



Gang-gang

MARCH 2013

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

MARCH MEETING

Wednesday 13.03.2013

7.30 pm.

Canberra Girls Grammar School, Multi-media centre, corner Gawler Cres and Melbourne Ave, Deakin.

The short presentation will be given by **Felicity Hatton**, an Honours student at the University of Canberra. Her presentation is entitled "**Born in a tent**", and describes the trapping methods and monitoring of post fledgling behaviour of a Wedge-tailed Eagle tracked using satellite telemetry in the ACT.

The main presentation will be by **Kate Grarock**, from the Fenner School for Environment and Society on "**The Common Myna in Canberra: introduction, spread and impact**".

Human habitat modification and the introduction of pest species pose major threats to biodiversity across the globe. The impact of introduced species can be diverse with some having devastating impacts while others are relatively benign. To successfully manage introduced species it is essential to understand the type and level of impact they cause and then (if required) how to reduce this impact. Management prioritisation is required to ensure the limited resources for pest management are used effectively.

Everyone welcome

What to watch out for this month.

What a contrast the February Canberra bird scene seems to have been compared to the highs of December and January, quite pedestrian by comparison. In respect of waterbirds I expect the main reason for this was that there was no follow up rain for 4 weeks after the Australia Day storms, which only half-filled the local wetlands which then dried up rapidly in the ensuing hot weather. The best area to visit for waterbirds (and raptors) seems to have been the large dam at Mulligan's Flat, which has retained its water much better this summer after the breach present for around 10 years was finally repaired last spring.

However, there were no reports of many of the species that caused so much excitement in January. Most reports of waterbirds seem to have been from the first half of the month, when there were still some crakes and **Latham's Snipe** about as well as largish numbers of **Red-kneed Dotterels**, and the **Royal Spoonbills** seemed to stay on longer than most species. The highlight, however, was the further breeding record of the **Buff-banded Rail** early in February, this time at the tiny North Watson wetlands. I suspect the party's over in respect of waterbirds and the ACT for a while, with the widespread rain during the last week of February now providing good conditions for them elsewhere.

I suspect different reasons were responsible for the low numbers of rarer land bird sightings. There were very few of these except around the last weekend of February when first there was a report of an **Azure Kingfisher** at Jerrabomberra, followed closely by one of a **Black-eared Cuckoo** at Mt Majura, and then a juvenile **Blue-winged Parrot** at Campbell Park. The first a northern/coastal bird, the second an inland species, and the last has a very unusual coastal Victoria and inland NSW/SA

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distribution. It doesn't rate a mention in COG's Annual Bird Report, but Steve Wilson's book *Birds of the ACT: Two Centuries of Change* reveals some (probable) early sightings with the last being in February 1968! Wilson notes it to be a "rare vagrant in our area".

None of the rarer species listed in my previous column seem to have been seen in February, except for a **Cockatiel** record in Kambah provided to me personally just before this column went to press. February has also been much quieter for reports of breeding though there have been some notable ones in this respect, including a number of reports of trilling **Southern Boobook** free flying young early in the month, and separate reports of **Pallid Cuckoo** fledglings fed by **White-eared** and **White-plumed Honeyeaters**, respectively. The **Common Bronzewing**s which bred in Dennis Ayliffe's Fraser garden were seen adding material to an old wattlebird nest, and there have been many reports of dependent young of the **Australian King-Parrot** coming into chatline subscribers' gardens after being raised in the west of the ACT. This species seems to have had a good breeding season.

Contrary to my predictions last month there have been only four more reports of **Eastern/Pacific Koel** fledglings, including a second one in Barbara Allan's Page garden; perhaps this reflects the view that these are no longer thought worthy of reporting. Again all were hosted by the **Red Wattlebird**. There has been an interesting discussion both on the chatline, and later at the February COG meeting in respect of this species, with some members reporting very few in their gardens, etc, with the **Noisy Friarbird** seeming to have replaced them. Others reported very few if any of the latter in their local area this summer, as there have been in my patch of NW Chapman/Coolleman Ridge, but where the Red Wattlebird has had dependent young constantly from mid-September to the end of January. I suspect this very long breeding season is being exploited by the Koel, but not in my area so far, though birds were still calling during the month. So keep an ear/eye out for the Koel to see if it stays for most of March as it has done for the past few years.

