

Gang-gang

February 2007

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

Monthly Meeting

8 pm Wednesday

14 February 2006

*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.*

Our short talk will be on the Cape Range NP, in WA. Before his untimely death Tom Green had prepared the talk for this meeting and Jane has very kindly offered to deliver it.

The main talk, "Return of the Dawn Chorus: Breeding, persistence and ecosystem services of woodland birds in young revegetation" will be by David Freudenberger and Geoff Barrett, of CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems, though David is currently seconded to Greening Australia. David and Geoff will report on the preliminary (first 3 years) results of a banding study that is finding a diversity of woodland birds feeding, breeding and persisting in revegetated sites less than 5 years old in the Holbrook District of southern NSW. During the past year of drought there has been a marked reduction in the number and diversity of woodland birds seen and banded in remnant woodlands. However the decline in birds has been much less in revegetation. This project is supported by Earthwatch Australia, Holbrook Landcare and the NSW Environment Trust.

Everyone welcome

What to watch for this month

Judging by the distinct drop in reports on the COG chat line over the second half of January, many of this season's spring/summer migrants have now left the ACT, including all the specials this time such as the **White-browed Woodswallows** (but very few **Masked**), **Superb Parrots**, **Common Koel**, the **Little Lorikeets** and the several **Black Honeyeaters** at Mulligan's Flat, and the occasional **Painted Honeyeater**. Even though NSW has been in drought for a number of years each spring/summer seems to bring a slightly different suite of birds, with even the commoner migrants staying for different periods. Certainly the **White-winged Triller** and **Rufous Songlark** seemed to arrive and leave earlier from NW Cooleman Ridge, with no sightings in 2007, about a month earlier than in the past two summers. Even the **Dusky Woodswallow** seems to have left there early, with only one seen over the Australia Day weekend, though this species will stay around other parts of the ACT until mid May and may even overwinter. At this time look out for flocks containing a mix of adults and juveniles/immatures, with well over a dozen birds not uncommon.

There have also been reports of **Dollarbirds** starting to bring their (much duller) young into the suburbs. Watch out also for the **White-throated Needletail**, and if you're really observant **Fork-tailed Swift**, particularly on the storm fronts. February and March seems to be the best time to see these species in the ACT; there were only a few reports of them in the thunderstorms that occurred during January.

Breeding seems to have had very mixed success this year, with a number of species seeming to breed reasonably successfully despite the dry conditions and the lack of a good supply of insects. Other indications are of a very poor breeding season. In particular there were many reports of the **White-browed Woodswallows** abandoning nests, even with young in them. In my experience this is common for this nomadic species, which very typically leaves when conditions deteriorate. Certainly this was the case for the pair that were present (for the first time that I'm aware) on NW Cooleman Ridge for about five weeks centred on November last year. — **Jack Holland**

White-browed Woodswallow
(*Artamus leucorhynchus*)
Photo by Ian Fraser



Field Trip reports

Sunday 3 December 2006 —Hospital Creek, Namadgi National Park

Eighteen members and guests took advantage of the cooler conditions and spent a very enjoyable day walking and bird watching in the Namadgi NP, in an area with which not many of us were familiar. We did a circuit of about 8 km encompassing a variety of habitats starting from the Yankee Hut car park, along the Old Boboyan Road up to the Hospital Creek Hut, then followed Hospital Creek downstream for about 1 km, over a saddle and returned to the cars via a loop road. A total of 57 different species were recorded, all within the one COG grid cell.

While bird activity was good all the way up to Hospital Creek Hut, it was best at the beginning, the middle (along a creek line) and end of this leg. At the car park, highlights were **Brown Treecreepers** and **Dusky Woodswallow** with dependent young, as well as two **Australian Hobbies**, the second of which was a young rather tatty bird which sat quietly in a dead tree allowing excellent views, particularly of its brownish–orange plumage and the half collar. In the restored regrowth/revegetation on the western side of the road were over 100 **Little Ravens**. Midway we first encountered the very widespread (this spring/summer at least) **Rufous Songlark**, a **New Holland Honeyeater** as well as a brightly marked 1 m snake (darkish with a clear white stripe along either side of the upper part of its body) none of us could identify.

