

Gang-gang

August 2009

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

August meeting

7:30pm Wednesday 12 August 2009

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

The short talk will be by **Barbara Allan** on “**Highlights from the first four years of COG’s bird blitz**” – what we found, what we didn’t find, and plans for the 2009 blitz.

The longer presentation will be by **Rick Webster** and **Sue Logie** on “**Superb Parrots in the Barmah Millewa Region**”. Rick’s presentation will focus on the ecology and distribution of the Superb Parrot. Sue’s presentation will outline the work done by landholders in Victoria and NSW to rehabilitate and establish habitat for the Superb Parrot. Rick is based in Deniliquin and has been an Ecologist for the last 25 years. He has worked primarily in the Murray Darling Basin, specialising in threatened species, particularly the Superb and Regent Parrots. He has coordinated the annual Superb Parrot Count in NSW for the last 11 years. Sue has been coordinating the Superb Parrot in Victoria for the past 12 years. She currently works for the Murray CMA in NSW in the revegetation team, where she coordinates the seed collection and direct seeding in the eastern region of the catchment.

Everyone welcome

What to watch out for this month

Despite the continuing mild winter in July, with only a handful of frosts, bird activity in Canberra remained a very low. This was underlined during preparations for the Canberra Winter Birds bus trip, with birds absent where they would have been expected, including being present last year. One wonders why and where they might all have gone. One aspect that has become very clear is the lack of winter flowering compared with 2008, when planted ironbark in the suburbs and yellow box on the outer fringes both flowered very prolifically. But this doesn’t explain it all, for example why non-nectar feeders like the **Dusky Woodswallow** and **Welcome Swallow** also seem to be largely absent.

Certainly the mild weather can’t be responsible. In relation to this I was very surprised to hear one of Julian Reid’s preliminary conclusions at the July COG meeting that there wasn’t a strong correlation in many of the declining species between the Cowra and Canberra woodland surveys. I also found very interesting his point that in these surveys you can only test weather patterns such as drought as possible reasons for changes in numbers, and not variable/factors such as food availability etc as they are not easily obtained separately or measured concurrently. This certainly confounds any theory about declining species, as you cannot be certain that they haven’t simply moved to somewhere else where the food supply is better. There are so many things we don’t know about Australian birds, and so many areas where birds may go to that aren’t adequately surveyed/covered. Members who have visited desert areas will fully appreciate the stark differences between bird numbers and activity in times of drought compared with after good rains.

In contrast to other species numbers of **Flame Robins** have been higher, at least compared with last winter, in my local patch of NW Chapman/Coleman Ridge/Narrabundah Hill, where they have often been accompanied by a single or a pair of **Scarlet Robins**. During August/early September these robins will depart for higher altitudes or the mountains, along with **Golden Whistlers**, **Crescent Honeyeaters** (very few records this winter), the **White-eared Honeyeater** (already quite scarce in July) and to a lesser extent the **Eastern Spinebill**.



‘Richard Mason 1934 – 2009

Members may have seen the notice for Richard Mason in the Canberra Times late in June. Richard was an active COG member for many years, from at least the time of my joining in the late 1970s, until very recently when his health started to deteriorate. He regularly lead COG outings, atlased and put in datasheets, wrote articles for CBN and contributed in other ways including serving on the committee during the mid 1980s. Richard took a special interest in my family’s welfare after the January 2003 fires. I will remember him as a keen and accurate observer, and I’m sure all members will join me in passing on our sincerest condolences to his wife Rose and family.— *Jack Holland*



Peaceful Dove (*Geopelia striata*)

Photo by Rhonda Hansch

At the time of writing, brought forward by the Gang-gang editors, the first spring migrants were still to arrive. So it remains unknown whether the earliest this year be **Welcome Swallows** or **martins** or one of the **Bronze-cuckoos**?

Towards the end of August listen for the first **Pallid Cuckoos** or the **Noisy Friarbird** calling. Other species which usually have arrived by then are the **White-naped** and **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters**, **Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike** (a few were reported in July), **Olive-backed Oriole**, **Dusky Woodswallow**, **Clamorous Reed Warbler**, **Rufous Whistler** and the **Grey Fantail** (all of which very few seem to have overwintered).

While it still mid winter the nesting season is already upon us, with early reports of the **Australian Raven** and **Brown Thornbill** nest building. Some birds, such as the **Yellow-rumped Thornbill** are known to breed very early. The **Red Wattlebird** also appears to be starting increasingly early, as judged by its vigorous pursuit of any small bird that enters its territory. Soon the **Australian Magpie** breeding season will be upon us!

