



Gang-gang

December 2003

News letter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

DECEMBER MEETING

“Christmas Party”

Wednesday 10 December

Sausage Sizzle 6-8pm
Black Mountain Peninsula

DETAILS PAGE 3

JANUARY MEETING

“QUIZ NIGHT”

Wednesday 14 January

CSIRO Sustainable
Ecosystems Gungahlin

DETAILS PAGE 4

FROM YOUR COMMITTEE

From your new President

When Barry Baker approached me in June to take over the presidency of COG in June, I was not in a position to agree. However, after much consideration I decided to nominate at the time of the AGM. There were a number of reasons for this, one is that I feel that COG is a great organisation which I have enjoyed being a member of for over 25 years and secondly that I feel I have something to contribute to this position.

While I was the COG secretary in the late 80s, and have been formally on the committee for the past year in this cycle, I feel I still have a number of things to learn about the vast number of matters with which COG is, or potentially can be involved, as is clear from the conservation report in this Gang-gang. I propose to use the Christmas/New Year period to gain a better understanding of the major issues.

One thing that I will be is a much more visible COG president, particularly to the membership. One of my aims while president will be to get to know as many members as possible, hopefully all. I already know many of you personally, particularly through the outings program. While I have a scientific background I am not a professional ornithologist, so please don't feel intimidated and let me know what you like about COG, what you don't like and what you think can be improved.

As a self-confessed “bird tragic” one of my aims will be to share with all members the sheer pleasure that watching and studying birds has given me for over the past 25 years. I would very much like to make every member feel comfortable and at home with COG, from those who are only just beginning to those who watch birds for a living. We have a big membership and there are many different aspects for

members to become involved with, from monthly meetings, to outings and more formal surveys. However, let's not overlook the social aspects, part of the reason COG has been successful over the years is that people from different backgrounds and with different views can get together and have a common bond through enjoying bird watching.

I am very fortunate in having been able to retain a core of very experienced committee members together with 2 new ones. However, there are still up to 2 vacancies on the committee, which does need some more fresh faces and new blood. If you are interested please contact me. In particular we are looking for people who have some spare time and are prepared to do a specific job after a period of familiarisation.

Jack Holland

From the COMMITTEE MEETING 19 NOVEMBER 2003

The new committee

At the AGM, the following officebearers were elected for the coming year:

Jack Holland (President); Nicki Taws (Vice-President); Barbara Allan (Secretary); and Joan Lipscombe (Treasurer). Jenny Bounds, Sue Lashko, David McDonald, Julie McGuinness, Harvey Perkins, David Rees, Tanya Rough and Alan Thomas were elected as Committee members. The Committee will continue to meet in the Environment Centre at 6pm on the Wednesday following the COG

general meeting.

Field trips

The field trips program for 2004 is almost finalised and will be published with the February *Gang-gang* but Jack would still welcome suggestions and offers, particularly for Easter 2004. Contact him on 6288 7840 (ah).

Missing Gang-gangs

The Committee apologises profusely to those members who failed to receive their electronic copy of *Gang-gang* before the November meeting. Steps have been put in place to ensure its dissemination in future, should Alastair be stuck at sea again.

Atlassing in fire-affected areas

Steps are being taken to organise with Environment ACT an ongoing program of surveying the avifauna of selected sites to monitor post-fire recovery. Further details will be notified in future issues of *Gang-gang*.

Conservation issues

Members will be aware that the ACT Government has recently issued two key documents: *Shaping our Territory*, on non-urban land use; and a draft spatial plan. Copies are available for perusal at any public library. Julie McGuinness (6231 9882 ah) and Jenny Bounds (6288 7802 ah) will draft a COG response to the latter and would welcome your input. Julie and Jenny have also provided input to the Conservation Council's options paper on cat control in Gungahlin suburbs near nature reserves and would welcome feedback on that and any other ACT conservation issues.

COG office

The office in the Griffin Centre is now open on Tuesday mornings from 10-12:30 approx, or at other times by arrangement (contact Barbara on 6254 6520). Extensive roadworks are underway outside and conditions are quite noisy at the moment, however.

Barbara Allan, Secretary

Field Trip Reports

East O'Malley – Sunday 9 November 2003

On 9 November Dick Schodde led a dozen COG members on a walk in "East O'Malley". This began spectacularly with about 40 **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos** flying and feeding excitedly in the gardens of Callemonda Rise, some only a few metres from the spectators. The birds were stripping bark from acacias, and feeding on young hakeas.

Nearby a pair of **Noisy Friarbirds** were completing a nest in a street tree.

