lindsay Hansch**

2003 bushfires, is recovering and what bird species have remained or are returning. It will be led by Jonette McDonnell (262 9414 A/H), a member of both COG and the Friends of Tidbinbilla, who have been regularly monitoring the birds there since the fires. She will be assisted by ranger Monica Murani, who will also be happy to talk about recovery at Tidbinbilla more generally.

Meet Jonette at 9:00 am at the Visitors Centre for a morning's inspection of various areas of the reserve. There will be some walking involved but mainly on fire trails and paths. Note that no entrance fee is currently being charged.

Lake Road – **Sunday 19 September – longish morning walk**

Lake Road runs along the foot of the escarpment on the southwest corner of Lake George. It is planned to walk along the road from where we will be able to see birds on the lake bed and on the forested slopes, as well as in the roadside trees and grassed areas.

This is an easy flat walk beginning at the southern end of the escarpment and heading north before returning either along the road or the edge of the "lake". This time last year the mistletoe was flowering and there were large numbers of honeyeaters. For the past two years at this time, Sue Lashko has recorded about 40 species, including **Little Eagle**, **Speckled Warbler**, **Red-capped Robin** and cuckoos, as well as Echidna.

Meet Sue (6251 4485 A/H) at 8.00 am at the corner of Lake Road and Bungendore Road, before driving a few kilometres to the starting point for the walk. From the Federal Highway, turn right onto Macs Reef Rd just after the Sutton overpass. Go to the end and turn right onto the Bungendore road. Lake Road is at the base of Smith's Gap, over the Cullerin or Lake George Range (it's called both). If you are coming via Queanbeyan and Bungendore, turn left at the roundabout in Bungendore, without turning right into Bungendore. Bring morning tea, water, hat and sunscreen. The walk will finish before lunch.

Buddigower/Charcoal Tank; **2-4 October - long weekend campout– Mark Clayton**

COG will join Mark Clayton's bird banding crew for the October long weekend campout in these two reserves near West Wyalong. This will be a take everything camp as there are NO facilities in either



Silver Gull *Larus novaehollandiae*

Photo courtesy **Martin Butterfield**

reserve. All rubbish etc will need to be taken out. Access is more difficult to Buddigower but with care, a conventional vehicle will get in OK. There are no problems getting into Charcoal.

Buddigower is larger than Charcoal and covers a wider range of habitats, from pure Mallee to small areas of heath, extensive areas of Broombush (*Melaleuca*) and ironbark ridges. There are numerous old mineshafts in Buddigower so care needs to be exercised walking around. Both reserves have been severely affected by the drought so birds could be a bit of a pot-luck assemblage. However most migrants should have returned to the area. We will move from Buddigower to Charcoal on Sunday afternoon.

For those who do not wish to camp, there are motels and caravan parks approximately 15 km away.

Further details on getting there etc will be provided in the September *Gang-gang*, but in the interim please register your interest with Mark Clayton (6241 3620 A/H or Mark.Clayton@csiro.au).

Wednesday Walk

There is an informal walk on the third Wednesday of each month (ie the wed. after the COG meeting. These are gentle outings to nearby places starting at 9 am and finishing by lunchtime.

The mid week walk for August will be at lake Ginninderra on

Wednesday 18 August. Meet at the parking area at the end of Townsend Place adjacent to the John Knight Memorial Park at 9 am to look for waterbirds, combined with some bush birds and possibly quail, which have been seen there regularly in the past. Perhaps there will also be some early **Clamorous Reed Warblers** or other migrants such as the **Pallid Cuckoo**? Bring morning tea.

2005 Calendar

I've only had limited response so far to my request for ideas about the 2005 COG Field Trips Program. If you have any places that you think are worth visiting next year, favourite places that COG should visit, past outings that you think ought to be repeated, or comments on the types of outings that should be included in our program, please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au). Offers to lead outings in 2005 will also be gratefully accepted. This year's program has run very smoothly because members have been happy to help organise and lead one, or at most two, outing for the year. That's all it takes, so please let's continue this co-operative spirit!

From the COG Committee

At its meeting on 21 July 2004, amongst other business, the committee considered the following matters.

It committed to the continuation of the Garden Bird Survey. A working group, comprising Martin Butterfield,

Jack Holland and Nick Nicholls, was formed to come up with proposals for the future conduct of the survey and reporting thereon.