As always keep an eye out for these early nesters and/or arriving spring and departing altitudinal 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 2009-2010 Annual Bird Report. - **Jack Holland**

Field Trip reports

Sunday 5 July Farrer Ridge

A small group met at Farrer Ridge early on 5 July. At the parking area near Erindale Drive numbers of Weebills were busy in the small eucalypts, and we continued to see and hear Weebills most of the way. Near the track under the power lines we came upon a very busy pair of **Yellow-rumped Thornbills** carrying nest material into a clump of mistletoe only a metre or so above the ground. On those lower slopes as well as further up the ridge we saw several **Scarlet Robins** (see photograph page 4), male and female. Where the track up to the trig starts there were a couple of **Speckled Warblers**, together with **Weebills** and more **Yellow-rumped Thornbills**. Views from the top were great, on a cool but still and sunny morning. Two **Wedge-tailed Eagles** were circling over the end of Wanniasa Hills. Twenty four species were seen altogether, with others including a **Grey Butcherbird**, **King Parrots**, **Crimson** and **Eastern Rosellas** and **Grey Shrike-thrush**.—Sandra Henderson

Wednesday walk at Newline 15 July

Although the day was a tad cool and foggy to begin with 11 members had a rather good time at Newline.

We managed to see nearly all the 'specials' of the site: Brown Treecreeper (2), Southern Whiteface (4), Jacky Winter (1), Peaceful Dove (1 heard), Speckled Warbler (3). There was no sight or sound of Crested Shrike-tit. 12 Double-barred Finches were gleaning in the concrete recycling area and an out of season Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike put in an appearance.—

Martin Butterfield

Canberra's Winter Birds – day bus trip, 19 July 2009

The purpose of this trip was for participants to observe and learn more about bird activity in winter in Canberra, including those that come down from the mountains to stay here, and those that decide not to join their peers in warmer climes at the coast or further north. The decision to go to a few places where some interesting birds were known to be in the hope of finding some of our target species, rather than go to a larger number of spots where they had been reported recently in the expectation that they may still be there, turned out to be a very wise one.

Our first stop was the SW corner of Callum Brae, entering through the very open barrier off Mugga Lane, and within 5 minutes we found our first altitudinal migrant, a **White-eared Honeyeater** sunning itself and uttering its typical “chew” call on a dead branch, allowing excellent views. Soon after we encountered a very typical phenomenon of the Canberra winter bird scene, a mixed feeding flock (MFF) consisting of treecreepers, thornbills, weebills, pardalotes, a couple of **Speckled Warblers** and three **Diamond Firetails**, as well as our second target species, 2 male and a female **Scarlet Robin**. Following this rather mobile MFF we were surprised to find two **Grey Fantails**, a summer migrant very few of which seem to be overwintering this year.

A bigger bonus came when we back-tracked and came upon a small flock of **Brown-headed Honeyeaters** feeding in surprisingly low and open positions in the regrowth, and allowing, for this species, great views. Bird life was much quieter when we moved into the more open area on the hillside, though we did observe a male **Superb Fairy Wren** in (recently acquired?) full breeding plumage vigorously pursuing a female. Finally just before we boarded the buses a couple of flocks of **Silvereyes** came through, but they were too high and the light too poor to ascertain whether any were of the Tasmanian buff-flanked form.

At the Botanic Gardens we moved quickly to the Sydney Gully and after seeing a number of **Eastern Spinebills** on the way we soon heard the loud call and then had great views (at least as good as you could expect with a group of over 20 people, well within binocular focus!) of the male **Crescent Honeyeater**, a number of which had been reported here on the chat line. Above them in the eucalypts we found several **Fuscous Honeyeaters**, quite high but co-operative enough for all participants could get reasonable views, including when they hawked for insects. Another **Grey Fantail** (perhaps two) was behaving similarly. Again our luck held as we moved across the Eucalypt lawn on the way to the Rainforest Gully when we came upon several **White-naped Honeyeaters** and a male **Golden Whistler**, both very co-operatively feeding in the trees above us, along with more fuscous, a **White-throated Treecreeper** and **Striated Thornbills**.



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STOP PRESS!

Strzelecki Track/outback tour
8 to 26 August 2009

Two places have become available
on this long booked out tour
5% discount applies.

Plains-wanderer weekends 2009 season

14/15 November, 28/29 November
12/13 December 2009
2/3 January 2010

2010

February 2010

SW Western Australia
Christmas Island
Tasmania

March 2010

Thailand

May /June 2010

New Guinea

June 2010

Top End
Alice Springs

4 —22 September 2010

Strzelecki Track Outback Tour

Tour itineraries, bird lists, checklists
and latest news are on the website.

www.philipmaher.com

After lunch we had a complete change of scene, going out to Stromlo Forest Park where in the open country we very soon found our quarry the **Flame Robin**, with a couple of very brightly coloured males and at least one female in a MFF consisting of up to six **White-fronted Chats**, a similar number of **Diamond Firetails** and slightly more **European Goldfinches**, with some **Eurasian Skylarks** also in loose association, plus a flock of over twenty **Red-rumped Parrots**. We then pushed our luck too far hoping to find the **Restless Flycatcher** which has been present in the edge of Chapman during autumn/winter, but were rewarded by again great views of a pair of **Scarlet Robins** and another **White-plumed Honeyeater**, its very yellow face and distinct plume contrasting with those of the Fuscous seen earlier in the day.

