

# Gang-gang

August 2007

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

## Monthly Meeting

**8 pm Wednesday  
8 August 2007**

*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.*

Drawing on his recent sojourn in New York, **Martin Butterfield** will reflect on *Birding in the home of Super-heroes*, discussing birds and places to bird in both Metropolis and Gotham City (as well as some nearby boroughs),

The main speaker is **Dr Denis Saunders** well known to COG members for his work on the ecology of Black Cockatoos in Western Australia. In June 2007, Denis spent 11 days on the Galapagos and 3 days on Easter Island. His illustrated talk, *Reflections on a brief visit to the Galapagos and Easter Island*, will explore these two very iconic places and attendance should be mandatory for members whose appetites were whetted by the articles on Galapagos birds in the latest edition of *Wingspan*.

**Everyone welcome**

## What to watch out for this month

With August approaching and the days lengthening, it's coming up to my favourite time of year – SPRING!! And after the quiet winter bird wise (except for the vagrant honeyeaters and the **Powerful Owl!**) I'm looking forward to it with even greater anticipation than usual, wondering what will happen this spring. As usual this is sure to be dictated by the weather, while it appears that the drought may be over this cannot be guaranteed as over the past five years there have been a number of false indications of the drought finally being over, only to lapse back again.

During August as the weather warms up we can expect the first spring/summer migrants to appear. Will the earliest again be **Welcome Swallows**, **Tree and Fairy Martins** as for last year? Or will it be the **Fan-tailed Cuckoo**, or perhaps one of the **Bronze-cuckoos**, both very slow to arrive last year?

Towards the end of August listen for the first **Pallid Cuckoos** or the **Noisy Friarbird** calling. Other species which usually arrive by then are the **White-naped** and **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters**, **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike**, **Olive-backed Oriole**, the **Dusky Woodswallow**, **Clamorous Reed Warbler**, **Rufous Whistler** and the **Grey Fantail**.

And as some species arrive, others depart, at least from the Canberra area to the higher country. By the end of August most **Scarlet** (there have been at least 4 pairs in the Cooleman Ridge/Narrabundah Hill area this winter) and **Flame Robins**, **Golden Whistlers**, **White-eared** and **Crescent Honeyeaters** (very few records this winter), and to a lesser extent the **Eastern Spinebill**, will have departed for higher altitudes or the mountains. Keep an eye out for these early arriving spring and departing migrants in your local area, and please make sure all your sightings are provided to the Records Management Team and can be considered for the 2007-2008 Annual Bird Report.

**Jack Holland**

Photo by Harvey Perkins



**Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike**  
(*Coracina novaehollandiae*)

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## Field Trip reports

### 8 July—Ducks Plus

Eleven participants converged at the Regatta Point car park at 9AM for a walk round the ponds in Commonwealth Gardens. The main purpose of this outing was to look more closely at the behaviour of waterfowl, with **Pacific Black Duck** being the main likely subject. Unfortunately, few social interactions were to be observed on this cold, dull, and overcast morning with the ever present threat of rain. However, we could cover the subtleties of distinguishing drakes from ducks by differences in calls and a close attention to plumage features. We did see a variety of other species including a lone dull-plumaged drake **Hardhead** and a large flock of **Red-rumped Parrot**.

Generally, we found well separated pairs of Pacific Black Duck either loafing or occasionally preening but a small group of unattached drakes did offer us some insight into the ways that males assert social dominance amongst themselves. There was some discussion on the ways that social signals have developed from preening or comfort behaviour and we had a wonderful opportunity to watch, at very close quarters, a pair of **Black Swan** going about nest construction. The hen (pen) had laid one egg and together with the male (cob) the two of them went about the business of painstakingly moving material towards and into the nest. This was a perfect demonstration of the peculiarity of all waterfowl in their limitations in transporting nest material other than by picking it up in front and passing it to their side.

The behaviour of a lone **Maned Duck** (Australasian Wood Duck) was interpreted as being most likely a paired drake loafing while his partner was at the nest site; almost certainly somewhere nearby in a tree hollow.

Finally, we were able contrast the social behaviour of waterfowl with that of rails, notably, **Dusky Moorhens**, **Eurasian Coots** and **Purple Swamphens**.

