

# Gang-gang

April 2011

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

## MARCH MEETING

7:30pm Wednesday 13.4.11

*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.*

The short presentation will be by Steve Stephenson on "2010 Winter Sojourn with camera", interesting and unusual photographs as seen from Alice Springs to the Connie Sue track and beyond.

Michael Guppy, Sarah Guppy and Anthony Overs will give the main presentation entitled "35 Years On: What Have We Learned About the Breeding Ecology of Woodland Birds at Moruya?"

Between 1975 and 1984, Stephen Marchant did a meticulous and comprehensive study on the breeding biology of the birds in 10 ha of woodland, five km NE of Moruya, NSW. In 2006, we (Sarah is Stephen's

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## What to watch out for this month

A feature of the reporting on the COG chat line for the second half of March has been the large number of postings of observations of mixed feeding flocks (MMF). These have been very variable in their composition, including up to four species of finch/firetail, and sometimes containing birds rarely seen in the garden or area. Both species of **pardalote** have featured strongly, with in a couple of cases either the **Striated** or **Spotted Pardalote** forming the main species or even pure flocks, with sometimes numbers in the hundreds. Both these species can show considerable movement in autumn, but reasonable numbers stay in Canberra over winter. The **Silveryeye** and the **Grey Fantail** have also been prominent, with up to 20 of the latter seen together. Both of these species migrate, including from Tasmania, but a number also stay over winter. I was fascinated by the account in the latest edition of *Wingspan* of how the latter cross Bass Strait at a very low level, and singly it appears, rather than in the much bigger and higher flying flocks of the former.



**Rainbow Bee-eater**  
(*Merops ornatus*)  
Photo by Margaret Leggoe

A surprise in these MFFs has been the continued presence of the **Rainbow Bee-eaters** at both Shepherd's Lookout and the Tharwa Sandwash, with birds still there as late as 24 and 27 March, respectively, and further south at Scottsdale, close to the bottom end of COG's area of interest. These seemingly showed no signs of impending movement despite the posting of observations of migrating flocks overhead about 14 days earlier (their usual latest departure time).

Reports of single **Sacred Kingfishers** were still being posted up to the end of the third week of March, but the

last posting of a **Dollarbird** was of one seen on 1 March. A **Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo** and **Tree Martins** were still reported in mid-March, as was a **Pallid Cuckoo** in late March.

The **Eastern Koel** continued to call widely in late February and well into March, with the last report of a call posted on the chat line on 22 March, at

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Everyone welcome

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least two weeks later than the latest observation of the first week of March in the past three COG Annual Bird Reports. These have mainly been of the male, with calls becoming less frequent and shorter in length as the month progressed. However, there have been five further reports of immature or begging young Koels in this period, four of them from the new areas of Nicholls, Mt Rogers, Curtin and Holt, with the last one seen in Ainslie again on 22 March, where a male was still seen on 25 March. Michael Lenz has noted their lengthy stay is probably associated with the abundance of food and the longer breeding than usual of the **Red Wattlebird**, whose dependent young were still being widely observed up to late March.

This species remains their only confirmed local host. Like the one earlier in Ainslie, Martyn Moffat tells me his Curtin juvenile was often associated with the **Pied Currawong** (note not a known host according to HANZAB), but despite it begging loudly at no time (bird was present for about two weeks) did he see any species feed it, including the also present **Red Wattlebird**. The summer of 2010-2011 has certainly been the one of the **Eastern Koel**, as it has seen an unprecedented expansion of this species in this region, including much more widespread breeding considering the first confirmed records were from the Ainslie area only a couple of years ago. It was present in Goulburn when COG visited in October, and I understand has been a recent frequent visitor in Cowra.



**Superb Parrot**  
( *Polytelis swainsonii* )

Photo by Julian Robinson

On the other hand there have only been a few sightings in this time of the **Superb Parrot**, with a single bird in Harrison in mid March, but a surprise was up to five together seen at Mulligans Flat on 27 March (and two there the following day). There has also only been a single report of **White-throated Needle-tails**. Despite the much wetter conditions numbers of them do not seem to have been significantly higher than in the previous drought years, and it seems there have been no definite reports of the **Fork-tailed Swift**. While they do sometimes occur in early April it is unlikely there would be any more once this Gang-gang hits letter boxes.

Of species that leave by the end of March/early April, there were single reports in late March of the **Western** and **White-throated Gerygone**. The **Leaden Flycatcher** was still reported on 27 March, but there have been none of the **Satin Flycatcher**. By contrast, two or possibly three **Rufous Fantails**, other passage migrants on their way down from the mountains, stayed in the Botanic gardens for at least nine days up to 27 March. Two were also seen at Wamboin on 29 March. Species that usually completely depart during April are

the **Rufous Whistler** (quite a few still reported in March), and **Noisy Friarbird** (apparently common and bred well in some areas, but again rather scarce in my local area this season).

