

Gang-gang

December 2005

News letter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

DECEMBER MEETING



Christmas Party

Sausage sizzle
Black mountain Peninsula
Wednesday 14 December

Details pg 5

January 2006 Meeting

8 pm
Wednesday
11 January 2006



“Quiz night”

The January meeting will be a quiz night. The venue will be the Turner Senior Citizens Centre, Watson Street (the end closest to Belconnen Way in the City), Turner.

Please contact Ian Fraser on 6249 1560 or ianf@pcug.org.au if you'd like to take part.

What to watch out for this month

As was clear at the nest workshop held at Campbell Park on Sunday 13 November, this is proving to be a bumper breeding season for birds in the ACT. Many of the spring/summer migrants began nesting almost as soon as they arrived, and in particular the **Dusky Woodswallow** seems to be breeding prolifically and early. Watch out for their very streaked dependent young after they have left the nest. With conditions remaining ideal it will be interesting to see if this early burst is sustained. However, by early January the bulk of the breeding may be expected to be over and for some species such as the **White-winged Triller** and the **Rufous Songlark** their brief period here will nearly be over. Records for these species after the end of January are usually very few, so keep an eye out and note when you last see them. Other species which tend to breed away from the built up areas may move into the suburbs for a period once they've bred, the **Dollarbird** is a good example of this. Again make sure that valuable records are not lost but are entered into the COG database. As mentioned last month breeding records are the most valuable records of all, but for many species these are very under-represented in the COG database.

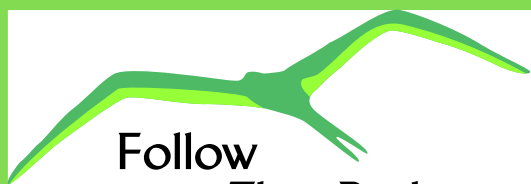
Jack Holland

Field Trip Reports

Stoney Creek Nature Reserve 19 October 2005

On a mild, overcast Wednesday morning 7 of us set out on a leisurely amble through the Stoney Creek Nature Reserve. This reserve is approximately 80 ha with a small parking area and gate located on the Captains Flat Road 4.5k from the Kings Highway. On the advice of a local cogger, Graeme Clifton, we set off on our amble in a vaguely anticlockwise direction.

The most obvious bird on the day were **Striated Pardalotes**. I believe we heard them calling throughout the entire walk. However as bird species were not plentiful we chased up bird calls and admired the beautiful display of bush flowers. Surprisingly an **Australian King-Parrot** called and sure enough after a 5-10 minutes search we saw the red and green parrot flash through the trees. I had never seen one in the area and Graeme had seen only a few and then only in the spring migration time. **Varied Sittellas** were sighted as well as **Buff-rumped, Yellow-rumped, and Striated Thornbills**. **White-throated Treecreepers** were plentiful. During latter part of the walk we saw a good number of **Leaden Flycatchers** both male and female, a male **Mistletoebird**, a **Sacred Kingfisher**, both **Rufous and Golden Whistlers**. Several **Olive-backed Orioles** were seen, one treated us to a fine mimic



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January 2006

26-30th **Alpine Birds and Plants** with Dion Hobcroft \$ 1485
Start Canberra End Canberra

February 2006

7-11th **Exotic Hong Kong** with Dion Hobcroft \$ 2200
(excludes airfares)

18-22nd **Divine Lord Howe Is.** \$ 1780

March 2006

Newcastle Waders Afloat \$ 550

31-3rd April **Warrumbungles** \$ TBA

May 06

8-14th **South West Queensland** \$ 2190

July 06

22-26th **Comboyne & Crowdy Head**
Start Canberra End Canberra \$ 1495

August 06

9-23rd **Eyre Peninsular** \$ 3440

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chorus. We saw 2 raptors, a **Wedge-tailed Eagle** and a **Nankeen Kestrel**.

There was plenty of nests. In the parking lot we could see 2 Magpie chicks in the nest and during the walk we had a nest building display by one of the plentiful **Noisy Friarbirds**. There were unoccupied nests possibly of Wedge-tailed Eagle and Brown Goshawk.

The bird calls skills and persistence of our small group were needed to see the 35 species for the walk. Alex McLauchlan kindly shared his knowledge of wild flowers to add colour to the pleasant morning outing.

Julienne Kamprad

NOT ANOTHER WHALE AT GREEN CAPE! 25-28 October 2005

Ten COG members and friends spent a delightful 3 nights mid-week at the Green Cape Lighthouse cottages south of Eden, NSW. (For more detail plus comparison of species of birds seen in winter, see Field Trip Report by David Rosalky in July 2004 *Gang-gang*.) The duplex cottages were comfortable and well equipped, with the best feature a wide, covered veranda with 180° view to the ocean, looking out to sea to the north-east and away from Disaster Bay at our backs. After 05:30 starts with our binoculars and telescopes (thanks for the extra scopes from our expert leader, Peter Fullagar) down at the very point to look both ways, we came back for breakfast and to do our own thing. More 'scoping from the point or verandah, or walking a trail through the heath. One morning a small party led by Jenny Bounds did have wonderful sightings in the sun of a pair of **Southern Emu-wrens**, however no Striated Fieldwrens or Ground Parrots were ever seen. The heath abounded in **Honeyeaters**: Tawny-crowned, New Holland, Yellow-faced, White-Naped and **Little Wattlebirds**.

But the highlights for most were the sea birds, thanks to Peter's expertise in identification. In total we saw four species of **Shearwaters**: mostly Short-tailed and Fluttering, but also a few Wedge-tailed and Sooty; five species of **Albatross**: Shy, Royal, Wandering, Yellow-nosed, plus a Salvins on the last morning. Also one juv. **Giant-Petrel**. Dozens of **Australasian Gannets** plied the sky each day, plummeting from on high. **Crested and Caspian Terns** flew by, their yellow or red beaks respectively, glinting in the sun, plus a daintier White-fronted which not all of us got to see. A pair of adult **Pacific Gulls** was seen every day on the rocks nearby. They looked very striking with their stark black and white plumage, bright yellow legs and huge yellow beak tipped with red. Peter pointed out the fast, direct flight of the very dark appearing **Arctic Jaegers**. We saw at least five in all.

We watched three **White-bellied Sea-Eagles** soaring over the coastline. Once, during a feeding frenzy of approx. 3000 shearwaters floating on the surface, gannets dive-bombed through the melee and an immature sea-eagle took a shearwater in its talons (with some difficulty) and flew off – and returned! Over the three days we had to admit there was a feeding frenzy inside the cottages as well as out. No one went hungry and everything tasted delicious after all that fresh sea air and excitement of seeing new species for



the first time. It was a gourmet's delight.

