



Gang-gang

September 2013

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

SEPTEMBER MEETING

Wednesday 11 September 2013

7.30 pm.

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

Steve Wallace will start proceedings with **'2012 – a good year for wetland birds'**, consisting of a short presentation on the Australian Little Bittern followed by a video of 8 wetland species not commonly observed in the ACT.

The main speaker will be Anna Lashko. Anna spent the summer of 2012/13 on Macquarie Island, as a field assistant on the Macquarie Island Albatross and Giant Petrel Programme.

She studied the four species of albatross and two species of giant petrel that breed there. Her talk will share with you Macquarie Island's wildlife, weather and landscapes and give you a taste of what it's like to live and work on the island.

What to watch out for this month.

August has been a very quiet reporting month for observations on the COG chatline, possibly due to the very changeable, windy and showery weather we had for the first 3 weeks, with the first signs of some returning migrants generally not until about then. Certainly at the time of writing in the final week of winter there has been no major influx of returning spring/summer migrants so far. The most notable species to return to date, at least in the number of reports, seems to have been the **Tree Martin**, as opposed to the related **Fairy Martin**, which only seems to have been confirmed so far from the big dam at Mulligans Flat during the COG mystery bus tour and the week before while we were doing a recce.

This is all more than a bit surprising given that the winter has been a relatively mild one. During August the **Grey Fantail** was still regularly reported in small numbers, and seems to have been the most notable overwinterer this

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Yellow-billed Spoonbill

Photo: David Cook

Everyone welcome

What to watch for this month — continued from Page 1

year, though after 3 weeks of the month a number of chatline posters noted the first returns to areas where they had been absent all winter. This also was the case for the **Yellow-faced Honeyeater**, whose numbers seem have been a bit lower, and similar to the **Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike**. There continued to be scattered reports of **White-naped Honeyeaters**, but I can find only a couple of the **Fuscous Honeyeater**.

I also could find only four records of the **Olive-backed Oriole**, all mid-month. They are one of the last species to leave and also amongst the earliest to return, with Steve Wallace's charts obtained from the COG database showing a sharp rise in September (and a small rise in August compared with May to July). I've always thought they first returned towards the end of August, though particularly this year when migrants seem to be slow in coming despite the mild conditions, you can't rule out that they all had overwintered, particularly as there were no further reports until 27 August, just as this column was being sent to the editors. One species that has definitely overwintered is the **Superb Parrot**, with both Kim and Geoff Larmour and Stephen Benson posting that they've noticed them feeding in small numbers in the flowering ironbarks at the bike path reserve in Lyttleton Crescent, Cook, all winter. Sandra Henderson also found 15 at the AIS on 1 August.

One bird that definitely has not been reported overwintering this year, or yet returned for that matter, has been the **Dusky Woodswallow**, with the last record I can find being on 11 May. There was also only a late **Rufous Whistler** record, again on 27 August, and there have been further reports of the **Mistletoebird**, as well as the first returning **Australian Reed-Warbler** singing lustily at Lake Ginninderra on 17 August, but none since! There have also been a couple of further reports of the **Fan-tailed Cuckoo**, the least migratory of the 4 local cuckoo species, but of the other cuckoos, only a single report of a **Pallid Cuckoo** calling on 20 August. Also there has been only a single report of a further **Noisy Friarbird** heard so far in August, following the one heard in Watson on the afternoon of 31 July.

So it is clear that the major spring influx of returning migrants has still to begin. With warmer weather forecast for the last few days in August and into September, please keep an eye and ear out for the above species and any other spring/summer migrants returning to Canberra, when the first **White-throated** and **Western Gerygone** and **Leaden Flycatcher** generally arrive, and on good years (ie dry inland) the **White-winged Triller** and the **Rufous Songlark**, and perhaps the **Sacred Kingfisher** and **Rainbow Bee-eater**. It will be interesting to see whether their arrival is also delayed, or whether the different species' return will be compressed this year, just as the wattle flowering seems to have been.

In respect of waterbirds, Steve Wallace tells me there have been a few **Freckled Ducks** seen on the West Belconnen Ponds for the whole month, and there have also been a few **Pink-eared Ducks** reported, and a single **Red-kneed Dotterel** and **Buff-banded Rail**. **Hardhead**, another mainly inland species that likes deeper water, have been relatively common, but the surprise has been the **Yellow-billed Spoonbill**, with up to three reported at the large dam at Mulligan's Flat.