March is a very special month on the ACT bird calendar with many species leaving for the winter but others coming down into the suburbs to spend

the autumn/winter here. The former includes the **White-throated Needletail**, a passage migrant for which there were several reports this month, including on one occasion accompanied by some **Fork-tailed Swifts**. Particularly if the humid weather at the end of February continues watch out for these up to the end of March. Also keep an eye out for the **Superb Parrot** for which there were surprisingly few reports in February, but which in recent years has stayed well into March, with a few overwintering.



Superb parrot (*Polytelis swainsonii*)
[above: male. Photo by Graham Stephinson]
[below: female. Photo by David Cook]



It is clear that some species have already departed with no observations that I can find for the **Brown Songlark**, **Horsfield's Bushlark**, **Brush Cuckoo** and, surprisingly, the **Rufous Songlark**, given it was still relatively widely reported up to the end of January (**Rufous Songlark** sighted on Lady Denman Drive on 26 February – Ed). However, there have been some continued reports of the **White-winged Triller**, including late in the month at Callum Brae; one wonders if late breeding is occurring there as it did last year. There were also still some **Dollarbird** observations over the last weekend of February; the last of these usually leave by early

March. **Rainbow Bee-eaters** often leave by mid-March and can be quite spectacular as they move through, including high over where their call and orange wings are diagnostic. So watch out for these species in the first two weeks of March. Other birds that usually mostly leave by the end of March include the **Leaden Flycatcher**, the **Latham's Snipe** and the **Australian Reed-Warbler**, as well as the **Pallid Cuckoo** and the two **Bronze-Cuckoos** (the last four species are often very quiet in this month). In fact this year seems to have been a poor year for cuckoos, except perhaps for the **Shining Bronze-Cuckoo**, for which there were a few records in February.

Some species will be seen in Canberra during March as they move north from their breeding sites in the mountains. These passage migrants include the **Satin Flycatcher**, **Rufous Fantail** and, rarely, the **Cicadabird**. Other species also move down from the mountains but will stay here; look out for your first **Scarlet Robin** (a few have already been recorded this year including a probable young bird by Jean Casburn at Narrabundah Hill), **Golden Whistler** and **White-eared Honeyeater** in March, and also for the first migrating **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters**; this movement often starts in the last week of the month.

Finally, there have already been a number of reports of that autumn phenomenon, the mixed feeding flock (MFF), including one in my garden where the main species were over 40 **House Sparrows** and 16 **Crested Pigeons**, together with **Silvereyes**, two **Eastern Spinebills** and a **Brown Thornbill**, showing that MFFs can have unusual or unexpected compositions. So watch out for these; nothing in bird watching gives me a bigger thrill than a MFF moving through and looking out for the unexpected species lurking quietly in amongst all that activity.

As I read back over my column perhaps February wasn't quite so dull after all, but I can promise that March will be more exciting. As always please ensure that all significant observations end up on the COG database, including any late breeding records; in the past few years there has been a remarkable amount of autumn breeding in Canberra, and perhaps the rain over the final week of February will be the trigger for the same this year.

- Jack Holland

Committee news

- A letter is being sent from the Committee to the NSW Government expressing concern at the proposal for hunting in NSW national parks.
- The Committee has discussed moving the members' meeting normally held in January to December, since we are unlikely to have access to the CGGS theatre in January in future years.
- Alison Russell-French and Jenny Bounds will represent COG at BigNET in April.