Birds of Canberra Gardens, a runaway success for COG and Urban Services, is now out of print. An updated version is under consideration.

The proposed Pocket Guide to the birds of the ACT, a joint endeavour of Birds Australia and COG, is progressing well and should be finalised shortly. This is a pamphlet style publication aimed at attracting new members to birdwatching/COG or helping newcomers/visitors to Canberra. Copies will be free and made available to all members.

The web-based data entry and search facility is being fine-tuned and will be officially launched at a COG public meeting in the near future. Never fear – hard-copy instructions for its use will be provided! And for those of you allergic to computers, paper copies of your records on the familiar datasheets and incidental record sheets will continue to be welcomed (sheets available at meetings, from the COG office or from the secretary).

COG's website is now www.canberrabirds.org.au. And our email address is cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au. The email discussion list can be accessed via canberrabirds@canberrabirds.org.au.

The Woodland Survey site coordinators met recently. Two new sites are under consideration; and another grant to further the work of the survey is being sought. A progress report by Alison Rowell on the survey will be published in *Canberra Bird Notes*.

Barbara Allan, secretary

Other surveys/Activities of Interest to COG Members

Barren Grounds - Ground Parrot Survey 2004 9am to 12 noon Sunday 8 August 2004

Ground parrot surveys at Barren Grounds have been conducted annually since the January 1983 fire. Volunteers from Birds Australia, COG, CBOC, Birding NSW, the University of Wollongong, NPWS and elsewhere have always come along to help. **!!WE NEED YOUR HELP THIS YEAR!!**

The results over the past few years have been quite erratic. What will happen this year?? **BE THERE YOURSELF AND FIND OUT**

Bring stout walking gear, wet weather gear, sun bonnet, picnic lunch. For more information, contact Jack Baker
jack.baker@npws.nsw.gov.au.

Do you like to talk about birds and birding?

Then **we need your help** for this years Science Festival. COG has been kindly invited to join the Murray Darling Basin Commission on their 'Olympic Birds' exhibition stall at the National Convention Centre from 18 to 22 August 2004.

All you need to do is stand around and do your best to answer any enquiries about local birds.

If you may be able to help Tanya fill the roster, even for half an hour or so, please contact her by phone 6274 2302 or by email gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au.

Notices Notices

Calling all 2003-04 datasheets

Yes, it's that time of year again. Please dig out all your 2003-04 records that you have not yet

submitted and drop them into the red box at meetings or send to our postal address, so that they can be processed in good time for the Annual Bird Report.

New COG internet and email addresses

As previously advised, COG's web site is now located at www.canberrabirds.org.au. On most browsers you only need to type canberrabirds.org.au.

A number of new email addresses are now available to assist members and friends of COG to contact office holders and others, as follows:

General enquiries (Barbara Allan)
cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au

Membership Officer (Alastair Smith)
membership-officer@canberrabirds.org.au

Webmaster (David Cook)
webmaster@canberrabirds.org.au

Gang-gang editors (Tanya Rough & Sue Lashko)
gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au

Canberra Bird Notes editors (Barbara Allan & Harvey Perkins)
cbn@canberrabirds.org.au

Garden Birds Survey co-ordinator (Martin Butterfield)
gbs@canberrabirds.org.au

Email discussion lists enquiries (David McDonald) coglists-owner@canberrabirds.org.au

COG Woodland Survey Project Site Surveyor for Tuggeranong

Hill We are seeking someone to undertake surveys quarterly at our woodland survey site on Tuggeranong Hill at the southern end of the Tuggeranong Valley. This site has been surveyed by Julie McGuinness for the last 4 years, but Julie is taking on a new site in the project and cannot do both. Surveys are done 4 times a year, generally in the last 2 weeks of March, June,

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. For the more energetic, Guerrilla Bay and Burrewarra Point are within walking distance. The wetlands at Barling's Beach are only a few kilometers away. Rich birding is available in almost any direction, the Eurobodalla Botanical Gardens are a favourite spot. The front beach at Rosedale is patrolled by the resident white sea-eagle. Tariff - \$50 per night; \$250 per week (\$300 per week in school holidays); 3 night weekend \$125; 15 December to 31 January - \$400 per week.