The surprise bird during August was the **Powerful Owl**, reported from rainforest gully in the Botanic Gardens for only a couple of days. I expect it is there regularly but that it's just very hard to find its roost site. Interestingly when Jenny Bounds went to look for it on 17 August as a possible stop for the COG mystery bus tour, she noticed six rather quiet **Brown Gerygones**. There had been just a few earlier in August, and I thought that might

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Red-kneed Dotterel

Photo: Lindsay Hansch

What to watch out for this month—continued from Page 2

have been the last record, but Michael Lenz reported 6 still there on 27 August.

Of the winter altitudinal migrants there have been a couple of reports of the **Pink Robin** and just a single of the **Rose Robin**, two of the **Restless Flycatcher** (again both northside), but none of the **Yellow-tufted Honeyeater** or the **Swift Parrot** in August. However, there were more records of the **Crescent Honeyeater** in the first half of August. This species has been a regular in my garden in Chapman since the early 1980s, but interestingly there have been few in the past couple of years, and none so far this winter. Certainly from some of the postings on the chatline they seem to have found some other spots to go this year, and if they're in your garden they will certainly make themselves heard!

So please also keep an eye and ear out for these species, which you would expect to see the last of in the Canberra suburbs and surrounds in the first half of September. While there were still plenty reported in August, the same applies to the **Scarlet Robin**, the **White-eared Honeyeater** and the **Golden Whistler**, as well as the **Flame Robin**, which, as a number of members have remarked to me, have not have not been present in their usual spots this winter, including my local patch of NW Cooleman Ridge and the southern fence line of Narrabundah Hill.

Perhaps because of the indifferent weather, with the coming of spring seeming to be suspended for three weeks, the few

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Red-rumped Parrot

Photo: Julian Robinson



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2013

22 – 29 September:

NSW Central Coast, Barrington Tops
NP, Barren Grounds NR

10 – 18 December:

SW Western Australia birding
and mammal tour

Plains-wanderer weekend

28 & 29 December 2013
Three places left

2014

2 – 8 February

Tasmania including Melaleuca flight and
Eaglehawk Neck pelagic

19 – 26 April

Alice Springs

25 May – 8 June:

Top End, Kakadu NP, Katherine,
Kununurra, Mitchell Plateau

12 – 26 July

Gulf Country
Cairns to Mt Isa

Late August:

New Caledonia

6 – 25 September

Strzelecki Track Outback 35th tour

Please see itineraries, checklists and
latest news on our website

www.philipmaher.com

What to watch for this month — continued from Page 3

reports of breeding activity in August consist only of a **Red-rumped Parrot** sitting in a nest hollow, a **Black Swan** and a **Noisy Miner** on the nest, **White-winged Choughs** and everybody's favourite the **Tawny Frogmouth** nest building. The most interesting observation was that of the **Scaly-breasted Lorikeet** showing aggressive behaviour suggestive of breeding in Fadden. This occurred when Sandra Henderson was following up a reported **Rainbow Lorikeet** nest, so it was certainly worth following up. Judging by their sudden change in behaviour (calling loudly while they tried to ward off the **Pied Currawongs**) the eggs of the **Masked Lapwing** in the backyard in Percy Crescent, Chapman, seemed to have hatched in the last full weekend in August. John Brannan had reported 2-3 very young fluffballs being shepherded at the roundabout in Josephson St, Belconnen, a week earlier. We both thought this was early, but Steve Wallace's analysis of the COG data base shows August is quite a normal time for the first young to appear.

So has August been the calm before the storm, and will the coming of spring herald a flush of migrants? This is always the most exciting time on the bird calendar in Canberra, so please keep an eye out for an increase in breeding activity in September, as well as arriving spring/summer migrants and departing winter altitudinal migrants. As usual always please ensure that all significant observations end up on the COG database.

Jack Holland



Rainbow Lorikeet

Photo: James Rolevink



Scaly-breasted Lorikeet

Photo: Noel Luff

Committee News

The Strategic Environmental Assessment outcome for Gungahlin was announced recently, with much of Throsby (between Mulligans Flat/Goorooyarroo reserves) and Kinlyside (near Hall) to go into reserve; the proposed 100 metres buffer between the Superb Parrot breeding site on Throsby Ridge remains unchanged, with a few conditions (fencing and limited pedestrian access from the suburb); we remain concerned about the impacts of Common Mynas from the new suburb.

Some committee members will meet with a representative from the Canberra BioBlitz, to see whether it might be possible to cooperate with this project, which is being run on the same weekend as COG's blitz.

Sandra spoke about garden birds to a Boys Brigade group at Hughes, and Bruce, with Rosemary Blemings, represented COG at the recent Sustainability Festival at the University of Canberra.

COG will host the BIGNet meeting in April 2014, to be held at the ANBG.