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2013 tours

**Easter Saturday & Sunday
Plains-wanderer Weekend**
30 & 31 March

**20 – 27 April: Alice Springs area
&
MacDonnell Ranges**

July: Top End
Darwin, Kakadu NP, Katherine,
Kununurra, Mitchell Plateau flight

July: Gulf Country
Cairns to Mt Isa, returning via
Atherton Tablelands

September: Strzelecki Outback
Vic, NSW, SW Q'ld, SA, 34th tour

**Late September: NSW Central
Coast, Barrington Tops, Barren
Grounds**

**October: Yorke Peninsula to
Ceduna** (over 60 scarlet-chested
parrots seen on the 2011 tour)

Mid December
SW Western Australia

2013 Plains-wanderer weekends
30 Nov & 1 Dec
7 & 8 December
28 & 29 December

2014 tours

February: Tasmania

Please see itineraries, checklists
and latest news on our website

www.philipmaher.com

Field Trip Reports

Saturday 2 February - Jerrabomberra wetlands

Just three brave souls joined me on a cold, grey and windy morning to celebrate World Wetlands Day. We began the morning in Ardea hide, peering into the typha hoping for crakes or rails to appear. However, the cold southerly wind funnelling through the hide and freezing our hands as they clutched binoculars drove us outside before we sighted our target species. We had more luck in Cygnus hide with a very cooperative **Australian Spotted Crake** just outside the hide, a single **Latham's Snipe**, 13 **Black-fronted** and 7 **Red-kneed Dotterel**. After visiting the silt trap, we wandered along Jerrabomberra Creek, finding a pair of **Chestnut Teal** and we enjoyed tremendous views of a pair of **Australian Darters** drying their wings in front of Tadorna hide. A **White-necked Heron** flew over and obligingly circled to show its "headlights". Before we finished the morning, we decided to brave Ardea hide again and were soon rewarded with a **Buff-banded Rail** and an **Australian Spotted Crake** feeding along the edge of the reeds. 48 species were recorded.

- Sue Lashko

Saturday 9 February - Tuggerannong Wall to Pine Island North

On the clear and sunny morning, 10 members and guests gathered at Pine Island and car shuffled to Vikings Club car park. Our first site was the dam behind the Club where we spotted an **Australasian Grebe** and a **Hardhead**. Not many species were seen on the way down to the Murrumbidgee River, but there was plenty of activity by the river. First, we had good views of a **Sacred Kingfisher**. Then, there were large numbers of **Red-browed Finches** and **Silvereyes**. Quite a lot species were perching for good views. They included **Little Pied Cormorants**, **White-faced Heron**, **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes**, **Yellow-faced Honeyeater**, several **Dollarbirds** and lots of **Noisy Friarbirds**. Towards the end of the walk, we saw a flock of 16 little birds flying over high. Excitingly, they were awesome **Rainbow Bee-eaters** according to experienced birders in the group. A final reward at Pine Island Reserve was a **Collared Sparrowhawk** circling overhead clearly showing its finely barred underparts. We recorded 43 species in total, and appreciated the beautiful scenery as well. Luckily the walk finished at 10am before it was really hot.

- Nigel Zhou

Sunday 17 February - East Basin/Molonglo Reach Electric Boat Cruise

Under calm but cloudy conditions, 21 members and guests joined me on the "EL Gull" for this annual trip to view the darter and cormorant nesting on Molonglo Reach. While this was the eleventh year I have led these trips, this was our first trip in this new and larger electric boat. Because of its bigger draft we travelled along the south and east bank of East Basin, into Molonglo Reach and along its southern bank before retracing our route.

We encountered **Australasian Darter** nests only on the southern bank, and found only eight of these, less than one third of the numbers seen last year. Six of these were of birds (4 of them males which are usually in the majority) sitting tight on the nest, presumably on eggs, while another had 3 reasonably advanced chicks in the nest, and in the final case the three chicks were already quite mature and sitting well out of the nest. I suspect this reflects the summer weather patterns, with the new nests having been started after the storms on Australia Day, and the mature chicks the remnant of the earlier breeding started in late spring/early summer before the weather dried up. In support of this theory there were a couple of very low nests less than 0.5 m above the water line, reflecting the lower water level in Lake Burley Griffin which has been dropped to fix problems with Scrivener Dam.

Altogether about 70 free flying darters were seen on the day, many of them seeming to be immature birds by their dirtier plumage, while the number of males was relatively low. Despite the lower numbers caused by the particular conditions this summer, the evidence remains strong that the clearing of the willows from the north bank has had limited impact to date on **Australasian Darter** presence and breeding.

However, this year there is further evidence that the same conclusion can no longer be drawn for cormorants. On the Reach only a single **Great Cormorant** was seen, again where it opens up much wider about 0.5 km west of the first bridge, plus three more near the mouth of Jerrabomberra Creek. While the former had white flanks indicative of breeding, no evidence for breeding was found for any cormorant. In fact,

no **Little Pied Cormorants** were seen on the day and only a single **Little Black Cormorant** was seen flying up and down the Reach. This contrasts starkly with the well over 200 **Little Black Cormorants** seen at close quarters last year communally fishing and resting in the river.

The lack of these cormorants was made up, at least partly, by the sighting of a **Pied Cormorant**. We had seen this species loafing on the east bank of East Basin on the way up and on return it was found sitting on a dead branch over the water near the mouth of Jerrabomberra Creek. Cormorants are usually much more flighty than darters, but this one stayed put and allowed the skipper to move right alongside so that all participants had very good views from less than 10 metres away, and could closely examine the distinguishing features.

