

Gang-gang

August 2005

News letter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

Monthly Meeting

8 pm Wednesday

10 August 2005

*Canberra Girls Grammar School
cnr 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 carpark is full, enter using
Chapel Drive.*

Our **short talk** will be by long-time COG member, Dr Michael Lenz. Michael will outline some unusual aspects of last season's breeding by Jacky Winters at Campbell Park.

Our **main speaker**, back by popular request, is University of Canberra Applied Ecology Research Group student Esteban Fuentes. This time, Esteban's talk will be "The raptor community of Molonglo Ridge".

Everyone welcome

Join COG or Renew your COG membership now!
See membership form in this *Gang-gang*.

Field Trip and Survey Reports

Superb Lyrebird survey, Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, 25 June 2005.

The second, annual survey of the Superb Lyrebird at the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve was run under perfect conditions on Saturday 25 June. Seventeen COG members and friends met at the gates by 8.00am and were dispatched to assess the number of lyrebirds that could be seen or heard along the Gibraltar Rocks, Devils Gap and Fishing Gap walking trails, along the Ashbrook Creek fire trail and part-way along the Camel Back trail. The areas covered were the same as last year when 7 birds were reported, all from the drier, eastern side of the valley. In contrast this year there were 13 birds reported, most of which were recorded from the wetter southern and western side of the valley. A repeat survey was conducted on 6 July. This time the Gibraltar Rocks trail was not repeated. Nine birds were reported and this number was similar to the 11 birds reported from the same trails 12 days earlier. Twenty-six bird species were recorded during the surveys including independent sightings of **Brown Quail**.

On 13 June after much physical effort David McDonald and Chris Davey were able to relocate the Lyrebird walking trail. This trail has not been reopened since the January 2003 fires but had previously been a favourite walk for David's popular lyrebird outings. Before the fire lyrebirds and their mounds were commonly seen but on this occasion there was no sign of either.

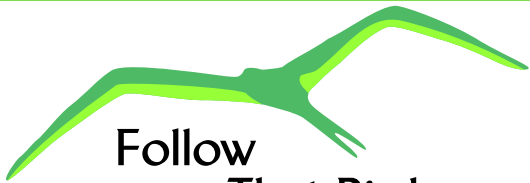
Many thanks to the participants and to the staff at Tidbinbilla for opening the gates early and for giving CD a push to start a car with a flat battery!

Chris Davey & Peter Fullagar

Robin Twitchathon Sunday 17 July 2005

Two 12 seater buses full of eager participants set off with me on this ambitious quest to try to see all 7 species of robins which occur in the ACT in the one day.

Our first stop was Mulligan's Flat where 3 species had been reported



Follow That Bird

Our small well serviced birdwatching tours with the following trips having pick up and drop offs available from Canberra's city centre.

All three star accommodation and meals are included. For an itinerary for any of the trips please contact us.

October 2005

Eastern Australia

Part 1 Tropical Cairns 1st-6th \$ 2250
Leader Klaus Uhlenhut
Start & End Cairns

Part 2 Lamington to Sydney \$ 3950
Leader Alan Morris
Start Lamington End Sydney

December 2005

Christmas Island \$ 2850
Leader Dion Hobcroft
Start & End Perth

January 2006

Alpine Birds, Plants & Everything \$ 1485
Leader Dion Hobcroft

February 2006

Divine Lord Howe Island
18-22th \$ 1750
(excludes airfare) Start Lord Howe
End Lord Howe. Leader the Lord
of Howe himself : Ian Hutton

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recently. We encountered our first pair of **Scarlet Robins** amongst a very active mixed feeding flock close to the former woolshed. We then moved to the NE of the reserve where we located much more quickly than expected the **Hooded** and **Red-capped Robins** that had been seen there over the past month. All participants had very good views of the single male and 2 female/immature hooded feeding in front of us for over 30 minutes, together with a female/immature Red-capped Robin (with a clear red-brown forehead, particularly from some angles, but no noticeable red wash in the breast). For most of the party this was their first sighting of this species in the ACT. Towards the end the feeding party was joined by a pair of Scarlet Robins, and it was lovely to be able to see the 3 species together, even though the latter were not made too welcome by the male Hooded Robin.