Sandra Henderson

Field Trip Reports

Sunday 18 August – Mystery bus trip

Twenty two members and guests joined Jenny Bounds and me on a fine morning with a forecast of a clear but windy day. We first called past the Dickson Wetlands where only a few participants had been before, to find quite a few common species, the highlights being **Little Grassbird** calling, **Little Pied Cormorant** and a single **Hardhead** loafing on a log with its head firmly tucked under its wing so we couldn't tell by its white eye whether or not it was a male. We then drove on to Mulligan's Flat where we planned to spend most of the day as the rangers had given us permission to take the buses through the gates into the sanctuary. We first stopped at the new woolshed where 4 **Masked Lapwings** gave repeated alarms calls suggestive of breeding activity; their presence here was unusual as they have rarely been in this spot over the many years of COG woodland surveys here.

Other birds were surprisingly quiet in this area, but we did stumble onto a mixed flock comprising a pair of **Scarlet Robins** (the male was mostly seen), **Weebills**, **Striated**, **Buff-rumped** and **Yellow-rumped Thornbills**, both species of **pardalotes**, and a **White-throated Treecreeper**. Later we found a single **Yellow-faced Honeyeater** feeding very low on the flowering urn heath. Deeper into the sanctuary we stopped at two spots for some more of the same birds as well as a male **Golden Whistler** which afforded good views and also called loudly (rare for the day). A **White-eared Honeyeater** was more subdued, sitting quietly among half dead mistletoe with only the occasional and not full call.

After lunch we repaired to the big dam where we almost immediately saw 3 **Yellow-billed Spoonbills**, an increase of one on the two Steve Wallace had reported there during the week. Also present were about 8 **Hardhead**, 2 **Musk Duck**, 3 **Grey Teal**, 3 **Australasian Grebe**, lots of **Eurasian Coot** and a few **Pacific Black Ducks**. Many **Welcome Swallows** were flying low over the water, with a few **Fairy and Tree Martins**, which were very difficult to separate while flying even though we concentrated on trying to see whether their heads were rufous or dark. However, the undoubted highlight was the appearance of a **Whistling Kite**. We had been on the lookout for them but it took quite a while for one to appear, and it seemed to be just ambling past but then back-tracked and perched for a while. Some of the participants then saw it take a stick and fly to the nest in a dead tree over the water, place it, then shape the nest and settle in it very low for at least 10 minutes before we had to leave.

Steve Wallace had alerted us to this nest on the COG chatline earlier in the week, and we had a debate as to whether they would nest in the dead tree over water which Jenny and I had also seen when doing a recce a week earlier. When we arrived with no presence of this species I had looked at the nest and decided it looked too rough and possibly was old. This was in part because we had seen 4 earlier floating over the northern part of the reserve – how wrong I turned out to be.

Despite the wind, which seemed stronger when we left the reserve (perhaps all the trees were shielding us), all participants enjoyed the day learning about what's happening in the area and visiting spots which are difficult to access particularly for older people due to the amount of walking needed. My thanks again to Jenny Bounds for the idea of visiting here, with her help with planning the day and leading/driving one of the buses. Our thanks also go to the rangers for providing the permission to access the reserve in our buses.

Jack Holland

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Wednesday 21 August - Newline

24 members and guests gathered on a cool, but not as windy as recently, morning. By the time we had moved off 14 more common species had been written down. As an innovation, we walked along the road to the quarry first before exploring the paddock. This strategy was immediately rewarded by several members hearing a **Brown Treecreeper** call within the paddock. Not to worry, we'll find it when we come back – we didn't!

A Brown Goshawk did a high level flypast, with a **Brown Falcon** not too long after, followed by 2 **Wedge-tailed Eagles** and a **Nankeen Kestrel** hunting when we got back to the cars. More than 20 **Double-barred Finches** were recorded.

The only breeding records were both parrots; a female **Red-rumped Parrot** and a **Rainbow Lorikeet** which promptly dived into a hollow not to reappear while we were present.

There was no evidence of returning migrants. In total, 39 species were recorded.

Martin Butterfield

COG'S BIRD BLITZ 26-27 OCTOBER 2013

A reminder about our annual bird blitz. Nominations to survey sites have been coming in steadily but there are still many outstanding areas yet to be “adopted” for survey purposes over that weekend. If you “adopt” a site, you commit to doing at the very minimum a 20-minute 2-hectare survey there, though of course longer surveys and surveys of several sites are most welcome. Full details about the blitz and an Excel spreadsheet of the adopted sites are provided on the COG website; to “adopt” a site, please contact the blitz organiser Barbara Allan at blitz@canberrabirds.org.au or telephone her on 6254 6520. Here are some of the sites waiting adoption. More than one individual or group may survey each site, but it is helpful to spread our coverage as widely as possible.