As we got closer to the hut, the trees were taller and the bird life intensified with five adult **White-winged Chough** seen feeding three young in a nest (almost a replica of the observation at the Campbell Park Nest workshop the week before except that the chicks were much more robust), as well as good views of both **Brown-headed** and **Fuscous Honeyeaters**, **Satin** and **Leaden Flycatchers** (causing a rather long identification debate particularly for the females), **White-throated Treecreepers** feeding young and for a lucky few, a **Red-browed Treecreeper**.

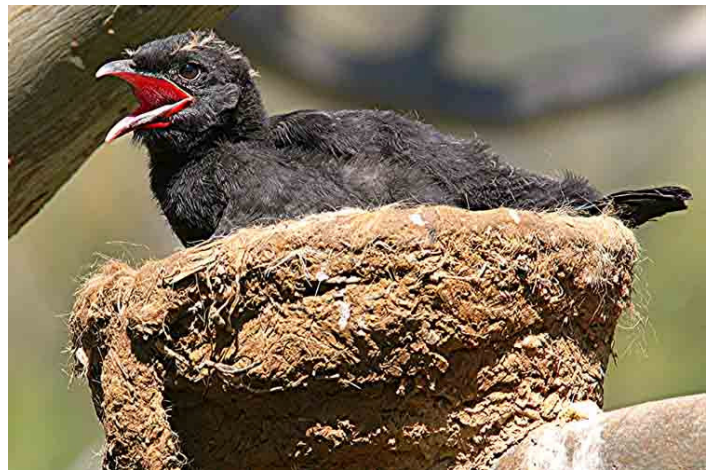
An early lunch was taken at the Hospital Creek Hut, on the edge of a lovely round grassy area ringed by trees and where only one of the party had been before. A number of other species were quite active during lunch, the undoubted highlight here (and of the day) being a **Brush Cuckoo**, which after initial identification and flushing returned to a couple of perches where it sat quietly in full view of the munching participants. During more than 30 minutes it never called once, unusual in my experience for this species which can be very vocal at that time of the year. However, with the lack of an eye ring, the rather paler colour and the square cut tail its identification was clear, and identified it from the **Fan-tailed Cuckoo** which had been heard in denser bush close by.

Post lunch activity was quieter as the weather warmed up, with the highlight being a pair of **Sacred Kingfishers** commencing to prepare a nest hollow by continually flying beak first into the trunk of a tree (the fresh scar was clearly visible). A detour to try to find the **Turquoise Parrot** Julian had found on a recce earlier in the week was (not surprisingly) unsuccessful and activity remained relatively quiet except for the large number of **Spotted** and **Striated Pardalotes**, **Red Wattlebirds**, **White-eared** and **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters**, with the highlight being at least seven **Gang-gang Cockatoos** feeding closely together in a wattle.

Certainly a very enjoyable day which led to the filling out of seven data sheets for the ACT Parks and Conservation Service. My thanks once again to Julian Robinson for offering to lead us round this part of the NP, particularly as a relatively new but very enthusiastic member. — **Jack Holland**

21 January 2007 — Blundells Creek and Warks Roads

Our regular annual outing on this weekend turned up some surprises this year. A pleasant overcast day was much cooler than forecast, but the effects of the long, hot and dry summer were clear throughout. 12 COG members came along, with



White-winged Chough
(*Corcorax melanorhamphos*)
Photo by Geoffrey Dabb

a nice mixture of experienced and inexperienced people.

The water level at Uriarra Homestead dam was the lowest I have ever seen, and the number of birds and species (23) was down on past years. Waterbirds included **Australian Wood Duck**, **Pacific Black Duck**, **Grey Teal** and **Hardhead**, **White-faced Heron**, **Australian White Ibis**, **Masked Lapwing**, but no **Nankeen Night Heron** nor **Latham's Snipe** seen in previous years.