In the eastern hectare of 'O'Malley', it was decided to stroll towards an area of regrowth near the erosion gully, where nesting activity was intensive. In that area of about one hectare we noted nesting or other breeding activity by the following species:

Little Eagle

Rufous Whistler

Willy Wagtail

Red-browed Finch

Double-barred Finch

White-throated Gerygone

Leaden Flycatcher

White-winged Triller

Crimson Rosella
Galah
Dusky Woodswallow
Common Myna



Little Eagle (*hieraaetus morphnoides*)

Photo courtesy Geoffrey Dabb

Other species found in the vicinity included **Brown-headed Honeyeater, Dollarbird, Grey Butcherbird and nesting Noisy Miners.**

This was a great walk for the thinking birdwatcher. Dick discussed with the little group the reasons why the old Blakely's Red Gums had prospered in the area and their importance to the bird attractiveness of 'the hectare'. It was found that beyond that particular hotspot areas of less-dense growth contained no exceptional numbers of birds. The old farm dam produced not much beyond a spectacularly aggressive

December Meeting



6-8 pm

Wednesday 10 December 2003

“COG Christmas Party”

Sausage sizzle at Black Mountain Peninsula

We expect to use the same barbecue area as last year (from the main road into the Peninsula, turn right at the second side street, about 400 metres along). But the same site cannot be guaranteed, so just follow the COG signs.

Sausages, bread and drinks supplied

Bring any or all of the following:
a picnic table, chairs, plates and glasses,
salads or desserts to share. Insect repellent
and sunscreen might be called for;
and binoculars for the bitterns.

Contributions: \$4 a head for food and soft drinks;
\$6 a head for food, wine, beer
(free for members' children under 12)

Lucky ticket prize and prizes for the best 'birdy' T-shirt

*Offers of help to assist
with food and drink purchasing,
setting up etc, to
Jenny Bounds 6288 7802 (ah).*

You'd be Cuckoo to miss it!

January 2004 Meeting

8 pm

Wednesday
14 January 2004

"Quiz night"

Instead of the usual members' night, we have opted this time for another quiz night, hosted by Mark Clayton at

CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems at Gungahlin.

CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems is located on the Barton Highway, however there is no direct access from the highway. Entrance to the site is from Bellenden Street (a "no through road"). Parking is available immediately after the entrance gate or in the carparks near reception. Activities will take place in the "Caughley Building" [the brick building you see as you come in the back gate], adjacent to the old stone homestead.

Please be on site by 7:50 pm for an 8:00 pm start. And please bring a pen or pencil.

Everyone who has participated in one of Mark's quizzes will know what fun they are, and how instructional as well. So start boning up on your natural history books and *Australiana* and come along for an entertaining evening. Bring your own team if you wish, or we'll share out the 'experts' on the night.

Light refreshments served afterwards.

Don't miss it!

nesting cockatoo.

Dick's insights on the habitat features of the area were appreciated by the group. These included his drawing attention to signs of how the **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos** were using the general area. One pair of these lingered in the trees near promising hollows, and there were indications of bark-stripping, some at ground level.

Geoffrey Dabb

CAMPBELL PARK; SUNDAY 16 NOVEMBER 2003 – MORNING NEST WORKSHOP

Fifteen of us gathered at Campbell Park for an informative and enjoyable nest workshop. The leaders were Jack Holland and Janet Gardner.

Jack gave us an introduction to the types of bird nests. Jack's notes summarized 10 basic nest types, listed *Birds Australia Atlas* criteria for confirmed breeding and named his sources. A separate sheet gave us some other facts related to breeding.

Janet Gardner's familiarity with the woodland enabled us to see many nests. Her knowledge was supplemented with some sharp observations from the group and two other COG members who were out with their cameras.

Five of Jack's 10 basic nest types were seen.

Janet took us to two ground level **roofed nests of the Superb Fairy-wren**. One was protected by a huge cage, the bird still hatching. The second nest had been predated. We were able to

feel the lightness and see the material – grass stems and the softest fur lining of maybe rabbit and kangaroo. Janet showed us a **Speckled Warbler's domed nest**. It was built in a slight hollow in the ground at the base of a low dense plant. Janet also showed us another predated **roofed nest of the Yellow-rumped Thornbill**. It was well camouflaged in a Native Cherry. The open cup upper false nest was torn. The lower true nest chamber was still intact but parrot feathers were visible. Only a metre away in the same tree was another predated **domed nest**. **Crimson Rosellas** were active at nest hollows. **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes** and **White-winged Trillers** were seen at small **saucer-shaped nests** blended into forks on horizontal branches. An **Australian Magpie's stick nest** was visited by a female to feed a young bird. A **Noisy Friarbird's cup nest** was hanging at the end of a limb above the track. **Varied Sitellas**, with building material, made busy downward journeys increasing the height of their cone-shaped nest in a tree fork. Male and female **Leaden Flycatchers** were active on a well-camouflaged small nest on a horizontal branch. A **Willy Wagtail** was nesting at shoulder height in its distinctive small cup. The large **mud nest of the White-winged Chough** was out on a horizontal branch but we saw no activity.

Other birds heard and seen included **Sacred Kingfisher**, **Laughing Kookaburra**, **Dollarbird**, **Rainbow Bee-eater**, **White-winged Triller**, **Olive Whistler**, and a very young Shrike-thrush with an adult. Both forms of **Gerygone** were heard.



Mistletoebird (*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*)
excreting berry.
Photo courtesy Geoffrey Dabb

Other birds included the **Noisy Miner**, the **Mistletoebird**, the **Olive-backed Oriole**, **Little Ravens** and **Australian Ravens** – and **Common Mynas**.

Thank you to Jack and Janet for such a fascinating morning.