Northside

Hall and environs; Kowen Forest; Percival Hill NR; Gungahlin Hill NR; Bruce Ridge NR; Gossan Hill NR; Mt Painter NR; Umbagog District Park; Mt Ainslie NR; O'Connor Ridge NR; all the grasslands

Central sites

National Museum environs; ANU; Kings Park; Parliament House gardens; Commonwealth Park

Southern sites

Mt Mugga Mugga NR; Mount Taylor NR; Oakey Hill NR; Stromlo Forest Park; Point Hut; McQuoids Hill; Rob Roy NR; Tuggeranong Hill NR; Urambi Hills NR; Kambah Pool; Tharwa sandwash; Cotter Reserve

Further afield in Namadgi NP

Shanahans Mtn; Yerrabi Track; Orroral Valley; many spots in the Brindabellas; Glendale Crossing; Brandy Flat Hut; Square Rock; etc.

Come on, COG members! Sign up for an enjoyable day's – or weekend's – birding to help us build as complete a picture as possible of the birds of the ACT over that weekend!

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>

A reminder that COG has a long-standing policy to give preference to members for field trips that can accommodate only a limited number of people.

Saturday 7 September - 2 pm, 54 Grayson St, Hackett

Tips for the Blitz - when to report and not report birds, help in being confident of your ID, and easy ways to estimate numbers.

Forms, notes & pencils provided.

Optional second hour - search of a local park, further practice with id and reporting, plus tips about describing location, type of search, use of latitude & longitude, support software & COG online system.

Registration not required, questions welcome, contact Michael Robbins
mrobbins@home.netspeed.com.au

Sunday 15 September - 11 am, 3 Thorn Pl Curtin

Format as for Sat 7 Sept 2 pm, Grayson St, Hackett.

If you unable to attend either session (7th or 15th Sept), but would like a copy of the notes please email Michael.

Registration not required, questions welcome, contact Michael Robbins
mrobbins@home.netspeed.com.au

Friday 13 to Sunday 15 September 2013- Galong, west of Harden

This trip is now full.

Wednesday 18 September – Lake Road, Bungendore

Meet at the Big Dam at 9am about 1km from the start of Lake Rd. We will bird along the road checking out the bed of Lake George where possible, although the main water has receded well out of binocular range

Saturday 21 and Sunday 22 September –Eden pelagics

Monday 23 to Friday 27 September 2013 - Green Cape

These trips are now fully subscribed and there are people on the waiting lists for both trips. Keep in mind for next year that it's best to get in early, rather than waiting until the last few days before the payment deadline, to avoid disappointment!

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Monday 30 September – Kelly Road

This trip has been cancelled.

Friday 4 to Monday 7 October - Stackpoole Nature Reserve

Previous visits to the Stackpoole area have yielded **Pied, Black, and Painted** Honeyeaters, **Crimson Chats, Major Mitchell's Cockatoos** and **Budgerigars**. We will check several areas for **White-browed Treecreepers** that have previously been recorded here.

There are **NO** facilities in Stackpoole Nature Reserve or in Langtree and Loughnan NRs, the other reserves I hope to visit if time is available. So camping will be “bring everything in and take everything out”.

If people do not wish to camp there are several motels in Goolgowi, a further 15 km along the Mid Western Hwy from the Back Hillston Road sign.

PLEASE NOTE:- The reserves are within the Fruit Fly exclusion zone so fresh fruit and vegetables should NOT be brought into the area unless purchased somewhere like Griffith. Heavy fines can apply.

There are two ways to get to Stackpoole Nature Reserve. The most direct is to travel from Temora to West Wyalong and take the Mid Western Highway at the western end of WW to Rankin Springs (93 km – kilometres are cumulative), pass the turnoff on top of a rise to Griffith (107 km) but stay on the Mid Western Hwy until you come to a crossroad marked **BACK HILLSTON ROAD** (133km – the signpost is on the left of the hwy) – Back Hillston Road is a good dirt/gravel road. **Turn RIGHT** here and follow this road until you see WELLS ROAD off to the right. Do not turn here but travel another several hundred metres where you will find the BHRd is sealed. Just after the bitumen and on the right is a NSW NPWS sign low down – turn in here and travel until you find a “clearing” near two large eucalypts. I should have my small tent erected here so find yourself a spot to camp.

The second route is via Griffith. It is 50 km to the south of Goolgowi but the road north (The Kidman Way) is sealed all the way. Turn right at Goolgowi and travel the 15 km to the Back Hillston Road and turn LEFT.

In the event of heavy rain the trip will be cancelled. I will make the decision on the Thursday before the long weekend.

