

Gang-gang

April 2009

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

April meeting

7:30pm Wednesday 8.4.2009

Canberra Girls Grammar School corner Gawler Cres and Melbourne Ave, Deakin. The meetings are held in the Multi-media Theatre at the School. Enter off Gawler Crescent using the school road signposted as Gabriel Drive. If that car-park is full, enter using Chapel Drive.

Sherry McArdle-English, President of the Friends of the National Arboretum and Gardens, will be giving the short presentation on current progress and the vision for the future. This will include a short DVD on plantings to date.

The main speaker will be Rohan Bilney on "Ecology and conservation of Large Forest Owls in East Gippsland".

Three species of Large Forest Owls occur in south-eastern Australia, the Powerful, Sooty and Masked Owl. All three species are Threatened top order predators that consume predominantly mammalian prey, are forest and hollow

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Everyone welcome

What to watch out for this month

The continuing dry weather during March has meant that there has been very little activity reported in respect of both unusual bird sightings or of migrants passing through. Certainly there have been very few reports of any of the birds that I alerted members to keep an eye out for in last month's column. There have also only been sporadic reports of mixed feeding flocks.

The report of several **Superb Parrots** still around towards the end of March was a surprise. It has also been very pleasing to see the numbers of **Diamond Firetails** reported, with groups of up to 30 birds including immatures, appearing

Photo by Geoffrey Dabb

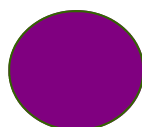


Grey Butcherbird
(*Cracticus torquatus*)

to reflect good recruitment this year. However, the main surprise, probably drought related, was the spate of reports of the **Grey Butcherbird** being seen in the suburbs all over Canberra. These have often been the first sighting in the observer's garden, in some cases after over 20 years' residence. The dry conditions have certainly meant an influx of birds into my GBS site, such as a significant increase in numbers of the **Crested Pigeon**. However, the most conspicuous bird in my garden for the past month has been **Red-rumped Parrots**, which uncharacteristically have spent little time on the ground feeding but have been flying round lorikeet like, calling rather agitatedly for most of the day, and roosting in my neighbour's Chinese elm. They have also been seen feeding dependent young and visiting the bird baths, both previously very rare events. Chat line subscribers have reported flocks of around 40 birds in parks in Woden and Tuggeranong.

If we do get some rain there might still be an opportunity, in the first few days of April, to see **White-throated Needle-tails** and **Fork-tailed Swifts** on passing fronts or local thunderstorms. However, be aware that these species can also be seen in perfectly clear weather, and are pretty obvious if they are whirling round fast and low. There may also still be the odd **Australian Reed-Warbler** lurking in a reed patch, but these birds can be very quiet and inconspicuous after the breeding season.

Continued page 2



VICTORIAN BUSHFIRE WILDLIFE APPEAL

If you wish to donate to the care of wildlife injured by the Victorian bushfires please send a cheque to The Treasurer, Canberra Ornithologists Group, GPO Box 301, Civic Square, ACT 2608 and we will ensure that it is sent to Wildlife Victoria. Alternatively, donations can be made directly at

<http://www.wildlifevictoria.org.au/>

What to watch out for (continued)

Similarly there might still be an opportunity early in April to see a **Satin Flycatcher** or **Rufous Fantail** passing through, or the **Leaden Flycatcher**, both **gerygones** or one of the **cuckoo** species.

The **Grey Fantail**, **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike** and the **Noisy Friarbird** (I've hardly seen one this summer) usually stay a bit longer into April, with small numbers staying over winter, depending on the season. **Red Wattlebirds**, **Silver-eyes** and both **Striated** and **Spotted Pardalotes** also migrate, and can sometimes be seen doing so in large numbers, but quite a few remain over winter. Keep a special ear and eye out for the **Dusky Woodswallow**, particularly on clear still days, as groups drift slowly overhead in a northerly direction, calling and feeding on the wing. These have been very commonly reported gathering in large flocks of 20-30 birds, as they often do in autumn, but remain absent in my local patch.

Up to the time of writing (24 March) there was only limited evidence, mostly from the lower Cotter catchment, that the **Yellow-Faced Honeyeater** migration had begun. The hot dry weather may have delayed matters, and it remains to be seen whether this species will migrate at the usual time from late March to mid-late April or what numbers will be like this year. Towards the end of April the **White-naped Honeyeater** traditionally joins these flocks and then becomes the major species. It will be very important that this migration is carefully monitored again in 2009, including to clarify whether the Victorian bush fires have had any effect on local numbers. Please do so and report any major numbers, or the failure for any to appear when expected (remember the best migration conditions are on a clear still day after a cold crisp night). Some **Fuscous Honeyeaters** may be caught among the movement, and some may linger in gardens for a while, though few seem to have over-wintered in recent years.