We then moved to the Australian National Botanic Gardens, to find the **Eastern Yellow Robin**, and hopefully also the **Rose Robin**. Again all participants had good views of the former relatively quickly, though the latter remained elusive, as it seems to have all this winter, with prior to the trip no-one able to report its presence in spots where they have often been seen in previous winters and where we might have searched for it.

After lunch we moved to the edge of the former Narrabundah Hill pine plantation with the Chapman horse paddocks where the expected **Flame Robins** initially proved elusive with only some distant views of several female/immature birds and a couple of calls during the first 45 minutes. However, close to our return to the buses we encountered the flock, along the former pine forest track and some distance from where they have been over the past few weeks. Again all participants had excellent views of 5 males and at least 10 female/immatures as they moved around and fed on the ground in front of us. The latter generally had white wing bars and were lightish under (some appeared to have a faint pink wash in the throat) with few darker birds with yellowish "broken arrows" indicative of immature birds. An added bonus was 2 **Diamond Firetails** and 2 **Speckled Warblers**; I hadn't seen the former there for about a month, and I only have 1 or 2 records of the latter for this area, and certainly none since the fires. A **Wedge-tailed Eagle** circling over as we started our walk was also only the second record I have of this species in the area since the fires.

It was agreed by all that finding 5 of the 7 robin species, all able to be seen clearly by all participants, made for a pretty good pass mark. As noted above the rose robin has rarely been seen this winter, and I am not aware of any sightings of the much less common **Pink Robin**. After the rain overnight

and the less than optimistic forecast, the clear, sunny conditions though with a pretty cold wind were appreciated by all participants. My thanks to all who participated and especially to Jenny Bounds for offering to drive the second bus, and helping to plan the itinerary as well as to find the birds. Certainly worth a repeat or at least something of a similar nature – trying to see all the eleven local raptor species in one day would be a particular challenge.

Jack Holland

Wednesday walk 20 July 2005

We were fortunate to encounter a fine winters day for our trip to the Blue Range hut area.

A number of **Flame Robins** were found in the burnt out pine forest and one **Scarlet Robin** posed against the black trunks of some burnt pines. **Brown Falcon**, **Nankeen Kestrel**, and **Black-shouldered Kites** were seen along with the usual little brown birds.

A stop at the Uriarra homestead dam yielded good views of a **Restless Flycatcher**.

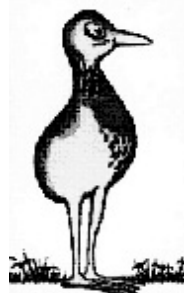
Tom Green

Future Field Trips

At its May meeting, the committee discussed the COG policy on sharing costs on field trips where car pooling is encouraged or occurs. The committee noted that there was a clear expectation that drivers should be recompensed for both fuel and running costs. Rather than set formal rates it was concluded that the exact amount should be agreed at the start between the driver and passengers. This policy applies to car pooling both for travelling to and from a venue such as Jervis Bay, and for sharing car seats, often in the 4WDs, when moving around to different sites once at the venue.

Lake Ginninderra Waterbirds for beginners -Sunday 7 August

This is the second of our bird walks in 2005 that is aimed specifically at beginners or new members. Meet Anthony Overs (6254 0168 AH or email on anthony.overs.reps@aph.gov.au) at 8.30 am in the car park at the western end of Diddams Close on Ginninderra Peninsula (also known as Diddams Close Park - see Yellow Pages Map 38, ref A9). We will walk the shores of the peninsula around to the eastern side, then back to the carpark along Diddams Close. We should be able to view several species of waterbirds up close, focusing on the identification features of the common species such as the various ducks, "waterhens" and



Australian Ornithological Services P/L

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2005 Birding Tours

**The Good Food
Plains-wanderer Weekend
19 & 20 November 2005**
Combining good food, good wine
and good birding

2005 Plains-wanderer Weekends
10 & 11 December 2005
17 & 18 December 2005
31 Dec ember 05 & 1 January 06

2006
5 —11 February 06
Tasmania
Bruny Island, Derwent Bridge,
Melaleuca & pelagic trip. Accom.