The skipper confirmed the lack of activity again this year at the former significant **Little Black Cormorant** breeding site near the mouth of Sullivan's Creek, and that there has been limited cormorant/darter breeding closer to Black Mountain Peninsula. However, several postings on the COG chatline by Jean Casburn at the end of January/early February noted that **Darters** and **Little Pied Cormorants** are breeding again on the Molonglo River well downstream of the Scrivener Dam (west of the Tuggeranong Parkway).

Compared with the past three years other waterbird activity on the river and East Basin seemed to have increased. Most of these were common species seen on the open water and on the banks, with the clear highlight several **Latham's Snipe** seen near the river mouth. We were alerted to their possible presence from several chatline postings in January. The other surprise was a party of 4 **Greylag Geese** looking as though they belonged there, though no-one could remember them being observed before. While they looked much closer to the wild type than the single goose often seen, they were no doubt escapees or had been released there. Land birds seen included a surprise couple of **Leaden Flycatchers**, a relatively late **Dollarbird** and well over 30 **Red-rumped Parrots**.

At 47, the total number of species was up from the previous year. All participants, quite a few of them repeat clients, enjoyed the trip, as I did in now my fourteenth trip since we started in 2003. Participants in particular enjoyed the space and viewing conditions in the new bigger boat, though not all participants saw all species, with the need to keep the boat moving adding to this difficulty.

- Jack Holland

Wednesday 20 February - Wark's Road

The COG Wednesday Walkers went to check out Warks Rd (and a few other spots) in the Brindabella Ranges to the west of Canberra. 22 of us eventually gathered at the big dam beside Uriarra Homestead. In a fairly brief stay we recorded 19 species here, with the highlights being **Nankeen Night-heron** (in willows); 3 **Pink-eared Ducks** and a **Black-fronted Dotterel** on the island. Turning down Blundell's Creek Rd we frequently marvelled at the regeneration of the forest after the 2003 bushfires so well described by Ian Fraser in a recent blog. After a few hundred metres there seemed to be a few birds around so the convoy paused. Highlights of the 14 species seen here were **Rose Robin** (a nicely displaying and calling male), **Rufous Fantail** and **Fuscous Honeyeater**.

We then headed on down the road and parked at the intersection with Warks Rd. We walked up the road for some while seeing several good species. After being checked out by a **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo** (the scout for a flock of 9), an early highlight was our first **Red-browed Treecreeper**. We ended recording at least 4 of these high country residents. Looking down on some tree ferns, our view was enhanced by a pair of **Rufous Fantails**. Some of the group saw a **Pilotbird** and an **Olive Whistler**; the rest of the group were envious!

Our last stop was for a walk down Moonlight Hollow Rd. The group were promised **Flame Robins** and a colourful male appeared within the first 20m. The next thing to appear was a Parks truck, the driver of which advised us that they had been warned to get out of the area as a severe thunderstorm had been picked up on radar heading this way. We took the hint and scarpered, heading to Bulls Head for an expected comfort stop and an unexpected but interesting chat with two CNP Rangers.

Total for the day (including species seen in transit) was 54! A full bird list will appear in the trips section of the COG website in due course.

- Martin Butterfield

Future Field Trips

Before the start of each trip, each participant must sign a COG Field Trip Registration Form which acknowledges the participant's responsibilities. The form reads as follows:

I declare I am capable of undertaking this trip having: discussed with the Trip Leader any limitations I have (e.g. medications, physical), assessed the risks to myself and my property, and ensured I am adequately equipped.

I will follow the instructions of the Field Trip Leader, and advise them before moving away from the group.

Changes to trips are notified on the trips page of the COG website <http://canberrabirds.org.au/> and on the COG chat-line at <http://bioacoustics.cse.unsw.edu.au/archives/html/canberrabirds/2012-03/index.html>.

Sat. 9 March to Monday 11 March—Narooma/Mt Dromedary (Gulaga NP)

The aim of the Canberra Day long weekend outing will be to visit the local estuaries, lakes, beaches and forest of the Narooma area and to explore Mt Dromedary with its rainforest gullies and topography acting as an outlier for many of the more northern coastal bird species.