Pat Williams

NAAS VALLEY

21 to 23 November 2003

Seven members joined me to re-visit sites COG surveyed last in 1999, along the Naas Valley track, thorough Namadgi National Park to Mt Clear. We based ourselves in comfortable farmhouse accommodation at Caloola Farm at the head of the trail, a most convenient base.

Unfortunately, after many dry and warm weeks, the weekend of wet weather starting on Friday pm with heavy thunderstorms, plus the fact that much of the trail had been recently graded and was not able to be driven on in the wet due to likely damage, meant we could not do the drive down the

trail. There was virtually continuous rain and low cloud for most of the weekend in the valley, with more than 2 inches of rain on Saturday, and it was still raining when we got up on Sunday. Most of the group returned home on Saturday

afternoon when it was clear we would not be able to drive down through the park. Those of us left enjoyed a gourmet curry dinner with sambals and other trimmings on Saturday night, around the cosy fire in the house.

Despite the conditions, a couple of people donned wet weather gear, braved the rain and walked into the park from the north, recording quite a few birds on the park edge including 3 **Brown Treecreepers** (they are usually in this area) and a **Scarlet Robin**. Many bird sightings occurred from the house verandah and on brief forays around the property when the rain reduced to a light drizzle (it never really stopped). On Saturday, just before lunch, I heard a distant call like a **Painted Honeyeater**, at first dismissing this as just my ears getting "twitchy", but the calls continued and I rounded up the rest of the group and we went on a search. We were finally rewarded with a male Painted Honeyeater, not far from the homestead, flying between the trees and perching high on dead limbs, calling frequently - this was a first sighting of this species for several people. The bird flew off a long way and we did not hear or see it again on the weekend; there

was plenty of mistletoe around the property.

We ended up with a list of 58 species for the weekend in and around Caloola and further south to the park edge, including **Brush Cuckoo** and **Peaceful Dove** as well as the Painted Honeyeater (above), and plenty of the other birds you usually have around this time of year, like Rainbow Bee-eaters, and various small honeyeaters. On the last trip down the trail in 1999, COG recorded 53 species of birds. We did not see Hooded Robins or Diamond Firetails on the recent weekend, but they are usually recorded around this area in the more open parts. It was good to see how well the area is recovering from the bushfires which burned the ridges and spotted into the valley, but did not extensively damage trees in the open valley. Thanks to Sue Lashko, Sue Edgar, Stuart Rae, Ruth Parker, Philip Veerman, Noel and Ethel Luff for their participation.

Jenny Bounds

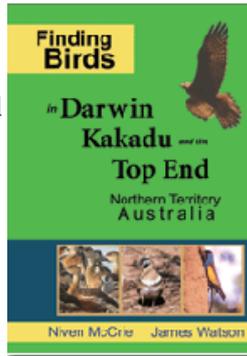


Australian King Parrots (*Alisterus scapularis*) on bird feeder. Photo courtesy Martin Butterfield

COG SALES

- **Finding Birds in Darwin, Kakadu and Top End** by Niven McCrie and James Watson. \$24.00.
- **The Birds of Prey of Australia Field Guide** by Stephen Debus, \$12.50 (Special Price)
- **Messant Calenders 2004, "Birds of Australia" and/or "Australian Wildflowers", \$8.00.**
- **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 Rottnest Island – by Denis Saunders & Parry de Rebeira - \$15.00**
- **Birds of Rottnest 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 - \$27.00**
- **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**
- **Field Guide to the Birds of Australia** by Pizzey and Knight - \$35.00
- **COG Birds of Canberra Gardens - \$25.00**
- **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.



Future Field Trips

TSR 60/Mountain Creek Road; Sunday 7 December 2003 – Morning outing

The penultimate COG outing for 2004 will be to this popular spot to the NW of Canberra. While the main focus will be to observe the birds that live in TSR 60, a couple of other TSRs and local dams will also be visited. Meet David McDonald [6231 8904 or email David.McDonald@gpo.com.au] at the large dam the Uriarra Homestead on the corner of Brindabella and Uriarra Roads at 8 am for this morning outing. Bring a telescope if you have one, and morning tea.

East Basin/Molonglo River; Sunday 14 December 2003 – Electric Boat cruise

An opportunity has arisen for a further cruise on the upper parts of Lake Burley Griffin and the adjacent Molonglo River on the all electric "E.L. Cygnet". As members will be aware this boat allows both a quiet approach as well as access to areas normally difficult to get to. The main focus will be to view the nesting **Australian Darters and Little Pied Cormorants**, but the area is also rich in other waterbirds and with the continuing dry weather a large variety should be seen. The boat trip will last about 2 hours and will cost \$20, payable in cash on boarding.

Please book your place on the boat with Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@ea.gov.au). As the boat takes a maximum of 10

passengers there will be an early and late shift, one at 7 am and the second at 9 am. With some pre-publicity given at the November COG meeting etc, the early boat is filling up fast. The point of departure will be from the Kingston Boat Harbour as previously (Beaumont St/Mundaring Drive, N1 on Map 69 of the Yellow Pages). However, due to the Kingston Foreshore building activity this will need to be accessed from the opposite end, namely via Cunningham St, The Causeway and the SE end of Mundaring Drive – as in the past please ignore any road closed signs.