23—30 April 06
Central Australia birding tour
Alice Springs, Uluru, Glen Helen
Accommodated

15—30 May 06
Top End
Darwin, Kakadu NP, Kununurra,
Mitchell Plateau, Lake Argyle Accom.

1 — 8 August 06
New Caledonia birding tour

15 August – 2 September 06
Strzelecki Track Outback Tour
Accommodated
check website for availability

7– 24 April 2007 Thailand

www.philipmaher.com

cormorants. A variety of bush birds are also likely to be seen. Please don't forget to bring your binoculars and field guide.

Sunday 21 August – COG Trip Leaders workshop

This event will be held on the date originally advertised but at the Botanic Gardens rather than Campbell Park. A room is being organised because it will be need to be indoors at this time of the year. The proposal is for there to be 45-60 minutes worth of presentations of the principles for leading COG bird walks, followed by an outdoor activity to put some of these into effect. COG's draft Guidelines for the Advertising and Conduct of COG Field trips will also be presented to participants for comment and feedback in the first part.

Anthony Overs will be assisting Jack Holland with the running of this workshop. Meet at the bus stop in the car park at 9:15 am before moving to the venue. It is highly recommended that all current and aspiring COG bird walk leaders attend this event. If you are proposing to come please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au).



EMU TOURS

Nature Tours with the Focus on Birds

EMU TOURS TO MALAWI IN 2005

Richard and Roz are going back to Malawi for one more time! The experience of a lifetime—and wonderful birds - in the spring when migrants will be around and birds will be in breeding plumage. We shall include magnificent Nyika Plateau in the north and Liwonde NP. The tour will be for 14 days in mid-October (ask us for the dates). Unbeatable value at **\$2950** twin share ex Lilongwe - with all good accommodation (1 night a bit rustic!).

Reserve your place now.

Richard and Roz
emutours@austarnet.com.au 0428 38 5677

Mulligan's Flat to Gorooyarroo walk; Sunday 4 September – morning walk/car shuffle

Following difficulties with viewing into the sun experienced by some members who recently undertook a similar walk, this trip will now be done in the reverse of what was published in the July *Gang-gang*. The proposal is to meet at 8 am at the Gorooyarroo carpark off Horse Park Drive, leave some cars there and proceed in the others to the Mulligans Flat carpark on the Gundaroo Road. The walk will commence from there along the old coach road, checking out spots such as where the **Hooded Robin** and **Red-capped Robin** have been seen before walking down the Gorooyarroo track heading south (see map on COG's web site). There is another nice area of woodland for Hooded Robins and other woodland birds about 1.5 km before the end, at the northern end of Gorooyarroo. The total distance will be around 7-8 km. As this is a reasonable distance and somewhat undulating, participants should be moderately fit.

We are still looking for a leader for this walk, so if you can help please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au). Assistance with the route can be arranged. For details of the leader and also to get an idea of likely numbers could all intending participants please contact Jack Holland.



Rainbow Bee-eaters (*Merops ornatus*)
Photo courtesy Geoffrey Dabb

Cuumbeun Nature Reserve; Sunday 18 September – morning outing

Many thanks to David and Kathy Cook for agreeing to lead the first COG walk to this newly declared nature reserve south of the Kings Highway and straddling the Captains Flat Road east of Queanbeyan. The reserve was declared in January 2001 to protect rare tablelands forest particularly yellow box woodland. It's a large reserve of some 968 ha consisting of many large trees, good understorey in places, and plenty of hollows. In a late summer visit there were quite a few birds present, including **White-throated Treecreepers, Striated and Spotted Pardalotes, Striated Thornbills, Grey Fantails, Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike** and

juvenile **Southern Boobooks**. In the early spring you might expect to see a number of migrants as well. Kathy and David (Ph 6236 9153) are proposing to visit the reserve again to map out the best route to take and the place to meet. Details will be in the September *Gang-gang* - in the meantime pencil this outing and date into your diaries.

