



Gang-gang

April 2004

News letter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

APRIL MEETING

Wednesday 14 April

Details pg 3

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Black Swan (*Cygnus atratus*)
Photo courtesy **Lindsay Hansch**

'Whitey' the Boobook Owl faces a dark future

For at least 11 years, Whitey the Boobook Owl has been nesting in the same area within 100 metres of his favourite roosting tree at Black Mountain Reserve, now marked for destruction under the new Gungahlin Drive freeway plans.

Several members saw Whitey and his family on the recent COG field trip with Jerry Olsen, reported in the February 2004 *Gang-gang*.

Whitey is a dedicated parent and has successfully produced at least two young each year for the past 11 years. Boobook Owl chicks start to fly just before Christmas. Good nesting hollows are rare and the bulldozers will destroy two out of three of Whitey's nesting sites.

Protected roosting sites during the day are also important for Boobook Owls who are vulnerable to attack by other birds such as Currawongs and Kookaburras.

Whitey's best roosting sites have been red-tagged and will be cut down to make way for the freeway.

At last check, Whitey and his mate are in their roosting hollow waiting

for the bulldozers to uproot the trees.

The ACT Government has issued licenses for Whitey's family to be killed, along with other birds and animals.

Boobooks need their own piece of territory. There may not be other territories for them to move to if they survive the bulldozers, or other hollows for them to shelter in. There are just no enough mature hollow trees to go around.

Dr Jerry Olsen from the University of Canberra has been studying Whitey and other Boobooks for 11 years.

Jenny Bounds (based on material from Jerry Olsen)



Southern Boobook (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*) "Whiteys" Juveniles.

Photo courtesy **David Cook**

Letters to the editor

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

Field Trip Reports

Wednesday walk 17 March 2004

The Wednesday group ventured out to Kelly Lane on St Patrick's day and were blessed with sightings of many hard to find woodland birds. We saw several pairs of **Brown Treecreepers**, **Hooded Robins**, and **Southern Whiteface**. Lots of **Diamond Firetails** including some dark billed younger birds and a distant glimpse of **Speckled Warblers** were other highlights. We also honed our identification skills on a mixture of **Fuscous** and **White-plumed Honeyeaters** which were feeding in the roadside trees.

The next Wednesday outing will be to Mulligans Flat on the 21st of April. Meet at 9am at the parking area off the old Gundaroo road Gungahlin.

We will walk some way into the park searching for the mixed feeding flocks that form during Canberra's cooler months. We will specially target Speckled Warbler, Hooded Robin and the Thornbills.

The Wednesday walks are low-key outings for people who enjoy being among the birds. They are gently paced walks where we endeavour to ensure that everyone sees and identifies all the birds that we encounter.

They begin at 9am and are completed by 11.30 and are held on the Wednesday following the COG monthly meeting. Everyone is very welcome.

Tom Green

Pejar Dam etcetera Sunday 22 February 2004

In a number of ways this was an exploratory trip. It was the first COG outing for several years where a hired bus was the main form of transport. More importantly some local contacts that I made in an endeavour to add on some other spots to visit opened up the possibility of a number of other places for COG to visit in the Goulburn area, some of which we had an introduction to in the afternoon. In the end there was quite a large gathering, with 11 members in the bus, another 6 in the two "tag-a-long" cars, 3 local COG members who met us there, and about six participants from the Goulburn Field Naturalists (GFN) and related local organisations.

Though it was an outing which I organised and "led" to places where I had not been before, I was keen to see the Pejar Dam following a number of reports on the bird life there on COG-1. After our nearly 2 hour journey initial impressions of a very low level of water with very dry surrounds, with only the odd bird dotted on it, were not that favourable. However, as often happens on closer inspection with the many pairs of eyes and at least 4 scopes set up, things soon were more promising. Highlights on the water/bare edges were **Great Crested Grebe**, **Musk Duck**, **Australian Shelduck**, **Australasian Shoveller**, **Hardhead** and **Red-capped Plovers**; all species which are not reliably observed in the ACT, or present only at the Jerrabomberra Wetlands. The grebe was a first for many, and reasonably close views

were obtained. The Musk Duck, formerly reasonably common on Lake Burley Griffin but now rarely present, thrilled the spectators by performing a courtship display.

The edges also produced some good sightings. All participants had good views of a **Swamp Harrier** as it cruised low over the surrounding grassland, clearly a young bird by its very dark brown colour and orange/buff rump patch. A lucky few saw a **White-bellied Sea-Eagle** before it soared off into the distance. Those lingering longest near the dam wall were rewarded with very good views of several **Southern Whiteface** (seen only by Phyl earlier) and at least 2 **Diamond Firetail**. We then moved to a very attractive bit of woodland closer to the dam inlet, which had some good woodland birds such as **Dusky Woodswallow**, and a flock of at least 50 **martin sp.** While they were mainly resting on the bare branches of trees and therefore affording a much better look than on the wing, I remain to be convinced that the few with slightly redder heads were **Fairy** rather young **Tree Martins**.