Every day dozens of Humpback Whales swam by – well over 100 in total – some very close in, some with a small calf nearby. We saw them blow, spy hop, breach, dive, tails out of the water, or just the tops of their black backs with the tell-tale

identifying dorsal fin showing. They never ceased to delight us ... all this from the veranda, mind you! Plus there was a small, tight group of Australian Fur Seals bobbing like corks, flippers straight up in the air. They seemed to never leave that same spot – always the exact distance from one particular rock. Both Bottlenose Dolphins and Common Porpoises were sighted. From the veranda we were also entertained by **Superb Fairy-wrens, Welcome Swallows** and **Australian Pipits** (no, not Richard's any longer) right on our front lawns and picket fences.

It wasn't just the wildlife that enthralled us from the veranda, but also the weather, the clouds, the waves (or lack of), the changing colours of sea and sky. Our first afternoon, after a bit of rain, a beautiful, bright, complete double rainbow appeared over the ocean, but so close we were sure the "pot of gold" was just off those close rocks where the fur seals lounged. We noted the mirror image of the colours of the second, slightly dimmer outer bow, and we all commented with amazement at the misty pinkish-cream glow that was only within the confines of the inner bow. We were disappointed when all eventually faded from our sight.

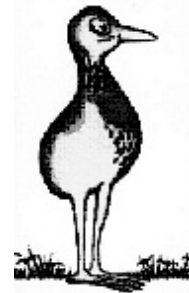
The second afternoon we were feeling rather warm and started shedding jumpers or jackets when suddenly Peter shouted "A southerly has just now blown up!" We could see the difference on the ocean, we noted how fast the sea birds were travelling with that strong tail wind, and we all scuttled to put our jackets back on as the temperature dropped dramatically. So – we all experienced a sudden sea change from the safety of our veranda.

For those who find seafaring not to their liking, this was a great way to see some pelagic birds without setting foot on a ship. It was a paradise for photographers, painters and poets, not to mention wildlife watchers who collectively saw 58 species of birds, some reptiles including a brown snake and a lace monitor, 5 mammals and an echidna. I won't mention the 3 masked boobies, as they were the *Homo sapiens* variety – don't ask.

Kay Hahne (Photo Horst Hahne)

Remnants and Revegetation Sites - Greening Australia site visit Sunday 6 November 2005

A group of ten keen members joined Nicki Taws, (with Anthony and Annabel), for a morning visit to this site near Gundaroo. COG visited this property on 19 October 2002, during the first year of the three year drought period - see the report in the December 2002 *Gang-gang*. There could not have been a bigger contrast with a lush green landscape on our recent visit. This property features a twelve year old re-vegetation patch,



Australian Ornithological Services P/L

PO Box 385
South Yarra 3141
Victoria
Tel: 03 9820 4223
Mob: 04173 10200

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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

planted by direct seeding, around a number of existing large paddock trees which give the site a more varied structure - the species mix is mostly eucalypts and wattles, with some non-local species. As well, there is a large mature woodland of six eucalypts species nearby, where the native grasses, lillies, orchids and other plants were in bloom. 29 species were recorded in the remnant and 26 in the planting, in a total of 49 species (53 species in 2002). Here are some species highlights.

White-winged Triller - recorded in both planting and remnant, and around the adjacent open paddocks (in 2002, only recorded in and around the planting). **Varied Sittella** - recorded in both planting and remnant, but in the re-veg patch were seen in the large eucalypts or flying between them (in 2002 only seen in the remnant). **Superb Parrot** - 3 birds recorded flying over the re-veg patch, probably to remnant woodland to the north and one seen in the remnant (also recorded on the property in 2002). **Rufous Whistler** - the most vocal species, 4-5 territories in the planting, with one pair on a nest, and also in the remnant, but not as many birds (similar to 2002). **Crested Shrike-tit** - close views of a pair in the plantings - the young trees with hanging bark seem to be a favoured feeding habitat; none in the remnant (same as 2002). **Dusky Woodswallow** - a couple of birds in a large tree in the planting; also heard overhead (in 2002, there was a mixed flock of around 50 White-browed, Masked and Dusky Woodswallows in and around the planting). **Rufous Songlark** - recorded in the planting and around the adjacent open paddocks. **Striated Thornbill** - recorded in both planting and remnant (similar to 2002). **Gerygones** - only White-throated recorded in both habitats, including a nest in the remnant (in 2002 Western Gerygone was also recorded in the planting). **Scarlet Robin** - pair seen in the remnant (this species was not recorded in 2002). **Striated Pardalote** - recorded in both habitats, this universal Pardalote is common in re-veg sites (similar to 2002 but possibly not as many birds); Spotted Pardalote was not recorded on this visit (it was recorded in the remnant only in 2002, it usually prefers mature woodland and is not usually found in plantings). **Common Bronzewing** - one bird seen in the remnant; they are attracted to the wattle seeds. **Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo** and **Shining Bronze-Cuckoo** - both recorded in the planting. **Wedge-tailed Eagle** - one bird soaring over the remnant.

Species only recorded in the remnant were: **Leaden Flycatcher** (several pairs), **Buff-rumped Thornbill**, **Sacred Kingfisher**, **Laughing Kookaburra**, **White-throated Treecreeper**, **Olive-backed Oriole**, **Brown-headed Honeyeater** and **Jacky Winter** with an advanced immature bird. This is a similar list to 2002, with the exception of Jacky Winter and Oriole, absent in 2002.

A noted difference from our 2002 visit was the lack of Thornbills in the planting - four species were recorded there in 2002 (Striated, Brown, Yellow and Yellow-rumped), but only Striated and a single Brown Thornbill in 2005. This year also, the Tawny Frogmouths which nest in a large Yellow Box near the homestead had already raised their young and left (in 2002 they were on the nest).

This was another very interesting morning of birding. Thanks to Nicki and to the property owner for allowing us to visit.

Jenny Bounds

Nest workshop Campbell Park Sunday 13 November 2005

Over 25 members and guests joined Anthony Overs and me on this 3rd annual event. We split into 2 groups, and were treated to a real breeding bonanza with the perfect weather and much better conditions than for the previous 2 years. Forty six species were seen, of which 26 (well over half) were observed carrying out some aspect of breeding behaviour. This was all in the space of less than 4 hours, as we made our way through the most productive area within 500 metres of the car park, and all well within the area labelled as Campbell Park "proper" on the map on the COG web site. The slow pace also allowed plenty of time to carefully observe all birds as well as their nests.