While there were reports of migrating **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** from as early as 13 March, it wasn't until two weeks later (significantly after the coldest clearest night for some time) that more widespread movement in the ACT and Canberra suburbs was reported. Surprisingly there were some **White-naped Honeyeaters** already among them, this species usually migrates later and by the end of April forms the majority of the flocks flying low over the tree tops, often resting briefly in them before hurrying on to an unknown destination. Perhaps the very much wetter conditions have resulted in a much better breeding season, and significantly more will migrate this year. Keep an eye out for them (remember the best migration conditions are on a clear still day after a cold night), and also for any **Fuscous Honeyeaters** that may be caught up with them. The **Red Wattlebird** also migrates in flocks of up to about 100, indeed some have already been reported doing so.

While many species, wholly or in part, leave Canberra for warmer areas at this time of year, each autumn/winter a number of bird species come down from the mountains and higher areas around Canberra to spend the colder parts of the year in the suburbs or surrounding areas. Examples are the **White-eared** (a first report on 27 March of this species which usually arrives by the end of March) and **Crescent Honeyeaters** (look and listen for them at the end of April) and the **Eastern Spinebill**, quite a few of which stayed over this summer or have already come back into gardens. There have also already been some reports the **Golden Whistler**, including a very early one of two juveniles on Mt Ainslie on 8 March. If you're lucky, a beautifully coloured male may come into your garden this winter.

**Red-breasted robins** also are much more common in Canberra over winter, including the **Scarlet** (quite a few reports of these already in March) and the **Flame** (which usually arrive in mid-April, with again the duller females first), and the two species which are much less common (**Rose** and **Pink**). After the excellent short presentation on the **Swift Parrot** at the March meeting, members will also be on the lookout, particularly where there are flowering gums or lots of lerps (if the **pardalotes** haven't cleaned them all out!), for this species migrating from Tasmania, indeed a couple were already reported in Cook on 27 March.



**Red-browed Finch**  
(*Neochmia temporalis*)  
Photo by Margaret Leggoe

The very long breeding season seems to have come to an end, particularly for passerines, with only dependent young reported in March, except for the **Red-browed Finch** photographed copulating with a piece of grass in its bill late in the month. However, waterbirds may still continue to breed over autumn/winter, with in particular the Australasian Grebe seeming to continue to have a very good season. Raptors may also breed in this period, I'm wondering whether the first signs of a mouse plague is an indication that the **Black-shouldered Kite** will breed in my local area, as it did last time in 2004-2005?

Again any breeding activity from now is significant, and should be reported for inclusion in the COG database, as should any significant observations of species mentioned above, especially if outside of the time they usually are considered to be present. — **Jack Holland**

## Field Trip Reports

### 6 February 2011 — Jerrabomberra Wetlands -

This outing, to celebrate World Wetlands Day and the 40th anniversary of the Ramsar Convention, was attended by a group of 20 despite the overcast conditions. Chris Davey and Warren Nicholls, Chair of the Board of Management for the Jerrabomberra Wetlands, gave some introductory comments before we split into two groups, one heading first to the sewage ponds across the road (thanks Dan), the other concentrating on Kellys Swamp. Following recent trends, there were not a lot of waterbirds about, but we did see most of the expected **ducks**, even if in small numbers, **Great, Little Pied** and **Little Black Cormorants** and **Australasian Darters**, as well as evidence of the good breeding year, at least for **Purple Swamphens** and **Dusky Moorhens**. On the sewage ponds there were also lots of young **Australasian Grebe**, some only a couple of weeks old. Despite searching, no **Latham's Snipe** were observed.

Perhaps the highlights of the morning were the **Stubble Quail** calling from the paddocks and the immature **White-bellied Sea-Eagle** that flew over while we were still listening to the introductory comments in the car park. The **Little Eagle** and an **Australian Hobby** were also seen.