An enjoyable outing. — **Peter Fullagar**

### 21 July – Molonglo Valley

Nine members and international guests turned out on a beautiful winter day to take a stroll across a large property in the Molonglo valley that is marked for housing development. We began at the house at the top of the grazing property where we observed **Eastern Rosella**, **Crimson Rosella**, **White-winged Chough**, **Australian Magpie**, **Wood Duck**, **Masked Lapwing**, **Red-rumped Parrot**, **Welcome Swallow** and **Galah**. A leisurely walk down along the Molonglo River corridor revealed large numbers of **Red-browed Firetail**, **Superb Fairy-wren** and **Double-barred Finch**. We also observed **White-throated Treecreeper**, **Australian Raven**, **Brown Thornbill**, **Yellow-rumped Thornbill**, **Pacific Black Duck** and **Little Pied Cormorant**. A **Grey Currawong** was heard. We also found a **Wedge-tailed Eagle** nest in a Casuarina right by the river. Walking back into the open paddocks to the cars we observed **Richard's Pipit**, **European Goldfinch** and a solitary **Brown Falcon**. A big thank you to Andrew Collins and his family for allowing us to visit the property. — **Anthony Overs**



**Red-browed Finch**  
( *Neochmia temporalis* )

Photo by Stuart Harris

## 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.

### Sunday 5 August – Lake Ginninderra – Waterbirds for beginners morning

This is the second of our bird walks in 2007 that is aimed specifically at beginners or new members. Meet Anthony Overs (6254 0168 AH or [anthony.overs.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:anthony.overs.reps@aph.gov.au)) at 8.30am 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 car park 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 cormorants. A variety of bush birds are also likely to be seen. Please don't forget to bring your binoculars and field guide.

### Wednesday 15 August – Midweek Walk

This month's Wednesday walk will be held at Campbell Park. Meet at the northern end of the car park at 9.00am.

### Saturday 18 August – Kambah Pool to Red Rocks Gorge

This walk offers the chance of some interesting sightings, especially **falcons** near the Gorge, and possibly **Mistletoe birds** in the Casuarinas at Allens Creek, also a good range of bush birds in the regrowth from the 2003 fires, and **Flame** and **Scarlet Robins** in the paddocks. The new path between Kambah Pool and the Gorge provides a fairly easy walk of about three kms from Kambah Pool to the Gorge with fairly easy grades until some steep steps down and up, of about 25 metres elevation, after roughly two kms, where the path dips to the river at Allen's Creek. The path follows the Murrumbidgee River, although mostly well above the river. Meet **Michael Robbins** (contact **6231 7391**, or at [jrobbins@netspeed.com.au](mailto:jrobbins@netspeed.com.au)) at 8:00 am at the car park above Kambah Pool Beach, second turning left after you cross the cattle grid at the entry to the Bullen Range Nature Reserve. You are welcome to come for the full morning, and the full walk to the Gorge, or return to Kambah Pool after morning tea, which will probably be somewhere near Allen's Creek.

### Sunday 2 September — Yanununbeyan State Conservation Area (SCA)

Yanununbeyan SCA, (gazetted in 2003), is about 25 kilometres southeast of Queanbeyan. It has a range of eucalypt forest types with a variety of understorey. The landscape of the SCA will limit us to short excursions through various habitats including creek lines, a dam area and some relatively undisturbed areas. We'll pass through a population of a subspecies of Argyle Apple *Eucalyptus cinerea spp triplex*, and we'll also make a stop by a massive old Apple Box.

**NOTE: The trip will be weather dependent as the roads may become impassable after heavy rain.**

The combined area of Yanununbeyan SCA, National Park and Nature Reserve has a list of over one hundred bird species including **Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo**, **Owlet-nightjar**, **Spotted Quail Thrush** and **Eastern Whipbird**. During this excursion we hope to encounter honeyeaters, robins and a variety of thornbills and other common birds of the area.

This introduction to the SCA will hopefully encourage COG members to revisit the area in the future and explore further. There are possibilities for camping in the SCA which the leaders will point out, and after the recent heavy rains we may be fortunate enough to see some early spring wildflowers.

Meet at 7:30 am at the 'Spotlight' carpark at the intersection of Kings Highway, Yass Road and Ellerton Drive in Queanbeyan for carpooling. Bring hot and cold drinks, morning/afternoon tea and lunch. We expect to be back in Queanbeyan by 4:00-4.30pm, but may be earlier depending on weather and the birds.



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### 2007 Birding Tours

#### Plains-wanderer Weekends

24/25 November &  
1/2, 15/16, 29/30 December 2007

### 2008 Birding Tours

**25 February—2 March  
Tasmania Birding &  
Mammal Tour**  
incl pelagic & Melaleuca flight

#### **12—30 March Thailand**

A repeat of our wonderful 2007 trip with over 400 species of birds recorded; fantastic mammals, reptiles, butterflies, flora, scenery and food. Co-led by Uthai Treesucon, Thailand's foremost birding guide  
See website for checklist & trip report

**July  
New Caledonia  
incl Lifou & Ouvea islands**

**10—28 August 2008  
Strzelecki Track  
Outback Tour**

See other 2008 tours on our website

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

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Bookings are essential. Contact Margaret McJannett or Charles Buer, phone 6161 3450, email: [mcjannett9@hotmail.com](mailto:mcjannett9@hotmail.com), or mobile: 041 337 9655.