A visit to a known active **Satin Bowerbird** bower, complete with lots of blue objects and a few yellow Sulphur-crested Cockatoo crest feathers, with a male close by, in Yarralumla rounded off the day very well in which round 60 species were seen, many incidentally. This included at least 8 of our 9 winter visitors, but only a couple of the over wintering summer migrants, though Phyl did see a Welcome Swallow early before we boarded the buses. Surprisingly the large flocks of white cockatoos/corellas so prominent this winter along median strips etc in central Canberra were not located.

So another very successful bus trip, which all participants thoroughly enjoyed and learnt lots. Well worth repeating. My thanks again to Jenny Bounds for helping to do the rekkies of where the birds were and in planning the itinerary, as well as driving the second bus.—**Jack Holland**

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.

Saturday 8 August — Lake Ginninderra Waterbirds for beginners — Morning

This is the second of our bird walks in 2009 that is aimed specifically at beginners. Meet Anthony Overs (bookings essential on 6254 0168 or anthony.overs@gmail.com) 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. Bring your binoculars and field guide.



Wednesday 19 August—Midweek walk

The mid-week walk will be in the Urambi Hills area, meeting at 9am. Details of the meeting point will be posted on the chatline closer to the date.

Sunday 30 August - Local private property - Morning

We will visit a local private property located between Bungendore and Braidwood and will walk through some remnant woodland. We should be able to see a variety of local bush birds, and Glossy Black-Cockatoos have been seen here in the past. Depending on the level of interest, we will arrange a car pool out to the property. If you are interested in participating please book with Suzi Bond (suzi.bond@anu.edu.au or 6125 1038 - work). Please bring your binoculars and some morning tea.

Scarlet Robin (*Petroica boodang*) Farrer Ridge July 2009
Photo courtesy Chris Hastir

Sunday 6 September - Mt Taylor Nature Reserve - Morning walk

Meet at 8am at the Colquhoun Street entrance to the reserve, which is off Sulwood Drive in Kambah. We will spend the morning observing the birds of the remnant Yellow Box-Red Gum Grassy Woodland of the lower north-western section of the reserve, before heading up the mountain, where the habitat changes to Dry Shrubby Box Woodland. We will look at some habitat here that could provide food for the Glossy Black-Cockatoo (noting that this species hasn't been recorded here since 1996) and examine the effects of the 2003 fire on this sensitive area. Another focus for this walk will be noting any of the early migrants that have returned, and for those so inclined, enjoying the colourful spring woodland flowers. Medium fitness required as terrain is sloped. Bring water, sunscreen and morning tea. To register or for further information, contact Matthew Frawley on 6155 1358 (work), 6296 1026 (home) or email: scallywags@effect.net.au.

Sunday 13 September Aranda Bushland Morning

Kaye Hahne will lead a spring morning walk through the Aranda Bushland. Meet at the old Aranda shops, in Bandjalong St, at 8.00am. Bring morning tea. To book please contact Kaye on 6251 1792 or hahnehk@pcug.org.au

Oolambeyan National Park, mid week 14-18 September

Expressions of interest are invited for this mid week trip, staying in a comfortable homestead (shared bedrooms) at this large national park south of the village of Carathool off the Sturt Highway in the Riverina. COG had a successful visit there in 2006. Oolambeyan was primarily set aside as habitat for the endangered Plainswanderer. It is on the Riverina/Hay plain, with varied habitats including sand dune/Callitris, acacia/borree, rosewood/belar and black box woodland. At this stage, we have agreement for a small group who will be doing some bird surveys for the Parks Service, as part of our birding activities, and these places are tentatively filled. However, we expect to be able to take another 4-5 people if plumbing works are completed on time - this can't be confirmed until early Aug. Entry to the park is accessible to 2WD vehicles, but 4WD will be useful in the park. For more details or if you are interested in going on the list, please contact Jenny Bounds (ph 62887802).

Sunday 20 September Goorooyaroo NR morning walk

We are looking for someone to lead a walk through this woodland reserve. If you are interested in leading, please contact Anthony Overs (6254 0168 or anthony.overs@gmail.com).

Mittagong revisited; 10-11 October - overnight accommodated/camping

This will be a reprise of the very successful COG outing in September 2007, with perhaps some differences, including that local COG member, Pamela Morse-Evans will be absent overseas. We expect to be travelling down round lunchtime on Saturday, staying in Mittagong overnight and returning latish on Sunday afternoon, fitting in waterbirds at the Cecil Hoskins Reserve and 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 are likely to be seen. Another attraction will be the spring wildflowers, this visit is a month later to ensure the Waratah is flowering.