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**2-7 April 2011**  
**Laos**  
**Bald-faced Bulbul tour**

**8 – 23 April 2011**  
**Sabah (Northern Borneo)**

**13 – 28 May 2011**  
**Gulf Country**  
Cairns-Atherton-Cloncurry-Mt Isa

**22 June – 5 July 2011**  
**Top End**  
Darwin-Kakadu NP-Katherine-Kununurra

**10 – 17 July 2011**  
**Alice Springs**

**6 – 13 August 2011**  
**Pilbara (Western Australia)**  
Karijini and Millstream & Chichester National Parks

**3 – 22 September 2011:**  
**Strzelecki Track, Outback**

**13 – 22 October 2011**  
Yorke Peninsula, Lake Gilles, Ceduna

**Plains-wanderer Weekends 2011**  
26 & 27 November  
10 & 11 December  
New Year's Eve 2011 Plains-wanderer Weekend

**Tour itineraries, bird lists, check-lists and latest news are on the website**

[www.philipmaher.com](http://www.philipmaher.com)



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Growth of the typha and other swamp-side vegetation has been rampant this season and management of the swamp will need careful attention if the wetland is to retain its attraction to a wide range of waterbirds. — **Harvey Perkins**

## 20 February 2011 – Private Property near Collector

Eleven of us met at the Dickson shops and three more joined us along the way to *Warriewood*, off the Collector to Gunning road. As we arrived at the property, a flock of about 25 **Little Ravens** flew by. During the first hour, few bird species were observed as we strolled through the heavily wooded section of the property. We did, however, see several swarms of Crane Flies and noticed that they always congregated on the underside of the trunks of trees which had a slight lean to them. Those with astute hearing heard a **Mistletoebird** fly over. **Rufous Whistler**, **White-throated Gerygone** and **Laughing Kookaburra** were also about. After morning tea, we walked down to the creek where the birds were more active. **Eastern Yellow Robin**, **Dollarbird**, **Red-browed Finch** and **Varied Sittella** were all seen and we had very good views of **White-eared Honeyeater** with dependant young. In all, 30 species were observed.

As we were leaving we heard what we suspected was a tree falling. We soon discovered that one had fallen, across the causeway at the entrance to the property! It was a wise decision to park outside the gate, although the men did manage to clear most of the debris.

We stopped briefly at TSR 47 which is also on the Bicentennial Trail. Besides the **Noisy Miners** very few birds were in evidence. An **Australian Wood Duck** startled us when it flew off out of the grass a metre in front of us and we saw **Crimson** and **Eastern Rosella** and **Red-rumped Parrot**. **Wedge-tailed Eagles** were soaring over the nearby open fields. — **Lia Battison**

## 16 March — Wednesday Walk — London Bridge

The day started well, both in terms of the weather (fog disappeared as the 22 members and guests left Burra Rd) being a beautiful fine day — at least to start with — and a good crop of birds.



**Australasian (Richard's) Pipit**  
( *Anthus novaeseelandiae* )  
Photo by Mat Gilfedder

The birds of the day appeared early in the walk in the high speed forms of four **Peregrine Falcons**. There was considerable interaction between the birds flying at one another and vocalising loudly. Two perched in a dead eucalypt and were duly chased off by a **Sulphur-crested Cockatoo**. Two **Australasian Pipits** posed nicely on dead Mullein stalks at the end of the London Bridge arch.

On entering the woodland we were treated to good views of two **Eastern Yellow Robins** and a little later to four **Scarlet Robins**. Only a single **Leaden Flycatcher** was seen, close to the Queanbeyan River, attacking a **Pied Currawong** but we couldn't determine if this was defending a nest or simply good policy being put into practice.

Overall 40 species (the full list will appear in the trips section of the COG website) were recorded before the leader took the group on a side track followed by a scramble up a hillside just in time to put on our raincoats for a heavy thunderstorm. As we were all drenched we passed on the side trip to Tin Hut Dam! — **Martin Butterfield**

## 20 March — East Basin/Molonglo Reach — Boat Cruise

Under surprisingly calm waters (considering the strong SE wind blowing at home, and that the Festival balloons were not able to ascend) but cloudy conditions with unfortunately a pretty persistent drizzle when we moved along the river, a nearly full complement of 23 members and guests joined me on the MV Darter and EL Cygnet for this annual trip to view the darter and cormorant nesting.

This time we first travelled across East Basin, and up into the Molonglo Reach. Very soon on the S bank we encountered three close together groups of four large **Australasian Darter** chicks with still some down showing, sitting tight close to

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their nests. Nearby was a male on a nest, on the way back confirmed to be brooding small young. This was also the case for two close together nests further upstream, and in one case the chicks could be seen and heard spiralling their necks up past their dad's breast towards his bill. These six were the only still active nests we saw this time, lower than in all previous visits in autumn, confirming the intelligence I had received before the trip that the breeding season was largely over for this year.