### Sat-Sun 15-16 September – Mittagong – overnight accommodated/camping

Local COG member, Pamela Morse-Evans will be showing us all her favourite birding spots in this area, which COG has not visited for some time. We'll be travelling down round lunchtime on Saturday and concentrating on waterbirds that afternoon, first visiting the Cecil Hoskins Reserve where a variety of ducks and other waterbirds as well as possibly the **Swamp Harrier** should be seen. If time permits we'll also visit the Wingecarribee Reservoir for waterbirds that prefer deeper water and perhaps the White-bellied Sea-eagle.

After staying in Mittagong overnight we'll spend the morning exploring the Box Vale and other tracks to the north of the town where a range of birds, including Origma (**Rock Warbler**), **Pilot Bird** and **Bassian Thrush**, is likely to be seen, returning to Canberra mid to late afternoon. Another attraction at the time of year will be the spring wildflowers, with the Waratah likely to be flowering.

Please register your interest with Jack Holland on 6288 7840 or [jack.holland@environment.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@environment.gov.au), who will be able to provide further information including on the range of accommodation available. Participants will need to make their own bookings, and it is recommended this is done early as it will be tulip time in the Southern Highlands, with advance bookings already significant. It is proposed that there will be the opportunity for a meal together on Saturday evening at one of Pamela's favourite restaurants. Participation in either the Saturday or Sunday program will also be possible.

### 29 September - 1 October long weekend – Buddigower Nature Reserve – Camp-out

COG will join Anthony Overs and other Canberra bird-banders for the October long weekend campout at this reserve, near West Wyalong. This will be a bring-everything camp as there are **NO** facilities in the reserve. All rubbish etc will need to be taken out. With care, a conventional vehicle will get in to Buddigower OK. The reserve features a wide range of habitats, from pure Mallee to small areas of heath, extensive areas of Broombush (*Melaleuca*) and ironbark ridges. There are numerous old mineshafts in Buddigower so care needs to be exercised while walking around. The reserve has been severely affected by the drought so birds could be a bit of a potluck assemblage. However most migrants should have returned to the area. Participants will be able to see the local birds in the hand, as the banding crew conducts its operation over the weekend. For those who do not wish to camp, there are motels and caravan parks in town approximately 15 km away. If it has recently been wet, and access to Buddigower is limited we will stay in nearby Charcoal Tank Nature Reserve. Anthony will have further details including directions at the August and September COG meetings. If you can't make the meetings, or wish to register your interest please contact Anthony on 6254 0168 AH or [anthony.overs.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:anthony.overs.reps@aph.gov.au).

### Green Cape – Monday to Friday 8-12 October – Mid-week accommodated

This mid week trip is a reprise of the very successful COG trips in June 2004 and October 2005. COG has again booked the two duplex cottages associated with the lighthouse, and Peter Fullagar will again be leading. This time it will be the peak of the season for the shearwater migration and he also expects to see a mix of other sea birds as well as whales close to shore (depending on the weather). In the nearby heath there are some specials such as the Ground Parrot and the Tawny-crowned Honeyeater, and there is likely to be a range of birds in the woodlands, also close by. Highlights from COG's previous visits include up to four species of **shearwaters**, five species of **albatross**, **Brown Skua**, **Black-faced Cormorant**, **Striated Fieldwren**, **Southern Emu-wrens**, not to mention the very tame **Ground Parrot** in June 2004.

The two cottages have been booked for 4 nights. The cottages each hold a maximum of 6 people, consisting of separate rooms, the master bedroom with a queen size bed, one bedroom 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 \$125 per person for the 4 nights, including the COG admin fee. The trip is currently fully subscribed and has a short waiting list, though some compatibility/gender balance issues still need to be sorted out. To put your name on the waiting list in case of cancellations, please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on [jack.holland@environment.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@environment.gov.au)). A deposit of \$30 is required from those accepted by 1 August to ensure their place in the cottages. The full payment of \$125 is due by the COG meeting on 13 September, when further information for participants will also be available.