The exact program will be decided once a rekkie is done, but in the meantime please register your interest with Jack Holland on 6288 7840 or jack.holland@environment.gov.au, who will be able to provide further information including on the range of accommodation available from which participants will need to make their own bookings. It is recommended accommodation is arranged as early as possible as it will be tulip time in the Southern Highlands, with advance bookings already expected to be significant. There will again be the opportunity for a meal together on Saturday evening. Participation in either the Saturday or Sunday program will also be possible.

Sunday 18 October Tinderry Nature Reserve extended morning walk

Ian Anderson will lead an extended morning walk to Tinderry Nature Reserve. Meet at 8.00am at the garage at Williamsdale on the Monaro Highway. Some car pooling is possible there before we travel on to Michelago and the walking track off the largely unsealed Michelago to Captain's Flat Road, close to Big Tinderry mountain. Lyrebirds, wonga pigeons and crested shrike-tits have been reported from this area in the past. Participants should bring morning tea and perhaps lunch with them. Food and drinks can be purchased in Williamsdale and Michelago. To book, please contact Ian on 6281 0609 or iananderson@grapevine.com.au.

Meeting to discuss the 2010 Outings program

During September each year the Outings program is decided for the following year. The program is a most important part of COG's activities and, although well attended, these outings are run by a few enthusiastic individuals.

Anyone interested in the Outings program is invited to a general meeting that will be held at the Conservation Council, 3 Childers St, Civic starting at 5.30 pm on 3 September 2009. At the meeting we will discuss the program for 2010. The COG committee would appreciate as much input from the membership as possible.

Canberra Bird Notes now on the Web

All 34 volumes of Canberra Bird Notes (CBN), dating from 1968 to 2009, have now been scanned and loaded onto the COG web site as full-text searchable PDFs and are available to members and non-members of COG free of charge.

The scanned volumes can be found at <http://canberrabirds.org.au/>. Click on *Canberra Bird Notes* at the bottom of the screen page and from the left hand column choose the volume of interest. Once the volume is loaded it is possible to search for a specific item. A brief history of CBN is provided with instructions on how to download particular volumes. Indices for volumes 21 to 32 compiled by Harvey Perkins are also available.

Scanning of CBN has been a 10 month-long task of 150 volumes and some 5,100 pages undertaken by Alastair Smith. In March 2008 in discussions with Alastair it was decided that having the scanned text 'searchable' would greatly enhance the value of the digitised documents and so in July 2008 the COG committee approved funds for the purchase of much improved optical character recognition (OCR) software. This purchase greatly improved the speed and accuracy of the scanning process.

I would like to thank Alastair for the great job that he has done and all those interested in the birds of our local region owe him a debt of gratitude. The availability of CBN on the COG web site will allow a much wider audience to learn about and appreciate the birds of the ACT and surrounding regions. I would also like to acknowledge the webmaster, David Cook, who has been responsible for adding all of the scanned volumes to the website, and to Harvey Perkins for undertaking the thankless task of providing indices to the latter volumes. — **Chris Davey** (President)

Committee news

A short response was sent from COG re the Majura Parkway EIS, not supporting or opposing it, but commenting on some issues such as impacts on Molonglo Reach (new bridge), and offsets for losses of woodland trees in the Majura valley (note: Campbell Park woodland is not affected)

The draft nomination of the Glossy Black-cockatoo is expected to be finalised and lodged in August.



Weebill (*Smicromis brevirostris*) Stuart Harris

The winter woodland survey round was undertaken in the last week of June. The next round is 19-27 September.

Work on the 10 years analysis project is proceeding.

Chris Davey attended a roundtable discussion convened by the Government about the Jerrabomberra Wetlands, and was able to raise issues of concern to COG. - **Sandra Henderson**

2009-2010 subscriptions

Members are reminded that membership fees are due at the start of each financial year. Many thanks to all who have already paid their subscriptions for the coming financial year. The cost of an annual subscription remains at \$35. Payment can be made by cheque or money order mailed to the COG mailbox (details on back page), electronic deposit (details are on the membership form which is downloadable from our website <http://www.canberrabirds.org.au>) or by paying at a COG meeting.

Woodland winter surveys - compiled by Jenny Bounds

Gold Creek (near Hall): Alison Rowell reported cool and foggy/cloudy conditions for both surveys. Highlights were 4 species of honeyeater (White-plumed, White-eared, Eastern Spinebill and Brown-headed), and seeing White-plumed and Brown-headed on the ground attending the flowers of Urn Heath (Melichrus). Thornbills were numerous – Buff-rumped, Yellow-rumped and Striated, with Speckled Warblers and Scarlet Robins at two sites each, and Varied Sittellas at one site. Southern Whitefaces were seen between sites.