Over the space of a couple of hours 45 species were seen on the dam or its immediate surroundings. My concerns about not needing to spend much time there were unfounded and we could have stayed much longer, as it was we had no time to visit the Alison Hone Reserve but had to return to Goulburn to meet Peter Mowle of the GFN so that he could let us in to two areas which have recently been purchased by the Goulburn City Council (GCC) for conservation purposes.

We had lunch at the first of these, Kenmore Dam, which is a very attractive piece of woodland surrounding a dam promising a different mix of species. Unfortunately, although we spent a couple of hours here, the rain set in early and while this was welcomed

by the locals it did rather restrict bird watching and bird species. A walk round the dam in the drizzle added a further 11 new species for the day, including **Brown Goshawk**, **Yellow Thornbill**, **Varied Sittella** and **Mistletoebird**. Despite the continuing rain participants were keen to spend the last hour before we needed to return home at the nearby Kenmore Quarry, which has a mix of woodland and riverine habitat on a sweeping bend of the Wollondilly River. Here we added a further 8 new species, notably **Little Eagle**, **Nankeen Night Heron**, **White-throated Gerygone** and **Double-barred Finch**.



Yellow-rumped Thornbill
(*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*)

Photo courtesy **Lindsay Hansch**

All in all it was a very successful outing, with well over 60 species for the day. It was particularly successful for the contacts made and my sincere thanks go to Peter Mowle and Rodney Falconer from the GFN for both organising access and showing us their special spots. The foresight of the GCC in purchasing these parcels of land is very commendable. These spots (and other not yet seen) are well worth a return visit on a fine spring day, possibly as part of a weekend to Goulburn, an area which COG has neglected in the past. Pejar Dam is also well worth a longer return visit, probably on a separate day. The bus worked well too, though the number of cars at the venues did mean that, particularly at the Pejar Dam, things tended to get a bit unwieldy and difficult to lead properly.

Jack Holland

PS. Unfortunately we lost an eye-piece for one of the scopes during the trip. This may have happened when some-one substituted the one being using for the one with higher magnification. If you are able to shed any light on this, please call Jack Holland on 6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au.

Thredbo, Canberra Day long weekend 12-15 March 2004

Eleven other COG members spent this weekend with me enjoying John and Michelle's excellent hospitality at the Boali Ski Lodge in delightful early autumn weather while observing the birds that occur in Australia's highest country.

While the altitude restricts many birds as they do not venture this high, close to 40 species were recorded. Of the two specials that can be found close to Thredbo Village, **Olive Whistlers** were particularly abundant and co-operative (as was the case in January), with all participants getting very good views as they often emerged out of the vegetation. Perhaps with the fire damage this normally cryptic species has moved into more open habitat, usually not favoured, and is thus easier to observe than usual. **Pink Robins** proved more elusive. We were very fortunate to have Jean Whatman, who first recorded them there over 20 years ago and has observed many nests and territories since that time, to show us the best spots where to find them. However, despite searching the ti-tree gullies very carefully, we only managed to find a total of two males, and just a single female, and, with many of the participants only getting brief views or missing out altogether. This may have been due to it being towards the end of the breeding season after which they disperse to areas unknown, but presumably at lower altitude.

Particularly conspicuous and plentiful, however, were **Flame Robins**, with a conservative estimate

April Meeting **8 pm Wednesday** **14 April 2004**

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

Our main speaker will be Adrian Manning; his talk is entitled "**A multi-scale study of the Superb Parrot: implications for landscape-scale ecological restoration**".

Adrian is a post-doctoral fellow at CRES, where he recently submitted his PhD thesis on the Superb Parrot, research supported by our Canberra Birds Conservation Fund. One of the greatest environmental challenges is the integration of conservation and production in the same landscape. The vulnerable Superb Parrot is an ideal subject for investigating this issue because it lives almost exclusively in the privately owned agricultural matrix in many parts of its range. Adrian will describe the Superb Parrot and the threats to its survival, and will then discuss the multi-scale approach he used in his study, the results and implications for landscape-scale ecological restoration.

Our short talk will be presented by the University of Canberra software development team USEE Software consisting of Duncan Lester, Jason Chui, Zumana Khalid and Catherine Kendrigan. The presentation entitled "**Online with COG**" will describe COG's proposed internet-based bird observation submissions and information retrieval system. The presentation will focus on the benefits and ease of use of the system including a brief walkthrough and discussion.