Highlights included both species of **gerygone**, with a pair of **White-throated** sitting on a typical nest with a long pony tail and side entrance and roof over, and a pair of **Western** putting the final touches on a near completed less elaborate version. There was also a completed and very dainty **Varied Sittella** nest in a dead upright fork, a male **Rufous Whistler** on a nest in amongst regrowth with another pair just starting to build in a native cherry, a **Dusky Woodswallow** on a nest less typically also amongst regrowth but still right up against the trunk of a slender sapling and a **White-winged Chough** on a large bowl-shaped mud nest. First a male and then a female **White-winged Triller** was seen sitting on a tiny nest hidden amongst the foliage on a horizontal outer branch, with their cousins, a pair of **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes**, feeding 3 young in a similar small nest with the parent also spending some time brooding (participants wondered how everyone managed to fit in). There were a pair of **Leaden Flycatchers** with the female building (and the male mainly supervising) a nest on a dead branch typically with a live one just above. However, for me the highlight was my group surprising upon a **Grey Fantail** nest, with both a chick and one parent very close to the

nest freezing for several minutes at our presence.

Many birds were either seen inspecting or entering/leaving nest hollows including the **Pacific Black Duck**, **Sulphur-crested Cockatoo**, **Crimson and Eastern Rosella**, **Red-rumped Parrot**, **Sacred Kingfisher** and **Striated Pardalote**. It was surprising that there were still any hollows left as many **Common Mynah** and **Common Starlings** were very busy repeatedly taking food into a large number of hollows, not only near the car park, but also well into the woodland. In addition **Galahs** were seen feeding young at the entrance of a hollow, **Weebill** and **Australian Magpie** had dependent young, and **Pied Currawong** had a nest with young. Lastly both **Red Wattlebird** and **Noisy Friarbird** were seen nest building, while a **Noisy Miner** was on a nest. Surprisingly these were the only honeyeaters seen for the morning.

Other species seen but not observed nesting were a male **Mistletoebird** and a pair of **Shining Bronze-cuckoos**, one of which was sitting quietly affording great views while the other was giving a range of calls including some not often associated with this species. We speculated whether this was preparatory to one bird laying an egg in a host's nest, making for the sixth type of nest (out of ten). Finally a pair of **Dollarbirds**, which had been heard occasionally during the morning, came to perch in a dead tree close to the combined groups just before we were leaving, again affording great views.

Participants were highly impressed and strongly of the view that this should be an annual event. The extent of breeding activity within such a short distance was quite staggering. It was interesting to find that the nucleus of nesting was about 50-75 metres closer to the car park rather than in the drainage line where it was concentrated last year. Conditions were certainly much better, with long green grass etc where one year ago it was bare. My thanks again to Anthony Overs for

December Meeting



6-8 pm

Wednesday 14 December 2005

“COG Christmas Party”

Sausage sizzle at Black Mountain Peninsula

We expect to use the same barbecue area as last year (from the main road into the Peninsula, turn right at the second side street, about 400 metres along). But the same site cannot be guaranteed, so just follow the COG signs.

Sausages (Gluten free, chicken and red meat), bread and drinks supplied

Please bring any or all of the following:
a picnic table, chairs, plates and glasses,
salads or desserts to share. Insect repellent
and sunscreen might be called for;
and binoculars for the bitterns.

Contributions: \$4 a head for food and soft drinks;
\$6 a head for food, wine, beer
(free for members' children under 12)

**Lucky ticket prize and prizes for:
Children for the best dressed bird; and
Adults for the best bird theme poetry reading**
suggested limit 8-12 lines, can be own composition or other author

*Offers of help to assist
with food and drink purchasing,
setting up etc, to
Sue Lashko 6251 4485.*

You'd be Cuckoo to miss it!



Striped Honeyeater (*Plectorhyncha lanceolata*).
Photo courtesy **Lindsay Hansch**

helping with the leading of this highly successful event, and a special thanks to Steve Holliday who had found quite a few of the nests during the week, and was thus able to show to both groups some nests which may have been otherwise overlooked.

Jack Holland

Wednesday Walk—Cooleman Ridge 16 November 2005

14 members came along to watch Jack Holland show us around his special part of the Cooleman Ridge. The morning began with a cool breeze but Jack soon found some **Rufous Songlarks** for us to practice our ID skills on. A **Laughing Kookaburra** and a male **White-winged Triller** were soon added to the list. The tall grass concealed the **Stubble Quail** but they could be heard calling from a number of points. We had a break by a small dam where we were lucky enough to see a **Southern**

Whiteface feeding in a grazed down area. We added more species as we skirted some regenerating eucalypts. On the skyline we watched a **Nankeen Kestrel** being harassed by some **Australian Magpies** and as we descended the slope back into Chapman we enjoyed close views of a busy flock of **Weebills**. As we passed the first house there was a **Pied Currawong** busy feeding three well grown chicks. A very pleasant walk with a total of 34 species. Thanks, Jack.

Cooleman Ridge – Wednesday 16 November 2005

Despite the very blustery S wind, a baker's dozen midweekers joined me on this walk taking in the NW end of the ridge behind the suburb of Chapman. Due to the wind the **Rufous Songlarks** (of which there were about 8 distributed along the W and SW slopes at the time) were unusually quiet, though all participants had good views of several uncharacteristically quietly perched birds. For some this was a new species. A quiet male **White-winged triller** was also spotted nearby, and other notables were a pair of **Australasian Grebes** nesting on one of the dams, and over half a dozen **Stubble Quail** (the first since February) calling in the grassland around another local dam.

There seemed to be lots of little brown birds (LBBs), with active groups of **Yellow-rumped Thornbills** and **Weebills** seen at different spots. A single **Southern Whiteface** was initially seen by only a couple of participants, but the careful checking of all the LBBs brought its reward when one later obligingly sat on a fence allowing all excellent views. Again for some it was a new species. Also in among these were some **Striated Thornbills** which I had not recorded here since the fires. In addition a **Mistletoebird** was calling in this area, again very few have been present for the past couple of years.

Only lucky participant got distance views of a **Diamond Firetail**, adding to the high number of observations of this species here for 2005. All in all a surprising 36 species were seen or heard, not quite up to Campbell Park standards but pretty good considering the conditions, though the wind did ease somewhat later in the morning. A less welcome observation was that of a fox and 3 cubs, who checked out the group for some time before slinking away.