That it had been a good season was illustrated by an estimated over 40 juvenile birds often sitting together on the exposed dead trees, judged to be so by their generally more buffish colour and lighter back of their necks. Due to their grouping it was very hard to tell how many adult female birds were among them. Numbers of adult male birds seen were low, estimated as not more than half a dozen, the lowest for some time if not ever in over 12 trips here. However, several birds with black necks but still white breasts/bellies were seen, identified later through consulting HANZAB as immature males, the first time I can remember observing this, at least for some time. Altogether about 60 **darters** were seen on the day, slightly down from last year, but still the evidence is strong that the clearing of the willows from the N bank has had limited impact to date, at least on **Australasian Darter** presence and breeding.

Where the reach opens up much wider about 0.5 km W of the first bridge there was a single **Great Cormorant** nest containing three well advanced chicks and an adult bird very close by. Also in this area were about six **Little Pied Cormorants**, including again some buffish immatures. No **Little Black Cormorants** were seen on the river, but first eight, and then 15, were seen flying high overhead in a distinct V pattern. Given the drop in numbers I'm less confident in saying that clearing the N bank has not affected **cormorant** breeding, though this could also be attributed to the much wetter conditions this year and the birds moving away to breed. The latter is supported by the apparent lack of activity this year at the significant **Little Black Cormorant** breeding site (for the past 4-5 years, including last) near the mouth of Sullivan's creek. This was noted by the boat's skipper who added there is/has been some cormorant/darter breeding closer to Black Mountain peninsula, as indicated by Martin Butterfield in a chat line posting of 7 February.

The two Terries (Bell and Munro) checked this area on 23 March and reported a couple of **Australasian Darter** nests, one with large young, as well as two **Little Pied Cormorant** nests with young. A couple of the latter were also seen near two newish nests on the banks of the peninsula. Several postings on the COG chat line over summer have noted **Darter** and **Little Pied Cormorant** breeding elsewhere on Lake Burley Griffin or the Molonglo River well downstream (W of the Tuggeranong Parkway) of the Scrivener Dam. Michael Lenz informed me that **Little Pied Cormorants** started to nest at Yowani in August 2010, and **Little Black Cormorants** in September 2010. Highest nest numbers were reached in October for the former and in December for the latter, again indicative of an earlier breeding season, but in late March both species still occupied a few nests.

As for the past three years, the river was very quiet in respect of other water birds, with low numbers of common species seen. The highlight was four **Cattle Egrets** which obligingly stayed put in open view in the trees close to the boat. Again a number of land birds were seen, a late staying **Sacred Kingfisher** seen by some participants in both boats being the highlight.

We returned via the SE corner of the basin to look for activity around the former Kingston Boat Harbour and up the mouth of Jerrabomberra Creek. We weren't able to go far due to the fear of getting snagged on submerged logs brought down by the floods, but this was enough to confirm activity here was much lower than it had been in previous years.

At 31, the total number of species was much lower than in previous years too. Nevertheless all participants enjoyed the trip, as I did in now my twelfth trip since we started in 2003. My special thanks to Jenny Bounds who was happy to help lead the second boat at short notice when some late interest made taking this one viable, and to those who provided information for the above summary of the 2010-2011 breeding. As the popularity of this trip remains very high I intend to run it again next year, possibly a little earlier if the wet cool weather persists. — **Jack Holland**



**Cattle Egret**  
( *Ardea ibis* )  
Photo by David Cook

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## 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.

### Wednesday 20 April — Midweek Walk

The next walk will visit Red Hill, focussing on the area between Gowrie Drive and Kent Street. We will meet at 9:00 am at the part of Buxton St, Deakin closest to the Red Hill Nature Park.

### Friday-Tuesday 22-26 April – Willandra (Easter/Anzac Long Weekend)

The Easter long weekend outing has been switched to Willandra NR (previously planned for Yathong NR). This trip will represent an excellent chance for COG members to see some of the more typically western species and the local grasslands should be in excellent condition following the extensive rains in 2010.

The trip is now full, but if you would like to go on a waiting list in case people drop out, please contact **Noel** on 62883291 or at [noelluff@homemail.com.au](mailto:noelluff@homemail.com.au).

### Saturday 7 May – Australian National Botanic Gardens (Beginners' walk)

This morning walk will be the first for 2011 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](mailto: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.

### Sunday 22 May – Day bus trip (Canberra's Autumn/Winter Birds)

Each autumn/winter, a number of bird species come down from the mountains and higher areas around Canberra to spend the colder parts of the year in the suburbs or surrounding areas. Examples of these are two species of red-breasted **robins** (**Scarlet** and **Flame**), plus two species which are much less common (**Rose** and **Pink**), and a number of species of **honeyeater** including **White-eared**, **Fuscous**, **Brown-headed**, **Crescent** and **Eastern Spinebill**, and **Golden Whistler**. Several other species such as **Dusky Woodswallow**, **Grey Fantail** and **Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike** will overwinter in the ACT in small numbers. The aim of this outing is to learn about them and to try to observe as many of these species within the ACT in one day. Some passage migrants might also still be moving around in late May to add to the interest.