Don't miss it!

of several hundred birds mainly on the lower slopes close to the village. This species is well known to favour recently burnt areas and were often seen together in loose clumps, with the vast majority (>95%) of them in brown plumage, indicative of a good breeding season. It certainly was very encouraging to see this declining species in such numbers, and would appear to assure of at least its short term future. It will be interesting to see if this is reflected in higher numbers in the ACT close to Canberra this winter.

Compared with Kosiblitz survey in March 2003, within 2 months of the fires, many of species seeming to then be using the unburnt areas as temporary refuge were not present. One new bird was added to the list, Australia's most widespread bird according to the recent Atlas the **Willie Wagtail** was seen close to the parking area at Dead Horse Gap, round about the 1500 m contour, further proof of its great adaptability. Several other birds seen on Kosiblitz surveys but not on the NSW NPWS Checklist of birds occurring above 1500 m in Kosciuszko National Park were also confirmed, namely the **Southern Boobook, Laughing Kookaburra, Pilotbird and Eastern Yellow Robin**.

All in all a very relaxing and enjoyable weekend, with good food and very comfortable centrally situated accommodation. Participants really enjoyed the variety of walks on offer even though there were times when few birds or different species were seen, such as on the alpine areas which have a very restricted bird list. It was agreed there is a place for fully accommodated comparatively more expensive trips on COG's calendar, and I will be looking at including further such outings in future programs.

Jack Holland

Mulligan's Flat Survey Sunday 28 March 2004

This survey marked the end of 10 years of the woodland project surveys at the reserve, quite an achievement. It would not have been possible without the contribution of around 20 COG members who have helped me with the surveys over this time. In particular, a core group of regulars which includes Bruce Lindenmayer, Martyn Moffat, and Kay and Horst Hahne, who were there with me on the very first survey in June 1995 - thanks everyone for your commitment. On the recent survey, three new surveyors, Tom Green, Adam Leavesley and Debbie Saunders assisted, along with Bruce, Martyn, Jack Holland, Steve Holliday, Pauline Wicksteed, Peter Roberts, Alan Ford and Sue Lashko.



Hooded Robin
(*Melanodryas cucullata*)

Photo courtesy **Lindsay Hansch**

The dry seasonal conditions were evident on this survey with dam levels very low and grasses very shrivelled. 46 species of birds were recorded. Interesting sightings of a **Wedge-tailed Eagle** (I later saw a bird probably the same one over the Gooroo Reserve next door), two sightings of **Varied Sittella**, several pairs of **Scarlet Robin**, a **Fan-tailed Cuckoo** and a **Crested Shrike-tit**. Only one small group of **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** and a group of **Red Wattlebirds** moving through on migration were seen. Most of the other birds were seen in mixed flocks moving through. The species mix and number of species is very similar to the March survey last year. It is

good to see that fox baiting has now been commenced in the reserve.

Surveys for remainder of 2004 will be Sunday 27 June, Sunday 26 September and Sunday 28 November - volunteers note your diaries. I promise I will have mud cake (and maybe champagne) for the June survey to really celebrate the 10 year milestone.

Jenny Bounds

News from your Committee

The Committee met on 17 March and considered, amongst other more routine business matters, the following items. If any COG member would like more information on any of these issues, please contact the nominated Committee member.

The Birds Australia proposal for a pocket guide to the birds of the ACT, directed principally at the tourism market, is being further developed (Jenny Bounds – 6288 7802).

An Internet-based information management system for COG data, including online data entry and retrieval, is now under development by students at the University of Canberra . (David McDonald – 6231 8904).

Further data are being sought on the bird species which COG nominated as vulnerable but which were not so declared by the ACT Government, on the recommendation of the Flora and Fauna Committee (Jack Holland - 6288 7840).

COG has held discussions with Environment ACT on post-fire atlassing. EACT will be monitoring certain sites and will seek the assistance of COG volunteers to conduct bird surveys. A preliminary workshop will be held shortly (Jack Holland - 6288 7804).

The status of Spotted Turtle-Doves was also discussed with EACT, and

whether they could be considered 'a threatening process'. See 'Conservation matters' report in this *Gang-gang*.

Barbara Allan, secretary

...from your President

Six months into my presidency I'm still finding out about the many issues that COG is involved in, and the many members who help COG in its day to day activities, often behind the scenes and largely unrecognized.

One of my initial aims has been to provide a more visible identity/focus with the membership, of which our monthly meeting is a very important aspect. In my view the enjoyment of the social side of COG is very important, as an enthusiastic leadership and membership is the lifeblood of any organisation.

Conservation issues have been very much to the fore during this time, with a number of major issues running at this time which are giving concern to many members, ranging from responsible cat and dog ownership to loss of important bird habitat through the building of new suburbs or roads, and also including the future management of the Jerrabomberra Wetlands, so very important to a large proportion of the membership.