No Wednesday walk in December

Due to the closeness to Christmas there will be no walk organised for this date. The next mid-week walk will be on Wednesday 18 February 2004 – details will be in the February *Gang-gang*.



Rose Robin (*Petroica rodinogaster*)

Photo courtesy Martin Butterfield

Black Mountain - Aranda Bushland; Saturday 17 January 2004– Late evening stroll; post-breeding boobooks

Members will recall Jerry Olsen's fascinating presentation to COG a couple of years ago on the Southern Boobooks that he has studied nesting in the Aranda bushland area over the past few years. He has now agreed to take a limited number of COG members to view the post-breeding activities of these birds in this area. This will entail a couple of hours walk after the sun sets. Wear strong walking boots and take a torch.

Due to the potential sensitivity, numbers will be strictly limited to 10 participants, on a first in first served basis. To reserve your place please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@ea.gov.au), before 24 December or after 9 January. Details of where and when to meet will be provided to participants closer to the day.

Jerrabomberra Wetlands; Sunday 8 February 2004– Morning waterbirds

A regular summer outing is a visit to one of the most popular and best birding spots in Canberra. With the lingering drought a number of **very interesting species** such as terns and the rarer ducks continue to be seen here. So who knows what will turn up. Meet at the carpark off Dairy Road at 7.30 am for the morning's outing. We will be visiting both Kelly's Swamp and the adjacent Fyshwick sewerage ponds. The latter in particular is very open, so

if it is going to be hot don't forget to bring a hat, sunscreen and plenty of water to drink (plus morning tea).

A leader is needed for this outing. If you can help please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au).

Croajingalong National Park 13-16 February 2004 - Extended weekend camp-out

COG is venturing south of the border for a quiet late summer camp-out after the main holiday period. Thurra River campsite is about 320 km easy drive south of Canberra via Cooma, Bombala and Cann River. This is a wonderfully wild area with a variety of habitats and hopefully we'll find many of the 306 species seen in the Park. New members and beginners are particularly welcome and there are plenty of lovely walks, vistas, coastal history etc if you or yours do not want to peer through binoculars all weekend. Option to return via Errinundra NP. For the information kit please contact Joan & Trevor Lipscombe on 6 2 6 2 7 9 7 5 or TrevorLipscombe@bigpond.com.au

Longer trips

Thredbo; Canberra Day Long Weekend 13-15 March 2004

This visit to Thredbo over the Canberra Day Long Weekend on 13-15 March 2004 is based on our experience with the Kosciblitzy surveys. It will allow members to

enjoy the early autumn atmosphere in Australia's highest country and also to see the birds that occur there. In particular it's one of the more accessible places close to Canberra where Pink Robins and Olive Whistlers can be reliably seen. There are also a number of walks of varying difficulty for members to enjoy.

As for the Kosciuszko surveys it is proposed we will stay at Boali Lodge and enjoy Michelle's legendary hospitality. We've been pencilled for a maximum of about 20 people, with the option of full board or bed and breakfast. The cost for the former is \$90 for the first night reducing to \$75 for the second (\$165 for 2 nights), and for the latter is \$105 for 2 nights (\$60/45 per night). A \$6 COG admin fee will need to be added to each.

If you're interested please register with Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au) by 17 December as a firm booking needs to be made before Christmas. A \$25 deposit should be paid within one month of booking, to secure your spot on this outing. Please also indicate your preference for full board (recommended) or B/B only.

COG GOES

PLAINS-WANDERING TO THE MALLEE WITH EMU TOURS Sunday 28 March to Sunday 4 April 2004

This outing has been advertised 3 times. As there has been no indication from any member that they are intending to participate, it has been **cancelled**. Please note that it will not be advertised to

Emu Tour's wider clientele as previously advised.

DRAFT FIELD TRIPS PROGRAM FOR 2004

I have had little if any feedback or comment on the draft published in the November *Gang-gang*.

As noted then the program is still incomplete as there are still some gaps, particularly in winter - so if you have a favourite spot/trip that you think should be included, or where you think COG should go to again, or have any reasonable suggestion, there is still the opportunity to do so. Thanks to Joan and Trevor Lipscombe for suggesting and offering to organise the Croajingalong camp-out advertised above - this will be a top outing.

I have also had no further feedback concerning the Easter long weekend. As noted last month, in 2000 COG went to a place at Tullamore (NW of Parkes, 360 km drive) which has been suggested again. It is available and while it comes strongly recommended we would need a leader. It would either be a bring everything camp on one property, or we could use the shearers' quarters/toilets at the property across the road. Mughorn Gap, where COG has also been in the past, has been suggested as an alternative. Again a leader would be needed. Other suggestions are also welcomed.

As indicated, leaders are still needed for a number of outings. If you can help with these or have any comments or offers of a place

to go and/or lead, please let Jack Holland know (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au) by 17 December. The final program will be published with the February 2004 *Gang-gang*, which will be available late January.