As is best suited for these types of outings, transport will be by two 12-seater buses. This involves a total of 24 people, and a decision has been made not to allow tag-a-long vehicles, otherwise the outing becomes logistically very unwieldy. The point of departure will be the National Library car park at 8 am. This is quite central, and where the parking is free. It will run until mid afternoon so that the buses can be returned late that afternoon, so please bring morning tea and lunch. If we fill the buses, costs will be around \$20 per person, including the COG admin fee. This will be payable on boarding the bus. To book please contact Jack Holland by E-mail on [jack.holland@environment.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@environment.gov.au)) or after hours phone 6288 7840.

This annual outing has been brought forward a couple of months to the end of autumn, as the species are often more conspicuous when they first arrive. We will be visiting several spots in the ACT where these species are likely to be present. As usual, the exact itinerary will not be determined until very close to the day, and will depend on recent reports of where these birds are, though there will be an attempt to stay within the ACT boundaries. Jenny Bounds and Jack Holland will lead the outing.

NOTE: Late cancellations at short notice, which cannot be filled from a wait list, may have to pay the full fare if a loss to COG results.

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## Sunday 22 May — Jerrabomberra Wetlands — in conjunction with the ACT Down Syndrome Association

The Canberra Ornithologists' Group has invited members of the ACT Down Syndrome Association to join us for this field trip to the Jerrabomberra Wetlands. This area is one of the most valuable wetland habitats in the ACT and is of regional importance.

We are meeting at 9am at the carpark at the end of Dairy Road. After an introduction and an opportunity to meet each other, we will visit the bird hides overlooking Kelly Swamp, where we can sit down and watch birds without disturbing them. We will break after about an hour to enjoy some morning tea and to socialise, and then continue some more bird watching, finishing by midday.

This field trip is a unique opportunity to meet some interesting new people of all ages, including some with limited experience with birds, so if you are interested in sharing your knowledge, your participation will be very much appreciated.

To register, or for more information, please contact Matthew Frawley at [frawley.matthew@gmail.com](mailto:frawley.matthew@gmail.com) or telephone 6296 1026.

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*(March meeting — Continued from page 1)*

daughter) began the mammoth task of attempting to repeat Stephen's study, in the same area, using the same grid (rediscovered and re-cleared), 20 years later.

We spend about 450 hours on the site between August and January (inclusive), and most of our time is spent finding nests. We find about 150 nests a year representing 29 species. We also colour-band the birds with the help of a group of banders from Canberra. Last season about 60% of re-trapped birds were colour-banded, and 90% of the nests we found were associated with at least 1 colour-banded bird.

The data we get each year is distilled into the following categories: Nests/year (total and for each species); nesting period for each species; minimum number of breeding pairs for each species; percentage of nests judged successful for each species; and maximum nesting attempts per pair for each species.

We have just completed our 5<sup>th</sup> season (2010/2011), and are now able to begin to make comparisons between our and Stephen's data.

The **Australian Bird Study Association** is holding its annual Scientific Day in Albury on Saturday 9 April, at Charles Sturt University.

Speakers include:

- Judit Szabo - the state of Australian birds
- Dean Ingwersen - Regent Honeyeater
- Natasha Schedvin - Barking owl
- Peter Menkhorst - Orange-bellied parrot
- David Parker - Plains Wanderer.

Details and registration form on the Association website: [www.absa.asn.au](http://www.absa.asn.au)

## For Sale

### Lieca Televid Appo 77 Spotting scope

Plus:

- camera attachment to suit an Olympus camera; and
- a cordura scope cover.

**Cost: \$2300.00**

Technical details are at:

[http://www.birdwatching.com/optics/scopes\\_rev\\_leica.html](http://www.birdwatching.com/optics/scopes_rev_leica.html)

**Contact: David Coates, MOB 0427 531659**



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## Garden Bird Survey Notes

Sorry for missing last month: no idea why.

The chatline has been reasonably quiet on GBS sightings this month!

- a good range of species at a new site in Hawker;
- **Spotted Dove** (boo, hiss) in Duffy
- calling **Eastern Koels** (and some breeding records) for a number of sites;
- **Little Corella** (see below) in Kaleen.