Finally there are some species that move down from the mountains and higher country in late March/April to overwinter in Canberra. In the past week there have been a number of reports of the first **Scarlet Robins** this autumn. This species usually prefers to stay in the woodlands close to suburbs as opposed to the **Eastern Spinebill**, the **Golden Whistler** and **White-eared Honeyeater** which will visit gardens. It will be interesting to see whether the **Flame Robin**, the only robin that occurs in flocks and prefers the more open spaces to the west of the city, will be present in any numbers this winter. This species is well known to irrupt after fires, and numbers have been significantly reduced for the past couple of winters compared with the very high counts immediately after the 2003 fires. — **Jack Holland**

April meeting (continued)

dependent, wide-ranging, naturally uncommon, and are strongly territorial nocturnal species. Limited ecological information exists on these species, which is of considerable conservation concern.

For five years Rohan, a PhD student in Life & Environmental Sciences at Deakin University, has been conducting ecological research on these species, the aim of which was to gather information covering a range of ecological attributes of all three species, with the Sooty Owl being the main study species. The prehistoric Sooty Owl diet was also investigated by analysis of sub-fossil deposits, to provide crucial information about the diversity of the prehistoric small mammal community, the extent of the small mammal decline following European settlement and diet change of the Sooty Owl.

Field Trip reports

16 - 19 February 2009 — South Durras

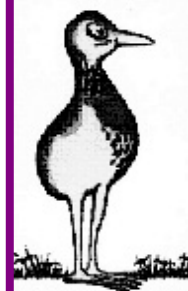
Our base was the South Durras Big 4 Resort which has direct access to the surrounding Murrumbidgee National Park without the need to drive to a starting point. This suited three dedicated individuals who, PM on day one, hit the scrubby trail at the back of the park to give the binoculars a serious workout. Others took the non-birding option of a plunge into the Pacific (this was to prove a popular diversion throughout our stay), while others opted for a total relax at the campsite.

Our walk was a mixture of bush bashing, and following various walking trails and a track which provides vehicular access to the middle reaches of Durras Lake. We came up with about 30 species as we strolled through tall spotted gums and ironbarks, then casuarinas where four **Glossy-black Cockatoos** were feeding. **Rufous Fantails, Satin Bowerbirds, Eastern Yellow Robins, Jacky Winters, Lewin's Honeyeaters** and a **Brown-headed Honeyeater** were all seen during this area, while **Grey Fantails** were everywhere. Because of the low water level we were able to complete a circuit of Durras Lake which took us back to base via the lake shore and along tracks which are quite swampy when lake levels rise. A highlight here was excellent views of **Southern Emu-wrens**, along with **White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Caspian Tern, Pied Oystercatcher** and **Great Egret** amongst others. In Durras village we saw our first **White-headed Pigeon** and several colourful **King Parrots**.

Day two started well with the sighting of a **Brown Cuckoo-Dove** and another **White-headed Pigeon** before we had left the park. Then it was up the highway and off to Durras Mountain on the forest roads through Murrumbidgee National Park to a small parking area at the start of the walking trail to the top (you would hardly call it a summit). **Golden Whistler, Black-faced Monarch, Rose Robin, and Red-browed Treecreeper** were added to our list, while examining the evidence of long gone human occupation, plus taking in the spectacular views, added to our enjoyment. The group opted to return via Pebbly Beach, Depot Beach and North Durras and by so doing were able to tick **Wonga Pigeon, Rainbow Lorikeet, Crested Tern and Great and Little Pied Cormorants**, as well as more **Rufous Fantail** activity.

Later that afternoon, Martyn Moffat and Liz Harman, after a close encounter with a Red-bellied Black Snake, came upon no less than 12 **Glossy Black-Cockatoos** feeding in the casuarinas. Meanwhile, during a recce for the following day's kayaking activity, I saw two **Eastern Osprey** on the southern side of the lake, a big double as I have only ever seen one here previously.

The day three early drizzle couldn't dampen the spirits of our intrepid kayakers, and after suitable briefing we set off in determined fashion in two double kayaks (Martyn Moffat and Lyndall Young, and Margaret and Bill Robertson) plus Jane Green and me in our singles. Objective number one was achieved when we saw a single **Eastern Osprey** roughly where I had seen the double the previous day. A **Collared Sparrowhawk** spotted flying overhead by Margaret landed to give us some more good views. Shortly thereafter major objective number two followed in the form of an **Azure Kingfisher**. Weather conditions hadn't improved much so after a short morning tea break we headed



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17 April — 2 May 2009
Vietnam birding tour
co-led by Uthai Treesucon

3 May — 9 May 2009
Thailand Pitta tour
co-led by Uthai Treesucon

12 May — 1 June 2009
Borneo and Peninsula Malaysia
co-led by Dennis Yong

1 — 5 July 2009
Alice Springs
best birds: dusky grasswren & grey
honeyeater, slaty-backed thornbill

8 — 18 July 2009
Gulf Country
best birds: Carpentarian & Kalkadoon
grasswrens, rufous-crowned emu-wren,
spinifexbird, flock bronzewing

13 — 25 June 2009
Top End
Kakadu NP, Katherine, Kununurra
best birds: chestnut rail, white-throated
grasswren, red goshawk, black-banded
fruit-dove, Gouldian finch, chestnut-
quilled rock pigeon

26 June 2009
Mitchell Plateau
best bird: black grasswren Kimberley
honeyeater, yellow-eyed form of
partridge pigeon

4 — 22 September 2010
Strzelecki Track Outback Tour

**Tour itineraries, birdlists, checklists
and latest news are on the website.**

www.philipmaher.com

back to the boat ramp. While this was going on Pat Williams encountered an **Intermediate Egret** and seven **Red-capped Plovers** while walking North Durras Beach.