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## Other Surveys/Activities of Interest to COG Members

### Woodland Surveys Report

#### Mulligan's Flat - Sunday 24 June

With the regular periods of rainy and windy weather of late, we were lucky to get the Mulligan's Flat survey on a reasonably good weather day. The teams reported very little activity though and only 32 species were recorded. Highlights were a female **Hooded Robin** in the usual area near sites 21/22, a **Common Bronzewing**, six **Yellow-tailed Back Cockatoos** at the north end of the reserve, **Speckled Warbler** near site 24 (they are thin on the ground at Mulligan's) and a group of **Yellow Thornbills**. Yellow Thornbills used to be regularly seen on the surveys, but are now only recorded occasionally. The ground/grass layer is still very low despite more rain this year, and is obviously being affected by kangaroos over-grazing. Thanks to everyone who assisted on the June survey. The next survey date will be Sunday 23 September - volunteers please note your diaries.

I'd like to take the opportunity to thank Pauline Wicksteed, who has been a volunteer on the Mulligan's Flat survey team over many years. Pauline has decided its time to 'retire'. Great to have had you in the team Pauline and best wishes from all of us.. — **Jenny Bounds**

#### Other Woodland Sites

I did the woodland surveys in the last week of June at COGs two locations in the Jerrabomberra Valley, in Callum Brae Reserve and nearby woodland in a leasehold, and the sites in the woodland area at the back of the Grasslands Reserve off the Monaro Highway. Weather was not optimum (cold, overcast) and total counts were low. Pairs of **Wood Ducks** were quite active though, calling and inspecting hollows. The highlights were several **Common Bronzewings**, **Scarlet and Flame Robins**, **Speckled Warbler** and a large group of **Brown-headed Honeyeaters**. Having just relinquished the Newline sites, which I have surveyed for seven years (to Sue Lashko), I was rather envious (although pleased at the same time) to hear that the **Black-chinned Honeyeater** made it into the woodland survey record. — **Jenny Bounds**

#### Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater surveys — 4/5 August

The **Swift Parrot** and **Regent Honeyeater** surveys are being held in the week ending 4/5 August. For more information Please contact Belinda Cooke, Swift Parrot Mainland Recovery Coordinator, Department of Environment and Climate Change, NSW, ph 02 6298 9733, freecall 1800 66 57 66, fax 02 6299 4281.

#### Birdfair 2007

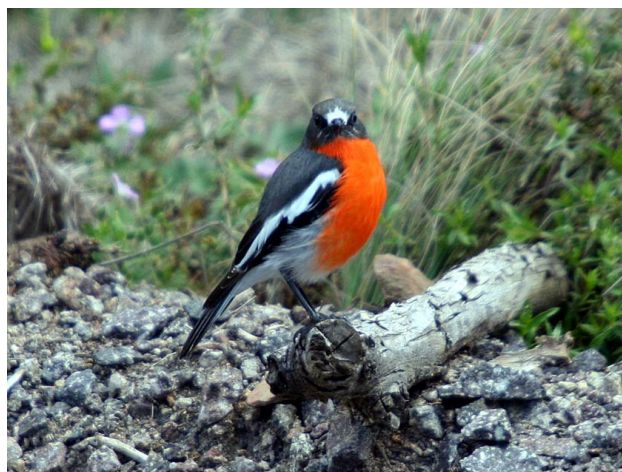
The initial programme for Australian Birdfair 2007, organised by the Fivebough and Tuckerbil Wetlands Trust is now on the Birdfair website, [www.Australianbirdfair.org.au](http://www.Australianbirdfair.org.au). The website will be regularly updated.

#### Sulphur-crested sun rises sooner

In their day's first light  
Three white cockatoos  
All on pink wings  
Flew brightly  
Just a hundred feet above me  
And a few seconds before  
The sun hit the back of my shoes.

**Richard Harding**

Photo by Lindsay Hansch



**Flame Robin ( *Petroica phoenicea* )**

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## News from the Committee

- The Committee discussed a proposal that the Sales Desk stock some CSIRO publications, and it was agreed this would be of benefit to members, as a good discount could be offered. The Sales Desk manager, Bruce Ramsay, will organise to get a selection of their relevant publications for sale to members.
- COG has provided input to the latest State of the Environment report, which is in preparation.
- The Committee discussed the local twitch email list, which was recently mentioned on the canberrabirds email list. It is not an alerting mechanism, and any confirmed sightings are almost immediately sent to canberrabirds.
- The need for a COG business card was discussed - some members often encounter interested people while out birdwatching, and it would be useful to be able to hand them a card with COG's basic contact details. Anthony Overs is going to work on this.
- Subscriptions — The COG subscription period is July-Jun each year. While many members have paid their subscriptions, there are still over 200 who have not renewed their subscriptions for the 2007-2008 financial year. Subscriptions remain at \$35 per year, and can be paid by direct deposit, cheque, money order, or in cash at meetings - see the Treasurer or Sales Desk to pay your subscription at a meeting.