Bush birds included five species of parrot, **Yellow-rumped Thornbill**, **Varied Sittella**, **Restless Flycatcher** and a **Willie Wagtail** family with dependent young.

It was again interesting to see further progress in the recovery of Namadji National Park along Blundells Ck and Warks Roads after the 2003 fire. There has been excellent recovery of native understorey plants that have now largely displaced the exotic grasses and weeds that grew in profusion for the first few years, although there are still many weeds along the roadsides and blackberries in the wetter areas. It was good to see that Environment ACT had (at COG's request) repaired a nasty creek crossing which gave us some headaches in 2006. Again, there were fewer birds and species (26) than in recent years. Numbers of **Golden** and **Rufous Whistlers**, **Grey Shrike-thrushes** and **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** were down but this year we recorded more **White-eared Honeyeaters**. As predicted, the abundance of **Flame Robins** is down as the bush regenerates, but we had excellent views of a male by the roadside. Summer migrant **Satin Flycatchers** were again in good numbers and there were a few sightings of migratory **Rufous Fantails** amongst their resident cousins. One **Superb Lyrebird** was heard calling, but no **Pilotbird**, **Wonga Pigeon**, **Red-browed Treecreeper** or **Cicadabird**.

It was a most enjoyable outing and a long but easy and completely downhill walk. — **Bruce Lindenmayer**

Saturday 27 January 2007 — Black Mountain Peninsula/ Springbank Island

This now annual boat trip to view the **Darter/cormorant** nesting among the willows on the eastern side of Black Mountain Peninsula is always taking something of a risk, as the extent is very hard to check from the land using the bike path. So it was a pleasant surprise when only a few hundred metres past the mouth of Sullivan's Creek we encountered a major congregation of **Little Black Cormorants**, and another large one and then a smaller one a few hundred metres further on. Typically this species was very wary and many birds often left the trees before a good estimation of numbers could be made, but we estimated at least 120 birds and over 40 nests in these three spots. The chicks in the nests were mostly very well developed, though still with some black down, indicative of hatching some time ago, with only several younger ones seen. This species dominated with only about 15 **Little Pied Cormorants** and a single nest with young and about a dozen **Darters** present, including two males sitting tight on nests. Two **Great Cormorants** were also seen near a nest, though breeding could not be confirmed. A number of other species were also seen, with the count being 17 along this edge.

Rather than visit other places on the Lake, which in the past have proven somewhat disappointing, we were dropped off on Springbank Island for a very enjoyable picnic tea. Thirteen species were seen during this visit; of



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Services P/L**

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enquiries@philipmaher.com

2007 Birding Tours

Tasmanian Endemic Bird and Mammal Tour

18—24 February
Bruny Island, Melaleuca, pelagic

South West Western Australia

27 February — 7 March
including pelagic

Northern & Central Thailand

7—24 April
co-led with Uthai Treesucon

Top End

14—29 May
Darwin, Kakadu NP, Kununurra
& Mitchell Plateau

Gulf of Carpentaria Cairns return

17—28 June 2007

New Caledonia 22—28 July 2007

2nd Outback (Strzelecki) Tour 7—25 September 2007

Central Coast NSW inc nearby national parks

1—14 November 2007
Barrington, Gloucester & Copeland
Tops, Mungahorn Gap and several
others parks

All above tours are accommodated

Plains-wanderer Weekends 2007
late November and December

Itineraries are on the AOS website

www.philipmaher.com

interest was the large number of **Purple Swamphens** feeding on the open areas in the centre of the island, and several **Superb Fairywrens**, causing a debate as to how they got to the island given the several hundred metres of water separating it from Acton Peninsula.

While only a small group joined me, due to some mechanical problems a bonus was being able to travel for the first time in the larger conventionally powered motor boat the “Darter”. This was especially appreciated when we were picked up to be taken back to the cars, being a much more comfortable ride than was experienced by the attendees of the 30th birthday party that were being ferried back, in a variety of very small and frail looking craft, against the chop caused by the strong NE breeze. — **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.