I found the 2002-2003 Annual Bird Report published early in March very interesting reading, and I would like to congratulate Barbara Allan, Harvey Perkins and the team for putting it all together so quickly from the very raw state I saw it just before Christmas. I feel the integrated, more interpretive approach is certainly the right direction.

It does, however, emphasise the difficulty COG has in capturing on our database all the important bird records, for example the many interesting sightings posted on COG-1 or even in Canberra Bird Notes

articles such as the paper I recently wrote on Satin Bowerbird breeding. This is something the committee will be looking at, members would appreciate the importance of having the best data available on our database for use in the many conservation issues before us. The proposal for electronic data entry currently being investigated through the University of Canberra should be a significant step forward as it should make this process smoother for many.

Another aspect I'm proposing to raise with the committee is to consider reviving the Species of the Year. Michael Lenz' presentation on the Pied Currawong at the February meeting is an example of how an amateur can make an important contribution to the knowledge of a particular species. My view is that some of COG's money would be well spent in providing a bit of encouragement for some of our members to co-opt and study a particular species. One example is the Little and Long-billed Corellas, which seem to be increasing and expanding their range in the ACT (and also in other cities in the region). A study on why this is happening would be very valuable.

I'd be happy to discuss the above or any other issue with any member, and can be contacted on 6288 7840 AH or by email jack.holland@deh.gov.au.

Jack Holland



Photo courtesy **Geoffrey Dabb**

Conservation Matters

JERRABOMBERRA WETLANDS - REVIEW OF PLAN OF MANAGEMENT.

The draft POM process will be a major focus over the next few months. Jenny and Julie have attended a recent stakeholders meeting and presented COG's views. We followed this up with a brief written outline of our main issues and a response to specific questions from one of the consultants.

The recently announced proposed East Basin residential development will put even more pressure on the adjacent wetlands from increased human and domestic pet visitation and changes to drainage and nutrient inflow into the sub-catchment. Any comments or issues to Jenny or Julie ASAP please.

CAT MANAGEMENT IN NORTH GUNGAHLIN – GOVERNMENT DECISION

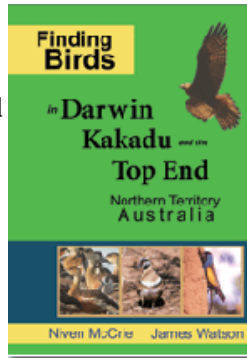
The Legislative Assembly, and the Government, agreed on cat containment measures to protect wildlife in Mulligan's Flat and Gooroo NRs. Householders in Forde and Bonner will have to confine their animals to their properties at all times – either inside the house or in a cat run. This will be legislated as an amendment to the Domestic Animals Act. The Government has promised to monitor and enforce these management proscriptions and will undertake community education.

The Assembly came close to agreeing to a cat-free zone in the two suburbs, with a majority of members supportive in principle. However due to a procedural matter as well as the Liberals, although supportive, wanting further community consultation, the Assembly decided to accept the Government's amendment to the original Green's motion and institute cat confinement as a first step. However, the

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.



Assembly has let the door open for future strengthening of the management regime.

COG has written to all parties and independents to thank them for their decision on this issue (we may need them to make similar decisions in future regarding domestic pet management at Kingston Foreshores and the East Basin developments adjacent to Jerra Wetlands).

MINIMISING MYNAS PROJECT

Dr Chris Tidemann has recently launched an updated website to service the MM project, and is now accepting (electronic) expressions of interest from people interested in assisting with hosting traps and monitoring Myna populations. A notice inviting the general public to assist has also appeared in the Canberra Times. The project will commence soon. Check out the website at:
<http://sres.anu.edu.au/associated/myna/index.html>

Interested people will be put on an email list to receive information on the project.

ACT NATURAL TEMPERATE GRASSLAND CONSERVATION STRATEGY

Jenny recently attended the first in a series of public consultation meetings regarding the development of the grasslands strategy.

ACT LOWLAND WOODLAND CONSERVATION STRATEGY

The finalised Woodland Strategy is due out soon. It will include action plans for ACT threatened bird species. The ACT Flora and Fauna Committee has recently recommended that two bird species be added to the ACT's threatened species list – White-winged Triller and Varied Sitella. Other nominated species, Crested Shrike Tit, Dusky Woodswallow, Flame Robin and Diamond Firetail will not to be listed

at this time, but a “watching brief” will be held by the Committee on these four species.

SPOTTED TURTLE-DOVES

Members may remember that Environment ACT undertook to monitor and respond to our concerns regarding increasing numbers of STDs in the ACT and Queanbeyan. EACT have requested more information on regular sites where STDs are persisting. Could all members please report STDs in your suburb, especially those that appear “resident”, in pairs, or any other evidence of associating or breeding, giving the nearest house number and street name (and GPS coordinates, if you have the capacity). You can report them on a COG Incidental Record sheet, which is available at meetings or can be downloaded from the COG website.