## Report of July COG meeting

Members reported a wide range of significant sightings, some of which will be considered by the Rarities Panel in due course. Among these was the **White-fronted Honeyeater**, only the second to be recorded in the ACT, which took up residence at **Phillip Veerman's** home in the first week of July and attracted a steady stream of visitors. Others mentioned were the **Powerful Owl** at the ANBG, **White-plumed** and **White-naped Honeyeaters**, **Tawny Frogmouth**, a **Little Wattlebird**, various raptors and a possible **Black-eared Cuckoo** at Red Hill.

In introducing the night's speakers, the President thanked **Barbara Allen** for her outstanding service to COG in having organised speakers for the monthly meetings for the last 18 years.

**Geoffrey Dabb** presented two excellent short videos: the first recorded a successful breeding event by **Peregrine Falcons** at the Big Hole, which was first reported by **Elizabeth Compston**; and the second provided superb views of the **Powerful Owl** at the ANBG first discovered by **Anthony Overs** on a COG outing in May.

Our main speaker was **Debbie Saunders**, a PhD student at the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies at the ANU, who was previously co-ordinator of the national **Swift Parrot** surveys. Her topic was the *Migratory movements and conservation of the Swift Parrot*. This unique threatened species is an obligate, migratory parrot that breeds in Tasmania and migrates north to mainland Australia for the winter.

Debbie noted that much of the current knowledge about migratory birds is based on research within Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas, with only limited research on austral migration systems. Although research on these systems within South America has increased recently, there is a relative paucity of information on such migratory systems within Australasia.

The migration systems of land birds within Australasia are complex and challenging to study, largely due to the varied climatic conditions in which they occur, and the often cryptic nature of migratory movements across vast areas. Despite some studies on Australasian migrants using similar techniques to elsewhere in the world, such as bird banding, there is still insufficient data to reveal specific timing, destinations and movement patterns of most migratory Australian land birds. Such challenges are further exacerbated when migrant population sizes are small, such as for threatened species. Therefore alternative methods, such as the use of data collected by networks of volunteer birdwatchers, have more recently been used to improve understanding of land bird migration in Australia. Despite these advances, migratory patterns of the Swift Parrot (*Lathamus discolor*) have remained elusive.

Debbie and her colleagues from the ANU (R Heinsohn, R. Cunningham and J. Wood) have made an assessment of spatial and temporal variations in migratory movements of the Swift Parrot across eastern Australia using seven years of detailed volunteer survey data collected for the national Swift Parrot recovery program. Her talk discussed the implications of this research for conservation and long-term monitoring of environmental change.



**The Paradise Parrot  
E E Gostelow**

## MR GILBERT'S BEAUTIFUL PARRAKEET

**Until Sunday, October 14, 2007 Visitor Centre, National Library**

This display, curated by Dr Penny Olsen of the School of Botany and Zoology at the Australian National University, focuses on the, almost certainly extinct, paradise parrot as a symbol of all those birds and animals which have ceased to exist as they have been hunted for food, their feathers and fur, or had their habitat destroyed through human expansion. Visitors will have the opportunity to view some special items from the Library's collections such as the work of John Gould, Gregory Macalister Mathews and Gracius Broinowski and the watercolours of William Cooper, E.E. Gostelow and Neville Cayley.

## Myna Matters

The Canberra Indian Myna Action Group (CIMAG) reports:

- CIMAG members in areas where trapping has taken out large numbers of Mynas (like Aranda, north and west Kambah and parts of Garran) are reporting that they now see mynas and get a shock when they realize that they have just spotted one.
- April and May trapping data — Trapping in April and May in the Canberra region was very slow: 341 in April and only 260 in May, although this brings the aggregate of Mynas removed up to 10 602.
- Plans to control Indian Mynas are being developed in a number of regions outside Canberra with community and environmental groups, councils and other agencies (including the Queanbeyan City Council and the Yass Pastures Protection Board) getting involved.
- Substantial funding has been secured for a PhD research project into the impact of mynas and, amongst other things, the effectiveness of trapping efforts. Dr Chris Tidemann and Prof. David Lindenmayer (both from ANU) have agreed to develop and manage the project and oversee the PHD student. COGis also supporting the project and Birds Australia has been approached for further support.
- The CIMAG annual general meeting will be held on 22 August at a time and place to be notified.

Further information is available on the CIMAG website <http://www.indianmynaaction.org.au/> — **Bill Handke**

*Gleanings continued from Page 8*

- There were several reports of early nest building activity or courtship displays by **Magpies, Australian Wood Ducks, Hardheads, Pacific Black Ducks**, and **Brown and Buff-rumped Thornbills**, while **Peter Milburn** spotted a newly fledged **Pied Currawong** in his yard.
- **Golo Maurer** spotted a **Brush Wattlebird** hawking for insects in the Botanic gardens from a big Banksia near the CSIRO-gate (basically the end of the owl track).