9-12 February 2006 — Mallacoota – extended weekend accommodation/camp-out

COG is again venturing to the coast for the now regular, late summer, post-holiday period campout. This time we are going to Mallacoota just across the border in Victoria. It is an easy drive of about 375 km southeast of Canberra via Cooma, Bombala and the Imlay Road. There are a number of accommodation options at that time of the year including, for those members who prefer not to camp, units or a hotel-motel, and for campers there are about 600 sites at the camping area. We plan to visit different habitats such as rainforest, heath and woodland, and a boat trip on the lake could be a possibility. There will be plenty of opportunities to relax and socialise. New members are always welcome.

There has been significant rain there recently, and a trip in mid November found more than a hundred species of birds. One feature of interest was the large number of **Scarlet Honeyeaters** scattered through the forest, especially where the melaleuca was flowering. Hope some will still be there in February 2007! We also saw a number of **Little Terns** from the beach flying about and had close views of several **Glossy Black-cockatoos** in the casuarina forest.

While the response to this trip has been good there is still room for a few more people. Contact Ian Anderson iananderson@grapevine.com.au or on 6281 0609 for information.

21 February 2007 — Wednesday Walk – Lake Ginninderra

Given the continuing hot and dry conditions elsewhere, the mid week walk for February will be held at Lake Ginninderra, which affords shade for participants and has a variety of land and water bird species. Meet in the car park in MacDermott Place on the western side of the lake at 9:00 am. Bring a hat and some morning tea.

Sunday 25 February — Tallaganda National Park – day outing

Tallaganda National Park occupies two sections of the Great Dividing Range some 50 km south-east of Canberra. It has a variety of forest habitats but the wet forests are of most interest to COGites, particularly with the loss of so much of these habitats to the west of Canberra in 2003. Previous COG trips to this area have produced the following avian highlights, among others: **Cicadabird, Wonga Pigeon, Red-browed Treecreeper, Lewin’s Honeyeater, Gang-gang Cockatoo, Pilotbird, Eastern Whipbird, Satin Flycatcher, Rose Robin and Black-faced Monarch**, along with several owls.

Meet at 8.00 am in the car park of the Queanbeyan Swimming Pool, Campbell Street, Queanbeyan, for car pooling. As this will be an all day trip, please bring lunch and water. Being on the Dividing Range, the area is much wetter than

Canberra, so be prepared for rain (now that would be nice!) and leeches. The trip will be cancelled if a total fire ban applies. David McDonald (phone 6231 8904) will lead this trip. Please contact him for further information.

Sunday 11 March — Lake Burley Griffin — birding by bike or the "Tour des Birds de LBG"

The recently returned Martin Butterfield will lead a repeat of this bicycle tour of the Central and West Basins of Lake Burley Griffin, intending to visit a number of locations with good chances of seeing some of the less common sights of Canberra (in addition to the birds there is always the possibility of encountering a bagpipe player or a naked jogger).

Martin's expectation would be at least 40 bird species including four **Cormorants** and **Darter**, and most of the other usual lake and parkland suspects. In addition the edge of Westbourne Woods can generate some of the less common bush birds, and the extra exposed mud around Acacia Inlet has recently produced some **Crakes** and at least one sighting of an immature **Little Bittern**.

Meet at Mr Spokes bike hire in Acton Park at 8:00 am, and we'll head off clockwise (for those with digital watches, that means towards the Carillon). Martin expects to have at least nine 'formal' stops with many others possible. We'll cover about 20 km, at a polite pace with no big uphill, in about three hours. At least one water bottle per person is advised, and although he doesn't intend to go off road, a spare inner tube each would be good insurance. Wearing a helmet is compulsory.

For further information please contact either Martin Butterfield (Ph 0422 753 230, martinflab@gmail.com) or Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au).