By the time late checkouts were completed on the final day our list had grown to 88 species in an area that stretched from Durras Mountain to North Head. It was a very enjoyable few days socially as well as from a birding perspective, thanks to contributions from all concerned: Carol and Ivan, Margaret and Bill, Liz and Ian, Martyn and Pat, and Lyndall, Jane and Pat. — **Rod Mackay**

7-8 March — Saturday/Sunday — Goulburn area overnight campout/accommodated

A good-sized COG contingent (13 on Saturday and 15 on Sunday), supplemented with good numbers of our hosts, the Goulburn Field Naturalists Society (GFNS), participated in this joint outing over the Canberra Day long weekend. On Saturday afternoon we visited the Gorman Road sewage ponds, an area of large finishing ponds compared with those at our local sewage farm at Fyshwick.

With the aid of three scopes, by keeping the sun behind us and slowly advancing along the middle of the pond system, everyone was able to see and identify the waterfowl in this area. The water levels were noticeably down and the predominant species, numbering several hundred, was the dabbling **Grey Teal**. There were also good numbers of **Australasian Shoveler and Chestnut Teal** and lesser numbers of **Pink-eared Duck**. While the **Hoary-headed Grebe** predominated, as may be expected in deeper open water, there were enough **Australasian Grebe**, including in breeding plumage, to allow a good comparison of their identification features.

Non water bird highlights here included a number of dullish and very quiet **Golden-headed Cisticola** flitting about on the top of the rank grass, some equally silent but rather yellow **Australian Reed-Warblers**, and an **Australasian Pipit** teetering frequently. However, the undoubted highlights were first a **Peregrine Falcon** cruising overhead, often on very pointed wings, and later a circling light phase **Little Eagle** identified by the almost perfect M underwing pattern.

We moved onto the much larger and deeper "polishing" pond on the eastern side of the complex, and on climbing over the dam wall were immediately impressed by well over 500 waterbirds on this. As the many birds loafing of the southern side took off on our arrival, about 20 **Australian Shelduck** were identified by their large size and considerable area of white on their underwing when in flight. There were also good numbers of **Hardhead** here, and persistence and close checking identified about 20 **Blue-billed Ducks** amongst them; these species are easily confused by their superficial similarity from a distance. Even closer checking revealed about three **Musk Ducks**, including at least one male.

Our return to the cars yielded a **Sacred Kingfisher** which obliged us all by sitting quietly in a dead tree, its rather white underparts but blue rump clearly visible in the scope. At the cars was another surprise for us in several **Diamond Fire-tails**. In total 39 species were seen in the space of 3 hours including, with one exception, all of the local duck species.

On Saturday night we had a dinner with our hosts at the historic Old Brewery, the oldest in Australia still using the original buildings. A combination of the lovely setting, both inside and outside, good company and food, as well as learning about the history of the place, made this a very enjoyable and memorable evening.

Despite this, we still gathered early next morning which was surprisingly cloudy, brought in by the NE breeze that had come in late evening. We then spent a couple of hours birdwatching NE of Towrang alongside the Wollondilly River on the property



Local birds at the COG Christmas party

Photo by Beth Mantle

'Wollondale'. After a slow start we observed 37 species here, including another two obliging **Sacred Kingfishers**, a **Rufous Whistler**, still calling loudly, and three **Southern Whiteface** found by Rosemary. As we were making our way back to the cars, a mature **White-bellied Sea-Eagle** floated upstream above the river, and then perched right in front of the homestead, a magnificent sight but not to be outdone by the magnificent morning tea put on by property owner, Julia, on behalf of the Billyrambja Landcare.

This was followed by a short drive through private property to 'Bush Bottoms' adjoining the Tarlo River National Park. This is an area in which koalas have been reintroduced, but unfortunately we did not see them. The walk started in riparian tall open forest and black sheoak forest but soon we encountered the short conglomerate cliffs which signify the

CHANGE OF MONTHLY MEETING TIME

From April, the Members Night meeting will start at 7.30pm NOT 8.00pm.

This will be for a trial period during the winter months.

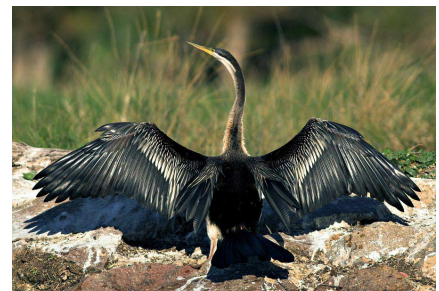
southern limit of the Blue Mountains pagoda formations. After climbing these we walked along the top small rocky plateau complex through mallee eucalypts and dwarf heath interspersed with grassy swales with ribbon gum/river peppermint open forest in the intersecting gullies. Given the time and the habitat this was a walk as much for the scenery, views, geology and vegetation as for birds, and in complete contrast to the sewage ponds most birds were only heard or seen by a couple of participants. The 15 species included **Spotted Quail-thrush**, **Superb Lyrebird** (which were very quiet although we did see a nest in a cave) and an **Origma**.