## HAVE YOUR SAY

In addition to the usual request for articles and trip reports (see page 12) the Editors invite members to contribute shorter pieces for publication in Gang-gang.

Share your experiences, the good and the bad, in prose or poetry.

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## Gleanings from the Chatline

*A small selection of items from the COG Chatline which caught the Editor's eye*

*(NOTE: Reports of sightings of rare species have not been endorsed by the Rarities Committee)*



Photo by Julian Robinson

**White-fronted Honeyeater**  
( *Phylidonyris albigrons* )

On 5 July, an excited **Philip Veerman** first reported the presence of a **White-fronted Honeyeater** in his front yard. Numbers of COGites and various others have enjoyed excellent views and taken countless photographs and videos of the visitor. The bird was still there on 25 July and it seems to have taken a great liking to Philip as it usually appeared within two to three minutes of his starting to look for it. Some splendid photographs can be seen on our photo gallery at <http://photogallery.canberrabirds.org.au>, and on Julian Robinson's web site at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/ozjulian/768994536/>, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/ozjulian/768995732/>.

On 26 July **Tony Lawson** reported that the **Powerful Owl**, after being absent for about a week and a half, was back at its' usual upper perch in the ANBG at lunchtime. Tony then visited Section 28 and was rewarded with very close views of the Little Wattlebird.

- The **Black-chinned Honeyeater** was seen still hanging around Newline on 22 July.
- A request by **Ann Howarth** for members reporting sightings to the chat line to first write the names of birds in full, immediately followed by an abbreviation in parentheses, [e.g. Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike (BFCS)] and then use the abbreviation for any subsequent mentions of the bird, received both sympathetic and non-sympathetic responses. [*Editor's note: As a fledgling birdo myself, I fully support Ann's request, particularly as I have noticed there have been cases of typing errors in some abbreviations used.*]
- **Frank Antram** reported an **Eclectus Parrot** being attacked by **Magpies** and **Currawongs** at West Macgregor on 1 July, a cold, overcast afternoon.
- On 12 July **Graeme Clifton** reported: "We have a resident pair of **Grey Currawongs** (GC) about our house and paddocks. They are often heard but only occasionally seen around the place, and that is mostly on overcast days. However, today (a sunny day) one visited us and gave the verandah pot plants and knicknacks the once over. We got excellent views from 5m distant. Two things of note were (i) the size of its beak (it is much longer than the **Pied Currawong**) and (ii) the way it used its beak. There were two plastic bags of garbage on the verandah and the GC used its closed beak to puncture holes in the bags and then, amazingly, opened its beak to enlarge the holes. It was a deliberate manoeuvre and it was repeated several times. It also used the same technique when inspecting under a small gnarled log. Finally it tried to pull the wicks out of some candles."
- **Rosemary Blemings** came across a relaxed, preening **Grey Currawong** in deciduous trees in the area once called Palmerville (N of Giralang, NE of Evatt), and at least eight **Dusky Woodswallows**, equally relaxed but on the lookout for food.
- **John Leonard** reported: "This morning (8 July) I observed an immature male **Magpie** hanging from a powerline in our suburban street by one foot. At first I thought it was dead, having seen dead **Galahs** in a similar pose, but after about 30 seconds a **Magpie-lark** landed on the powerline and pecked at the Magpie's foot. The Magpie released its grip, fell, then righted itself in the air and flew off apparently perfectly normally. It wasn't raining at the time, so bathing wasn't a motive. The interesting thing was how long the bird hung perfectly motionless. Also interesting was the low-key Magpie-lark; it wasn't agitated at all, and the pecking of the Magpie's foot looked almost like a game between them."

*Gleanings continued on Page 7*





## Limited Edition

### Framed and unframed Wild Bird Photographs

by Stuart Harris  
& David Cook

See our range at  
[naturefocus.com.au](http://naturefocus.com.au)

Email us at  
[stuart@naturefocus.com.au](mailto:stuart@naturefocus.com.au)  
or [david@naturefocus.com.au](mailto:david@naturefocus.com.au)



**Note: Special COG Prices**, with \$10 from every purchase being donated to the Canberra Birds Conservation Fund

## Garden Bird Survey Notes

Matters raised on the chatline have included:

- many reports of a **White-fronted Honeyeater** at a site in Kambah. The bird appears to have taken up permanent residence, its been there for more than 3 weeks, and has been viewed by numbers of locals and inter-state visitors;
- a high-quality sighting of a **Major Mitchell's Cockatoo** from Chapman and another sighting (and sounding) from Curtin; and
- a **Masked Lapwing** sitting on four eggs in a nest in a reserve in Jerrabomberra. This is only the 13th breeding record for this species, and several weeks earlier than the others.