Sunday 25 March — Marulan – day visit to private property

As part of our continuing links with the Goulburn Field Naturalists Society (GFNS) COG members have been invited to join an outing to a property near Marulan. This contains a very large drought proof dam where the **Great-Crested Grebe**, **White-bellied Sea-eagle** and other waterbirds are known to regularly occur. **Musk Ducks** are common breeding residents. It also has significant areas of natural woodlands/forests (including Swamp Gum open forest) where a variety of land birds occur. Of particular note is a stand of massive *Banksia marginata* that is a local hotspot for small birds. The house paddock has been part of the Open Gardens Scheme and borders the lake roughly in the middle of the 800 hectare property.

COG members will meet at the Shell Service Station on the Federal Highway, Watson at 7:00 am (daylight savings ends that morning) for car pooling in order to meet GFNS members at or near the property by 8:30 am. To put your name down or to seek any further information please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au). Morning tea and lunch should be taken. We expect to return home mid-afternoon.



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Andrew Patrick

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Sunday 1 April — East Basin/Molonglo River – Electric boat cruise

This will be outing/cruise for 2006/07 on the upper parts of Lake Burley Griffin (East Basin) and the adjacent Molonglo River. While this has been done a number of times on different dates, the experience last year was that this is the peak time for nesting. While the main objective will be to view nesting, with three species of **Cormorant** and **Darters** known to breed there, the area is also rich in other water birds, and a variety of land birds can be seen on the banks.

The boat trip will last about 2 hours from 8:00 am and will cost \$20, payable in cash on boarding. Please book your place on the boat with Jack Holland (on 6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au). Depending on the numbers we will travel either in the electric boat the "E.L. Cygnet" which takes a maximum of 10 passengers, or the new appropriately named "Darter" which can carry 16 people, and though it has a motor is very quiet at slow speeds. The boats allow both a quiet approach as well as access to areas normally difficult to get to. The point of departure will be 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).

6-9 April 2007 — Willandra Lakes – Easter camp-out/accommodated

COG's Easter campout will be held at Willandra Lakes near Hillston, about seven hours' drive from Canberra. There are camping facilities (access is suitable for camper trailers but not caravans) and the shearers' quarters (sleeps 24 in bunk rooms that open onto an enclosed verandah), both of which have been booked. At the moment this outing is fully subscribed and a wait list has been started. If you are interested in putting your name on this list could you please E-mail Sue Lashko on susan.lashko@cgs.act.edu.au or phone 6251 4485.

News from the committee

Report on November COG Meeting

- Grahame Clark from the Rarities Panel was invited to the December committee meeting, to discuss the work of the Panel. A very constructive discussion covered issues such as the list of reportable birds, the report submission and evaluation process, and the need for more explanation to accompany the form, to assist those making reports.
- The Jerrabomberra Wetlands Draft Management Plan is now on the ACT government's website, and Jenny Bounds welcomes comments on the Plan. COG's main concern is the impact of planned urban development. The closing date for submissions on the Plan is 2 April. You can find the plan online at http://www.environment.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/41172/Jerrabomberra_Wetlands_final.pdf
- Jack Holland will attend the March BIGnet meeting at Merimbula as COG's representative. BIGnet is a coalition of a number of bird groups in Australia
- COG will investigate sponsoring a seat at the Botanic Gardens in memory of Tom Green.

COG Library

Many members will know that COG maintains a library which includes the journals of many bird watching, ornithology and field naturalist groups. Recently received issues are available for browsing at each COG meeting.

Among the issues recently received are:

- *The State of Australia's Birds 2006* – this issue focuses on the effect of introduced species on native birds. As well as the well recognized threats of species such as the cat, fox and rabbit, some of the more complex

effects are discussed, such as introduced plant species which attract particular native birds to the detriment of others.