Jack Holland

GARUWANGA November 2005

Garuwanga – the name alone enticed me to Margaret Ning's and Geoff Robertson's property for COG's November visit. Our group totalled ten including Margaret and Geoff. Garuwanga truly is a beautiful place and despite trekking many kilometres across it I felt there was still so much hidden away, waiting to be discovered. We did discover three new orchid species for the property. The delicate almost shy-looking *Caladenia hildae*, the orchid highlight (for me), is listed as rare in NSW. A lone Greenhood *Pterostylis bicolor* which miraculously survived being trampled on by 8 birdwatchers was also a newie, as was a Golden Moth orchid *Diuris chryseopsis*. Seas of golden & orange peas intermixed with daisies large and small provided spectacular groundcover. Minute veronicas and pratis and other almost invisible flowers were shown to us by a very enthusiastic Margaret, as we spent a great deal of time examining the ground and forgetting about looking for birds! Margaret named flowering plant after flowering plant; I quickly jotted names down and recorded over 70 species (I missed a lot too!). Many weeds were 'beheaded' by mattock-wielding Margaret or Geoff! Throughout Garuwanga massive ancient granite boulders have been weathered to create artistic shapes, and I couldn't help but wonder if any were still waiting to bounce down onto unsuspecting birds! Geoff and Margaret led us on several walks over the two days which was what we needed to walk off Barbara Cumming's yummy

banana cake and Sue Lashko's scrumptious cheesecake! Pot-luck dinner on Saturday night was followed by John Cummings' flute performance. Animal highlights included a wombat out for a daytime river-side stroll, a couple of baby water dragons trying to look fierce, and an adult male water dragon looking very fierce, showing off its neck of bright yellow. Regrettably only two of our group saw the resident platypus cruise its territory – the rest of us were watching a kookaburra feed young (see Jack Holland's report). Charles and I were the only campers, and as we packed on Sunday afternoon a family of three Cunningham Skinks lazed nearby on a flat rock no doubt waiting for us to go and once again leave them in peace at Garuwanga. I could understand their impatience!

Margaret McJannett

and now for the birds.....

We walked over the length and breadth of the property, looking at its birds and plants. Fifty one species of birds were recorded in or just outside Garuwanga, an impressive total considering some of the common birds and expected summer migrants were absent. The definite highlight was the **Brush Cuckoo** allowing very good views as it was calling very loudly within 20 metres of the house. Other highlights were a **Tawny Frogmouth** flushed from a low perch, **Yellow-tufted Honeyeater** down by the Kydra River, and several **Satin Flycatchers**, a male of which was seen by all participants. Nesting was in progress with the **Australian Wood Duck**, **Pacific Black Duck** and **Grey Teal** all with ducklings on the full dams, **Laughing Kookaburra** young begging very loudly and easily seen in a split in a large tree and **Dusky Woodswallow** feeding young in a nest. The only new species for the property list was the **Common Bronzewing**, a somewhat surprising addition since several were calling loudly and flying about close to the house early on Sunday.

Jack Holland

Goulburn – Saturday 26 November 2005

Sue Lashko, Jenny Bounds and I, along with COG member Peter Macnicol, travelled down to Goulburn to lead some beginners bird walks for the **Goulburn Field Naturalists**. Due to access difficulties we had to change our plans and visit the Gorman Road Sewage Ponds first. A total of 9 duck species was again seen including many **Hardhead** and **Pink-eared Duck**, lesser numbers of **Grey Teal** and **Hoary-headed Grebe** than last year, and at least 10 **Musk Duck** on the very big pond, one of which was displaying to 2 other birds. When we managed to get the sun behind us we had lovely clear views of at least 10 **Chestnut Teal** and a number of **Blue-billed Duck** allowing a much better comparison of male and females of these species which, together with the Hardhead, can look very similar in poor light conditions. This also applies to the **Australasian Shoveller**, however, only several females were present.

This really is a great spot, with a much greater bird population than our local Fyshwick equivalent. Other highlights of the 42 species recorded here included a single **Black-tailed Native-hen** (the first Rodney Falconer has had for the district), a **Brown Songlark** calling occasionally but which could be seen on distant wires (again rare for the district), a **Latham's Snipe** flushed twice from wet grass, a **Southern Whiteface** briefly on a fence, and a **Black-fronted Dotterel** nest with 3 eggs on the road, on which somehow the party of about 15 people didn't manage to stand.

We then moved on to Kenmore Dam quite late in the morning though still managed also to record 42 species, including **Sacred Kingfisher**, both species of **Gerygone**, **Speckled Warbler**, **Yellow Thornbill**, **Varied Sittella**, a **White-winged Triller** and lots of **Olive-backed Orioles**. This area, which is also very good for wildflowers, continues to be under threat of development, and COG has agreed to make further submissions to have it reserved. A quick visit to Marsden Weir before leaving for home flushed another **Latham's Snipe**.

All in all another very successful outing with the Goulburn Field Naturalists on a day that cleared up fine and sunny after heavy thunderstorm just before we arrived. COG thanks them for their invitation and looks forward to doing more joint outings with them, and indeed we've been invited on to a couple members' property with a 6 km of frontage to Bungonia Creek, which I'll be looking at fitting into the 2006 COG Field Trips Program.

Jack Holland

Woodland Project—Mulligan's Flat Survey 27 November 2005

We arrived at the Reserve for this survey in fine drizzling rain after an overnight change, but this did clear for most of the survey, and we managed to finish with dry data sheets, but wet feet! A couple of sites were awash with water from the storms the day before - one had a small stream flowing through it! Quite a few small birds were around most sites, with plenty of Buff-rumped and other thornbills and **Weebills**, and **Olive-backed Orioles** and **Leaden**

PASSIVE SOLAR HOUSE FOR RENT - 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 while the front beach at Rosedale is usually patrolled by the resident White-bellied Sea-Eagle.

For 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.

Hugh McKay Crescent. Bring some morning tea. Those taking part are warned that these are cattle paddocks and the flies are bad this year - Aeroguard or a suitable alternative is recommended!

2006 Lake Burley Griffin/Molonglo Reach Chicken and Champagne cruises.

What better way to start off the outings in the new year by spending a balmy summer's evening cruising silently either on Lake Burley Griffin or East Basin/Molonglo Reach on the all electric "E.L. Cygnet". Both are designed so that food and drinks can be taken on board and consumed during the trip, for example during a lull in bird activity. Please book your place on the boat with Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au). As the boat takes a maximum of 10 passengers it will be on a "first in best dressed" basis.

Lake Burley Griffin; Saturday 14 January 2006– Evening electric boat cruise

On this trip we'll be keeping close to shore looking at the darter and cormorant nesting on the eastern shore of Black Mountain Peninsula and visiting Yarralumla and Orana Bays checking for **Silver Gulls** nesting on moored boats or

Flycatchers were particularly vocal. Interesting sightings were a breeding record of **Brown-headed Honeyeaters**, a couple of **Common Bronzewing**s (very scarce in recent years), and **Australasian Grebe** with three small young on the first dam. **Stubble Quail** were heard in paddocks adjoining the reserve and one or two **Rufous Songlarks** in the more open areas. A notable absentee was White-winged Triller which is everywhere else, including Gooroo NR and the extreme eastern side of Mulligans (where we don't have survey points).