UNRESTRAINED DOGS IN CANBERRA NATURE PARK

COG has sent a letter to the Manager of CNP regarding unrestrained dogs in the Mt Majura Nature Park and concerns with impacts on Glossy Black-Cockatoos coming in to drink at the dams. The Manager has agreed to organise more dog control patrols of the area, and is considering letterbox drops in nearby streets. Please let us know if there are further problems here.

RE-ESTABLISHMENT AND REVEGETATION OF RURAL VILLAGES

The ACT Government is in the early stages of planning for the re-establishment (and expansion) of the burnt out rural villages of Stromlo, Uriarra and Pierce’s Creek. Jenny and Julie had an informal chat with the project manager from the Chief Minister’s Department regarding revegetation of the villages and their surroundings, providing her with some ideas about native species

to encourage woodland birds, and emphasising the importance of creating landscape linkages.

GUNGAHLIN DRIVE EXTENSION

Relevant COG data has been provided to a range of parties involved in attempting to stave off the destruction of areas of Canberra Nature Park on the route of the GDE. Whilst COG has no official position on whether a freeway should be built, we have provided representations to previous public consultation processes on the GDE outlining potential effects on Canberra’s birds and their habitats, and have stated our objection to any resumption of land in Black Mountain Nature Reserve.

EDGE ISSUES WITH NORTH GUNGAHLIN NATURE RESERVES

COG is represented on a working group involving the Conservation Council and government representatives that is working on management of the edges and immediate surroundings of Mulligan’s Flat and Gooroo Nature Reserves. New sites for systematic monitoring of woodland birds in southern Gooroo will soon be established (we have been monitoring birds in northern Gooroo for a number of years now).

Your COG Conservation Officers

Jenny Bounds and Julie McGuinness

Future Field Trips

Oakey Hill to Mt Taylor Sunday 4 April 2004 longish morning walk/car shuffle

This outing will look at the post-fire regeneration, which birds have returned there and the early season honeyeater movement along this important corridor just to the south of central Canberra. It will involve a car

shuffle by parking at Mt Taylor, with some cars (and all participants) then moving to the northern end of Oakey



Restless Flycatcher (*Myiagra inquieta*)

Photo courtesy **Lindsay Hansch**

Hill and parking near the ACTEW substation/Iloura Horse paddocks. Participants will then proceed to walk back to the remaining cars.

Doug Laing will be leading the Mt Taylor part, and Alistair Bestow the Oakey Hill section. Meet Doug (6287 7700, E-mail doug.laing@deh.gov.au) and Alistair (6281 1481) at 8 am in the car park at end of Waldock St off McFarland St, Chifley for this longish morning walk/car shuffle.

Yathong Nature Reserve 9-12 April 2004 Easter Long Weekend trip

This trip is full as numbers have to be strictly limited to 20. There is a waiting list. Accommodation will be in the Shearers Quarters as camping is prohibited in the Reserve. The cost will be \$11 per night. In case of unexpected vacancies or to obtain more details please contact Noel Luff (62883291) or by e-mail on noelluff@bigpond.com.

Angle Crossing Sunday 18 April 2004 Honeyeater migration morning

The autumn movement of thousands of **Yellow-faced** and **White-naped Honeyeaters** (and lesser numbers of other species) from the mountains to warmer climes along the coast and further north is a feature of the Canberra bird watching calendar. Last year, despite the bushfires, we still counted thousands of honeyeaters passing through the Angle Crossing area on a good migration day.

To witness this spectacle, and to help count the honeyeaters, meet Nicki Taws at 8:30 am at Tharwa, in the first car park on the left immediately after crossing the bridge. Bring something to sit on, a hat, sunscreen and morning tea. Enquiries to Nicki (6251 0303, ntaws@austarmetro.com.au), or for the after Easter week, to Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au). As usual if the weather's not the best for honeyeaters we will visit the Tharwa Sandwash for some general birding.

East Basin/Molonglo River Sunday 9 May 2004 Electric Boat cruise

A repeat late autumn cruise on the upper parts of Lake Burley Griffin and the adjacent Molonglo River/Jerrabomberra Creek on the all electric "E.L. Cygnet", which allows both a quiet approach as well as access to areas normally difficult to get to. This season has been a good one for the nesting **Darters** and both **Little Pied** and **Little Black Cormorants**, with the last named not nesting here last year. With most of the leaves off the trees this should allow for excellent viewing of any late nesting. The area is also rich in other waterbirds and with the continuing dry weather a large variety should be seen.