COG members thoroughly enjoyed themselves and my thanks again to our hosts, in particular Rodney and Bill, for organising such an interesting and varied program in which a total of 58 species were seen. We look forward to more such joint outings. — **Jack Holland**

15 March — Sunday — East Basin/Molonglo River — Electric/powering boat cruise

On a sunny but cool morning a full complement of members and guests joined me on the MV Darter for this now annual trip to view the darter and cormorant nesting. This year's trip had added significance as it was the first one since the complete clearing of the trees on the northern bank in May 2008.

As this boat is much faster we had time to visit the SE corner of East Basin first, including the construction works around the former Kingston Boat Harbour and up Jerrabomberra Creek for a few hundred metres. We soon saw numbers of **Australasian Darter**, mostly loafing or drying their wings along the newly built wall on the entrance to the creek, totalling about 30 and all in female, or more likely, immature/juvenile plumage. Also resting along here were about 30 each of **Masked Lapwing** and **Silver Gull**. On entering the creek proper we were immediately struck by the large numbers of birds on the water, which turned out to be at least 150 **Pacific Black Duck** and about 70 **Black Swan**, complete with some half-grown cygnets and further up the creek a bird on quite an open nest close to the bank.



Australasian Darter
(*Anhinga novaehollandiae*)

Photo by Julian Robinson

The twin questions of where were all the male darters and had the clearing made a difference to the extent of nesting were soon answered when we moved up the Molonglo Reach. There were many **Australasian Darter** nests, as usual spread along the southern bank singly or in small groups. At least 10 birds, often males, were sitting tight on nests. Also seen were a number of nests with nearly or recently fledged chicks, identified by their yellowish colour when sitting close together on a nest or from their clumsy behaviour when still close to one. Altogether about 60 birds were seen on this stretch, about 1/3 males and 1/3 young birds. Interestingly no downy chicks were seen, indicating a distinct pattern with an apparently major breeding event some months back followed by a recent new commencement. Given that the last 6 weeks have been very dry the trigger for this new batch of nests is unclear. There were no nests observed on the now cleared northern bank, though Chris Davey tells me there were at least a couple of nests in bare trees here earlier in the season.

Where the reach opens up much wider about 0.5 km west of the first bridge, there were five newly built or still being built, close together **Great Cormorant** nests with a dozen birds resplendent in their very dark breeding plumage with a very obvious yellow and white cheek, a white flank patch and a clearly obvious crest. Just past this area was a single **Little Pied Cormorant** wedged between several darter nests, the only one of this species seen for the morning. About 10 **Little Black Cormorants** were seen during the morning, but with no evidence of any breeding behaviour. Also seen was an **Eastern Great Egret**, identified by its neck being much longer than its body when it obligingly settled on the bank close to the boat.

So the answer to the question of whether the clearing of the trees on the northern bank had affected the extent of breeding is clearly no, at least in respect of this season, for the **Australasian Darter** and the **Great Cormorant**. The numbers of darters counted is equal to or slightly in excess of those seen on the same day last year, before the northern bank was cleared, and the breeding season would seem to be at least similar to the very successful one last year, particularly if the new batch is successful too (from previous trips the species is known to still have chicks in the nest in late May). In addition, Jim, our skipper has noticed one or two spots around the lake where he has not seen darters nesting previously, eg West Basin along the shore parallel with Lawson Crescent near the old hospice and near the golf course water pump pick up along Yarramundi Reach. Numbers of nesting **Great Cormorant** were slightly higher than last year, but lower than the maximum numbers seen in April 2007, so too don't appear to be affected, though the very late start to the breeding compared with previously may be significant.

The extent of breeding of **Little Pied** and **Little Black Cormorants** was already very low in 2007 and 2008, with the former in particular now favouring a nest site just west of the mouth of Sullivan's Creek as reported from the COG boat trip at the end of March 2008. The significant nesting there again this year has already been noted on the COG chat line and on 28 February Rod McKay paddled down there and saw lots of activity with birds carrying nesting material, mating and feeding dependent young. He estimated there were at least 150 **Little Black Cormorants** there with 45 nests (very similar numbers to last year), a lone **Little Pied Cormorant** nest, and a lone **Great Cormorant** nest (with two birds in attendance), but only one **Australasian Darter** nest along the whole eastern side of the peninsula.

As for this time last year the river was very quiet in respect of other water birds, with few ducks and surprisingly not even a Coot seen. Land birds too were quiet though the total of 38 species seen was just below average based on previous years.

The 16 participants thoroughly enjoyed themselves as I did even though it was my tenth trip in six years. I look forward to leading my next trip; every time you go up the reach there seems to be something different.

— Jack Holland

18 March — Wednesday Midweek walk

Sixteen members and guests assembled in the general area of the Hall Travelling Stock Reserve (TSR) to commence our walk. It was pleasing to see water in the dam, but no birds were enjoying this currently unusual sight. **Red-browed Finches** and **Double-barred finches** were in the vicinity. We observed quite large numbers of **Dusky Woodswallows**, including some young, but since they were not fed by an adult they were not rated as dependent young. One highlight was excellent views of a **Crested Shrike-tit** foraging under the loose bark of various eucalypts - mainly I suspect *E. mannifera*. I saw two birds, but one was less forthcoming. However the prize goes jointly to (a) the member who spotted the guano on the ground and (b) the other member who immediately looked up and spotted the two **Tawny Frogmouths** imitating dead branches directly above the whitewash.