Mulligan's Flat NR: Jenny Bounds reported on the survey on Sunday 28 June, in fine but low cloud conditions. The Sanctuary fence is now completed, but the locked gates were accessed successfully to get our vehicles in. Sites generally were quiet, with highlights of 37 species, a number of honeyeaters, Yellow-faced, White-eared, White-plumed, and several Scarlet Robins. Several honeyeater species were feeding on flowering Urn Heath (Melichrus). There was one very large flock of small birds with 3 species of Thornbills, Weebills, Speckled Warbler, Golden Whistler, a Scarlet Robin pair and the three honeyeaters.

Gooroo (north): Nicki Taws reported that the survey was in cool, cloudy and somewhat windy conditions. The sites had either big birds or small birds or no birds. Two sites had no birds within the 50m, 2 had mixed flocks of small birds and the remaining 5 sites had only bigger birds. The mixed feeding flocks included Buff-rumped, Striated and Yellow-rumped Thornbills, Weebills, Scarlet Robins, Speckled Warblers, both pardalotes, Brown-headed Honeyeaters, Varied Sittella and Golden Whistler. No Hooded Robins were found this time.

Gooroo (south): Alison Rowell reported it was interesting to see the effects of the kangaroo fences at Gooroo South, where protected areas are regenerating well and new shrub plantings are appreciating the recent rain. Most sites were quiet, but there were plenty of thornbills, Scarlet Robins and Speckled Warblers at two sites, and a gully site had Superb Fairy-wrens and White-browed Scrubwrens.

Majura Field Range: Paul Fennell and Jenny Bounds surveyed on Thursday 25 June, amidst tight security at the range on account of the resumed kangaroo cull. Sites were quiet in terms of numbers of species, although there were Weebills and Buff-rumped Thornbills at many sites, and several sites with White-eared Honeyeater recorded. Between sites, 2 pairs of Scarlet Robin were highlights. No Hooded Robins or Brown Treecreepers were recorded this time.

Campbell Park woodland: Michael Lenz did the survey on 17 June on a fine fog-free day. There was not much birdlife, with only a few small birds recorded. Highlights were a female Brown Goshawk in its usual territory, the only (small) mixed feeding flock with 4 Varied Sittellas, and one site had 24 Common Bronzewing. Outside the survey sites, 2 Jacky Winters were near the dam with the bee hives.

Newline woodland: Sue Lashko did the survey on 27 June in perfect conditions. The survey began well with 3 Brown Treecreepers in the front paddock, 3 Peaceful Doves feeding there on the ground and Jacky Winter, Speckled Warbler and Southern Whiteface were also present, as well as the usual suspects. There were lots of Weebills at all sites, small numbers of Striated and only 2 Spotted Pardalotes. Wood Ducks called all morning, with at least 5 pairs nesting. Fly-pasts by two Wedge-tailed Eagles and a Little Eagle had every raven, magpie, Galah and SC Cockatoo taking to the air, making counting easier. 15 Double-barred Finches obligingly sat in a bare tree, warming themselves in the sun. The dam near Site 6 had water in for the first time in several years and Grey Teal and Wood Ducks were taking full advantage of it. Total 35 species, with no over-wintering migrants.

Kama Reserve: Chris Davey surveyed on Saturday 27th June during a cool and overcast morning. He reported that though winter surveys are usual quiet, this survey was particularly so. There was a noticeable lack of small birds with thornbills being virtually absent although a group of 3 Yellow-rumped Thornbills was particularly noisy chasing each other whilst in full song. Notable observations included a Restless Flycatcher and a Brown Goshawk. A male Wood Duck on station indicated a sitting female in one of the nearby hollows. No robins were recorded. A new fence along the western side of the Reserve and the cull that will be occurring between 3-31 July will have a large impact on Eastern Grey Kangaroo numbers.

Tuggeranong Hill NR: Lia Battison surveyed these sites on 27 June. The weather was overcast, mild and still. The usual paucity of birds was observed within the survey times and within sites - just twelve species in all. At Site 7 there were none at all! A further eight species were identified outside of survey times/sites, including a Hooded Robin. A Grey Butcherbird was heard calling from both sides of the Hill and there were a couple of large flocks of Galahs, again, one on either side.

Mt Majura NR: Kathy Walter and John Goldie surveyed over the last two weekends in June. Once again, the 5 sites near the old Heritage village side of Mt Majura were rather poor. No small birds were seen in any sites until at the very last moment in site 3, a small mixed flock of Yellow-rumped Thornbills, Spotted and Striated Pardalotes, Brown Thornbills, Eastern Spinebill and Weebills crept in. Disappointingly no Speckled Warblers were seen at any sites even though in the past they have been regulars, and the number of large dead trees was noticeable. The other 4 sites closer towards Mt Ainslie produced the usual suspects of large parrots and black and white birds. It was good to see a lot of rabbit baiting had been going on near almost all sites.