This trip comes highly recommended for both first time and repeat customers. It will last about 2 hours and will cost \$20, payable in cash on boarding. Please book your place with Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au). As the boat takes a maximum of 10 passengers there will be an 8 am shift with, depending on numbers, the possibility of a second at 10 am. As the previous point of departure from the Kingston Boat Harbour is likely to no longer be accessible at the time, the departure point will be advised in the May edition of *Gang-gang*.

Nursery Swamp day outing Sunday 23 May 2004

On this trip we will visit one of the most delightful spots in Namadgi National Park to ascertain which birds may be found in the high country, post-fires (the area was burned in January 2003), in late autumn, and to obtain records for COG's and Birds Australia's Ongoing Atlas Project. We will drive to the Orroral Valley. The first part of the walk is uphill on a good track, then we continue along a valley through Black Sallee's to Nursery Swamp, a fen at 1,100 metres altitude containing peat that has been dated to 10,000 years BP. The area is of great significance to Indigenous people, containing both rock art and tool-making sites.

Meet at the Kambah Village shopping centre car park (corner Drakeford Drive and Marconi Crescent, Kambah) at 08.30 hours for carpooling. We will return in the early afternoon, so bring lunch and water, and be prepared for brisk weather conditions. Please register for this trip by contacting its leader, David McDonald, at telephone (02) 6231 8904.

Glossy Black-Cockatoo search; Sunday 27 June

The above was listed in COG's 2004 calendar. A person is required to both help organise and lead this outing. Assistance can be given with possible places/contacts to visit (eg Mt Majura NR). If you are able to do this please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au).



Darters at Black Mountain Peninsula
(*Anhinga melanogaster*)

Photo courtesy **Martin Butterfield**

Wednesday walk 21 April Mulligan's Flat

An easy walk through the Mulligan's Flat Reserve in Gungahlin, probably following the marked 6 km trail (pamphlet available at the reserve or from the COG sales desk at meetings). Bring some morning tea or lunch. Meet at 9 am at the gate to the reserve off Gundaroo Road, just a short distance north from where the main sealed road through Gungahlin ends.

Longer trips

Green Cape Long weekend 12-14 June 2004

COG has booked the two duplex cottages associated with the lighthouse at Green Cape for our outing over this long weekend in June. Peter Fullagar will be leading, and in mid June he expects to see a mix of sea birds as well as whales close to shore (depending on the weather). In the nearby heath there are some specials such as the **Ground Parrot** and the **Tawny-crowned Honeyeater**, and there is likely to be a range of birds in the woodlands, also close by.

As previously indicated one cottage has been booked for Thursday to Monday, and the other now from Friday to Monday due to the demand. The cottages each hold a maximum of 6 people, consisting of separate rooms, the master bedroom with a queen size bed (both already taken), one with two single beds and a double sofa bed in the family/lounge room. Accommodation is limited to 12 people, but there are potentially still a couple of spaces available as it has been difficult to achieve the right female/male/couple gender balance. If there is additional interest there will be the opportunity to camp at Bittangabee Bay, which is not far away.

The costs per person will be in the order of \$32 per night (costs vary a bit depending on week or weekend rates), plus a \$2 per day COG admin fee. Further details will be advised later. However, at this stage please register your interest with Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au). A \$25 deposit per person (paid to the Treasurer COG) within a month will then secure your place in the cottages.

Other surveys/Activities of Interest to COG Members

COG has made contact with the Illawarra Bird Observers Club (IBOC) with the view of holding one or more joint outings, possibly a **shorebird trip** either late this year or early in 2005. We may also advertise outings in this column on our respective calendars that may be of mutual interest.

Meanwhile the IBOC has a WEB site that COG members may be interested in. It's an illustrated version of their handbook, and describes the spatial distribution of the 420 species recorded in their area since 1839. It also describes over 100 walks in the region.

You can find it by typing Wild Illawarra into your web browser (eg Google) or type the url which is: www.speedlink.com.au/users/cchafer

The dates for the **Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater surveys** are the weekends of 15-16 May and 31 July/1 August.

Debbie Saunders, the co-ordinator of this survey, indicates that there are usually several COG members who go out to the western slopes or south coast. She is wondering if someone may be interested as a leader for a small group or whether there could be several groups. Alternatively, if there is someone willing to lead a bigger group she could try to organise a visit to private property between Boorowa and Cowra (as COG did for a non-survey weekend last year). Another alternative is that the local reserves including Mulligans/Campbell Park/Mount Ainslie could be surveyed as swift parrots do pass through Canberra most years, even if only briefly.

If you are interested in helping in any of the above ways please contact Debbie on saunders@cres.anu.edu.au , Ph 6125

2635 or Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au).