Kay and I between us now have some 45 Charts for year 26. My records indicate at least another 16 sites were operational in that year. If folk were unable to bring their completed Charts to the July COG meeting could they bring them along to the August meeting? If you can't make it to the meeting please let me know (by e-mail to [martinflab@gmail.com](mailto:martinflab@gmail.com) or phone to 02 6238 2637) and I will make some alternative arrangements for pick-up and delivery of the charts.

To enable the charts to be processed in a controlled manner, and meet the requirement for the results to be available in time for writing the Annual Bird Report I would like to close off receipt of charts by the end of August.

At the time of writing my records show 53 Charts have been started for year 27. If any readers of this are operating a chart which they didn't collect at a meeting (or haven't told me about directly) could they please let me know by a message to the above e-mail address.

**Martin Butterfield**

### Newline

*to the tune of 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star'*

Newline, Newline, little yard,  
How I wonder what you guard.  
Seen above from planes up high  
Like a diamond in a sty.

Newline, Newline, stood outside,  
How I wonder what you hide.  
You attract so many birds;  
Birdwatchers arrive in herds.

Newline, Newline, little park,  
You are like a little ark.  
Thanks to Alastair and Peter,  
We've seen black-chinned honeyeater.

Newline, Newline, little field,  
Hope you've got more gifts to yield.

**Maurits Zwankhuizen**

# COG SALES

## 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. Contact Barbara de Bruine

(02) 6258 3531.

## 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

(02) 6286 1564

or e-mail  
gramsay@actewagl.net.au

**The Long Paddock:** A Directory of Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves in NSW - Rural Lands Protection Board - \$31.00

**Wet and Wild:** A Field Guide to the Freshwater Animals of the Southern Tablelands and High Country - M Lintermans and W Osborne - \$28.00 (RRP \$34.95).

**Where to Find Birds in NE Queensland** - Jo Wieneke - \$16.00.

**Reptiles and Frogs of the ACT** - Ross Bennett - \$13.00.

**Grassland Flora:** A Field Guide for the Southern Tablelands (NSW and ACT) - by David Eddy et al. - \$13.00

**Our Patch:** A Field Guide to the Flora of the ACT Region - \$13.00

**The Nestbox Book** - Gould League - \$12.50

**Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT** - Taylor and Day - \$14.00

**Woodlands:** A Disappearing Landscape – Lindenmeyer et al - \$34.00

**Feather and Brush:** Three Centuries of Australian Bird Art – Penny Olsen **reduced price** - \$50.00

**Simpson and Days' Birds of Australia CDROM** Version 5.0 **special price** - \$45.00

**COG Car Stickers** - \$2.00

**COG Badges** – red or grey - \$5.00

**COG Birds of the ACT:** Two Centuries of Change - Steve Wilson - \$25.00

**COG Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the ACT** - \$1.00

**COG Bird Songs of Canberra** – Cassette - \$10.00

**COG Bird Calls of the ACT** – CD - \$12.00

**All these items plus COG T-shirts and Polo shirts and various pamphlets etc are available at the monthly meeting sales desk or by contacting Bruce Ramsay via email to [barkeramsay@velocitynet.com.au](mailto:barkeramsay@velocitynet.com.au) or telephone 02 6294 5881 (after 6.30 pm please)**

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## Avian Whimsy #55 — Feathers and Death

Death, as it must be for all of us at times, is on my mind at the moment, but birds have long been part of that aspect of our lives too. Any sentence that contains ‘humans’, ‘birds’ and ‘death’ is more likely to be an unhappy one for the birds than us. Nonetheless we have chosen over the millennia to drag birds into our belief systems regarding that most final of mysteries, and often enough have held the birds responsible!

Owls have long been associated with death and surprisingly it seems that this is near universal. Owls even now may presage death and illness in Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, Argentina, Arab cultures, China, the Mediterranean, south, north and west Africa and Madagascar. Whether we can join Finnish ornithologist Heimo Mikkola in asserting that this is because such beliefs came out of Africa with our ancestors is another question of course. It seems to me that the forward-facing binocular vision eyes of owls have been recognised as giving a human-like visage, bringing associations with both wisdom and evil. It’s a fair assessment of us, but a bit rough on the owls...