Callum Brae NR: Jenny Bounds, with Sandra Henderson assisting, reported on the survey on Friday 19 June, a nice sunny morning. However, the birds were fairly quiet and few feeding flocks passed. Highlights were 2 pairs of Scarlet Robins between sites, and a small group of Flame Robins on the hill at the back of the reserve (less birds than previous years), Golden Whistler, and a Rainbow Lorikeet near the reserve entrance, plus Weebills, Buff-rumped Thornbills and Yellow-rumped Thornbills around most sites. 35 species total.

Jerrabomberra NR (woodland): On Friday 26 June, Jenny Bounds reported on the survey on the other side of the hill from Callum Brae, at the back of the grasslands reserve. There were several large flocks of small birds around, and 4 of the 7 sites had good numbers. Highlights were Varied Sittella, Speckled Warbler, Scarlet Robin pair, Rufous and Golden Whistlers, Southern Whiteface and a soaring Wedge-tailed Eagle. Again, groups of Weebills, Buff-rumped and Yellow-rumped Thornbills were active. There were no Flame Robins in the usual place on the slopes at the edge of the grasslands.

Red Hill NR: Harvey Perkins reported on the survey on Saturday 27 June in overcast and cool, but otherwise good conditions. Bird activity was very low except for the cockatoos, magpies, currawongs and ravens. Even the rosellas, usually the most abundant species, were surprisingly inconspicuous. The few highlights included a male Scarlet Robin and a Collared Sparrowhawk, both within sites. Also of interest was a Little Corella/Long-billed Corella pair, sitting together and allopreening for most of the 10-minute survey at site 9. Continuing recent trends, Grey Butcherbirds were heard twice, on opposite sides of the reserve. The only honeyeaters were a few Red Wattlebirds and Noisy Miners and a single Eastern Spinebill. Small bush birds were remarkably scarce, with only a handful of fairy-wrens and three Weebills for the morning - very unusual, and especially in the wake of the record numbers of the autumn survey. Where do they go?

Naas Valley site: Julie McGuinness reported on the survey, south of Tharwa near Mt Tennant in, initially, lingering low cloud and no sun; however, it ended up quite interesting with large numbers of small birds everywhere. There were 14 Flame Robins in a flock with one Scarlet Robin, 2 Diamond Firetails and a few Yellow-rumped Thornbills. Two big flocks of Yellow-rumped (15-20) and a large flock of around 15 Buff-rumped Thornbills with a Speckled Warbler, 1 Brown Treecreeper, a Restless Flycatcher and a couple of Jacky Winters were the other highlights. There were lots of Weebills about but, unusually, no Southern Whiteface nor whistlers this time.

Proposed Gungahlin Superb Parrot survey

As I am sure many are aware there has been a recent increase of the sightings of the threatened Superb Parrot in the ACT with breeding now reported from Goorooyarroo Nature Reserve and observations of birds hollow inspecting in other areas. I am pleased to say that the ACT government has agreed to our request to conduct a survey in the area this coming breeding season. This is an exciting prospect for it will allow us access to new areas in parts of the northern ACT. Although the primary aim of the survey will be to determine the extent of breeding activity of the Superb Parrot in the area it will also allow us the opportunity to gather information on other species.

At this stage the survey will go from September 2009 through to the New Year. We will encourage as many members living in the Gungahlin area to take up a Garden Bird chart to record Superb Parrots, and any other species, using an area defined by a radius of 100m from a garden or place of work. In addition, we will be conducting on-ground surveys one day a month during October, November and December. It is envisaged that members will be allocated to a team which will be responsible for surveying a defined area. At this stage it is likely that the on-ground survey would take one morning a month over a weekend and will involve some walking. This is a great opportunity for COG to have a major input into the management of a threatened species in the ACT, we will be relying on members to help with the survey and I urge as many as possible to put their hands up to help. Although early days, if anyone is interested in participating in this survey could they please let me know.

My email is chris_davey@aapt.net.au, telephone 62546324 — **Chris Davey**

Garden Bird Survey Notes

There have been several chatline postings that are directly GBS-relevant for the last few days of June to mid July.