Leeton Area (Riverina); Saturday to Monday 1-3 October – Long Weekend camp-out

This will be a repeat of the very successful outing at the end of September 2000. Once again David McDonald will be organising and leading it, and COG will again camp beside the Murrumbidgee River, in a River Red Gum forest, in the Whitton Punt Reserve. Last time there were **Superb Parrots** exhibiting breeding behaviour at the camp site and, besides exploring a variety of State Forests etc, where other bush birds typical of a more inland situation should be seen, some local wetlands will be visited, most notably the excellent Fivebough Swamp.

This is a 'bring everything' camp. Some participants may prefer to arrive on Friday 30 September. Bring your own drinking and washing water. We will arrange for toilet facilities, and erect COG's gazebo for get-togethers. During the course of the weekend we will pass through nearby towns where water and other supplies may be replenished, and it is expected hot showers may be had for a small charge.

More details will be in the September *Gang-gang* or are available from David (6231 8904), with whom you should register your interest in participating in this camp.



Sacred Kingfisher (*Todiramphus sanctus*)
Photo courtesy **Lindsay Hansch**

Wednesday walk – 17 August – Woods Reserve

The mid week walk for August will again be a little further afield. Meet at the earlier time of 8.30 am at the Deek Forest Park (corner of Cotter Rd and Uriarra Rd - **note this is at the former Stromlo Pine Plantation end – see Yellow Pages Map 67, ref A5**) to carpool to Woods Reserve at the start of the Corin Dam Road. Yellow, Scarlet, and Flame Robins will be among the birds targeted. Bring morning tea and join for a BYO BBQ lunch at the end of the outing.

Longer trips

Green Cape – Tuesday to Friday 25-28 October; Mid-week accommodated

This mid week outing is a reprise of the very successful COG trip in June 2004. COG has again booked the two duplex cottages associated with the lighthouse at Green Cape, and Peter Fullagar will again be leading. At the end of October he expects to see a mix of sea birds (including shearwaters) 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. Highlights from COG's 2004 visit included three species of **albatross, Brown Skua, Black-faced Cormorant, Striated Fieldwren, Southern Emu-wrens**, not to mention the very tame **Ground Parrot**.

The two cottages have been booked for 3 nights. The cottages each hold a maximum of 6 people, consisting of separate rooms, the master bedroom with a queen size bed, one with two single beds and a double sofa bed in the family/lounge room. There will also be the opportunity to camp at Bittangabee Bay, only 8 km away.

The accommodation costs will be \$100 per person for the 3 nights, including the COG admin fee. As expected the cottage accommodation has proven to be very popular and a waiting list has been started. However, due to the particular need to achieve a gender balance, there is a spot available for a single male and

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 a few kilometres 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@actewagl.net.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.

a single female. To book your place, please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au). A deposit of \$30 will ensure your spot in one of the cottages.

2006 COG Field Trips Program

It is time already to start thinking about the 2006 COG Field Trips Program, a draft of which is expected to be published in the October 2005 edition of *Gang-gang*. So if you have any places you think are worth visiting next year, favourite places that COG should visit, past outings that you think ought to be repeated, or any type of outing that you think would be suitable please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au).

Most of all offers to lead outings in 2006 will be gratefully accepted. This year's program has again run smoothly because members have been happy to help organise and lead one, or at most two, outings for the year. That's all it takes folks, so please let's continue this co-operative spirit!

Notices

The date for the second 2005 Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater survey is the weekend of **6-7 August**.

There are usually several COG members who participate by going out to the western slopes or the south coast. Why not form your own group and go to your favourite spot where trees are flowering or survey local reserves such as Mulligans Flat/Campbell Park/Mount Ainslie. If anyone is interested, they can register their interest with Debbie Saunders (swiftparrots@yahoo.com.au or Freecall on 1800 66 57 66), who will be happy to advise on spots to survey.

Volunteers are needed for the Barren Grounds Annual Ground Parrot survey/census from 9 am to noon on Sunday **14 August 2005**. This is one of the longest running monitoring programs in Australia. Members wanting to help with the census should contact Jack Baker by E-mail on Jack.Baker@environment.nsw.gov.au. Bring stout walking gear, wet weather gear, a hat and lunch.