### Of Galahs and Little Corellas

There have been a number of chatline posts – not necessarily GBS-related - about the number of **Little Corellas** around at present. *In A Bush Capital Year*, Ian Fraser recounts the invasion of the ACT by **Galahs** (p59) and somewhat further into the book (p124) comments that it seems likely that the **Corellas** will one day catch up to the **Galahs**. This was basically a red rag to my bull. What does the GBS data show about the likely time of this overtaking?

Without getting too technical, I usually use the trend function of Excel to smooth out noise in the data for past periods. In this case, what was needed was to project the values of A for two species forward and see where they intersected. At this point I became embarrassed for choice; one could use all 29 years of GBS data or just the more recent times; and one could use a linear trend or a polynomial (of a range of types). What emerged from this was that, depending on the mathematical model used, a wide range of answers emerged varying from:

- **Galahs** will decline dramatically in the next few years while **Corellas** will keep increasing (the latter overtaking the former in five years); to
- **Galahs** will increase faster than **Little Corellas** and the latter will never overtake the former.

This approach could be described as top down (observe an effect and then dig into the detail to understand it). It doesn't work in this instance as there is no consistent effect. The challenge is thus for the scientists to identify the leading factors influencing **Little Corellas** increasing and the future abundance of **Galahs**.

### Uses of GBS data

As usual GBS data has contributed to the *COG Annual Bird Report*. I have discussed the way in which GBS data could contribute to the *Atlas of Living Australia* and have submitted a paper to the COG Committee. I have circulated via the chatline links to my blogposts considering issues relating to **Spotted Dove** and the timing of **Yellow-faced Honeyeater** migration. — **Martin Butterfield**

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## Committee News

- The Jerrabomberra Wetlands Nature Reserve Plan of Management 2010 has been published. COG made comments on an earlier draft plan.
- Chris Davey and Jenny Bounds will be attending consultations and a site visit relating to plans for the Molonglo River corridor park, a significant area planned for recreation in the Molonglo development.
- The project to repair the dam wall on the large dam at Mulligan's Flat Nature Reserve is proceeding, with a view to completion by the middle of the year.
- The next woodland survey period is 26 March to 3 April. The bird/habitat relationships pilot project is proceeding; data is now with the statistician and an agreement has been signed for the analysis, consistent with

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(Photo Ops 2 — Continued from page 11)

almost guaranteed to find exceedingly rare birds breeding and flying wild with no more trouble than a short (and interesting) flight?

The OBP recovery team maintains summer volunteers, a feeding table and observatory at Melaleuca in an effort to maximise breeding and migration success and to provide a scientific and conservation base. During our three day visit in late February we saw at least 23 individual OBP's including banded, unbanded, adult and juvenile, so happily confirmed at least the lower end of population estimates. The feeding table and observatory provide excellent observation and photo opportunities but of course we were keen to see these surprisingly small (just bigger than a budgie) parrots 'in the wild'.

I therefore spent most of my time wandering the moorland and was pretty happy when I eventually lucked upon the adult pair shown here feeding on button grass, just west of the airstrip. Their use of the dead shrubbery to gain access to the tall buttons and their various means of holding on to the grass stalks was quite fascinating.

Some time later, while wading through the swampy plain looking for **Southern Emu-wrens** and wondering about the Tiger Snake that swam past my legs (I erroneously thought it was a black snake so was not too worried at the time), a pair of OBPs flew into the tea-tree stand in front of

me, right on the banks of Melaleuca Creek. The adult sensibly remained out of sight but the juvenile behaved in that innocently

gormless way that juveniles often do and picked a spot where we had excellent views of each other. I didn't get to see the adult again because the scrub was too thick to traverse, but eyed off and photographed the brilliantly coloured youngster for several minutes before they both left.

Of course OBPs are not the only attraction of this remote and wonderful place – other interactions included **Eastern Ground Parrots**, the **Emu-wrens**, many **Striated Fieldwrens**, endemic

**honeyeaters** and **Spotted-tailed Quolls**. Tobias has a magnificent photograph of an alpha male quoll that appears to run the area, and I had a younger one crash into my tent at high velocity in the middle of the night, then peer at me in the near darkness through the insect netting, coming as close as 20cm to my bleary-eyed but entranced face. It was one of my best wildlife moments and the quolls remain a highlight of Melaleuca, but the place still belongs for the moment to OBPs. Long may they be found there.

**A note to readers:** The photographs obviously suffer in the print edition by lack of both colour and size. Photos can easily be viewed in colour by downloading the PDF version of Gang-gang from the COG website. The pdf photos have enough detail to stand zooming to 200% or more. — **Words and pictures — Julian Robinson**

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(Committee News — Continued from page 8)

the budget in our Environment grant. We expect output to be finalised by the end of April. Jenny Bounds and Nicki Taws, with input from Alison Rowell, will compile the report.