We then moved to Hall Cemetery. There were few birds here, although we did add three species to our list, including a soaring **Wedge-tailed eagle** which was just about within a 500m radius when first spotted.

— Martin Butterfield

Photo by Geoffrey Dabb



Crested Shrike-tit
(*Falcunculus frontatus*)

Future Field Trips

The Guidelines for the conduct and advertising of COG field trips are published on the COG web site. Both trip leaders and members/participants should familiarise themselves with these guidelines. In particular, the Registration Form should be completed for each field trip.

4 April — Saturday morning — private property near Mundoonen

Alex McLachlan has kindly offered to lead an outing to his 450 acre property that adjoins the Mundoonen range near Yass. Common local birds include **Hooded Robin**, **Brown Treecreeper** and **Diamond Firetail**. In 2008, Alex reported seeing **Stubble Quail**, **Painted Button-quail** and **Little Button-quail** at the same time within one hectare! To book on this trip, please contact Alex at Alex.McLachlan@ga.gov.au or 0422 655 393. More details, including directions, will be made available to participants shortly.

10-13 April — Fri/Mon (Easter) — Weddin Mountains Extended camp-out

Previous trips to the Weddin Ranges have been popular and produced very good bird lists, with one trip recording over 80 species within 5 km of the camping area. For this trip we will again stay at the Fuzzy Box Campground (formerly known as Seaton's Farm). If preferred, participants could stay in motel accommodation in nearby Grenfell. Over the long weekend we expect to visit the callitris woodlands of Bimbi State Forest at the southern end of the range, the iron-barks of Seaton's farm and Holy Camp, and perhaps a visit to Gum Swamp near Forbes. If you intend to participate please contact Sue Lashko on 6251 4485 or SMLashko@gmail.com. While Sue will be organising and participating in the camp-out, she would like to hear from anyone familiar with the area willing to help lead the outing. Further details, including maps, bird lists etc will be available closer to the trip date.

15 April — Wednesday midweek walk

This month's midweek walk will be down the Murrumbidgee River, including a car shuffle between Kambah Pool and Pine Island. Check the Canberrabirds mailing list for details closer to the date. For the car shuffle we'll put some cars at Pine Island and have most people meet at Kambah Pool.

26 April — Sunday Morning — Honeyeater migration

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 birdwatching calendar. On a good migration day thousands of honeyeaters can be counted passing through the Angle Crossing area. To witness this spectacle, and to help count the honeyeaters, meet Nicki Taws at 8:30am in the car park on the Tharwa side of the bridge across the Murrumbidgee. Bring something to sit on, a hat, sunscreen and morning tea. Enquiries to Nicki (6251 0303, ntaws@bigpond.com). As usual, if the weather is not the best for honeyeaters we will visit the Tharwa Sandwash for some general birding.

16 May — Saturday — Botanic Gardens — Bush birds for beginners.

This morning walk will be the first for 2009 aimed specifically to help beginners and new members identify birds and to learn about their behaviour and calls. The Botanic Gardens are especially suitable for such an outing, as they allow the opportunity to observe a range of local bush birds in a variety of habitats. Due to the available food supply they are also a relative haven for birds during late autumn/winter. Anthony Overs will lead this outing, which will consist of a stroll through this lovely part of Canberra for a couple of hours from 9.15am, meeting at the bus shelter. Please book your place with Anthony (6254 0168, or anthony.overs@gmail.com), who will be happy to discuss whether this outing is suitable for you. Please also don't forget to bring your binoculars and field guide.

24 May — Sunday — Molonglo Valley — 'Finch Central' morning walk

Meet Martin Butterfield by the access gate about 100m north of Coppins Crossing at 9am. The first km is a walk along the service road for the sewage line and then we will prowl around the slopes and river banks along the Molonglo hoping to find, amongst other things, up to four species of **finch** and four of **robins**. Several raptor species have also been recorded in the area. Of course, no guarantees!

6-8 June — South Coast long weekend campout

We are still looking for someone to lead the June long weekend trip to the south coast. It was suggested that a trip to the Moruya and Narooma areas would be suitable. If this is your patch and you'd like to show people the birds of the area please get in touch with Anthony Overs on 6254 0168 or anthony.overs@gmail.com.

A Message from the President

For an organization such as the Canberra Ornithologists Group it is essential to obtain appropriate insurance that will cover the various activities that we are involved in, including outings, surveys and attending various events such as the recent 'Festival of the Forest'. This has become increasingly difficult and more expensive as time goes by.

We are not alone and many like organizations are having problems finding insurance that is of a reasonable cost with appropriate cover for their needs. At present we are insured with a group that covers organizations such as 'Meals on Wheels' and one must question whether this is appropriate.

To get over these insurance problems many like-minded organizations are becoming affiliated and membership numbers provide the opportunity to reduce costs and to find the required insurance cover.