Canberra Bird Blitz, 29-30 October 2005

More volunteers to take on a site or two are still wanted! We really want to achieve saturation coverage of the ACT over that weekend, to see what bird species are present, and to get a feel for abundance and location. The next *Gang-gang* will contain details of grid cell allocations and instructions. But remember, apart from your allocated grid cell(s), you're welcome to do as many others as you wish. Will the people who were previously undecided about whether they could participate please let me know asap, to allanbm@bigpond.net.au or by phone to 6254 6520.

Notice of COG Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc will be held at 8 pm on Wednesday 12 October 2005 in the Multi-media Theatre, Canberra Girls' Grammar School, cnr Gawler Crescent and Melbourne Avenue.

Agenda

1. Opening of Meeting
2. Apologies
3. Confirmation of Minutes of 2004 AGM
4. President's Report
5. Adoption of President's Report
6. Presentation of Annual Statement of Accounts
7. Adoption of Annual Statement of Accounts
8. Appointment of Auditor for 2005-6
9. Election of office-bearers (President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer) and ordinary committee members. (Nomination form on Page 11 of this *Gang-gang*.)
10. Other matters for which notice has been given
11. Closing of meeting.

Joan Lipscombe, Public Officer

The Birds Australia - Victorian Pelagic continues from Port Fairy in 2006. Chris Lester is the organiser, with Mike Carter the bird leader on the boat. The boat trip is organised for the first Sunday of each month (with some exceptions), with each trip accommodating 13 people. The cost of the trip is in the order of \$80 - \$90 depending on the number of people on the boat. Booking for 2006 trips can be made from noon on 15 July 2005. To make a booking e-mail Chris.Lester@dse.vic.gov.au.



Satin Bowerbird (*Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*) and **Regent Bowerbird** (*Sericulus chrysocephalus*)

Photo courtesy **Lindsay Hansch**

Yankee Doodlings #1

The most recent bird I saw in Australia was a **White-faced Heron** alongside the runway in Sydney as we took off for the USA. The first US bird was a common crow in a similar position in Los Angeles.

Having got to New York we went for a walk the next day in a very warm Central Park but didn't take binoculars until we had sussed things out crime-wise. The place has changed dramatically since the early 1990s with people wandering through the Ramble quite openly. We've been back since and wrote down 20 species, before the warblers really hit their straps, when we nailed 40 species (about 15 warblers) in 2 hours.

Jamaica Bay was also visited with a lurid **Indigo Bunting** the hit for me. The locals were very excited about **Eurasian Widgeon** and a dark phase **Little Blue Heron**. The various other waterfowl here helped get the USA 2005 list up to about 83 at the time of writing.

A less commonly visited spot (just) on Manhattan is Fort Tyron Park which surrounds the Cloisters Museum. This gave us our first **Cardinals** for the trip. The next day they were common in Central Park, including a female incubating on a nest less than a metre off a very busy walkway. I could mention the male **Scarlet Tanagers** being verminous on 15 May but I won't. Why do I find these colourful birds so much more exciting?

The house list only really started after 4 weeks, when we moved to our longer term apartment. It began well with a **Canada Goose** on Roosevelt Island in the East River, visible from the kitchen window. It looked to go even better when Frances spotted a **Great Horned Owl** on the building across E 46th St. Unfortunately it turned out to be *Bubo virginianus wal-martii*, being a plastic imitation put up to keep the pigeons away!

I have commented to the chat-line about the 'window list' at work including turkey vulture and osprey. From their location both of these would be eligible for the house list: it will be interesting to put a height dimension

to see how the list from the roof (35th floor) differs from the apartment proper (15th floor). I suspect the arrival of my telescope will greatly enhance both.

This first salvo concludes with the wedding in The Ramble of Central Park in the afternoon of 15 May. This was peak warbler season. Everyone in the wedding party, including the bride, groom and celebrant had their binos with them. Fortunately nothing dramatic came through at the crucial time! So, any Canberra birdos who reckon they are serious might wish to try to match that for dedication!