Please register with Mark Clayton by email: chollop7@bigpond.com or by phone on (h) 62413620 or (mob) 0419 48 23 41.

Thursday 10 October – Raptors ID Session, bus trip/outing

As a follow up to his presentation at the COG meeting the night before, Stephen Debus has agreed to lead a raptor ID session the following morning. One 12 seater bus has been booked and if it is filled a maximum of two cars may be allowed as tag-alongs on a car-pooling basis, thus making it a maximum of 20 people. The cost of the bus will be \$20 per person and the expected time of leaving will be 8 am, at a central car park yet to be determined. The route taken will not be decided until very close to the day, and will depend on where raptors can be most easily seen at the time. To express your interest in this outing, please contact Jack Holland on 6288 7840 or jack.holland@environment.gov.au.

Future Field Trips—*continued from Page 8*

Sunday 13 October – K2C bird surveys, 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**. We will be visiting the same sites to continue the monitoring and see if we can add to the property lists with spring-summer migrants. 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.

Saturday 19 October - 8 am at Callum Brae, then 9.30 am to 5 pm in Namadgi NP

On the weekend of 19/20 Oct GOG will hold joint outings with the Illawarra Birders and you are invited to join all or just one outing.

The following are target species for the weekend: **Speckled Warbler**, **Western Gerygone**, **White-throated Gerygone**, **Southern Whiteface**, **Fuscous Honeyeater**, **Grey Currawong**, **Diamond Firetail**, **Rufous Songlark**, **Spotted Quail-thrush** and **Olive Whistler**. We've a good chance for all except the last two. We will also be aiming to see other woodland birds of concern such as the **Brown Treecreeper** and **Hooded Robin**, plus migrants such as the **White-winged Triller**.

You are welcome to join the 90 minute exploration of Callum Brae starting at 8 am and/or the trip to Namadgi starting at 9.30 am. Both will meet at the Narrabundah Lane entrance to Callum Brae.

Bring a packed lunch, water, hat and sunscreen for the Namadgi trip as we will be out all day, visiting several places. Which places will depend on what have been recently reported as good options. Options certainly include Namadgi Visitor's Centre, Glendale Depot, Old Boboyan Rd, and Booroomba Rocks car park, but others are also possible.

On Saturday night there will be a dinner get together with the IBers at a restaurant in Dickson.

Bookings are not required, but advice of attendance is appreciated to facilitate car-pooling and booking of restaurant. Contact Michael Robbins mrobbins@home.netspeed.com.au

Sunday 20 October - 8 am at Shepherds Lookout, then 9.30 am to 3pm at various hot spots plus Mulligan's Flat.

This is the second day of joint outings with the Illawarra Birders and you are invited to join all or just one outing.

Both outings will meet at the Shepherds Lookout car park off Stockdill Drive which comes off Drake Brockman Drive, Holt. The Shepherds Lookout walk will run from 8 – 9.30am. We will then depart at 9.30 to check out the hot spots and Mulligans Flat.

Bring water, hat and sunscreen for the hot spots/Mulligans trip, and, if you want, a packed lunch (we're aiming to finish about 2 pm!). The aim is to visit several different places depending on which have been recently reported as good options and finish with a stroll around Mulligans.

Bookings are not required, but advice of attendance is appreciated to facilitate car-pooling. Contact Michael Robbins mrobbins@home.netspeed.com.au

2014 COG Outings

Planning has begun for COG's outings programme in 2014. If you have ideas for an outing (morning, afternoon, all day, weekend, long weekend or mid-week), especially if you would be prepared to lead that outing, please come to a meeting at 5.30pm on Tuesday 17 September at the Conservation Council office at 15/28 Barry Drive on the ground floor of the Lena Karmel Lodge. Free parking is available from 5.30pm in Watson Street, opposite the Lodge. If you are unable to attend, please send your ideas to Sue Lashko – email smlashko@gmail.com.

NEWS FROM CIMAG :

Recent months have been some of the most significant in the short (7+ year) history of Canberra Indian Myna Action Group. In June CIMAG held its second national conference, this time at Canberra's CSIRO Discovery Centre. It featured some outstanding speakers and presentations, most notably Susana Saavedra Cruz from the Canary Islands, who also spoke at COG's June meeting. A summary of papers and discussion at the conference is on the CIMAG website. Log on to www.indianmynaaction.org.au, click the Myna Matters Bulletins menu, and select No 27.

CIMAG members were overjoyed in July, when the group won three separate awards from Keep Australia Beautiful (The Sustainable Cities Award, The Community Action, Partnerships & Culture Award and The Environmental Stewardship Award). Most importantly, CIMAG was also selected as the ACT finalist to compete for the Keep Australia Beautiful National Association Award. A judge visited Canberra in late August to assess CIMAG for the national award.