Further details contact - Greg or Sallie Ramsay, 31 MacRobertson St, MAWSON, ACT 2607, phone 6286 1564 or e-mail at greg.ramsay@argel.com.au

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MUDBRICK COTTAGE

Mallacoota

Our mudbrick 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. Please contact Barbara de Bruine (02 - 62583531) for further information.



Silvereye *Zosterops lateralis*
Photo courtesy **Lindsay Hansch**

September and first 2 weeks of December; surveyors can choose a timing in an allotted survey period of 9 days which includes 2 weekends (there is flexibility to go a week either side of this if there is no-one available to do the survey in the allotted period). Surveys take up to 3 hours and for at least the spring and summer surveys, need to be done early in the day when birds are most active. Tuggeranong Hill has 7 sub-sites which are surveyed for 10 minutes each, using a special data sheet developed for the project - abundance is counted within a 50 metre radius plot. The terrain at this site is hilly. You need to know your local birds with ability to recognise the common woodland bird calls. It is crucial to collect data over a long period and the Woodland Project aims to do this; desirably we want someone (or a team of 2) who is/are able to make an ongoing commitment, although we have back up systems for others to fill in occasionally. Someone who lives in the Tuggeranong Valley would find this a convenient survey site. Please contact Jenny Bounds ph 6288 7802 or Julie McGuiness ph 6231 9882 after hours to discuss.

A new Twitchathon adventure: Habitat restoration for the endangered Regent Honeyeater in the Capertee Valley

This year Regent Honeyeaters will enjoy the fruits of fundraising conservation efforts and here's how you can help continue on with this great conservation project.

The Capertee Valley Regent Honeyeater Project was kicked off by Twitchathon money in 1994 and with financial support from a number of different bodies, as well as the hard work of many dedicated volunteers, over 60 000 trees and shrubs have been planted in an effort to restore and enhance habitat for the Regent Honeyeater, and other woodland

birds, in the single-most important breeding area remaining for this enigmatic species.



Hooded Robin *Melanodryas cucullata*
Photo courtesy **Lindsay Hansch**

The Regent Honeyeater Group plans to use some of the funds raised during the 2004 Twitchathon to purchase trailer-mounted tanks and pumps that can supplement those currently generously supplied by the local Fire Brigades. Additional Twitchathon funds will be used to fence sites of high conservation priority as they are identified as well as assist in follow-up maintenance of sites – weeding, fertilising etc.

So, get your 2004 Twitchathon Kit and start forming a team to go birdwatching over this October weekend. You can travel anywhere in NSW and/or the ACT. See how many species of birds your team can find from 3 p.m. Saturday 30 October to 4 p.m. Sunday 31 October 2004. Note the change of time for starting and finishing. In the weeks before this event, show your work colleagues, friends and family the publicity material I forward you in your Twitchathon Kit and gently persuade them to sponsor you so many cents or even dollars for each species your team sees.

There are prizes for the most species seen by three winning teams but also prizes for the most money raised, the rarest bird seen by an individual, a Lucky Twitcher's prize and even some champagne. So don't think you

have to be an A Class birdwatcher - remember it is all about saving an endangered species from extinction. A very small or very large effort by everyone can achieve the most wonderful outcome for this enigmatic species.

Volunteers wanted to help threatened shorebirds 2004/2005

Shorebirds, or waders, are under threat from habitat loss and disturbance globally these threats are affecting migratory shorebirds that migrate to Australia each year. While these threats are of concern and must be addressed through international cooperation there are also serious threats to habitat loss and disturbance of both migratory and endemic shorebirds in Australia, especially in NSW. Conservationist are concerned about the future of many of our threatened species that nest in precarious locations such as our major beaches as well as the future of migratory species that visit Australian wetlands for up to seven months every year.

This summer (2004/2005) a combined force of bird groups, National Parks Service of DEC and many individuals throughout New South Wales will be conducting two major surveys requiring all the help we can get from anyone interested in birds and their conservation. There are two distinct projects, though there will inevitably be some overlap for some species.

Project 1 – Beach Nesting Bird Survey

The NSW Wader Study Group in association with most bird groups in NSW, National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Bird Interest Group Network (BIGnet) and many individuals will be conducting the next Beach Nesting Bird Survey along the entire coast of NSW over

the weekend of 16/17 October 2004. This survey has been conducted every second year since 1994.

Two hundred volunteers needed!