Martin Butterfield

Report of June COG meeting *Sue Lashko*

Tom Green delivered a very interesting short talk on pratincoles, a species we do not see in the ACT, but which is familiar to many inland travellers. Although there are about 14 species of pratincoles found in Africa, and south and east Asia, only two are found in Australia. These mid-sized waders, found inland, have a buoyant flight and catch prey on the wing with their short broad bill. At rest, the wings extend well beyond the tail, and their far carrying melodic call is quite distinctive.

The table below lists summarises their distinguishing features.

Australian Pratincole <i>Stiltia isabella</i>	Oriental Pratincole <i>Glareola madivarum</i>
Chestnut-brown upperside	Olive-brown upperside
Deep chestnut flanks	Chestnut bib with narrow black border, Lower chest & belly white
Black underwings	Chestnut underwing
Long legs & upright posture	Shorter legs and horizontal posture
Feed on mobile insects eg grasshoppers by chasing/ sallying with short flights	Flocks feed on wing morning & evening at 5-30m
Parts of population breed in spring in southern Aus- tralia, and in autumn in tropics. Nest on ground near “crabholes”, cracks and culverts – where chicks are hidden	Breed from Pakistan through SE Asia to northern China. Part of population migrates into northern Australia in summer
	Nomadic flocks associated with cyclonic rain de- pressions. Rest during midday heat on open muddy plains in flocks >5000.

Many in the audience were disappointed when the main speaker, Dr Maxine Cooper, Executive Director of Environment ACT, announced that she was not going to discuss the ‘Environmental challenges for the ACT in the coming decade’, but instead talked about “Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve – Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow”. She outlined the destruction of 5450 hectares of the reserve in the January 2003 bushfires and the loss of all but one koala, many kangaroos and other animals, as well as **Regent Honeyeaters, Freckled Ducks, Cape Barren Geese** and many other birds.

One of the positives from the fires was that, with the loss of the neighbouring pine plantation on Block 60, 486 ha of land adjacent to Tidbinbilla is now managed by Environment ACT as Jedbinbilla. Here there has been very good regeneration of native species, with additional plantings to follow. Hundreds of Aboriginal artefacts were uncovered by the fires on this land.

One of the decisions of the non-urban study, ‘Shaping our Territory – Opportunities for non-urban ACT’, was that Tidbinbilla should have a research, recreation and education focus. There are plans to build a Nature Discovery Centre, which will be “an experience, not a building”, with a series of outdoor exhibits.

Maxine outlined the works completed since the fires, including the new koala enclosure housing koalas from Kangaroo Island, and the reopening of most tracks following the removal of or surgery on unsafe trees. A future project is the redevelopment of the wetlands so that they will be free of the botulism that has been a problem in the past. In addition three other enclosures will be created: riparian, granite outcrops and Australian bushland.

Report of July COG meeting *Sue Lashko*

Peter Fullagar delivered the short talk about the CD of ACT bird calls released last year. This was to replace the cassette produced about 20 years ago for the Murrumbidgee Corridor surveys. Making a CD was not a simple matter of copying the cassette to CD because the sound quality was not good enough. Instead, high quality recordings made mostly in the Canberra area by Peter or Ed Slater, and with no copyright issues, were put onto CD. Most are common birds, although there are some less common species such as rails. Peter produced the CDs as a cottage industry, but production will now be done by a commercial firm as it is more economical, both financially and in time. The intention is to produce a 2-CD set of 164 species. However, Peter needs help from COG members to record about another 70 local species. If you have high quality recordings or the technology to record local birds, contact Peter.

The main talk on ‘Oddballs of the Bird World – Eccentricities in Pheasant Coucals’ was delivered by PhD candidate, Golo Maurer with great flair and humour, interspersed with wonderful images and well-explained science. Golo’s reason for choosing **Pheasant Coucals** to study has much to do with their distribution. Although they are found in coastal regions from just north of Sydney to northwest Australia, Golo chose Howard Springs Nature Reserve, 50 km from Darwin, as his warm study site, where observations could be made from the comfort of a mosquito net-enshrouded hammock! These birds are not pheasants, but are members of the cuckoo family. They prefer wet areas with more than 1600mm of seasonal rainfall. Their habitat is often burnt, usually by quick, cool fires. They feed on frogs and other small amphibians, small reptiles and grasshoppers. Pheasant Coucals breed in the wet season, making it difficult for researchers to get to their nests which are woven out of dried pandanus. King Brown Snakes, Death Adders and Crocodiles are further hazards for the unsuspecting intruder.