Common Myna

Photo: Geoffrey Dabb

ANU PhD candidate Kate Garrock spoke at a Fenner School seminar in late July about her myna research project and submitted her thesis in August. Kate and her associates have published two additional papers dealing with the impact of mynas on native species. These have been published in *Environmental Management* and *Australian Ecology* journals. Kate received strong support from COG and CIMAG members during her project and she made extensive use of information from the COG data base.

Bruce Lindenmayer

MY GROWING LOVE AFFAIR WITH BIRDS

Kay Hahne, originally from Iowa, USA

Perhaps it all started with Mom's white laying hens (chooks to you Aussies). I loved helping Mom carry water, oats, corn and mash to the chickens. Gathering eggs twice a day was fun too, and placing fresh straw in the nests. And I would run most of the way home from my one-room country school on the day in May every year when the 250 one-day old chicks would arrive via the mailman, in his car – right to the door! As their white feathers started growing out, replacing the yellow fluff, Mom taught me to look for the rounded feathers to denote the female pullets, and the pointed ones to denote the males. The males also soon had larger combs. When the young roosters were plump enough – well, it was chicken every Sunday on the big farm house table!

We also raised Mallard Ducks. They really are beautiful creatures and at home in Iowa they were a part of our native landscape and nothing to grump about. They didn't hybridise with any natives like they do with the Black Ducks here in Australia. Their iridescent green heads, the beautiful, fine barring on the breast feathers and the saucy little curled tail feather were all something to notice and admire close up.

I was a natural nature girl from the start. My first sentence was "See the bug" as a boxelder bug crawled on my arm. Mom used to keep me quiet and standing still while she measured a hem for a dress by giving me a boxelder bug or two to play with. They were small, harmless and often invaded the house on warm, sunny days, even in the winter. On hot summer evenings my brother and cousins and I collected lightning bugs in jars with holes in the lids. We loved watching their abdomens which glowed on and off with a little yellow-green neon light! We always let them go before we went to bed. I was also fascinated by the hundreds of Monarch

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DEUA TIN HUTS (Via Braidwood)

- Comfortable accommodation on the door-step of the Deua National Park at Krawarree via Braidwood NSW.
- Three cosy huts accommodating up to 14 people.
- A short walk into the Deua National Park, the Big Hole and Marble Arch, walks in the beautiful Shoal haven Valley.
- Reasonable rates, hampers on request.
- Group booking discounts.
- Email enquiry@deuatinhuts.com www.deuatinhuts.com
- Ph 02 4847 1248

MUDBRICK COTTAGE—MALLACOOTA

- Our mudbrick cottage (Blue Wren Cottage) is available for rental.
- It is set amongst the trees in Mallacoota, Victoria (approximately 4 hours drive from Canberra). 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.
- Contact:** Barbara de Bruine (02) 6258 3531, or barbdebruine@hotmail.com

My Growing Love Affair With Birds—continued from Page 11

Butterflies (the Wanderer in Australia) which collected and rested in the row of hickory trees along the back fence of our schoolyard, before migrating all the way to Mexico each fall.

Dad was very instrumental in my love of birds and nature. He kept a piece of graph paper on the dumb-waiter door. Every morning when he rose early to milk the cows he noted the temperature from the outdoor thermometer outside the pantry window and put the day's 'low' in blue pencil. When he came in around noon for lunch, he looked again and put the 'high' in red. He also noted when the lambs or piglets were due, the arrival of the first Robin (our early harbinger of spring), the first bluebird and Barn Swallows, etc. Every year the swallows arrived in May, raised two or three broods and disappeared suddenly one day in late September or early October.

And of course being on a farm in the Midwest, temperate area of the United States meant there were many birds at all times of the year. You couldn't help but be aware of the many species of birds going about their daily or seasonal business of singing, nest building, feeding and migrating. Dad built wooden wren houses for our House Wrens and hung them in the apple orchard or in the lilac by the house; even a horizontal tin can nailed to the corncrib was used. He had to make sure the hole was small enough so that the pesky, introduced House Sparrows could not enter. We loved to watch the wrens' busy nest building and to hear their fast bubbly warble, and be the first one to spy the hanging nest of the Baltimore Oriole with their brilliant flash of black and orange plumage. Spring was so welcoming with the return of old friends.