For some time now COG has been in discussions with Bird Observation and Conservation Australia (BOCA) with the view to becoming covered through their insurance policy. Up until now a sticking point has been that COG requires a Public Liability cover of \$20,000,000 whilst BOCA was covered for \$10,000,000. This issue has now been resolved with BOCA increasing their level of Public Liability Insurance.

For COG to come under the umbrella of the BOCA insurance policy the two organizations need to become affiliated. In addition, affiliation will be of advantage to both organizations with COG benefiting from BOCA's education portfolio and BOCA benefiting from COG's experience with database management. Both organizations will benefit from their respective experiences with conservation issues.

The COG committee has agreed that we will become affiliated with BOCA. This will provide us with appropriate insurance with no cost to COG. There will be no legally binding arrangement between the two organizations and there will be no loss of identity for COG. We will need to accept the BOCA Outings Policy, much of which we followed when originally formulating our own. We will need to agree to abide by the BOCA Code of Birding Ethics and Code of Birding Ethics to Photography, none of which the COG committee has any objections to. Three members of the COG committee need to be BOCA members. Both organizations will provide each other with a list of their Outings Calendar and each others' newsletter. Results of elections and a list of committee members will be made available by both groups.

A draft Memorandum of Understanding between the two organizations has been produced by Richard Hunter (CEO, BOCA) and me at the BIGNET meeting held at the Shortlands Wetland Centre over the weekend 21-22 March. This will need to be finalized and signed by both parties. The COG committee agrees that becoming affiliated with BOCA will provide benefits to both organizations and will save COG the cost of insurance whilst obtaining appropriate cover for our activities. I urge all members to have a look at the BOCA website which can be found at www.birdobservers.org.au.

If anyone has any queries please do not hesitate to contact me. — **Chris Davey (President) 02-62546324**

Committee news

- Julian Robinson is working on some new display materials for COG, for use at events such as the recent Festival of the Forest.
- A contractor has been selected to upgrade the COG database.
- Chris Davey and Jenny Bounds represented COG at the recent BIGNet meeting in Newcastle.
- COG provided information for a hearing for the EPBC Act review.
- COG is pursuing a number of avenues with respect to Superb Parrot habitat protection, including writing to government advisory committees, raising the issues with the Bush on the Boundary group, and seeking advice from the Environmental Defenders Office.
- The data needed for the 10-year review of Woodland survey data is now in the database and this review is being planned.
- COG received a Volunteers ACT grant of \$3300 which will be used to cover some survey expenses.

— **Susan Henderson**

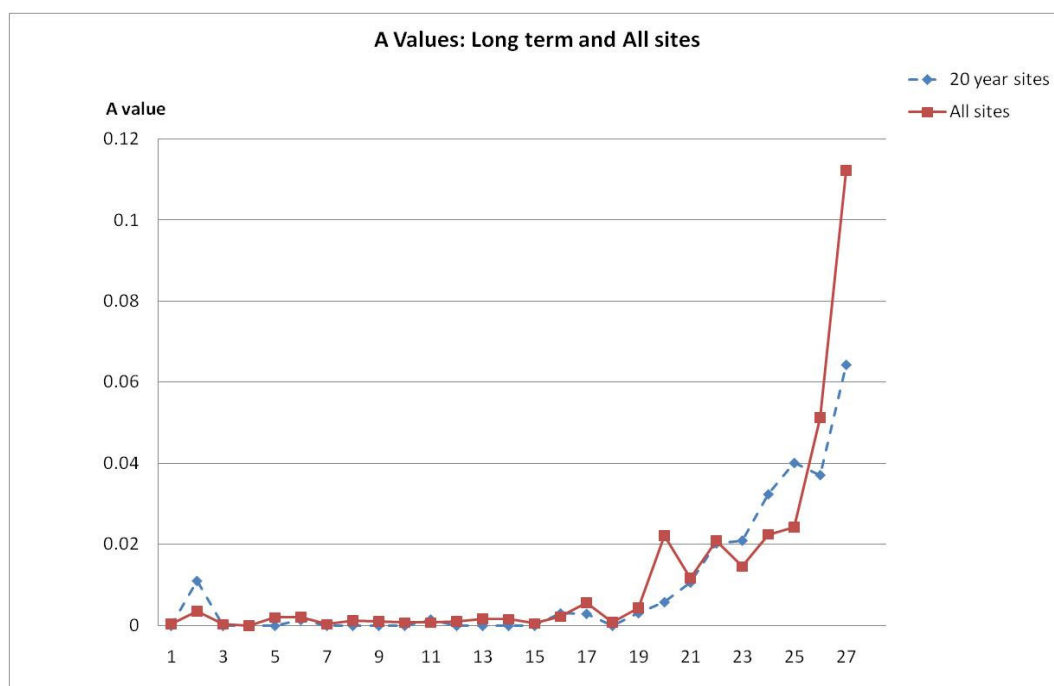
Garden Bird Survey Notes

It is all happening! Some GBS-relevant highlights from the chatline for the last few days of February and (most of) March include:

- Many reports of “the first **Grey Butcherbird** I have ever seen in this site” (see below);
- **White-throated Needleetails** in Queanbeyan on March 15, Carwoola on March 17 and Turner on March 22;
- **Little Lorikeets** in Duffy;
- **Little Friarbird** in Ainslie; and
- **Rufous Fantail** in Aranda.