- A letter has been sent to the ACT government about safety issues on the cycle/pedestrian bridge at the Jerabomberra Wetlands.
  - Chris Davey and Jenny Bounds will represent COG at the April meeting of the BigNET group.
-

## 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, or  
barbdebruine@hotmail.com  
or see

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

## PASSIVE SOLAR HOUSE

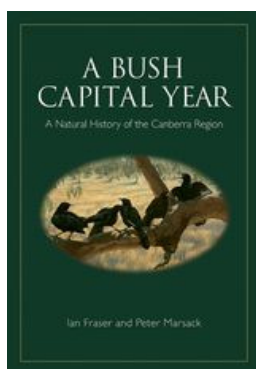
### South Rosedale

*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@grapevine.com.au

# COG SALES

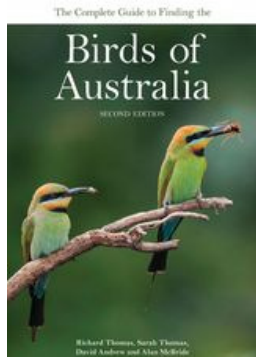


### **A Bush Capital Year: A Natural History of the Canberra Region** Ian Fraser , Peter Marsack

*A Bush Capital Year* introduces the fauna, flora, habitats and reserves of the Australian Capital Territory and includes the most recent research available. It also emphasises often unappreciated or even unrecognised urban wildlife. For each month of the year there are 10 stories which discuss either a species or a group of species, such as mosses and mountain grasshoppers. While never anthropomorphic, many of the stories are written from the organism's point of view, while others are from that of an observer. Beautiful paintings complement the text and allow better visualisation of the stories and the subjects. Members price \$32

### **What Makes a Good Farm for Wildlife?** David Lindenmayer

Based on thirteen years of intensive research, the book breaks the discussion into chapters on key environmental and vegetation assets and then discusses how to make these assets better for biodiversity. The work encompasses information on vertebrates and invertebrates on farms and their relationships with significant vegetation and environmental assets: woodland remnants, plantings, paddocks, rocky outcrops and waterways. A chapter is dedicated to each asset and how it can be managed. Members price \$27

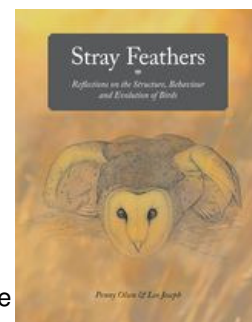


### **The Complete Guide to Finding the Birds of Australia 2nd Ed** Richard Thomas , Sarah Thomas , David Andrew , Alan McBride

First published in 1994, this was the first ever book of its type in Australia – a complete guide to locating every resident bird species. This fully revised second edition describes the best-known sites for all of Australia's endemic birds, plus regular migrants such as seabirds and shorebirds. It covers all states and territories, and is the first guide to include all of Australia's island and external territories. A comprehensive Bird Finder Guide details site information on all Australian bird species, and the authors provide valuable travel advice. Member's price \$32 – expected for the April meeting.

### **Stray Feathers: Reflections on the Structure, Behaviour and Evolution of Birds** Penny Olsen , Leo Joseph

*Stray Feathers* showcases some of the remarkable adaptations of Australian birds. A brief introduction describes how evolution shapes form and function, followed by a series of vignettes illustrating the wondrous variety of forms and functions shaped by evolution. For example, did you know that barn owls can hunt in absolute darkness and that cuckoos commence incubation before their egg is laid? Members price \$39 – expected for the June meeting



Also titles from CSIRO Publishing's *Australian Natural History* series (\$29.00 each for members): *Kookaburra*, *Australian Magpie*, and many more.

**At the March meeting only – remaining T-shirts and Polo shirts (limited sizes)**



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## Photo Ops 2 — Orange-bellied Parrot