Autumn saw Dad and his friends drive off to northern Iowa to go Ring-neck Pheasant hunting each year. My brother and I were quick to grab the long, pointed tail feathers and make Indian headdresses. As far as I know, Dad never shot a duck, a dove or a Bobwhite Quail. Instead we fed all the birds that hung around for the snowy winter, after the others had headed south. Cracked corn and oats and bread crumbs for the Blue Jays and Cardinals (have you ever seen a red Cardinal against a backdrop of fresh white snow?), bags of fatty suet were hung for the Chickadees, Tufted Titmice and the various woodpeckers. The feeder was very close to the kitchen window above the sink, so sometimes it took a long time to wash the dishes.

The turning point of my bird watching occurred as a biology student at Iowa State University in the late 1950s. Amongst all the botany, zoology, geology and biochemistry, I took three Wildlife courses: Fish; Reptiles and Amphibians; and Birds. The latter required Audubon's *Field Guide to Birds of Eastern United States* as a textbook. A special notebook was provided with Date, Time, Location and Weather at the top of each page. Binoculars were available to check out before the Saturday morning 3-hour field trip. Thus, armed with the means to identify and better view the birds and to note down what was seen – I was away! It was like discovering a new world in more detail. I didn't know so many different species existed and I wanted to discover as many as possible for myself.

Now, fifty years later, many bird books later, living in a new country, and partaking in many world travels, I still watch and listen and keep lists. I listen as my husband watches golf tournaments in the US – yes, that was the "thief, thief" call of a Blue Jay. I listen when I go to movies. You will recognise a few locals in the film *Jindabyne*, including the crack of an Eastern Whipbird. I never dreamed of seeing as many as 1000 species in my life, but I achieved that goal in Namibia in 2005. After a trip to Costa Rica in January 2013 my total has risen to 1700. I have contributed to the wonderful world of birds by participating in surveys and entering data. I am sure this hobby will keep me active and interested until I myself "fall off the perch".

CRACE WETLAND TWELVE MONTHS ON

John Harris

In July last year a few hopeful **Australian Wood Ducks** waited expectantly each evening beside the puddles created by the first excavations which would become the wetland and pond, part of the Crace Recreation Park's stormwater management. Now, twelve months later, a flock of up to 40 of them daily visit what is virtually a mature wetland system. Carefully designed plantings of sedges, reeds and rushes have grown to maturity and look like they have always been there. Native trees and shrubs have been planted around the edges and between the pond and wetland but are still very small. The pond and the wetland are separated by a path with a tunnel which the birds quickly learned to use.

Waterbirds arrived very rapidly well before the system was officially completed in November and a number of species give every indication of becoming permanent residents. These include **Pacific Black Ducks**, **Grey Teals**, **Eurasian Coots** and **Black-fronted Dotterels**. **Australasian Grebes** have gone through the full cycle of breeding and non-breeding plumage. Birds such as the **Little Pied Cormorant** and the **White-faced Heron** are regular visitors.

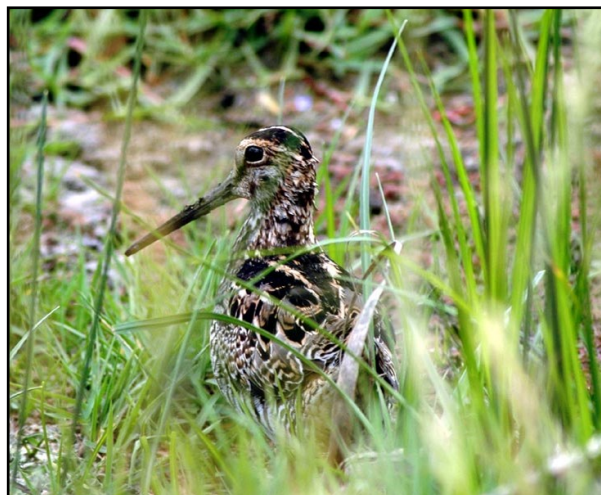
Small numbers of **Dusky Moorhens** and **Purple Swamphens** have recently taken up residence. For months there was a lone **Hardhead** but it has since been joined by three others and may become permanent. A lone **Latham's Snipe** turned up on 6 August but on 9 August I could not find it. The **Wood Ducks** are always around, in the water or on the banks and the grass beyond, and bred nearby in spring. They are not 'permanent' residents like the others are but call a much larger area home as I see the same flock moving around between the Crace wetland and other nearby creeks and ponds.

The interaction of the ducks with humans is interesting. People feed them and the **Pacific Black Ducks** always expect to be fed whenever a human approaches, as of course



Hardhead

Photo: Geoffrey Dabb



Latham's Snipe

Photo: Stuart Harris



Spotless Crake

Photo: Stuart Harris

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Grace Wetland Twelve Months On—Continued from Page 13

do the **Eurasian Coots**. The **Grey Teals** and **Hardheads** are less tame, hanging around the edges of the others and grabbing what they can. The **Australian Wood Ducks** never go to be fed. Indeed if people approach and throw food, even in the water, they take off and fly away.