Grey Butcherbirds come to town

As noted above many observers have reported seeing the first **Grey Butcherbird** in their garden in the past month. My impression was that the species first started to come into the bush in the urban area after the 2003 bushfires. However, the data tells the story:



In the last few years there has been a dramatic increase in the recording of **Grey Butcherbirds** in the GBS. Since the species is a regular enhancement to the soundscape of Carwoola I had wondered if this was an effect of the additional rural sites. This seems not to be the case to a great extent since the series restricted to sites which have been in the Survey for 20 years or more shows a broadly similar pattern. The correlation between the two series is rather good at 0.90 – but that could be expected when both stagger along the X axis for the first 18 years.

Applications of GBS data

Data has been provided to a member who wished to investigate the pattern of infestation of **Common Mynas** in their suburb. Data has also been provided to the writers of the second edition of *Birds of Canberra Gardens*.

GBS Redevelopment

Sandy Hayman of Absolute Access has been asked to undertake work to redevelop the GBS computing system as part of the COG plan to make the systems for all surveys more compatible. We look forward to using the new system for processing Year 28! — **Martin Butterfield**

MUDBRICK COTTAGE

Mallacoota

Our mudbrick cottage (*Blue Wren 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.

Contact Barbara de Bruine
(02) 6258 3531

barbdebruine@hotmail.com,

or see

<http://www.stayz.com.au/25595>.

PASSIVE SOLAR HOUSE

South Rosedale

Arupingi is a passive solar house situated in a peaceful bushland setting in South Rosedale.

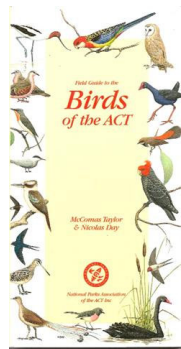
Birdwatching is possible from the comfort of a chair on the front or back deck, while for the more energetic, Guerrilla Bay and Burrewarra Point are within walking distance. The wetlands at Barling's Beach are only a few kilometres away. Rich birding is available in almost any direction.

Contact Greg or Sallie Ramsay

6286 1564 or

gramsay@actewagl.net.au

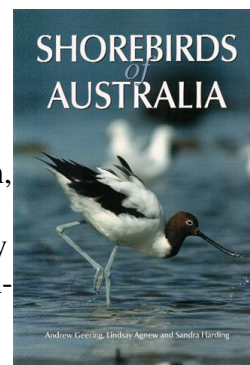
COG SALES



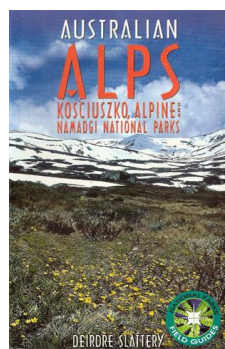
Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT (Taylor & Day) - \$16.00 — Bird identification in the ACT has just become much easier! Here are all the birds of the ACT in colour, with easy-to-follow text and key biological data, in a compact field format that will fit easily in your pocket.

Shorebirds of Australia (Geering, Agnew & Harding) \$33.00 — This title brings to-

gether the latest information about the evolution, ecology and behaviour of shorebirds and how they are distributed in Australia. This is a highly sought after title in the popular "CSIRO Publishing" series.



Field Guide to the Orchids of the Australian Capital Territory (Jones, Egan and Wood) - \$33.00 — Orchids can be found throughout the ACT, in nature parks, urban reserves and in Namadgi National Park. They can be beautiful or bizarre; some look like ducks or spiders, others grow long beards or have delicately hinged appendages. This guide's handy size makes it suitable for use in the field.



Australian Alps: Kosciuszko, Alpine & Namadgi National Parks (Slattery) - \$16.00 —

This guide is your key to the secrets of the three national parks that stretch over Australia's spectacularly beautiful rooftop - Kosciuszko in New South Wales, Alpine in Victoria and Namadgi in the Australian Capital Territory. Ideal for field trips, this guide will make a wonderful memento as well as a great reference for future trips.

Watching Wildlife (Chris) - \$24.00

Why Don't Woodpeckers Get Headaches? And Other Bird Questions You Know You Want To Ask (O'Connor) - \$13.50

CD: Bird Calls of the ACT (Fullagar & Slater) - \$12.00

LIMITED STOCK: Messent Bird Calendar 2009 - \$8.00

All these items (and more) plus COG T-shirts and Polo shirts are available at the monthly meeting sales desk

Avian Whimsy - No. 71 — Quisnam? Quare? Cur?

It will be no surprise to regular readers that I have a sometimes amused fascination with names of Australian organisms, including birds. (Actually, unless you're one of those three readers your surprise might stem from the suggestion that anyone reads this regularly.) As often happens I am surprised at the direction this Whimsy has opted to take. I started off musing on the number of names referring to long or short, wide or narrow bits of a bird's anatomy, then got distracted when I noticed lots of examples of names where the scientific name focuses on a different aspect of the bird from the common name; we might come back to that one some time.