The highlight of 48 species was a pair of **Superb Parrots** flying over the reserve from west to east. This species was also seen flying over Mulligan's and the north end of Gooroo during the COG Blitz on 31 October, and more recently by ANU researchers setting up their experimental project in the reserves. We do have a record of this species (possibly) breeding some years ago in the woodland near the large dam at Mulligans Flat, where a female with bent tail feathers was seen coming out of a hole. Superb Parrots could be breeding somewhere on the eastern side of the reserves/northern Gooroo, and I'd be interested to hear of any further sightings.

Majura Field Range Survey 29 November 2005

Paul Fennell and I did the survey in indifferent weather with the usual species recorded. The exciting find was a breeding record of **Hooded Robins** - five birds, including 2 males, a female and 2 immature birds, in the habitat we regularly find this species at the southern end of the range. We did not record Brown Treecreepers near site 1 this time around.

Jenny Bounds

Future Field Trips

Wednesday walk – 14 December 2005 (note earlier time) – Dunlop Grasslands

The Wednesday walk will be held as usual in December, but it will be a week earlier than usual, ie on the morning of the Xmas party. Joe Barr (6258 1127) who knows the Dunlop Grasslands well envisages a figure of 8 walk on horse trails and footpaths (often through long grass) and on one of the loops it will be necessary to pass through up to three "climb through" gates. Hopefully we will see **Rufous** and **Brown Songlarks**, **Fairy Martins** nesting, **Rainbow Bee-eaters**, **Diamond Firetails** and a variety of other grassland birds as well as whatever the ponds have to offer. **Stubble Quail** have just started calling and may be flushed.

Meet at 9 am the horse gate on the left on the 'Jarramlee Homestead' road off

pontoons. We will also be listening for **Bitterns** booming, and it is expected there will be a range of other birds both on shore and on the water. The boat trip will last about 2 hours and will cost \$20, payable in cash on boarding. The boat will leave at 6 pm from the jetty at the Australian Museum. Note this is different from 2005 and is where the steam paddler is tied up (near the labelled Hospital Pt on Map 59 of the Yellow Pages).

East Basin/Molonglo River; Sunday 15 January 2006– Electric boat cruise

A cruise on the upper parts of Lake Burley Griffin and the adjacent Molonglo River on the all electric "E.L. Cygnet". As members will be aware this boat allows both a quiet approach as well as access to areas normally difficult to get to. The main objective will be to view nesting, with three species of cormorant and lesser numbers of darters having already started, but the area is also rich in other waterbirds. A variety of birds can also be expected to be seen on the shore.

The boat trip will leave at 5 pm and last about 2 hours and will cost \$20, payable in cash on boarding. Note that the point of departure continues to be from the little landing adjacent to the car park in Bowen Park opposite the new Landmark Apartments. This car park may be accessed off Bowen Drive (going either way).

Brindabellas; Sunday 22 January 2006 - Day outing

This will be COG's traditional annual visit to the Blundells Creek/Warks Roads area of the Brindabellas, which as members know was devastated in the 18 January 2003 bush fires. The outing will provide members with an opportunity to see how this area is regenerating from the fire damage and also to see what birds have returned here this summer. Meet Bruce Lindenmayer at Uriarra Homestead (cnr Cotter and Uriarra Rds) at 8.30 am. Note there are actually TWO intersections of Cotter and Uriarra Roads, the other one being just up the road from Eucumbene Drive, Duffy! Participants will need to take either road and travel the 15 or so km to Uriarra Homestead at the other end.

Following a quick look at the waterbirds on the large dam there, we will car pool, and also do the usual shuffle, leaving some cars at the top of Blundells Creek Rd and some at the bottom so we only need to walk downhill. Could those intending to participate please ring Bruce (6288 5957, mobile 0417 418 759) beforehand as due to the sensitivity of the area and potential parking problems it has been agreed to limit numbers.

Jerrabomberra wetlands; Sunday 5 February 2006– morning outing

Come to our local wetlands and help celebrate World Wetlands Week. This outing will appeal to all levels of expertise. We will search for ducks, rails and small birds of the grasslands and discuss their behaviour and habitat. We will also visit the adjacent Fyshwick Sewerage Ponds to look at the birds of deeper water.

The area is very open so please bring a hat, sunscreen and plenty to drink. Meet at the carpark off Dairy Road at 7.30 am. The outing is expected to finish by 11 am. Please book with Tom Green on 62470630 or tomgreen@netspeed.com.au

Cape Conran Coastal Park; 24-27 February 2006 - extended weekend campout

Note that due to unavoidable circumstances the dates for this trip have been changed from that published in the draft 2006 COG Field Trips Program

COG is again venturing to the coast for the now regular, late summer, post-holiday period campout. This time we are going to Cape Conran Coastal Park in Victoria. It is an easy drive of about 350 km southeast of Canberra via Cooma, Bombala and Cann River. The campsite is located in banksia woodland and we will visit a variety of bird habitats on or near this unspoiled coast. There will be plenty of opportunities to relax and socialize. New members are always welcome.

Contact Martyn and Pat Moffat at mpmoff@bigpond.net.au or on 6282 3583 for information.



Masked Woodswallows (*Artamus personatus*).
Photo courtesy **Geoffrey Dabb**

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
- COG Atlas - \$12.00
- COG Car Stickers - \$2.00
- COG Birds of Canberra Gardens Poster - \$4.00
- COG Garden Bird Survey Chart (New Version) - \$1.00
- COG Badges – two colour versions - \$5.00
- COG Birds of the ACT – Two Centuries of Change – by Steve Wilson - \$25.00
- COG Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the ACT - \$1.00
- 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.

Lord Howe Island 2006

Twenty COG members and friends recently had a bird week with naturalist and guide Ian Hutton on wonderful Lord Howe Island (its 700km off the coast of NSW with a mild, sub-tropical climate). This event celebrated the 25th anniversary of the program which brought the endemic Woodhen back from probable extinction, and included a range of talks and evening events, as well as walks, birdwatching (both land and seabirds) and snorkelling over the coral reefs. It is an island unspoilt by tourism, with limited numbers of visitors and a relaxed atmosphere, as well as being very environmentally sustainable with walking or cycling the normal means of getting around. Apart from the wonderful seabirds nesting so close, including shearwater colonies just down the road, and seeing the Woodhen up close, I particularly enjoyed waking up in the morning to the resonant calls of the LHI Golden Whistler, which was abundant.

This was such an enjoyable week, the COG Committee has decided to offer it again to members, and I am taking expressions of interest. We will be negotiating timing and the program with Ian Hutton, hopefully to link in with a research or conservation related event, but our preferred timing is November 2006. Peter Fullagar, who was on the recent trip with us, as one of the researchers on the Woodhen recovery and an expert on seabirds, has indicated he is interested in going again with a COG group. The group will be limited to 16. Accommodation is likely to be at Somerset Apartments which are spacious and comfortable, set amongst the palms, and have a small kitchenette and nice balcony area (apartments generally have a double bed in a separate bedroom and a single bed in the lounge area - plenty of space for twin sharers). Usually the group has the evening meal at a range of local

restaurants, and you self cater for other meals (or go to one of the local cafes).