Other surveys/ Activities of Interest to COG Members

COWRA WOODLAND SURVEY

6-7 DECEMBER 2003

The next Cowra Woodland survey will be held over the weekend of 6-7 December. If you are interested in participating please contact Sue Proust on thebradybunch8@bigpond.com.

EARLY MORNING WALKS DURING AUSTRALIAN ORNITHOLOGICAL CONFERENCE (AOC)

In conjunction with the 2nd Australasian Ornithological Conference (AOC), which will be held in December at the ANU, COG is organising some early morning walks in the Australian National Botanic Gardens (ANBG) and the ANU. These will run from about 6.30 am for round 90 minutes, and are proposed for the ANBG on the mornings of 11 (Thursday) and 13 (Saturday) December and for the ANU on Friday 12 December.

I am looking for assistance to help lead these walks and am in particular interested in volunteers who know the ANBG/ANU well,

including those who may have early morning access the ANBG. As small groups of not more than 10 are proposed, it is expected that several leaders will be needed each day. A number of people have agreed to help, but a few more are needed. If you can help please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au).

INVITATION - BIRDS OF THE ARCTIC TUNDRA – A LINK WITH AUSTRALIA

at

**Manning Clark Centre,
Australian National University**

At 6:30 pm (for 7:00pm start) on Saturday 13th December a special presentation “Birds of the Arctic Tundra – a link with Australia” has been organised as a lead up to the Australasian Shorebird Conference. Dr Bob Gill from the US National Parks Service, Alaska and Dr Evgeny Syroechkovski from the Russian Academy of Science will give us an insight into the birds of the Arctic tundra with some spectacular images of the Arctic and its birds. The high Arctic regions of Siberia and Alaska are where birds arrive, nest and rear their young and get out again in two months in the short snow free period of the high Arctic.

Admission is free to delegates of the Australian Shorebird Conference and \$5 per person for members of birds clubs and the public. As seats are limited you are invited to register ASAP by contacting Barbara Allan 02 6254 6 5 2 0 or email: allanbm@ozemail.com.au.

To register for the Australasian Shorebird Conference, Sunday and Monday 14/15 December visit our website at www.tasweb.com.au/awsg/ or contact Barbara (Canberra) or Phil Straw (Sydney), pstraw@optusnet.com.au or tel: 02 9597 7765.

WATERBIRD IDENTIFICATION AND MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP

20-21 FEBRUARY 2004.

Sydney Olympic Park Authority (SOPA) is presenting this 2-day practical workshop on Wetland Restoration and Management. On 20-21 February 2004 you will learn about various approaches and methods of rehabilitating and restoring waterbird habitats, with special emphasis on wader habitats.

Several site tours and case studies will expose you to practical problems and successful solutions. Attention is given to hands-on training and education in the assessment, planning, restoration, monitoring, research and management of natural and man made wetlands. Emphasis is placed on practical experiences of successful repair and restoration of wetlands in Sydney Olympic Park and elsewhere. Top experts in their relevant fields will deliver these high quality tutorials.

Who should attend? Bird lovers, wetlands and catchments technicians, managers, planners, consultants, ecologists, volunteers, coast and river carers, engineers, students, scientists, rangers and conservationists.

Participants will be expected to have some knowledge of waterbirds, wetlands and habitat management issues. Please bring a Field Guide, a pair of binoculars and gumboots and wet gear, if you have them.

Price: \$396 for 2-day workshop, lunch and Workshop Notes.

For further information and Bookings please contact Parklands Bookings Coordinator on: Ph: 612- 9714 7509 or for a Registration Form contact Tanya Rough (COG) by email at Rough.Boden@apex.net.au or at home by phone 61610151.

Results of the 2003 NSW & ACT Twitchathon

Wow! The end of another truly marvellous Twitchathon! Who didn't enjoy it?! Everyone was so enthusiastic! Some of us sure needed that glass of champagne after the devastating thunderstorm, buckets of rain down the south coast, surprises and disappointments! How I admire the tenacity of all teams to persevere, no matter what! There is no doubt that all teams are true birding believers!

Thank you everyone for making it such a wonderful Twitchathon. The teams' dedication to the task at hand is really remarkable. As coordinator, the enthusiasm shown is so rewarding – for no matter what category teams enter the event, however many species seen or not seen by a team, everyone has made such a fantastic contribution to the conservation of our birds in the Murray catchment – what greater joy is that!

There were, in all, 40 teams – 10 Main Race, 20 Champagne Race, 6 Little Curlews (children under 10 yrs) and 4 Dollarbirds (children 11-16 yrs). Don't the champagners enjoy the twitching experience as well as

their champagne! I so enjoyed hearing about friends and family members having a great birding and social weekend – making it a most enjoyable time for everyone, including children.

Last year over \$10,528 was raised for the Cowra Woodland Bird Program – what will be raised this year for a bird monitoring program in the Murray catchment and what outcomes will there be for our Murray woodland birds after your great achievement? It can be nothing less than complete success after your fantastic efforts!

Firstly, I list the NSW/ACT Twitchathon results as I know you are all waiting!