It's interesting that even relatively serious amateur birdos are much less likely to be familiar with the Latin or 'proper names' than are amateur field botanists for instance. Very often they do tell us very little about the bird itself – thinking for instance of the 13 different species called *novaehollandiae*, not one of which is thus usefully distinguished from others of its ilk. Some are spectacularly unhelpful; the Australian **harrier** species names – **Spotted** (*Circus assimilis*) and **Swamp** (*C. approximans*) – both mean similar to, or like, but without specifying what! Likewise, the **Black-winged Monarch** (*Monarcha frater*) is someone's brother; well yes, but...

Some names seem to be obviously the result of loss of inspiration at the end of a long shift; I can see why a **Brown Honeyeater** (did not) inspire someone to call it *Lichmera indistincta*, or why **Gilbert's Whistler** was dismissed as *Pachycephala inornata*, but really, just a bit more effort might have been appropriate. A few names however sparkle and teach us about our language, as well as capturing the bird. The beautifully facially-patterned **Flock Bronzewing** is *Phaps histrionica*. There's no reason to suppose it's prone to histrionics – but both words come from the Latin for a pantomime actor. And still on the Roman stage, a persona was a mask and someone wearing one is described as personatus; hence *Artamus personatus* and *Poephila personata* for **Masked Woodswallow** and **Finch** respectively.

Telling us more about ourselves than the bird is the **Common Noddy's** name of *Anous stolidus*. The words, in turn, mean mindless and stupid! I am outraged, but then again, given that it refers to their propensity to trust humans – and sailors, what's more! – to come close, maybe there is a case, though it could have been worded more kindly.

Others make me wonder in a different way; *flavipes* describes perfectly accurately the yellow feet of both **Yellow-billed Spoonbill** and **Lesser Yellowlegs**, but why focus on them and ignore the much more conspicuous yellow legs immediately above them? And what made the vastly influential English ornithologist John Latham describe the **Barking Owl** (*Ninox connivens*) as blinking, or screwing its eyes shut? The dead one he described probably was a bit shut-eyed, but what ex-owl isn't? It was also a Latham name that led to the **Hooded Plover** being named *Thinornis rubricollis*, but if his specimen really had a reddish collar it was something else entirely! Not only is a **White-breasted Woodswallow's** bill not white (as its name *leucorynchus* claims) but it's pretty much the same colour as any other woodswallow's.

I've muttered before about the misnamed **Diamond-tailed Eagle** (which we call Wedge-tailed) but that's much more understandable than describing a **Whistling Kite's** tail as wedge-shaped, which is what its specific name *sphenurus* tells us. And if you think it's perverse to label the **Great Frigatebird** *Fregata minor*, then I wouldn't argue. And what was former churchman Charles de Vis, by then director of the Queensland Museum, thinking when he named the **Mangrove Grey Fantail** *Rhipidura phasiana*? Well yes, obviously he was thinking of a pheasant, but why? All fantails have nifty tails, but hardly pheasant-like, and why this one more than the others? History, as it so annoyingly often does, remains silent. The **Galah's** name *Eolophus roseicapillis* is glorious, both as it is and in translation, which is dawn-crest and rose-headed. Only it hasn't and isn't. Except for the WA race, for which the bird wasn't named, the head of a Galah is distinctly whitish, unlike most of the rest of it which is decidedly rosy. Nor is a **Black-faced Cormorant** at all dusky-brownish, despite being called *fuscescens*. What am I missing here? Perhaps in the latter case the specimen was that of a young bird. That seems to have been the case with the naming of the **Broad-billed Prion** (*Pachyptila vittatus*) and **White-fronted Tern** (*Sterna striata*); the species names mean striped and streaked respectively, not at all descriptive of the adult. And unless you come with up another (printable) suggestion, I can feel more of this coming on in a future *Whimsy*. Up to you really ... **Ian Fraser** ianf@pcug.org.au

Competition

The first of Ian's three readers to notify the editor of the deliberate mistake in this month's Whimsy will win a super prize.

Email: gramsay@actewagl.net.au

Result next month



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NEW MEMBERS

COG welcomes the following new members:

D McCaskill, Giralang

NEXT NEWSLETTER

April deadline

Wednesday 29 April 2009

Please send, articles, advertisements, updates etcetera to the Editors at gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au or c/- The Secretary COG, PO Box 301 Civic Square, ACT 2608

Articles should be less than 500 words (300 for reports of 1-day field trips; except by prior arrangement with the editor.

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

COG info

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Newsletter distribution
Judy Collett and helpers

COG membership

2008-2009 memberships:

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

Membership inquiries—

Sandra Henderson ph 6231 0303
membership@canberrabirds.org.au
for changed address or other details

Canberra Birds Conservation Fund
Donations to this fund are tax deductible. Funds are used to support projects that protect and enhance native birds and the environments that sustain them.

COG website

www.canberrabirds.org.au

Office

COG no longer maintains an office. For all enquiries or access to COG's library phone Barbara Allen on 6254 6520

COG E-mail Discussion List

COG has an email discussion list for members and friends: 'Canberra Birds'. Join the list by following the links on the COG website or by sending an empty email message to canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au with the subject 'subscribe' without the quotation marks

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Gang-gang

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