Calls in the night are always likely to engender responses based on fear and ignorance, and doubtless the owls’ grim reputations are related to that as well, especially considering the hoarse scream of the **Barn Owl** (living in church towers and hunting over cemeteries would have helped there too.) Lapwings, migrating geese, curlews and whimbrels call as they fly overhead at night, and some of their calls are very evocative indeed. It is no coincidence that these birds are intricately part of one of the most fearsome of English myths, the Seven Whistlers, which fly calling at night. Hearing six is bad news and death will follow, but if the six ever meet the seventh, the world will end. They are sometimes regarded as synonymous with the Gabriel Hounds (ie ‘corpse hounds’ apparently), or the Wild Hunt, which probably originated in Norse mythology and which go by many names in Britain (and doubtless elsewhere). Along the way they segued neatly into Christian folklore and added the Devil as hunt-master, without breaking formation. All agree that to hear them is very bad, but to see them is death.

(In that vein, I must confess to once waking from a very deathsome nightmare in the Atherton rainforest, fuelled by a novel I was reading and the quaveringly shrieking *heeeelp!* of the **Orange-footed Scrubfowl**.)

Probably only **Northern Ravens** have as deep an association with death in our minds as the owls do. As long as our Northern Hemisphere relatives have been providing them with battlefield banquets, the ravens have been coming. Some Mesolithic peoples (ie up to 20,000 years ago) left their dead out for the ravens to strip down to bones, before burial. (Xinran, in *Sky Burial*, tells of similar traditional Tibetan burial practices, involving vultures. "The corpse becomes an offering to the spirits and we call upon them to carry the soul up to heaven.") Literature ranging from the Babylonian saga of Gilgamesh to Edgar Allen Poe have equated the raven with death, either already visited or imminent.

Another aspect of this topic refers to the frequent stories of people becoming birds upon death. Perhaps the bird’s flight is symbolic of the ‘humanity’ or ‘life force’ fleeing the body or perhaps the transformation to a bird was itself a form of death. The most obvious such story in recent times is the belief – whose origin I can’t find – among European sailors that their souls are reincarnated as an albatross. (A pity the long-line fishermen seem to have forgotten this one.)

The Celts were big on the idea too. Blodeuwedd was created of flowers to be the wife of Lleu Llaw Gyffes who was cursed to be unable to have a human wife (reason unspecified). She met someone else though and plotted with him to kill Lleu (it involves a bathtub and a goat among other things and we do *not* want to go there...). The assassinated Lleu turned to an eagle and Blodeuwedd to an owl, to be forever harassed by other birds. Still in Wales – or thereabouts – King Arthur became a raven after death and his nephew (or possibly cousin) Eliwlod, joined Lleu as an eagle.

Across the Irish Sea the four children of Lir (or Lear) were killed by their jealous aunt, who was after their dad, and became swans. It was a 900-year sentence, and at the end of it they turned back into people, albeit understandably somewhat elderly – and promptly died anyway. I’m not entirely sure of the moral of that one.

Other relationships are even less immediately obvious. Ostrich eggs play an important role in various African death rituals. Woodpeckers, through no fault of theirs, became associated with Mars the God of War. In Borneo the raucous call of the **Maroon Woodpecker** was welcomed by raiding parties, because it pre-echoed their own enthusiasm when they relieved one of the opposition of his head...

Yet again I am reminded that, no matter how fascinating are the ways of humans, and how much we press-gang nature to help us interpret things we can’t understand, the birds continue just to be themselves.

And – thanks Fred, for showing me the birds. In death as in life. — Ian Fraser [ianf@pcug.org.au](mailto:ianf@pcug.org.au)



## WONGA

Bawley Point

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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 (follow the links to accommodation and Wonga)

## NEW MEMBERS

COG welcomes the following new members:

**Ingrid Kirsch, Torrens**

**Jeanie Bruce, Holder**

**Josan Moss, Watson**

**Alison Mackerras, Weston**

## Next newsletter

**August deadline**

**Wednesday 29 August 2007**

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

### President

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**Email: [jack.holland@environment.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@environment.gov.au)**

### Vice President

**Chris Davey, ph 6254 6324**

### Treasurer

**Lia Battisson ph 6231 0147**

### Secretary

**Sandra Henderson ph 6231 0303**

**[cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au)**

### Address for correspondence

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**Civic Square, ACT 2608**

### Newsletter distribution

**Judy Collett and helpers**

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**[membership@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:membership@canberrabirds.org.au)**

**for changed address or other details**

### Gang-gang editors

**Sue Lashko and Greg Ramsay**

**ph 6286 1564**

**Email: [gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au)**

### 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 Allen on 6254 6520**

### COG membership

**2007-2008 memberships:**

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

### 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-](mailto:canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au)**

**[subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au)**

### Editor Canberra Bird Notes

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



## Gang-gang

If undeliverable, please return to

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