The plan will be to drive down on Friday evening (8th Feb, 3.5 hours) from Canberra. After an early rise on Saturday (start 5.30am) we will drive to the track head at Tilba Tilba and walk from there to the top. The walk to the 800m summit will take about 5 hours return. Saturday afternoon-late evening will be spent on a local outing. Sunday morning there will be an exploration of nearby freshwater Lake Nargal and surrounds with the afternoon-evening outing again exploring the local estuaries and beaches. The return to Canberra will be the following day. Bring along some appropriate food for a BBQ on either the Saturday or Sunday evening.

Accommodation is available at the Regatta Point Holiday Park at Wallaga Lake (www.regattapointpark.com.au; phone 02 64934253). Places will be limited to about 12-15. The leader will be Chris Davey but as he will be away for the first 3 weeks in February please contact **Sue Lashko** 62514485 or smlashko@gmail.com for further information or to register your interest.

Friday 15 to Sunday 17 March—Shore/Heath with Illawarra Birders

The Illawarra Birders (IB) will show us a number of good birding spots in the Illawarra. The format is same as joint trip last year. Friday night arrival for COG members, due to early start on Saturday and roughly 3 hour drive from Canberra.

Proposed schedule: 1) 8.30 am start on Saturday with an approximately 3 hour visit to the restricted access Tallawarra Ashponds. 2) Saturday arvo visit Shellharbour Swamp and Lake Illawarra hotspots (then current). 3) Sunday morning visit Barren Grounds after which COG people head to Canberra.

Everyone should have a packed lunch and drinks for Saturday day so that we can adjust timings as appropriate and all stay together. Dinner on Saturday will be a joint COG/IB event at a Warilla Bowls Club south of Windang. COG members attending need to book their own accommodation. The Oasis Caravan Park is a good starting point: <http://www.oasisresort.com.au/> but there are numerous alternatives nearby.

Registration is essential pref. by 4 March, contact **Michael Robbins** mrobbins@home.netspeed.com.au

Sunday 17 March—Burra

This outing is to Ian Anderson's property, "Kurrajong Gardens", at 156 Hutchinson Place, Burra.

People can either travel there direct or if any want to travel in a convoy they can meet at my place in Canberra, 12 Wylly Place, Hughes. It takes about 40 minutes to drive from Hughes to the property. I suggest we aim to arrive at Burra by 8.00 am. I will expect to depart from my place in Hughes by 7.20am.

Those wishing to travel direct to the property from Canberra will need to use a part of the section of the Old Queanbeyan to Cooma Road between Queanbeyan and Williamsdale. One of the options, perhaps the easiest, is to take the Monaro Highway and just before Williamsdale take the turn left towards Burra.

Continue on this section of the Old Queanbeyan to Cooma Road for about seven or eight kilometres, most of which is dirt, until you come to a right hand turn with a bitumen road. This road is called Badgery Road. Continue on this road for about a kilometre. Turn right into a cul-de-sac, Hutchinson Place, which is a dirt road. The property, near the top of the cul-de-sac, has the number 156 stamped on a metal plaque on the fence, and has a Conservation Agreement sign on the front gate with the name "Kurrajong Gardens".

Those coming from the Queanbeyan direction need to take the Queanbeyan to Guises Creek Road. (There is no settlement at Guises Creek which is a fire control centre on the Monaro Highway.) Turn left at the Burra sign just before the historic Anglican Church on the right hand side. Continue on past the turnoff to London Bridge and Tin Hut Dam on the left until you come to Badgery Road on the left hand side, after turning right off the Burra to Michelago Road and crossing Burra Creek heading towards Williamsdale. Turn onto Badgery Road and follow the instructions from there given above.

A third option which may suit some people is to travel along the Monaro Highway to the Guises Creek Fire Station, turn left and continue on towards Queanbeyan until they reach the Burra sign. They can then follow the instructions given above.

Contact **Ian Anderson** on 62810609 (home) or 0413754453, or by email:
iananderson@grapevine.com.au

I suggest those coming bring something for a morning tea snack. There are facilities available at the property, including hot water and protection from inclement weather.

Wednesday 20 March – West Belconnen Pond

The Wednesday walk in March will be to West Belconnen Pond meeting at 8:30am. Details of the meeting point will be advised in an email to the chatline and on the website closer to the day.

Friday 29 March to Monday 1 April – Easter campout at Chiltern

We will camp on private property at Chiltern in northern Victoria, about 4 hours drive from Canberra. The site is suitable for tents, caravans or campervans. Some tank water is available. We will bird in a variety of habitats in the local area but may go further afield to the Murray (or to local wineries) if it is very hot and/or if fire bans are in place and forests closed. Numbers will be limited to 16. Please contact Sue Lashko at [smlashko\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:smlashko(at)gmail.com) to register your interest. More detailed information will be emailed to participants.