- Yellow-tufted Honeyeater at O'Connor and Ainslie;
- Male Rose Robin at O'Connor
- Roosts of Magpie-larks and White-winged Choughs in Cook;
- Pairs of Tawny Frogmouths in Ainslie and Carwoola; and
- Satin Bowerbirds in Ainslie

Growth of Observations

As part of the system redevelopment process for the GBS we looked at the likely annual number of records (site x species) and observations (site x species x week). Both series show a wave pattern: increasing quickly to a peak in Year 5 and then dropping until a resurgence, starting in year 16 and continuing up to year 27. It is possible to decompose the number of observations in a year as:

$$\# \text{ Obs per year} = (\# \text{ of Observations per species}) * (\# \text{ species per site}) * \# \text{ sites}$$

The table summarises the changes in these elements.

| Item | Broad Shape of graph (27 years) | Value | | Ratio |
|---------------------|---|--------|---------|-------|
| | | Year 1 | year 27 | |
| Obs per species | Early rise, then stable | 13.44 | 17.70 | 1.31 |
| Species per site | Stable, rise, stable(ish) | 39.95 | 43.76 | 1.10 |
| Sites per year | Rise, fall rise | 56 | 72 | 1.29 |
| <u>Obs per year</u> | Rise, fall, rise: less variable than above. | 30,059 | 55,763 | 1.86 |

Less than half the overall change can be attributed to the increasing number of sites. A range of factors **could** underlie the increase in the other components including increasing skill base of observers; maturation of sites over time leading to change in the species mix; and climate change leading to migrant species staying longer.

GBS Redevelopment

The redesigned system has been distributed, and is being used for entry of Year 28 records. Small refinements are being made as the system is utilised.

!!!! Charts !!!!!

Year 28 Charts will be collected, and Charts for Year 29 will be available for collection, at the August Meeting! Please return them then or contact Martin Butterfield to make other arrangements!!

CHANGE OF MONTHLY MEETING TIME

Remember the August Members' meeting will start at 7.30pm NOT 8.00pm.

MUDBRICK COTTAGE

Mallacoota

Our mudbrick cottage (*Blue Wren Cottage*) is available for rental for all those nature lovers out there!!

It is set amongst the trees in Mallacoota, Victoria (approximately 4 hours drive from Canberra). It is only 10 minutes walk to the beach, 5 minutes walk to the golf course and about 15 minutes walk to town. It sleeps 4-6 upstairs and there is a sofa bed downstairs.

It is fully self-contained with a kitchen and laundry.

Contact Barbara de Bruine
(02) 6258 3531

barbdebruine@hotmail.com,

or see

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

PASSIVE SOLAR HOUSE

South Rosedale

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

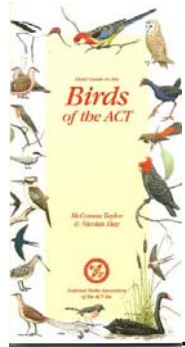
Bird watching is possible from the comfort of a chair on the front or back deck, while for the more energetic, Guerrilla Bay and Burrewarra Point are within walking distance. The wetlands at Barling's Beach are only a few kilometres away. Rich birding is available in almost any direction.

Contact Greg or Sallie Ramsay

6286 1564 or

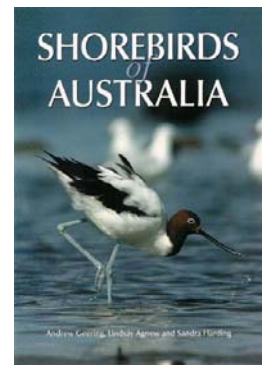
gramsay@actewagl.net.au

COG SALES

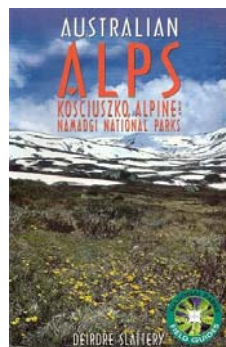


Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT (Taylor & Day) - \$16.00 — Bird identification in the ACT has just become much easier! Here are all the birds of the ACT in colour, with easy-to-follow text and key biological data, in a compact field format that will fit easily in your pocket.

Shorebirds of Australia (Geering, Agnew & Harding) \$33.00 — This title brings together the latest information about the evolution, ecology and behaviour of shorebirds and how they are distributed in Australia. This is a highly sought after title in the popular "CSIRO Publishing" series.



Birdwatching on the Far South Coast (see <http://www.thebegavalley.org.au/6224.html>) This spiral bound title is well presented, easy to read and is available from the Sales Desk for \$16.00. The inside front cover provides a quick guide to the towns and localities referred to in the text. All sites have been tried and tested and it is recommended that the guide be used in conjunction with a district map.



Australian Alps: Kosciuszko, Alpine & Namadgi National Parks (Slattery) - \$16.00 — This guide is your key to the secrets of the three national parks that stretch over Australia's spectacularly beautiful rooftop - Kosciuszko in New South Wales, Alpine in Victoria and Namadgi in the Australian Capital Territory. Ideal for field trips, this guide will make a wonderful memento as well as a great reference for future trips.