THE MIGRATION OF YELLOW-FACED HONEYEATERS

As yet there have been no reports of the Yellow-faced Honeyeaters being on the move. Migration from the mountains has usually commenced before now. Doubtless the long spell of hot dry weather has kept them in the mountains. But I believe that they will start their migration as soon as there is a change in the weather.

I am asking people to please let me know, as soon as they see any of these migrating birds, especially any seen to the east of Canberra, along a wide line between Angle Crossing and the foot of the Araluen Valley. I am also interested in their migration along the Murrumbidgee corridor.

I am proposing to lead a group from COG to map the easterly migratory route of the Yellow-faced Honeyeaters and any of their fellow travellers on Saturday April 24th. I shall speak more about this at the next COG meeting with the help of a map. Contact me on either 6295 3028 or email: william.compston@anu.edu.au if you would like to participate in this survey.

TWITCHATHON 2003

Dear Members of bird clubs and Birds Australia, **Congratulations** to everyone involved in the 2003 Twitchathon! You helped to raise the net amount of \$13,448 towards the Murray catchment bird monitoring program, which will begin in Spring 2004. Total donations received were \$13,991.55 - the second highest amount ever raised in a NSW/ACT Twitchathon. Expenses totalled \$543. I extend a big thank you to everyone who worked so hard to raise this grand sum.

We have achieved some wonderful

things for birds by running Twitchathons since 1990 and I list below the projects we have established, contributed to and still contribute to by our tree planting, bird surveys, etc. voluntary efforts. The support of everyone in the birding community is very much appreciated.

For what will we raise the funds from the 2004 Twitchathon? If your club has a very worthy cause for our birds please contact the NSW/ACT Group of Birds Australia with your ideas.

- 1990 Mallee research \$8000 nationally
- 1991 Black eared Miner \$10,000 nationally
- 1992 Regent Honeyeater and Star Finch \$25,000 nationally
- 1993 Endangered species nationally \$6,000 nationally
- 1994 Regent Honeyeater 75%, national seabird appeal 25% \$9612
- 1995 Barren Grounds Bird Observatory 75%, Red tailed Black-Cockatoo 25% \$10,004
- 1996 Barren Grounds Bird Observatory \$4800 approx.
- 1997 Black eared Miner 25%, Birds in Backyards project 75% \$8565
- 1998 Glossy Black Cockatoos and Red tailed Black Cockatoos \$4572 approx.
- 1999 Albatross research \$7096
- 2000 Newhaven Station land purchase (Birds Australia) \$9308
- 2001 Cowra woodland bird program \$14,011
- 2002 Cowra woodland bird program \$10,576

Isn't this a wonderful outcome for our birds!

Frances Czwalinna



Tawny Frogmouths at Gossan Hill
(*Podargus strigoides*)

Photo courtesy **Martin Butterfield**

Avian Whimsy # 19

Hover Nice Day!

In the last Whimsy we looked at soaring flight – or at least I did. I of course have no idea if you did or not, but since you're reading this there's a fighting chance you may have done so. (I'm sounding like John Clarke, so had best move on...)

Soaring, I suggested, is the epitome of flight. It is too, but is only possible if you're one of the Big Birds. On the other hand hovering is also something pretty clever that is only available to much smaller birds. It seems to be generally accepted that only the hummingbirds 'truly' hover, with no assistance from separate air movements. There may be a certain Northern Hemisphere superciliousness about this – the young **Western Gerygone** shown in the accompanying slide was making a fairly good fist of it – but there is no question that the hummingbirds are the stars. No other bird can remain absolutely stationary in the air for extended periods and then dart instantaneously in any direction, including backwards, and 'park' again.

It's not possible to explain properly how they do it without 3D diagrams and lots of words too technical for me, but the essence lies in flapping the wings very fast indeed, equally forwards and backwards. Hummingbirds have a shoulder joint so flexible that it hurts me even to think about it. Most birds generate power only while pushing backwards; the forward stroke is just to return the wing for another push. (Hence of course they can only fly forwards.) Hummers though 'stand' in the air and push as strongly on the forward stroke as the backward one; side on, the wing is moving in a horizontal figure-8. (You'll have to take my word for that; at 70 strokes a second it's a mere blur to our slow eyes.) The nett effect is to balance forward

and backwards movement – the subtleties of adjustment to achieve instant darting backward movement boggle my little brain.



Western Gerygone (*Gerygone fusca*)
Photo courtesy **Ian Fraser**

The energy cost though is truly enormous, alleviated only slightly by the fact that the wings are in constant motion so that the impetus helps them keep moving. The breast muscles weigh relatively 50% more than those of fast-flying birds and double those of more leisurely flyers. This would be far too great a burden for a larger bird, which must work both absolutely and relatively harder than a small one, but we won't go there...