Main Race

Whacked Out Woodswallows 222 (originally rung in at 221 - first prize)
Hunter Thickheads 205 (2nd prize)
Hunter Home Brewers 203 (3rd prize)
Rustle Crows 200 (original result rung in at 199. Team rang later advising of re-count.)

Grey Toilet Thrushes 185

Wandering Tattlers 183

Cheerful Drongoes 182

Central Coast Champions 179

Dodgy Drongos 164

Off the Rails 135

Champagne Race

Rylstone Curlews 139 (original result rung in at 136. Team rang in later advising of re-count)

Letsticum foradae 139 - (we'll see what we can do to stretch the purchased champagne between the two winners!!)

Eastern Whiplashes 135

Twitched Off 135

Warbled Specklers 120

Spineless Spinebills 118 (team experienced heavy rain for most of the event and twitched in their car!)

Champagne Shriketits110

Wooden Spoonbills 93

Liar Birders 92

Wonga Wonga Wanderers 91

Matheson Mopokes 89

Steamed Chats 86

Just Watching 86

Mickey Mouse Birders 73

Red faced Parrots 70

Counting Crows 61

Untwitchables, The 56

Chippa-Chirpies 50?

Mad Magpies 42

Little Curlews (under 10 yrs)

Ugly Ospreys 71

Weston Wagtails 62

Golden Whistlers 54

Beautiful Beeaters 28

White Tigers 25

Bird Tigers TBA

Dollarbirds (over 10-16 yrs)

Plover Lovers 120

Lorikeets 45

Magnificent Macaws TBA

Scarlet Robins TBA

Frances Czwalinna

NSW & ACT Twitchathon

Coordinator

Bird Conservation Issues

Brown Treecreeper re- discovered at East Gungahlin

One of the great excitements for me in birdwatching, indeed any natural history pursuit, is finding something unexpected. That is exactly what happened on 30 October when, with a small group of Conservation Council representatives on a brief inspection of this new reserve, I found a Brown Treecreeper calling stridently right on the southern boundary. Gooroo is still leasehold land, in East Gungahlin running along the ACT/NSW border between the Mulligan's Flat Reserve and the Federal Highway, but should be resumed within months.

Brown Treecreepers and Hooded Robins and several other declining woodland birds are intended to be protected in large reserves like Gooroo and Mulligan's Flat. While a small number of Hooded Robins are still in that woodland complex,

unfortunately, the Brown Treecreeper has disappeared from Mulligan's Flat in recent years, and similarly has not been recorded on bird surveys in the northern area of Gooroo for around the same time - we don't know exactly why they have declined and almost gone from these very large woodland remnants. Both bird species are listed as vulnerable under ACT threatened species legislation and both are still declining generally in our region.

So, while this discovery of one Brown Treecreeper at the southern end of Gooroo is very exciting news, it also concerns me that the location the bird was found in is very close to the proposed Horse Park Drive major arterial road now being built and adjacent to an area proposed for housing in future - Brown Treecreepers are known to be intolerant of close human settlement and disturbance.

The Gooroo landscape is rather different to Mulligan's Flat Reserve, being progressively more hilly as you go south along the ACT/NSW border and more cleared and open in the southern part where grazing has been more intense. There are still some very old Yellow Box (*Eucalyptus melliodora*) and Blakely's Red Gum (*E. blakelyi*) trees and some younger trees and saplings in patches there. The tree cover generally gets more dense as you go north with some open areas which have been regularly grazed paddocks. There are patches of the noxious Serrated Tussock grass in the southern part, which have been identified for attention.

Our visit to Gooroo included stopping at some soaks in drainage lines leading to dams, where sundews (*Drosera peltata*) were abundant as well as a few plants of Swamp Isotome (*Isotoma fluviatilis*), a pretty bluish perennial in the lobelia family. Billy Buttons (*Craspedia variabilis*) and Bulbine Lillies (*Bulbine bulbosa*) were also common in patches. We



Brown Treecreeper (*Climacteris picumnus*) Photo courtesy Helen Fallow

went through a stunning area of secondary grassland on a gentle slope on the western side of the northern part of the reserve, which has fortunately been included in the reserve. Secondary grassland is an area where the woodland trees have been largely removed but there is a substantial native grass layer or native understorey remaining. With the recent rain, there were a number of species in flower, including Creamy Candles (*Stackhousia monogyna*), and emerging plants of Blue Devil (*Eryngium rostratum*) in the carrot family which has a spectacular metallic blue mature foliage and flower heads like small spiky sputniks - these look stunning en masse in summer. There were lots of other interesting plants around which we looked at, including many native grasses, but too many to keep in my head, as well as listen for birds calling. This open grassland area was certainly a highlight for all of us on the trip.

The staff at Environment ACT's Wildlife and Monitoring Unit are to be congratulated for their on ground survey work of plants, reptiles etc, which assisted in ensuring much of the Gooroo area has been reserved.

Records of COG which has conducted bird surveys at Mulligan's Flat and in the northern area of Gooroo have also been important data.

Yellow Box/Red Gum woodlands, which are found at Gooroo and Mulligan's Flat, are listed as one of Australia's most endangered ecological communities. Only a fraction, less than 10%, of the original woodlands are left and only a couple of thousand hectares are protected in reserves. The prognosis for many of the plants, birds, reptiles and other animals dependent on this community is grim, unless actions are taken to stop the destruction of remaining woodlands and more biodiversity conservation programs are implemented.