Golo set out to answer several questions: why do the sexes differ, why do males and females differ in their reproductive roles, and why do we see sex role reversal? The female Pheasant Coucal is 50% bigger than the male and, although both call, the female call is deeper and carries further. Ecological factors may go some way to explaining the sex role reversal of these birds. With about 80% nest predation, females have to keep laying and will fight with other females to get a male. They will do the same in years of good food supply when they can also keep laying. Meanwhile the male incubates the eggs for two weeks, and feeds the chicks for two weeks in the nest and a further two weeks out of the nest, making parental care very costly. However, other species are subject to these same ecological factors as Pheasant Coucals, yet the sexes don’t reverse roles.

Is there another explanation? Research on the **Black Coucal** in Africa suggested a single testis as an explanation for male parental care. Testes produce testosterone which influences parental care and aggression. Where there are two testes there is increased aggression which inhibits parental care. So Golo hypothesised that Pheasant Coucals have small testes but changed this to ‘Pheasant Coucals have one large testis’ when he discovered that they have one testis which is larger than what would be expected if they had two. Although the males do most of the child care, they are still more competitive than the females, judged by calling. What about the females? Genetic paternity analysis from microsatellites in DNA show that the male Pheasant Coucal starts incubating the eggs once the second or third egg is laid. Meanwhile the female goes off to find a new male so that the fourth egg is often from a different father. So the male Pheasant Coucal has to put up with an unfaithful partner, look after the young and compete for females. We all look forward to the continuing saga of this bird as Golo seeks to find out how common extra-pair populations are.

COG SALES COG SALES

- **'The Long Paddock** - a Directory of Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves in NSW' by Rural Lands Protection Board - \$31.00
- **The Birds of Western NSW: A Preliminary Atlas** - NSW Bird Atlassers - **reduced** to \$5.00
- **Finding Birds in Darwin, Kakadu and Top End** by Niven McCrie and James Watson. \$24.00.
- **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 - \$12.50
- **Birds of Queensland's Wet Tropics and Great Barrier Reef** by Lloyd Nielsen - \$25.00
- **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
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- 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.

From the Committee

At its July meeting the committee considered, amongst more routine business, the following matters.

- It agreed to a request from the Conservation Council for additional one-off support, providing \$1000 to help the Council in its present funding crisis.
- It arranged to have the "Pocket Guide" to the birds of the ACT made available on COG's website.
- It is actively seeking involvement in the proposal to allow waterskiing on East Basin.
- It will work with Environment ACT on the development of a new interpretive display at Namadgi Visitors Centre.

If you would like more details on any of the above topics, please ask any committee member.

Avian Whimsy #33

A Bird By Any Name Would Still Say Tweet

"We don't just borrow words; on occasion, English has pursued other languages down alleyways to beat them unconscious and riffle their pockets for a new vocabulary." I'm not sure whether the author of this, one James D Nicholl, was a birdo, but he could well have been referring to Australian bird naming.

In the last whimsy I explored the somewhat sadly limited field of Australian bird names derived from indigenous Australian words. The response to that was so overwhelming that I've decided to pursue the names theme this month. (My thanks to the reader who responded, incidentally...) Last time I suggested that there are

probably at least as many main stream Australian bird names derived from non-English overseas languages as from indigenous ones. It is these that I want to explore now, and it is an exploration that will lead us to four of the other five inhabited continents. (You might also like to refer to Whimsy #7, back in February 2003.)

Australia's First Bird (at least in any list of Australian birds) is the Emu. Intuitively we might assume that this is of Aboriginal origin, but we'd be wrong. In fact it is of Portuguese origin, from 'ema'. In the seventeenth century the word primarily referred to a crane, but in more recent times it has been used to refer to virtually all of the ratites, including rheas and cassowaries. The sailors who bestowed it in Australia were evidently not birdos, and were apparently not Portuguese either, but Dutch – at the time Portuguese was the *lingua franca* among Dutch sailors in the East Indies, probably because the early maps were in Portuguese.