A survey will be carried out over the weekend of 16/17 October 2004 and covers every beach in NSW. This biennial count was initiated in 1994 as an extension of the national Hooded Plover Survey. The main objective is to count Hooded Plovers, Beach Stone-curlew, Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers, Little Terns and Red-capped Plovers and record any nesting activities. However as part of a day at the beach volunteers are encouraged to record other birds of interest including birds of prey and any beach washed birds. What better way to add to the pleasure of walking along a beach of your choice by helping to protect our coast nesting birds?

Project 2 – Adopt an estuary

The second survey is longer term and covers all species of shorebirds (waders) at all of the NSW estuaries. Ideally we are looking for small teams to adopt an estuary or group of estuaries (some estuaries are very small and will have relatively few birds) and count the shorebirds there at least each quarter, monthly if possible, for one year. However one-off counts are useful at any time.

Every participant in either of the surveys will be issued with a kit including a map/maps of the area chosen, simple instructions of how to record the information, suggestions of what to look for, contact details of regional and state coordinators and where to send your completed data sheets.

Information from both surveys will be plotted onto maps and used for conservation and management plans, showing where the threats are, areas that need protecting and lots more information for land managers and conservation agencies.

If you are interested in taking part in

either of these surveys and learning about shorebirds please contact the state coordinator: Phil Straw, NSW Wader Study Group, P.O. Box 2006, Rockdale Delivery Centre, NSW 2216. 02 9597 7765 or email: wadersnsw@optusnet.com.au who will put you in touch with your nearest regional coordinator and arrange for your beach or estuary survey kit to be sent to you.

The **July issue of The Tattler** is now available on the AWSG website www.tasweb.com.au/aws click on The Tattler (newsletter) then on the issue you wish to look at. If you don't have Adobe Reader click on the logo for a free download before opening The Tattler.

Otherwise go direct to www.tasweb.com.au/aws/tattler/tat-40.pdf



Red-capped Plover
Charadrius ruficapillus

Photo courtesy **Rhonda Abbott**

AvIan Whimsy # 23

Lingering with Lyrebirds

It would be most felicitous if you were to be reading this on 5 August, because that is the date, 206 years ago, on which Governor Hunter wrote to Joseph Banks to advise him that he was sending him two lyrebird skins and an egg. It was not long before Banks was knee-deep in dead

lyrebirds, but the egg was another matter.

In fact it was to be 50 years before another one was found – and by then the original one had been lost and forgotten. (Indeed, until some archival research by Alec Chisholm more than 150 years later, the much later find was generally regarded as the first.) Subsequent Sydneysiders proved themselves hopeless at the search and the next plausible description (ie ignoring the accounts of up to 16 eggs in a clutch in a hollow log in summer...) was 46 years later, east of Port Phillip Bay. And it was 56 years from the first collection before another was taken!

It seems extraordinary, but perhaps part of the problem was looking at the wrong time of year. As we now know, Superb Lyrebirds nest in winter. This is in itself pretty amazing, especially given that every lyrebird female is doomed to be a single mum, so the egg is left to cool, while she forages, to temperatures that would seem to be fatal. One spin-off of this is the extraordinarily long (and variable) incubation time of up to 60 days, probably double what we might expect of a bird of similar size. As to why? I've not seen a totally convincing explanation, though the suggestion that it might be to avoid goannas is not bad. Quolls were probably as serious a predator however, and are year-round.

The bird was referred to as a Pheasant for much of the early period of its acquaintance with European Australians – the name of Pheasant's Nest Bridge on the road to Sydney is a relic of that time. ('NSW Bird of Paradise', 'Peacock-wren' and 'Parkinsonian Paradise-bird' sank, strangely, beneath the surface of history's tide.) Its scientific description and associated naming though were matters of considerable debate and conflict, even as late as the 1950s, according to Alec Chisholm's wonderfully researched

1960 classic *The Romance of the Lyrebird*.

It seems unchallenged that the first European illustration was made by a Major-General Thomas Davies, who was also something of a birdo, in 1799. This was in England, from a skin sent by Governor Hunter to Lady Mary Howe (whose dad had a famous island named for him and who was a patron of Hunter). Davies popped over to Mary's for a cuppa (his motives are none of our business, thank you very much) and the subject of the skin popped up, as it would have.