Costings etc will need to be worked out later when we have sufficient numbers to proceed with a booking. Based on the last trip, the cost ex Sydney is likely to be about \$2000 per person on a twin share basis, including accommodation, evening meals, and all slide shows and walks with Ian. Bookings and payment for this are handled through a travel agent who you deal with directly - details will be provided later. You organise your own travel from Canberra to Sydney and back and breakfasts and lunches. Some boat trips are extra. Sole use rooms may be available at extra cost. Once we have the numbers to make the tour viable, a deposit will be payable.

Please note: This tour involves a fair amount of walking - you need to be able to walk to and from accommodation for meals, shopping, beach, talks and bird walks - eg some dinner venues can be a kilometre each way - or bicycles can be hired at low cost. The longer, more demanding bush walks are optional.

Contact me to put your name on the list or for further information on ph 6288 7802. I recommend an early expression of interest to guarantee a place - this trip filled up very quickly last time and several names are already on the 2006 list.

Jenny Bounds

Other Surveys/Activities of Interest to COG Members

You are invited to **count Australian White Ibis**. Sunday, 11th December, Anywhere in NSW. Report ibis numbers, band colours, nesting sites, location, etc and report it to the Department of Environment and Conservation (NSW). For more information visit http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/ibis_survey or phone the Environmental Line: 1300 361 967 Mon-Fri only.

The next **Cowra Woodland survey** will be held over the weekend of 10-11 December. If you are interested in participating please contact Malcolm Fyfe on 6253 0772 or mfyfe@tpg.com.au.

2006 COG Field Trips Program

The draft 2006 COG Field Trips Program was published for members' comments in the November edition of *Gang-gang*.

Again the response so far has been limited and there are still a few gaps where we're looking for suggestions of where to go, and there are still a few organisers/leaders needed for some identified trips. If you can help with these, or if you have any suggestions for trips at any other time not listed on the draft program, please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au).

Update on Waterski Trial on Lake Burley Griffin

At the deadline for copy for the December *Gang-gang*, COG had not yet received any response from the NCA to the letter outlining our concerns about the waterski trial on the East Basin of Lake Burley Griffin. This trial began at the beginning of November, though from a newspaper report it was delayed for 2 weeks by bad weather. However, from this article it appears that it will be a much broader trial than just the training facility for single elite skiers, as photos of a number of young children skiing there are shown, and by implying that it's a general facility where even newcomers can learn.

COG has also made contact with the Burley Griffin Canoe Club which is also very concerned about the impact of the trial on their activities. Interestingly the NCA is said to have informed them that only noise levels will be monitored, as other environmental impacts will not be of concern.

So it seems time for COG to raise the ante on this issue, as it appears that the conditions under which the trial was announced are already being violated. We have a number of avenues open to us. As indicated last month I'd certainly be grateful for any reports on anything that is beyond the bounds of the remit for the trial (such as two boats, general waterskiing or operating outside of the boundaries). Alternatively please report it to the NCA, or write to the Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads, the Hon Jim Lloyd MP, C/- Parliament House Canberra. COG is grateful to Chris Davey, Sue Lashko and Anthony Overs who have volunteered to do some bird monitoring there.

Above all if you are concerned about this proposal, please make your voice heard. As seems already to be proving the case, unless this is done it is inevitable that an increasing level of water skiing will occur on this valuable and currently relatively peaceful part of the lake.

Jack Holland

Yankee Doodlings 2

The birding scene in New York was fairly quiet over Summer. As I write we are now into the third day of Autumn.

It has been astonishing how little gap there is between the Northward and Southward migrations. The peak day for Northward movement of warblers was 15 May but by 20 July there were already shorebirds moving South.

We have visited, by public transport, a number of other good birding spots around the City. The best known is Prospect Park in Brooklyn which is like a less manicured version of Central Park. When we visited a week ago the Fall warblers were just beginning to move through and it will be revisited in a couple of weeks as the push South picks up.

Forest Park in Queens was enjoyable earlier in Summer: in terms of amount of vegetation that was more like Canberra Nature Park (before controlled burns). On the coast Great Kills Park and Breezy Point both had good shorebirds by July as the adults begin the trek South, leaving the young to fend for themselves in the Arctic.

From my perspective the bird of the season was the Black-crowned Night-heron which have appeared in every drop of water bigger than a puddle. They are astonishingly static birds: I assumed that the first ones we saw in Central Park they were a plastic installation. Another good sighting was the bird perched above the stage at a Harlem Meer jazz concert: fortunately it didn't share its last meal with the band.

There seems to be considerable public interest in birds. The local Audubon chapter put on some tours (by water taxi holding about 150 people) of heron roosts in Long Island Sound. They were so popular that an additional tour was inserted to the schedule (and most people on the trip we went on were not 'serious' birders).

Martin Butterfield

Christmas Wine Offer for Conservation

*The Conservation Council works to achieve the highest quality environment for the ACT. Help support the Conservation Council's fundraising efforts: **Conservation Council & Lark Hill Wine Co. Special Offer for Members and Friends. Cool Climate wines of distinction from the Canberra Wine District.....***

Lark Hill is offering a presentation pack of 6 of the best of their wines to members and friends of the Conservation Council. The six wines include:

- the 2004 Riesling, winner of the Chief Ministers Trophy for Best Canberra District Riesling at the 2004 National Riesling Challenge
- the 2004 Fledgling, a delicious Sauvignon Blanc Chardonnay blend placed in Australia's Top 12 Releases by Gourmet Wine Traveller
- the iconic 2004 Chardonnay, Gold Medal Rated (the Lark Hill Chardonnay flies Qantas Business International)
- the 2004 Rose, the perfect Christmas luncheon wine
- the 2001 Cabernet Merlot, multiple Silver Medalist
- the Museum Release of the 1998 Cabernet Merlot, a Gold Medal winner from a warm year.

Total Price including freight \$150.00, and for every purchase Lark Hill will donate \$37.50 to the Conservation Council.

Orders can be phoned or faxed to Lark Hill Wines, payable by credit card or cheque. Phone or Fax 02 6238 1393 OR email larkhill@larkhillwine.com.au or Mail to The Lark Hill Wine Co. 521 Bungendore Road,

BUNGENDORE NSW 2621.

Check out the Conservation Council's website: www.ecoaction.net.au for more about wine offers,. *Make a Donation for Xmas to the Conservation Council's 'Bogong Fund'. Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible. Send to The Bogong Fund, GPO Box 1875, Canberra, ACT 2601*

COG's draft Guidelines for the Advertising and Conduct of COG Field Trips

These draft guidelines are available from the COG web site and their availability has been published in the last 3 editions of Gang-gang. There has been a very limited response to date to these, and unless we hear from you they will be finalised as is and implemented from the first outing in 2006.