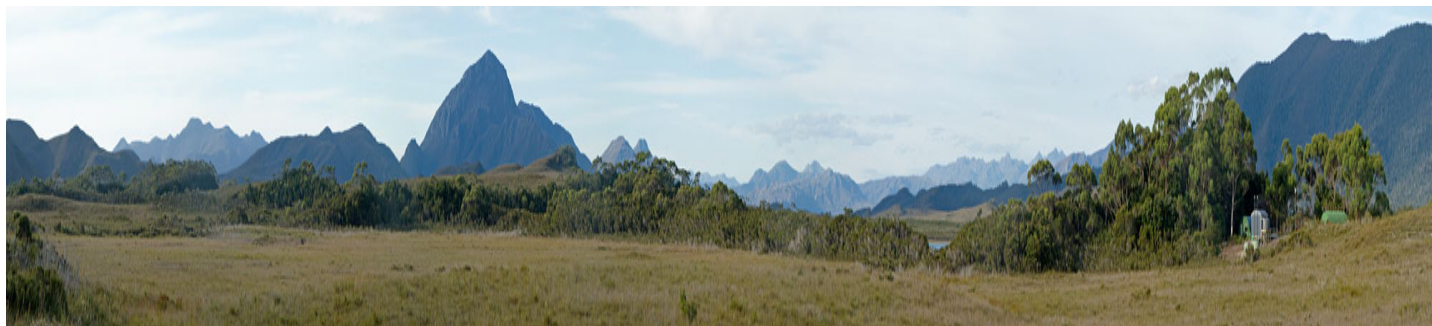
As well as being an iconic Australian threatened species, the **Orange-bellied Parrot (Neophema chrysogaster)** (OBP) has also recently become one of the very rarest wild birds remaining on the planet. Considering that it is also beautiful enough to put it right up there with small furry animals in the ‘So-Cute-We-Must-Save-Them’ stakes, it’s surprising that the species gets such half-hearted support from the community. Most people remember the OBP as a poor excuse for delaying approval of the Victorian Bald Hills wind farm in 2006, or a spanner in the works of the earlier plan to move Coode Island chemical facility. (The latter was the cause of Jeff Kennett’s famous reference to the OBP as a ‘trumped-up corella’).

But it’s not just rednecks or even the general community who are indifferent to the OBP’s fate. Many environmentally aware folk including bird enthusiasts are also now inclined to ‘let the OBP go’ in the spirit of acceding to more fashionable landscape-scale conservation efforts. There’s even a reverse-eco-snobbery argument running, the one that says the OBP is a bit too precious and not really so special and has been diverting too much of the government’s limited resources and should be finished off as soon as possible so we can get on with the bigger job. Without diverting totally from the photographic angle, I would argue that we must continue to target individual species because it potentially provides better focus, visibility, public support and easily measurable results than do landscapes. More

especially it can reduce inadvertent losses whereby significant species might otherwise accidentally disappear while we’re busy building them a landscape.

The story of these photos. Last year fellow COG member Tobias Hayashi suggested we should see the OBP before it disappeared. A first thought was that we could amble down to the Victorian coast in winter to some well-known spot and gaze at them there. Web searches referred to 200 to 400 remaining wild birds but with more research we realised that the situation had declined rapidly in the last few years with up-to-date estimates of no more than 20 to 50 wild birds (and 100+ in captivity). In a similar rapid shift, a 2006 report for the Victorian Government suggested that the OBP was at risk of extinction in 50 years. But by April 2010 Peter Garrett quoted experts as saying the wild population could become extinct in ‘three to five years’. That’s an uncomfortable rate of progress.

Rather than trying to find 20 or 50 birds spread over the Vic-SA coastline in winter, we decided to head for Melaleuca in Tasmania during the breeding season. As most birders know, Melaleuca is now their only known wild breeding place.



And as it turned out this was an excellent decision - one of the best avian photo ops in the world. Where else are you

*(Continued on page 9)*





## WONGA

### Bawley Point

South Coast of N.S.W.

Two well equipped timber cottages in 50 acres. Damp and dry warm temperate forest, kunzea and rock provide for a diversity of birds and other animals. A short walk down the driveway leads to sand dunes and beaches, sea birds and Hooded Plovers. Close to National Parks, lakes and historic sites.

patricia.walker@bigpond.com  
phone 02 6251 3136

[www.visitnsw.com.au](http://www.visitnsw.com.au) (follow the links to accommodation and Wonga)

COG welcomes the following new member:

**J Svensson, Chifley**

## NEXT NEWSLETTER

### May deadline

**Wednesday 27 April 2011**

Please send, articles, advertisements, updates etcetera to the Editors at  
[gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto: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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Civic Square, ACT 2608

*Newsletter distribution*

Brian Fair and helpers

*COG membership*

2010-2011 memberships:

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

*Membership inquiries*—

Sandra Henderson ph 6231 0303

[membership@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto: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](http://www.canberrabirds.org.au)

*Office*

COG no longer maintains an office. For all enquiries or access to COG's library phone Barbara Allan 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](mailto:canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au) with the subject 'subscribe' without the quotation marks

*Editor Canberra Bird Notes*

Beth Mantle

[CBN@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:CBN@canberrabirds.org.au)



## Gang-gang

If undeliverable, please return to

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