He realised that it was an undescribed species, so he borrowed it, drew it and presented a description to the Linnaean Society of London in November 1800 (one assumes that the wait list for would-be speakers was even longer than COG's). Their editors though were certainly not as efficient as ours', because the description didn't appear in print until 1802. Nonetheless his name—*Menura superba* – (superb mighty-tail!) was adopted long before then and even the doyen himself, John Latham, used Superb Menura as a common name. (That didn't quite catch the public imagination either.)

Subsequently though, Latham very naughtily published it as *Menura novae-hollandiae* and claimed precedence. Chisholm makes the case very convincingly that the claimed 1801 date for this publication was the result of judicious back-dating; sadly he has obviously not convinced those who decide these things for us and who have come down on the side of the establishment, Latham and *M. novae-hollandiae*. It seems clear to me that even if Latham did get into print first, the fact that he used *Menura* was an admission that he knew of Davies' work and was thus being a frightful cheat! Maybe Davies would find some satisfaction in knowing that he 'won' as far as the common name is concerned anyway.

As you've noticed, this has turned out to be much more about lyrebirders than birds, so I'll reserve the right to come back to this wonderful ancient Australian in the future. I might even get to discuss, as invited by David McDonald, the remarkable fact that lyrebirds (and the related scrub-birds) have a syrinx with three pairs of intrinsic muscles. A good time might be when I've understood it.

Now get out there to Tidbinbilla and tell us what's going on!

Ian Fraser ianf@pcug.org.au

GBS Central #4

Here we are at the start of a new GBS Year. Quite a few Charts have been distributed – some by bicycle – but there is still quite a supply here at GBS Central for others who wish to participate in the Survey. There are particular vacancies for observers in the more southerly parts of Tuggeranong and anywhere in Gunghalin!

Interestingly, after Year 22 there are 12 sites which had reported for at least 20 years: a magnificent achievement for those contributors. It's pleasing to note that this group are well represented in those who completed year 23 and are starting up again for the new year.



Eastern Yellow Robin

Eopsaltria australis

Photo courtesy **Lindsay Hansch**

A flood of completed Charts is expected **soon**. If you have a Chart for 2003 – 2004 please do your normal checking processes and get it to me as soon as possible: the computing processes are not that complex but some quality control checks do have to be applied before the data is added to the data base. The indefatigable Kay Hahne has commenced data entry, with the very great appreciation of the coordinator. Completing the GBS data base is one of the crucial tasks that have to be done before work can commence on preparing the Annual Bird Report.

As part of your checks, could you please ensure that any reports of Unusual Birds have been presented for consideration by the Rarities Panel. The appropriate (very simple) form is available at meetings and on the website at <http://canberrabirds.org.au/unusuals.htm>.

Discussions are imminent about how the GBS can assist Chris Tidemann with his project to remove the rats-with-wings (RAOU code 998) from our midst. More will follow on this cooperation.

Early birds for year 24 were a mixed bunch. Some disquiet was evident from two observers that their early entries were spotted turtle doves, in one case copulating. Better news came with a white-breasted sea-eagle in one case and Australian king-parrot in another. It was a particular pleasure to hear that our President's first birds were seen at his site in Chapman: it is very good to know that he is now back there after the fires. With 20 species in the first week – including breeding records for crested pigeon and Australian magpie- the bird life is still pretty good.

After 23 completed years the time is due for a thorough review of the GBS. This should be a root and branch (beak-to-vent?) investigation and will be discussed initially at a

forthcoming Committee Meeting. I (and probably others) will disseminate more information as it becomes available.

Best Regards, and please send in your completed Charts as soon as possible. As with the new forms I'm very willing to pick them up from folk who can't make it to meetings.

Martin Butterfield

Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio albus*

Photo courtesy **Martin Butterfield**



Next newsletter

SEPTEMBER deadline
Wednesday 25 August 2004

Please send updates, articles,
advertisements etcetera to
Editors *Gang-gang*
gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au
or send 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. Print photographs with or without articles are encouraged and welcomed.

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Lia Battison and helpers

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

COG membership

2004-2005 membership: Individuals, families and institutions: \$35. school students (under 18): \$17.50.

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cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au

Office volunteers are not in attendance for regular opening hours. Members access by prior arrangement.

COG E-mail Discussion List

COG has an email announcement and discussion list for members and friends of COG: 'Canberra Birds'.

Join the list by sending an empty email message to canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au.

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Gang-gang

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