This is your last chance to comment on these important draft guidelines. Please provide any comments to Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au).

From the Committee

Apart from its more routine business, the committee considered a number of other topics at its November meeting:

- Our President continues to pursue the matter of water-skiing on Lake Burley Griffin but has not received substantive responses from the relevant authorities as yet.
- COG is required to, and will, take out insurance for volunteers, as a condition of our Environment ACT grant.
- UHF transceivers have been purchased, for use in COG field trips. They will be available for loan – please contact the secretary well in advance of your need for them.
- Greg Ramsay has been appointed *Gang-gang* editor, assisted by Sue Lashko. All correspondence to gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au please, and Judy Collett will be our new newsletter/CBN distributor. Thanks to Greg and Judy for taking on these tasks.
- Please note that the next regular monthly meeting will be at Girls Grammar in February. In place of the December meeting, we will have the traditional family barbecue at Black Mountain peninsula; and instead of the January meeting, we will have a quiz night, organized by Ian Fraser, and held at the Turner Senior Citizens Club. Details elsewhere in this newsletter.

Conservation issues. COG has made representations to the Draft Namadgi National Park Plan of Management; Molonglo Valley Structure Plan; Greening Australia's consultation regarding the development of a Lake Burley Griffin Willow Management Strategy; and Friends of Mt Majura who are seeking advice on bird monitoring protocols, in association with their grant work on dam rehabilitation. In addition, COG has been invited to a public meeting to discuss the proposed dragway development on Block 51 in the Majura Valley, although the Committee does not deem this issue a major one for COG. (For more information on conservation matters, please contact Jenny Bounds or Julie McGuiness)

If you would like any further information on any of the above issues, please contact the relevant committee member.

DANCES ON THE EDGE

Judie Peet March c. 2001

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A Hooded Robin  
dances on the edge  
of the tree's dead wood.  
Dances on the edge of extinction.

But what does a bird know  
of extinction? This bird  
knows sunshine  
and fat black gnats;  
he knows flaking bark  
and yellow grasses,  
drying in the wind.

This bird knows  
soft autumn rains  
and sticky cobweb;  
he knows a hollow that is  
perfect for a nest.

and each morning, he sings  
in the light of false dawn.

He sings enticement,  
he calls, come to me,  
he sings and sings  
but he dances alone  
on the edge.

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## COG's first Canberra bird blitz – preliminary results

On Saturday 29 and Sunday 30 October 2005, as a highlight of bird week, COG conducted its first-ever “bird blitz”. The group has conducted many specific surveys over the years, such as its 1986-89 Atlas, its targeted quarterly surveys of woodland areas, waterbird surveys of Lakes Bathurst and George, and an ongoing garden bird survey; many of its members have adopted one or more two-hectare sites which they survey regularly; while others provide data of bird abundance and breeding from more ad hoc surveys or field trips. But COG had never attempted a snapshot of the birds of the ACT over a single weekend before. Our members attempted this on 29-30 October 2005. The aim was to conduct a minimum of one 20-minute survey within each of the 165 grid cells covering the ACT (a 2.5 minute grid on lines of latitude and longitude, so each cell measures approximately 3.5 km by 4.5 km); to record all species of bird present in the ACT over that weekend in all habitats, to obtain a broad indication of their abundance, and whether they were breeding. Walks for the general public, led by experienced COG members, were held at the Australian National Botanic Gardens and the observations incorporated in the totals.

Not unsurprisingly, in this spring featuring above-average precipitation, our chosen weekend was less than cheery, weather-wise. Saturday was dispiritingly grey and Sunday was wet. Notwithstanding this, only a few adopters of grid cells were deterred from conducting their surveys. As an exercise in participation, therefore, the blitz was moderately successful. Blitz datasheets are still being returned, but as of 30 November, 243 datasheets had been returned from a total of 70 named participants.

We fell far short of our aim of blanket coverage of the ACT, with surveys conducted in at least 103 of the 165 possible grid cells. Total coverage was never going to be possible, with Namadgi Park management indicating that certain areas were off limits, because of the weather conditions. This was compounded by the fact that some grid cell adopters elected not to venture out in the adverse weather conditions. Or simply “forgot”. However, with one minor exception, most habitat types were covered.

Analysis to date shows that 155 bird species were recorded, with 68 species breeding. No endangered species were recorded, but five species regarded as vulnerable were: Hooded Robin, Superb Parrot, Brown Treecreeper, Varied Sittella and White-winged Triller. Highlights included observations of several species badly affected by drought and fire: Superb Lyrebird, Pilotbird, Wonga Pigeon, Red-browed Treecreeper and Spotted Quail-thrush. Species not recorded included quail, egrets, spoonbills, bitterns, Musk Duck, Freckled Duck, Collared Sparrowhawk, White-bellied Sea-eagle, owl-nightjar, Olive Whistler, Cicadabird, Zebra Finch and Bassian Thrush. Full details will be published in *Canberra Bird Notes* 30 (4) December 2005.

As a modest inducement to participants, all were offered a native plant, and various other prizes were on offer. Our warmest thanks go to our supporters: Henry Nix; Redbrow Garden B&B; the Wine Shed, Belconnen; Vintage Cellars, Manuka; Andrew Isles Natural History Books; the Lindenmayer family; Rod's Gardening; Betty and Don Wood; Wild Cattle Productions; Stocks Native Nursery and I.D.P. Nursery. Winners were as follows:

“most significant effort” (2 days, 8 grid cells, 13 datasheets) – David McDonald (David won a weekend for two at Henry Nix's coastal retreat at Bawley Point)

“most interesting bird” (Pilotbird, at Shanahans Mtn) – Steve Holliday (Steve won overnight accommodation at Redbrow Garden b&b, Nanima Rd)

the “I must be cuckoo doing this” award for the most cuckoos recorded (13, of 4 species) – Harvey Perkins and Stuart Harris (they won Geoff Dabb DVDs)

the “twitch of the blitz” award (for a Turquoise Parrot) – Alastair Smith and Michael Wright (they won “The Big Twitch” by Sean Dooley)

encouragement award to the youngest blitzers – Ryan (aged 3) and Nina (aged 5) Lindenmayer – (they won bird posters)

“most thoughtful written comments” – Susan Robertson (the Woods' “ACT Plants”)

most species seen in a single grid (L15 – Callum Brae – 67) – Geoff Dabb (Andrew Isles books)

best breeding record (Varied Sittella and Hooded Robin) – Jenny Bounds (Andrew Isles books)

most datasheets returned (15) – Harvey Perkins and Stuart Harris (wine from Vintage Cellars)

teutonic thoroughness award (for coverage of Mt Ainslie) – Michael Lenz (Andrew Isles books)

blitzing in pain award (with a broken leg) – Kathy Water (Andrew Isles books)

most prompt return of datasheets - Sue Lashko (Andrew Isles books)

earliest recorded starting time (5:50 h) – Martyn Moffat ( 1 hr's gardening from Rod's Gardening)

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only observer(s) of a given species – Latham’s Snipe (Rosemary Bell – “Woodlands”, by David Lindenmayer); Great Crested Grebe (Ian Anderson and Tony Willis - Andrew Isles books); Red-browed Treecreeper and Southern Boobook (Jack Holland and Ruth Parker – wine from the Wine Shed); Restless Flycatcher (David Rosalky - Andrew Isles books); Brown Songlark and Fairy Martin (Joe Barr – wine from Vintage Cellars); and Rainbow Lorikeet (Phyl Goddard and Beverley Hammond - Andrew Isles books).