While the addition of the several Gooroo leaseholds to reserve is very pleasing, there are concerns about the extent of future urban settlement in Gungahlin which, under current plans, eventually will abut both these reserves and put more pressure on the threatened wildlife and ecosystems there. I and others would like to see Gungahlin development scaled down and the remaining remnant woodlands there preserved instead of being cleared for future housing. There are other opportunities now for

urban areas to be considered in some of the burned pine plantations, now cleared after the fires and currently ecologically useless. There are also some edge issues with the boundaries of Gooroo, (and Mulligan's Flat where it joins Gooroo); we would like to see the edges more rounded so there are minimal "edge" effects from urban pockets cutting into the reserve. Through the Conservation Council these issues will continue to be raised with the ACT Government.

Jenny Bounds

CONSERVATION OFFICER'S REPORT

The new Committee has decided to have two conservation officers this year - Jenny Bounds and Julie McGuinness will continue to advocate to the ACT Government on behalf of the region's birds. This is a reflection not only of the interests of Jenny and myself, but also of the continuing hefty workload on conservation matters.

COG remains very concerned about the future of remaining Yellow Box/Red Gum woodlands in the ACT, and the two resident, threatened birds, the Brown Treecreeper and Hooded Robin that continue to decline. This is against a background of Government decisions to develop remaining areas containing woodlands such as East O'Malley, to continue with full scale development in Gungahlin which will destroy much remaining woodland there and impact on the reserves adjacent to housing, and options to develop in the future the Molonglo Valley and Kowen Forest for greenfields housing as raised in the recently released 'Draft ACT Spatial Plan'. This document raises the possibility of a human population in the Canberra/Queanbeyan area of up to half a million by 2032 - how much room will be left for our declining bird species by then?

A number of COG email list members have mentioned with disquiet current tree and other vegetation clearance around town in the Government's attempts to make Canberra "bushfire-ready" this summer. COG made representations to Environment Minister Jon Stanhope a couple of months back regarding the intemperate treatment of a patch of remnant Broad-leaved Peppermint with (then) very good understorey at Fisher Parkland, as well as the subsequent proposal, with minimal community consultation, to remove many trees on Oakey Hill. Our correspondence has not yet been answered.

Whilst COG has no wish to frustrate the Canberra community's legitimate desire for reducing bushfire risk to property at the urban edge, it seems to us that some vegetation management activities appear over the top with little attempt to stage the thinning or vegetation removal over a reasonable period of time, or to minimise the effects on native plants and animals in a region that has already lost a lot of habitat.

If COG members feel strongly that a particular vegetation management activity is having or will have a detrimental effect on our birds, please write a letter to Jon Stanhope about it, or give his office a ring on 6205 0104. Jenny and I, as after-hours volunteers, can only do so much.

The times they are a changing! COG had hoped that the land now freed from pines would take the development pressure off some of our remaining woodland – but this will not happen unless the Canberra Community rallies to the defence of these precious woodland remnants. If you are interested in how the Bush Capital will look in 20-30 years time, pick up a copy of the Draft ACT Spatial Plan document (available from public libraries or download from www.actpla.act.gov.au/), and let the powers that be know your views.

HIDEAWAY FOR TWO!

Guerilla Bay / Burrewarra Point

Lovely, clean and quiet self contained 1 bedroom flat amid trees, own courtyard and garden, adjacent Burrewarra Point clifftop reserve. Close unspoiled walks, beaches. Over 120 bird species seen in the local area, half from the property and lots of other interesting fauna and flora. Reasonable rates. Contact Joan and Trevor Lipscombe 02 6262 7975.

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 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@argay.com.au

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.

The document is out for public consultation until 17th December.

Julie McGuiness

Options Paper for control of Domestic Cats in suburbs abutting Mulligans Flat and Gooroo Nature Reserves

On 24 November, the Conservation Council of the South-east Region and Canberra released an options paper submitted to the ACT Government, about the control of domestic cats in the new suburbs of Forde and Bonner abutting Mulligan's Flat and Gooroo reserves, to ensure the sustainable populations of threatened birds like the Brown Treecreeper and Hooded Robin and other sensitive fauna. COG, through Jenny Bounds and Julie McGuiness, had input to the paper through a working party of various community groups and Environment ACT and ACT Planning and Land Authority officials. There was good media interest in the proposals and constructive discussion on talk back radio when the paper was released.

Members are encouraged to read the paper at www.environment.act.gov.au. The Government will now consider the measures proposed and have said it will make some announcement in the New Year.

AvIan Whimsy # 16 Ruminating on Robins

No good reason really; I sort of played 'Spin the Bottle' inside my brain and it came to rest pointing to 'robins'. I've no idea of the story yet, but there's always one (or more) if we look. Actually, before I wander off down that track and become lost to sight,

please feel free to suggest a topic for future Whimsies – there are plenty of stories out there and telling them is often easier than thinking of one to share. This of course pre-supposes that anyone’s actually reading this...