Baillon's, Spotless Crake and **Australian Spotted Crake** were all present in the summer but now only the latter remains. A pair of them has been there consistently all winter and a third one appeared in early August. This was not double counting as the pair is always together and the new arrival stays at the other side of the pond. They are very interesting, particularly given that last year's COG Annual Bird Report noted only six records in the ACT in 2011/12, all between October and January. They act timidly, running to hide when you first appear but if you are patient they soon reappear a little further away. They are very active feeders, especially darting in among the other larger waterbirds on a small mudflat in the middle of the wetland.

The usual birds common to Canberra parklands are found in the grassed areas surrounding the wetland – **Magpies**, **Magpie-larks**, **Australian Ravens**, **Pied Currawongs**, **Galahs**, **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos**, **Crimson** and **Eastern Rosellas**, **Red-rumped Parrots** and so on. Small birds are noticeably absent except for the **Australasian Pipit**. This absence is of course hardly surprising, given that the large plantings of native trees are still very immature and we no doubt must await until there is reasonable cover.

This raises an interesting question: *Will they cross Gundaroo Drive?* I regard this main road as the border of my observation area but on the other side of the drive is mixed grassland and woodland bordering Ginninderra Creek. I walk about one kilometre through this reserve on my way to and from Crace. At the moment there is a flock of about 50 **Superb Fairy-wrens** and the same number of **Red-browed Finches** as well as a mixed flock of several types of **thornbills**, **Silvereyes**, **gerygones**, etc, and plenty of **Grey Fantails** and others. Will they cross the road? I suspect they will when the trees are taller and the bushes thicker as they already fly that kind of distance the other way, regularly crossing Ginninderra Creek.

The recent rains hint at a good breeding season for our local birdlife. I hope some of it happens in the Crace Wetland!

John Harris



Baillon's Crake

Photo: Geoffrey Dabb



Australian Spotted Crake

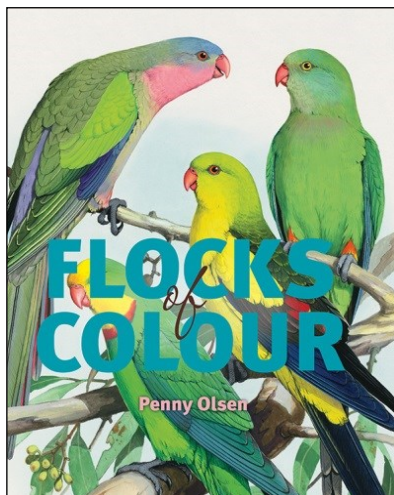
Photo: Stuart Harris



Australasian Pipit

Photo: Mat Gilfedder

New Book



Penny Olsen AM is a research scientist and natural history writer, based at the Australian National University in Canberra.

Her new book, ***Flocks of Colour***, will be available in mid-October, price approximately \$28. To place an order, see Chris Davey at the sales desk at the September COG meeting or email him at chris_davey@aapt.net.au

What name could be a more apt description of Australia than 'The Land of Parrots', a name inspired by late sixteenth-century maps showing a southern region labelled 'Psittacorum regio'? This beautiful book takes a close look at parrots in Australia, from the first published illustration of an Australian parrot—a Rainbow Lorikeet collected live on Cook's 1770 voyage—to William T Cooper's twentieth-century watercolour of the elusive Night Parrot.

With introductory essays by ornithologist Penny Olsen, *Flocks of Colour* covers two and a quarter centuries of discovery and illustration of Australia's avifauna. It features a rich portfolio of images of all the Australian parrots, by various artists including John Gould, Edward Lear, Neville W Cayley and William T Cooper, selected from the collections of the National Library of Australia. The foreword is by Joseph Forshaw, a world expert on the parrot family.

Be Kind to Your Editor!

Just a friendly reminder that, when submitting articles to Gang-gang, proofreading your final product before sending it and particularly ensuring that birds are correctly named, does save the editor a lot of time and the need to seek clarification from the writer. It is COG policy to use capital letters for bird names. The most common errors are for:

Willie Wagtail
Superb Fairy-wren
White-browed Scrubwren
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo
White-bellied Sea-Eagle

If you are unsure, use the GOG Observation Record Form or your field guide to check.

Sue Lashko

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 membership

2012-2013 memberships:

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

New members

COG welcomes the following new members:

R Luton, Sutton, NSW

NEXT NEWSLETTER

Deadline for October 2013 edition

Wednesday 25 September 2013

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.

Photographs (prints or electronic) with or without articles are encouraged welcomed.

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