NB: this trip is fully subscribed but you can put your name on the waiting list as there may be withdrawals.

Sunday 7 April – Farrer Ridge

Meet at 8.30am at the Erindale Drive entrance to Farrer Ridge reserve. This is not visible from the roadway, but is adjacent to the underpass through to Wanniasa Hills reserve. You can access it from Sulwood Drive - there is a dirt track leading from Sulwood up the side of Farrer Ridge reserve to the parking area. The track leaves Sulwood just before the major roundabout at Erindale Drive intersection (see the map for Wanniasa Hills walk in June 2011 Gang-Gang (http://canberrabirds.org.au/gg11jun_files/Gang%20gang%20June%202011.pdf)).

We'll walk to the summit of Farrer Ridge and through some of the bushland. Farrer Ridge is usually good for little bush birds and parrots. No booking required. **Sandra Henderson** 62310303 or shirmax2931@gmail.com

Sunday 14 April - K2C bird surveys in Bredbo Region

COG will continue with the K2C surveys that have been running since April 2010. The surveyed properties have healthy populations of many of the rarer woodland birds such as **Diamond Firetail**, **Hooded Robin** and **Speckled Warbler**, and the autumn honeyeater migration will be in full flight. We will be visiting the same sites to continue the monitoring and add to the property lists. The surveys will be undertaken in 'blitz' fashion; that is, observers in small groups will visit a number of sites on one or more properties before regrouping for lunch and a sharing of the survey's findings. Less experienced observers are welcome to join in the survey as each team will have at least one experienced observer. Anyone interested in participating is asked to contact **Nicki Taws**. Email: ntaws@bigpond.com or ph. 6251 0303, mob.0408 210736.

Sunday 21 April – Square Rock.

A leader is required for this outing. Contact **Sue Lashko** on [smlashko\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:smlashko(at)gmail.com) if you can help.

Sunday 5 May – The Pinnacle NR, Hawker – morning

Enjoy an easy morning stroll through the Pinnacle Nature Reserve in Hawker. It commands glorious views to the Brindabellas and we can expect to see several mixed feeding flocks of all the local thornbills, Speckled Warblers, scrubwren and robins. We'll try and find the resident Tawny Frogmouths and hopefully some raptors. We suggest you bring water and something for morning tea.

Meet at 8am at the end of Dungowan Street, Hawker, by the big tree. Registration is not necessary. For further information contact john.brannan@netspeed.com.au or **Barbara Allan** on 62546520.

An unexpected but interesting chat.

A big thank you from a Canberra Nature Park Ranger to all who put reports into the COG database.

As mentioned in the trip report for the Wed. 20 Feb outing, we met a couple of ACT Government Rangers at Bulls Head.

One of the matters discussed was the considerable value of COG data to one of the Rangers. He was keen for COG members to know the usefulness of this data, especially as he is aware that this is not acknowledged as often as it could be. He encouraged us to continue to collect this data acknowledging that his fairly "invisible" use doesn't provide much obvious reward. However, he noted that surveys which include areas that are, or may be, part of "asset protection zones" are extremely useful, as these parcels of land adjacent to housing and reserves are sometimes of considerable conservation importance, e.g. part of those next to the Kama Nature Reserve.



Survey of birds on Lord Howe Island

Background

The Lord Howe Island Board in association with the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH), Taronga Park Zoo and others have received funding to eradicate mice and rats from Lord Howe Island.

Due to COG's previous experience with surveying birds on Lord Howe Island, and because of our experience in running bird surveys in general, we have been asked to be responsible for the annual assessment of all bird species on the lowlands, except for nocturnal species and sea birds, over a five year period starting in September 2013.

Proposal

For 2013 the survey period will be Saturday 7 to Saturday 14 September. At this stage it is envisaged that COG will provide seven volunteers. For the 2013 survey, two of the seven volunteers will be Chris Davey (Project Manager) and Peter Fullagar (Project Supervisor). The volunteers, with at least one additional volunteer from the island, will be split into four pairs and from early morning through to midday each morning, weather permitting, will visit and survey birds at specified locations over the island. Transport will be provided to access some parts of the island. Volunteers will be asked to provide their own binoculars and GPS unit if they have one. If not, then a GPS unit will be provided. Each pair will be provided with a first-aid kit and all necessary datasheets and maps.