After decades of ornithological cultural cringe, when we assumed that all Australian birds had to be some sort of Northern Hemisphere derivative, we have finally agreed that our robins are not an old world flycatcher (family Muscicapidae) or a Monarch flycatcher, but a dinky di, ancient Australian family. They seem to have arisen during the Tertiary (which ended some 24 million years ago) at about the same time as the honeyeaters. The ancestral robin specialised in perching-and-pouncing to take its prey.

Today’s Australian robins are split equally (ten each) between rainforest-wet eucalypt forest specialists, and dwellers of open forests and woodlands. Of these, five are substantially inland, semi-arid species. There is also one which is exclusively a mangrove species; I’m very fond of Mangrove Robins, though I’ll always associate them with sandfly bites!



Flame Robin (*Petroica phoenicea*)
Photo courtesy Ian Fraser

The red-breasted Australian robins, of the genus *Petroica*, were the first to receive an English

name; ‘Robin’ was the affectionate personal name for a familiar unrelated English thrush-relation, whose surname was ‘Redbreast’. This was the connection of course, only it became a bit of a nonsense in Australia. Apart from the five redbreasts, there are eight with essentially plain grey or brown breasts, four yellow, two white and one black and white, spread across seven or eight genera.

I suspect that our local brown robin, the Jacky Winter, is often not even recognised as a robin. Apart from being a particularly delightful bird, its name fascinates me. I’ve recently come to suspect that I’ve been too literal in interpreting the ‘winter’ though; there is no particularly notable winter movement of this species in the Sydney district. However, could not our interpretation of the call – invariably “Peter, Peter, Peter” – be as readily “Winter...” etc? The Jacky is of course an egalitarian honorific, like Willie Wagtail (and indeed Robin Redbreast). But I am also fascinated by its strange old name, Lesser Fascinating Bird (reflected in its species name, *fascinans*). In this case though, the fascination was directed towards its prey as it hovered over it, and ‘hypnotised’ it, as did the (Greater) Fascinating Bird – the Restless Flycatcher!

I am also intrigued by the apparent yellow-absorbing qualities of the south-west of Western Australia, as evidenced by its propensity to fade yellow robins. The ancestral robin spread across southern Australia in moister times, but with increasing aridity and the advent of the Nullarbor the south-western population was isolated,

and in time their yellow breast faded to white. A temporary amelioration of the climate allowed another wave of yellow robins to arrive there, and in turn they too were cut off. Already their white-breasted relatives had evolved so that no interbreeding could occur – and now the Western Yellow Robin is losing its yellow too, in this case in the form of a broad grey band across the upper breast. Why?! I love this classic and obvious example of evolution in action – there are now three southern Australian ‘yellow’ robins where there was once only one. (As a curious aside, the same thing happened there to black-cockatoos, with ancestral yellow-tailed birds giving rise to two modern species of white-tailed black-cockies.)

Finally – but only because my word allocation is spent – it is curious that two Scarlet Robins, in 1922 and 1935, unwittingly played very different roles in promoting bird appreciation and conservation. Alec Chisholm, in his book *Mateship with Birds*, published a delightful photo captioned *Mateship with Mother Robin*, showing two boys kneeling almost reverentially within a metre of a female Scarlet Robin on a nest. And at the 1935 RAOU camp-out at Marlo in Gippsland, member and museum curator George Mack culminated a few days of collecting by shooting a Scarlet Robin in camp, while other members were admiring it at its nest as they ate breakfast! The resulting uproar, walkout and national debate within the RAOU led to more conservation-minded policies within the organisation. (I am grateful for this to the excellent history of Australian

ornithology, The Flight of the Emu – by Libby.... Robin. It's true!)

And on that note, taking my cue from yet another robin, time I was rockin' along.

Ian Fraser ianf@pcug.org.au

Welcome New Members

Prudence & Richard Hall,
O'Connor
Geoff Barrett, Macgregor

Joan and Frank Rigby, Campbell
George Heinsohn, Scullin
Jean DaCruz, Queanbeyan
John Shaw O'Connor
Karl and Meg Richardson, Garran
Ann Sutherns, Amaroo
Benjamin Walcott, Red Hill
Wayne Gregson, Deakin
Brain Chauncey, Lyons
Jack Davey, Bungendore
Margaret Mclvor, Holder
Daryl Murphy, Dunlop
Elizabeth Campbell, Duffy

Next newsletter

FEBRUARY deadline
Wednesday 28 January 2004
[There is no January *Gang-gang*]

Send updates to
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Articles should be less than 500 words (300 for reports of 1-day field trips; 150 for Atlassing Snapshots), except by prior arrangement with the editor. Print photographs with articles encouraged.

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Lia Battisson 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

http://www.canberrabirds.
dynamite.com.au

COG membership

2003-2004 membership: Individuals,
families and institutions: \$35. school
students (under 18): \$17.50.

Office (6247 4996)

COG maintains an office in room
G5, Griffin Centre, Bunda Street,
civic.

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 Birding',
also known by the nickname 'cog-1'.
Join the list at
http://www.topica.com/lists/canber
rabirds or by sending a blank
email message to canberrabirds-



Gang-gang

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