Perhaps the most encouraging aspect of the blitz was the obvious enthusiasm of many participants, who were enticed out to unfamiliar territory and found it rewarding. Others preferred to work over a familiar patch, but many took the opportunity to spend several hours there, rather than 20 minutes, and as a result many more breeding records were obtained. We’ll try again, next year. Put the dates of 28-29 October 2006 in your diaries now, and let us try for a bigger and better blitz. Any suggestions (in writing, to the author) for how we might conduct our second blitz would be most welcome.

A very big “thank you” goes especially to Henry Nix, Tom Green and Louise Muir, who led walks for the public at the Australian National Botanic Gardens, and to Sabrina Sonntag of the Gardens, who publicised and facilitated the event. The enthusiasm of the participants I met was palpable! Thanks too to Chris Davey, Peter Fullagar and Jonette McDonnell and staff at Tidbinbilla, whose efforts were rained off. And warm thanks to every participant and prize donor, for helping to make our first blitz a success.

*Barbara Allan*

## **Avian Whimsy #37 Dig That! Birds and burrows.**

A burrow is a great idea. Even in blazing summer it remains relatively cool and moist. In winter it stays much cosier than the blizzard above. It can provide pretty fair fire protection too. Hmm, I’m sounding as though I’ve just done a course with the Subterranean Real Estate Institute, don’t I? It also greatly limits the predators that can get at you (though unless you provide extra exits it can be pretty dodgy when an enemy does come calling).

Think of burrowing animals and we’re likely to think of mammals – oodles of mammals, from at least 30 families by my count, live or breed in burrows. Many reptiles do too of course, not to mention invertebrates because they are just too numerous. But it would probably take us a bit longer to get to birds. Why do not more birds use burrows? For a start, delicate bones and a bill are not generally the best digging equipment. Then there are the wings; a bird’s best escape mechanism is not going to work underground. On the other hand the same wings mean that a bird can much more readily escape the heat, aridity, cold, fire or predator that surface-bound animals use a burrow to avoid.

Having said all that, we well know that many birds do use burrows at least to breed in. Off the top of my head I can only think of one species that lives underground all year round, though I’m sure you can do better than that. I’m thinking of the extraordinary little Burrowing Owl of the Americas. (And while this is digressing, I’ll probably never get another chance to share this with you, so I’m delighted to be able to say that this creature has recently joined the growing list of birds known to use tools. In its case it collects mammal droppings which it strews tastefully around the burrow environs, in order to harvest the dung beetles thus attracted!)

I can think of some 30 Australian bird species which nest in burrows. Some, including some of our rarest tropical parrots and the apparently extinct Paradise Parrot, plus eight kingfisher species, dig into termite mounds (both arboreal and terrestrial). This is an added bonus for the eggs and chicks, as the hosts themselves undertake a certain amount of temperature control. The downside of course is that termite mounds are *hard*. It is painful to read accounts of kingfishers flying flat out and bill-first into a rock-hard mound to chip away at the hard shell. Once inside, female Buff-breasted Paradise-kingfishers use their impressive tail to sweep dirt out! Presumably the hooked bills of the parrots are more suited to the task. Golden-shouldered Parrot females do most of the work, digging with the bill and scraping dirt away with the feet.

If one is digging into soil then of course one can select a favourable substrate, though if it is too amenable it is likely to collapse. Pardalotes start the dig with their beaks and continue with feet. At a maximum of 5cm a day, Striated Pardalotes can take up to 20 days to excavate; Spotteds seem to be more efficient. Rainbow Bee-eaters dig in a flurry of activity, dislodging soil with the bill and hurling it out behind with pedalling feet. Their burrow, which can be 1.5m deep, progresses at about 8cm a day. Webbed feet obviously make good shovels, as a pair of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters can knock up a 15cm diameter, 1.5m long burrow, plus a 30cm chamber in the end, in a mere six nights work.

Some of these birds – the pardalotes and some kingfishers for instance – are only optional burrowers, using tree hollows at other times. Other birds also use other folks’ burrows opportunistically. Australian Pratincoles hide chicks in rabbit burrows, presumably in place of those sadly no longer provided by Bilbies or Bettongs. And after the 2003 fires I mused



## 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 accommodation and Wonga.

as to whether at least some of the Superb Lyrebirds which survived did so by ducking into wombat burrows. Recently Chris Davey confirmed that he has seen lyrebirds using wombat holes, albeit not in a fire situation.

I suspect that this is a topic which would repay more delving, but I am spraying these thoughts onto paper while racing round preparing to run a tour. Writing on burrowed time, you might say.

Ian Fraser [ianf@pcug.org.au](mailto:ianf@pcug.org.au)

## Next newsletter

**FEBRUARY** deadline  
Wednesday 25 January 2006

Please send updates, articles, advertisements etcetera to  
Editors *Gang-gang*  
[gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto: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.

## COG info

*President*

**Jack Holland, ph 6288 7840 (h),**  
email [jack.holland@deh.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@deh.gov.au)

*Vice President*

**Nicki Taws, ph 6251 0303**

*Treasurer*

**Joan Lipscombe ph 6262 7975**

*Secretary*

**Barbara Allan ph 6254 6520**

*Membership inquiries*

**Contact Alastair Smith 61618608(h)**  
[membership@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:membership@canberrabirds.org.au)  
for changed address or other details

*Address for correspondence*

**The Secretary**  
COG, PO Box 301  
Civic Square, ACT 2608

*Gang-gang editor*

**Tanya Rough 0414 719 846**  
and Sue Lashko

*Newsletter distribution*

**Lia Battisson and helpers**

*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)

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

*Editor Canberra Bird Notes*

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



## Gang-gang

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Canberra Ornithologists Group, Inc.  
PO Box 301, Civic Square ACT 2608

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