Volunteers will be assessed against the following criteria:

- Fitness
- Bird identification skills
- Involvement in previous COG field surveys
- Competence in the field, especially with the use of GPS and map reading skills
- Ability to work in a team
- COG membership

COG volunteers will be selected on the basis of their ability to meet the above criteria. It would be hoped to spread the opportunity amongst as many members as possible over the 5 years of the surveys.

Expressions of interest for the 2013 survey are being sought with applications in writing to the Project Manager (chris_davey@aapt.net.au). The decision on the team composition will be made by the COG committee by early April on advice from the Project Manager. In the event that a successful volunteer withdraws, their spot will be offered by the Committee to the next recommended volunteer.

It will not be necessary to participate in more than one survey. Volunteers will be covered by COG insurance. Each volunteer will pay COG \$500 towards costs and will provide their own travel and medical insurance and pay for their own breakfast and lunch. Due to the complications of accommodation arrangements, for the pilot project in September 2013, non-surveying partners will not be permitted. However, it is envisaged that participants may be able to take partners on future surveys, in which case any partners not involved in the project will be required to pay the full cost of airfares, accommodation and meals and make their own arrangements. All money must be paid by volunteers by mid-May into a COG account.

Cancellation. If before the start of August there is a cancellation and a replacement for the volunteer can be found, a refund will be provided at the discretion of the COG committee. If a replacement is needed after the start of August, there will be a refund of \$250 with the cancelling volunteer paying half price, ie \$250. The project will be cost neutral to COG.

For further enquiries please contact **Chris Davey** (chris_davey@aapt.net.au Tel: 02-62546324 h; 0418 679 847 m)

Avlan Whimsy #98

Guiding Principals

Marcelo Andy can recognise all 35 species of Ecuadorian woodpecker from a brief burst of tapping on wood. A snatch of antbird song – and there are scores of closely related species in this group of uber-skulkers – is all he needs to identify it and to know where and how to locate it. Ribelino Lactahuaman can walk along a Peruvian rainforest track in conversation, hear a jacamar softly click its beak once some twenty metres away, and instantly identify and locate it. Both can find a small perched plain-coloured bird rapidly through tens of metres of apparently solid rainforest understorey or canopy foliage, deduce the right spot for a scope and have it in focus in seconds. (Afterwards, most of us still can't find the bird with binoculars.) Jorge Valenzuela, deep in Patagonia, can imitate an Austral Pygmy-Owl's call so accurately that not only do small birds gather to mob it, but I've seen an actual owl come to investigate.

Supernatural as these skills apparently are, they are the basics and there are many more required of a successful birding guide. I've heard Frank Lambert say that a guide just needs to do their homework and work hard. That certainly, but it might still not be enough. In western Cameroon with Rockjumper Tours once, I saw Fraser Gear calmly get out of the vehicle in a muddy village road seething with angry young men demanding what they saw as adequate compensation for pushing the bus, and remove the rock they'd wedged under our rear tyre as a negotiating tool. Juan Cardenas in the Peruvian Andes left our bus at night to negotiate a passage through a burning roadblock created by drunken young strikers. I've heard it described how Mark Caulton of Pelican Tours reversed the Toyota and trailer at high speed along a Kruger National Park track to avoid a charging bull elephant.

When our motor canoe driver was too drunk to function early one morning, Ribelino took over, skilfully manoeuvring the long narrow vessel across the dangerous currents of the Rio Madre de Dios and neatly berthing it. Juan has to carry an oxygen cylinder on all bird hikes in the high Andes in case of altitude-related breathing problems among his clients. At a somewhat different level, George Swann has been known to pack up camp and drive his tired group all the way back to the Kimberley's Mitchell Plateau – a truly gruelling drive – on hearing of a fresh report of the Black Grasswrens they'd missed.

Regularly flights, vehicles, drivers and accommodation have to be rescheduled and reorganised at short notice. In Cameroon, I was in a minibus whose petrol tank fell off on the road. We crammed into the surviving vehicle, but of course there was no room for our luggage. We left it in the stricken vehicle, and driver Alfred to deal with it. Amazingly the luggage arrived late that night; we never did see Alfred or the vehicle again, however...