'Cockatoo' comes via Dutch from the Malay 'kakatua'; it is known from the early 17th century, so presumably was first applied to birds from north of Australia. This is not true however of 'Cockatiel', a hybrid Dutch-Portuguese diminutive of the cockatoo root word. (I'm glad we have Quarrion as a dinky-di alternative here!) Another Malay-Dutch-English route ends with 'Cassowary'. Yet another of Asian origin is 'Koel', from the Hindi – and it's always nice to hear that 'non-English speaking ears' hear the same bird message that ours do!

A couple of names come to us from across the Pacific. Both 'Jacana' and 'Jabiru' come from the Tupi-Guarani tongue of Brazil. (And I know we don't formally have Jabirus here, but in the absence of an indigenous alternative I much prefer it to Black-necked Stork – and don't pretend you'd be confused by my use of it!)

From the other direction comes 'drongo', originating in the Malagasy language of Madagascar.

I'm at least five million years late to claim a flamingo as Australian, but I like the origin of this one too much to ignore. It is purportedly from the Portuguese 'flamingo' for a Fleming – to the swarthy Iberians, the inhabitants of Flanders had pink and white complexions! (Though more prosaically, it may also be from a similar word meaning flaming, for the colour. Or perhaps the words are related.)

Needless to say though there are relevant names of European origin, some of the most interesting of which have become curiously bastardised – or even bustardised – as they evolved from Latin, sometimes via French, to become English words. 'Cormorant' in its original form was 'corvus marinus' – a 'sea crow'. 'Bustard' has some controversy associated with it, but it seems certain that it began as 'avis tarda', bestowed by the Romans in Spain – the trail into English can be recognised in the French 'outarde'. The obvious translation would be 'slow bird', but this isn't entirely convincing; slowness is hardly the essence of bustardry! It is suggested that 'tarda' represents a Latinisation of the bird's indigenous name where they met it.

To end though, I'd like to share with you perhaps the most mind-bending origin of all – that of the wonderful, shambling, cheerfully oafish coucals. I have the support of the Oxford Dictionary for the apparently outrageous suggestion that it is a contraction of the French 'coucou-alouette' – a 'cuckoo lark'!! The sheer effrontery of it *almost* makes us overlook the bizarre concept of this shaggy monster having anything in common with larks.

Any discussion about names is likely to say much more about us than the birds, but it's raining today, so in lieu of going out birding, I'll just sit here and muse. Whimsically.

Ian Fraser ianf@pcug.org.au



Committee Nomination Form

Nominations for the election of officers and ordinary committee members should be submitted, in writing, signed by two members and the person nominated, to

The Secretary, Canberra Ornithologists Group
PO Box 301
Civic Square ACT 2608

by 5 October 2005.

We hereby nominate

for the position of

on the Committee of Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

Nominated by and

I accept the nomination (signature of person nominated)



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COG welcomes the following new members

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Shaun Bagley, Griffith
Wendi Blaauw, Downer
Juliet and Trevor Bunning, Nicholls
Cechet family, Campbell
Fay Maxfield, Bruce
James and Rai Rolevink, Ainslie
Roger and Heather Stewart, Weston
von Behrens family, Weetangera
Rosalind & Benjamin Walcott, Red Hill
John and Veronica Waldron, Oxley

Next newsletter

SEPTEMBER deadline
Wednesday 31 August 2005

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

Articles should be less than 500 words.
Field trip reports should be less than 300, except by prior arrangement with the editor. Bird photos welcome with written material or without.

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Canberra Birds Conservation Fund

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

COG website

www.canberrabirds.org.au

COG membership

2005-2006 membership: Individuals, families and institutions: \$35. school students (under 18): \$17.50.

Office (6247 4996)

COG no longer has an office in the Griffin Centre.

For all queries or access to COG's library phone Barbara Allan on 6254 6520

COG E-mail Discussion List

COG has an email announcement and discussion list for members and friends of COG: 'Canberra Birds'. Join the list by sending an empty email message to canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au.

Editor Canberra Bird Notes

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Gang-gang

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