The young Western Gerygone in the slide was repeatedly hovering effectively, though briefly, at central Australian mulga foliage. It was certainly not flying backwards (though it was doing something no hummingbird could do – it was pretending to be a Grey Honeyeater, but that's another story too).

It was not using the wind though, which is what a Kestrel or Black-shouldered Kite or tern does while hovering. This 'wind hovering' uses a somewhat different principle from the hummers' or perhaps even gerygones' pure hovering. It involves flying forwards at exactly the same speed that the wind is pushing it backwards, using fanned tail as well as wings to achieve it. No need to be condescending about this – it's an extraordinarily sophisticated trick in its own right.

One last aspect of this is also fascinating. A bird's eyes are 'fixed' because the retinal muscles to adjust

them would weigh too much. When we're in motion, our eyes move to compensate. A bird can't do that, so must keep its head still while the body moves around it. Watch a pigeon walking; its head seems to bob, but in fact it is staying still while the body moves forward beneath it, then the head shoots forward again. A hovering bird does the same thing – watch the next hovering kestrel you see. So does a bird on a swaying branch, but now we're getting into a whole other whimsy. A hovering kestrel's head has been measured to 'wobble' by as little as 5mm. And despite the extra energy required, English Kestrels at least are known to be 10-15 times as effective at hunting while hovering compared with flying or perching.

And now I think I'll pop out and hover go at it; I've got as much chance of success there as I have in getting feedback to these columns...

Ian Fraser ianf@pcug.org.au

PS Having had no response to my plea last time to buy a surplus copy of the Proceedings of the 1974 International Ornithological Congress (Canberra) – does anyone have one I could borrow please?

Moldovan mutterings

Early in March I took a 2 week mission to the Republic of Moldova. This is a small country (with Romania to the West and the Ukraine everywhere else) which was part of the Soviet Union.

A disadvantage for going there in March is that although Spring officially starts on the 1st of March, the weather is not always aware of this. Thus, on the 2nd we scored 25cm of snow (which made the place look pretty). There were relatively small numbers of birds around, although the city is well treed and has a lot of parks.

For the first few days the only birds I really noticed were rooks, scavenging

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.

in the litter bins. This was a slight surprise since in England I had always regarded them as a rural bird. The answer appeared to be the use of the park trees as communal roosts. I first noticed this on a weekend run around the frozen Lake Valea Morilor on the edge of the CBD where some hundreds of birds were still moving off at 8am. With the temperature at – 12 I had also had some trouble getting out of bed! Later, walking under the trees I noticed that the snow was almost covered with guano: not a good place to walk at night!

During the run I could hear woodpeckers drumming on the trees (they also thought it was Spring despite the weather) but couldn't identify them. Later in the day outside my hotel I was pleased to get a close look at them (3m, so I didn't need my binoculars) and concluded that they were Syrian woodpeckers, my first addition to the life list for the trip. Common blackbirds, magpies and great tits were also noted at this point. The great tits seemed by far the most common small passerine: a few sparrows and starlings were around but once it stopped snowing every tree seemed to have a family of tits setting up a ménage.

The woodpecker family continued to be cooperative and on a later run, a grey-headed woodpecker came to have a close look at me toiling up the steps away from the Lake. This was the second lifer. The final "exciting" bird was a Bohemian waxwing which I added to my list on the Sunday morning: this was a bit of a surprise to find it so far South so late in the season: perhaps it was tail-end Charlie after an irruption?

The final species seen – getting the trip list up to a miserable 16, but I had gone there to work not search for birds – was a pair of mallards. They were quacking plaintively as they circled, looking for less solid water than that (un)available in the middle of the Lake. Perhaps Spring was just

around the corner?

If others should get to go to Moldova another area close to the city centre of the capital, Chisinau, which could repay some attention is the Parcu Dendrariu. It appears to be an arboretum with a lot of vegetation and a kilometre square. The opening times didn't suit me but I suspect in warmer weather it would be very fertile birding.

Martin Butterfield

Welcome New Members

Joan Cordeax, THEODORE
Jenny Kitchin, WARAMANGA
Julie Hotchin, ARANDA
Christine Freudenstein, WESTON
Frank Atkinson, WATSON
Alice Timbs, NARRABUNDAH
Wendy Moline, KAMBAH

Next newsletter

MAY deadline
Wednesday 28 April 2004

Send updates to
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Editor *Gang-gang*
rough.boden@apex.net.au or
Tanya.Rough@deh.gov.au
Ph: 6161 0151 (ah)
0414 719 846 (mob)

Articles should be less than 500 words (300 for reports of 1-day field trips, except by prior arrangement with the editor. Print photographs with 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-](mailto:canberrabirds-subscribe@topica.com)
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Gang-gang

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