Watching Wildlife (Chris) - \$24.00

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

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

LIMITED STOCK: Messent Bird Calendar 2009 - \$8.00

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

Avian Whimsy - No. 75 — Bird Salads; folivory or not folivory?

I've commented before on the apparently curious oversight by which very few birds rely on the vast food resources provided by leaves. Think of the huge number, and unimaginably vast biomass, of mammals which munch through millions of tonnes of leaves, especially grass leaves, every year. Most of these are leaf specialists, eating nothing else from weaning to death. By contrast only some 3% of bird species, from only 14 families of some 230 extant ones, eat leaves as a regular part of the diet. A clue to these low numbers is in the additional observation that the majority of leaf-eating birds are larger terrestrial species – geese and ratites (emus/ostriches/rheas etc) are good examples.



There are two problems with leaves as food. Firstly, unless you're eating out for pleasure, the basic purpose of food is to obtain energy, and quite frankly leaves are a lousy source of energy. By weight leaves only give half the return of fruit and a quarter that of insects and other wriggling goodies. Further, to get even that much return requires a veritable internal factory, run by a huge team of skilled and highly-trained bacteria – no other creature (except for a few clever silverfish) can break down the complex sugars of cellulose, which form the fibrous mass of leaves. Grazing and browsing mammals have big fermentation chambers wherein the bacterial workforce does the job of digesting the cellulose. It's not a rapid process though – a Koala's gut can take up to 8 days to break down a eucalypt leaf, so a large caecum is required. In the Koala's case it is two metres long and 10cm in diameter, definitely not the sort of accoutrement you want to carry around with a strict baggage weight limit for your flight. In fact it effectively precludes a flying bird from this strategy. The only confirmed avian example of foregut fermentation – a common mammal strategy – is in the strange and wonderful South America Hoatzin (*Opisthocomus hoazin*) which scrambles and glides rather than flies in any meaningful way.

To get a reward from your leafy lunch you don't actually have to go to all that trouble – by just grinding leaves up you can get to digest the cell contents without bothering about the nasty fibrous stuff. However this means of course that you are getting even less of the potential value of the salad, so you must eat more and have a bigger storage space which means a bigger body and/or a reduced flying capacity. There are very few small flying leaf-eaters. They include some of the saltators (South America cardinals), the three South America plantcutters (cotingas) and the African mousebirds (small non-passerines). I've had the fortune to see all three groups in the wild, and while the mousebirds are certainly flutter-gliders, the other two are actually perfectly respectable flyers. The Rufous-tailed Plantcutter (*Phytotoma rara*), found as far south as the stormy shores of the Strait of Magellan, is perhaps the smallest leaf-eating bird, relying almost solely on leaves in autumn and winter when fruits are scarce. The preference of all of these leaf-eaters is for the youngest tenderest shoots.

In Australia the bowerbirds are among the few leaf-eaters, as any gardener in their territory will know. The most dependent on leaves is the Tooth-billed Bowerbird (*Scenopoeetes dentirostris*) of the wet tropics of Queensland. It, like the plantcutters and the Satin Bowerbird (*Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*), turns to leaves mostly in winter when there is a dearth of the preferred fruits.

The other problem with leaves is that so many of them are downright dangerous to eat. Plants have had hundreds of millions of years to build their defences against those billions of creatures – mostly insects – who would rudely chew them. There are more than 30,000 identified chemicals found in plants whose use is not apparently related to daily functioning – many of these are probably involved with defence. Many of the chemicals whose function we do know are pretty scary. Some wattles have cyanide precursors; break the leaf, bring the chemicals together, and you get a very nasty mouthful indeed. Milkweeds have cardiac glycosides, very unpleasant heart poisons. In this case, astonishingly, Wanderer Butterfly caterpillars accumulate the poison and use it in their own defence. 'Spitfires' – wasp-related *Perga* larvae – do something similar, storing poisons from eucalyptus leaves in abdominal sacs. In their case Gang-gangs have them sussed though, picking out these sacks and discarding them, before downing the doubtless very eucalypt snacks.

Such anomalies aside, it is perhaps not so hard to see why so few birds have taken the salad bar option. In the circumstances, 'leaf it alone' seems a sensible approach.

Whimsy and photographs by **Ian Fraser** ianfr@pcug.org.au





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 (follow the links to accommodation and Wonga)

NEW MEMBERS

COG welcomes the following new members:

T Birch, Turner

C Hastir, Wanniasa

P Abbott, Yarralumla

Tony Robinson, Michelago

R & J Schurmann, Fisher

J Begg, Kambah

NEXT NEWSLETTER

September deadline

Wednesday 26 August 2009

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

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

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

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Newsletter distribution
Judy Collett and helpers

COG membership

2008-2009 memberships:

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

Membership inquiries—

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

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

COG website

www.canberrabirds.org.au

Office

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

COG E-mail Discussion List

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

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Gang-gang

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