And then of course there are the clients. In practice most are pleasant, supportive, appreciative, realistic and understanding of the inherent difficulties and the essential unpredictability of nature. But not all. A few feel they've paid their fee and the rare and elusive bird is theirs by right. I heard, from someone who was there, of a (Northern Hemisphere) client in New Zealand who abused a *volunteer* guide who failed to produce a Blue Duck for him. Then there is the person who never does their homework, has no idea what the relevant bird looks like or how it behaves, hasn't learn to use their binoculars properly, but still demands that each bird be delivered on a silver platter to their tick list. A very few are extraordinarily self-ish with regard to telescopes, front position in the viewing site, best seat in the vehicle, etc. All must be treated with patience, courtesy and tact, whatever the cost later in bitten tongues and knuckles bruised on bedposts... (Though I reiterate that these people are the very small minority, which must always be remembered.) This is on top of the constant stress of worrying if the Special Bird's not going to show, or that it will and having finally been coaxed into sight, someone will miss it.

There must be thousands of people – mostly men, but certainly not all – making a living as bird guides on all seven continents. In my experience most are very good, some are remarkable. Some focus on just one area, others can ply their trade from South Africa to Ethiopia to New Guinea to Peru to Antarctica. Some take groups of a dozen or so, others cater to one or two (usually wealthy!) clients. Some wear bird-blinkers, seeing nothing else, while others are equally knowledgeable about mammals, snakes, dragonflies, plants, local customs, etc. All cater to someone's needs. And for every guide there is a band of drivers, accommodation and transport workers, cooks, mechanics, travel organisers, even porters, most of whom are locals in often poor countries.

It's a profession that could scarcely have been imagined a few decades back, apart from providing assistance to museum 'collectors'. Now, however, it's a growth industry and I reckon it's one worth considering, from any angle you like.

Ian Fraser calochilus51@internode.on.net

Crace Recreation Park

The genesis of a small Wetland.

It has been fascinating to be present at the birth of a new wetland. Construction of the Recreation Area at the south-west corner of Crace began early in 2012. Excavation of its pond and associated wetland began mid-year, designed to slow and clarify the runoff from Crace before it passes under Gundaroo Drive and enters Ginninderra Creek about 500 metres away.

From the moment the excavators had dug a hole, a few hopeful Wood Ducks were there, sitting on the bare earth beside the smallest of puddles as if in expectation of better things to come. They were right! The pond and wetland gradually took shape and the large plantings of reeds and native grasses became rapidly established. By the time the park was officially opened in November, the Wood Ducks had been joined by some Pacific Black Ducks, a pair of Masked Lapwings on the little mudflat and a pair of Black-fronted Dotterels.

Since then, virtually every week has seen the arrival of a different species of waterbird. - Eurasian Coots, White-faced Herons, Australasian Grebes, Reed Warblers, an Australian Spotted Crake and, quite surprisingly, a lone Hardhead Duck which has been there for nearly three months now and apparently identifies with the Pacific Black Ducks.

By late January, there were more than 50 Wood Ducks including three breeding pairs with young. Then came the huge Australia Day storm on 26th January with massive torrents of water flowing through the system. I feared the worst but within two days, as the flow eased, birds re-emerged from wherever they had been sheltering – except for most of the Wood Ducks. They had come to no harm but had flown across the road to forage in the temporary wetland created by the flooding of Ginninderra Creek.

It is late February now. Only four Wood Ducks now appear to be ‘permanent’ residents. The rest seem to have found other places, of which there are many in Gungahlin, not just Gungahlin Lake itself but ponds and wetlands appearing all the time in the infrastructure of the new suburbs. Valley Ponds, a large and quite complex triple system, is under construction and about to be opened opposite Burgmann College, only about a kilometre away as the duck flies. Any bird lifting off from the small Crace wetland would be able to see it and I counted over 100 waterbirds there the other day.

All augurs well for the future of waterbirds in the far north of Canberra.

John Harris, February 2013



Crace wetland (right) and pond (left), facing North.

Photo: John Harris



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COG welcomes the following new members:

L Doucette, Weetangera
K Bradley/R Farmer,
Richardson
L Kendall, Curtin
K Kelly, Chifley
A Sloan, Fisher
R Korsch, Curtin
S & M Guppy, Moruya
L Hermann, Kambah
M Philip, Gowrie
N Hirsch, Fisher

NEXT NEWSLETTER

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edition**

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Please send articles, advertisements, updates etc. to the Editors at:

gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au

or

**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.

Photographs (prints or electronic) with or without articles are encouraged and

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2012-2013 memberships:

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

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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.

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