- *The Cumberland Bird Observers Club Inc. newsletter* for December 2006 notes that Birdline NSW, where NSW observers can record unusual sightings, is now online at <http://www.ereamae.com/>. [Click on Birdline NSW on the right of the screen for latest sightings around the state].
- the Spring 2006 issue of *Woodland Wanderings* includes a insert on the conservation of woodland birds.
- the December/January issue of the Hunter Bird Observers Club Newsletter includes reports from two Twitchathon teams about their exploits over that weekend.
- The Bird Observer of December 2006 includes a one-page article, with photographs, of a Musk Duck roosting on land.

After being available at two to three COG meetings, issues are placed in the Library, which is maintained by Barbara Allan.

COG Sales Desk

Carol Macleay, who has managed the COG Sales Desk for over the past 6 years, will not be able to undertake the duties regularly after February 2007, and therefore COG is looking for someone willing and able to take over this role.

On behalf of all members I would like to thank Carol for having undertaken this significant task so diligently, efficiently and cheerfully for the past 6 years. After such a long period she can certainly look forward to handing over the duties.

Unfortunately there has been no response to the notice published in the December Gang-gang, or subsequently on the COG E-mail Discussion List. If you feel that you can help COG in this way, please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 A/H or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au), including for the list of duties. Carol will be happy to do a hand over while passing on her stocks of sales items and files, and would also be happy to help out occasionally.

2007 COG Field Trips Program

The 2007 COG Field Trips Program is published for members' convenience separately in this edition of Gang-gang. While there have been limited additions to the draft published in November 2006, the committee is confident that it offers another strong program with activities for a range of tastes and preferences.

There are still a few organisers/leaders needed for some identified trips, as well as still some unidentified venues for local or mid distance day or overnight trips. If you have any offers or comments to make please contact Anthony Overs (6254 0168 AH or by E-mail on Anthony.Overs.Reps@aph.gov.au).

Canberrabirds Online Discussion List

Contributors to COG's Canberrabirds E-mail discussion list are reminded that the aim of the discussion list is to allow information to be passed on, questions to be asked, and comments made in a courteous way. Any messages which contain offensive or inappropriate language or can be construed as personal attacks or insults will not be condoned, and anyone sending such messages risks suspension from the list.

If you are not a subscriber to the discussion list, you can find instructions on how to join at <http://canberrabirds.org.au/discuss.htm>. This page also gives information about where to find the list archives.

For further information on any of these matters, please contact any committee member (contact details on back page).

Other activities of interest to COG members

BIGnet

The **first BIGnet meeting for 2007** will be hosted by the Far South Coast Birdwatchers at Merimbula on 17-18 March. Jack Holland will be officially representing COG but other members' participation in all or part of the events would be welcome. While the agenda has not yet been finalised, it will include "Bell Miner Removal, a Case Study", and there will be opportunities to bird watch before, during and after the meeting depending on demand.

If you are interested in participating in any way, please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au). More details will be provided in the March *Gang-gang*, as the agenda and associated events become clearer.

Woodland surveys

Newline — Friday 8 December

The drought had come to the Newline paddocks in December with very little grass, most of the dams dry and agistment stock obviously off the site. Yellow Box, however, was in flower over the site as it is in other woodlands in Canberra, but not much seemed to be feeding in this, with only a few **Noisy Friarbirds** and **Red Wattlebirds** around. Of a low 40 species recorded, I did record a couple of **Speckled Warblers** and several small groups of **Double-barred Finches** (mostly around the dump site 4 and site 5) and three very vocal **Crested Shrike-tits** in the front paddock, interestingly in Red Box trees where I often record them. An **Australian Hobby** flew through late in the survey and several **Dollarbirds** were still around, most seen sitting quietly on sentry duty in dead trees - possibly their partners were in hollows on nests. I did hear one **Brown Treecreeper** in the distance from the entrance road, and also heard one **Pallid Cuckoo** calling. Introduced species such as **Starlings** and **Common Mynas** were plentiful, especially the latter. —
Jenny Bounds

Mulligan's Flat — Sunday 10 December 2006

An enthusiastic group of surveyors reported this was the best survey for some time, with higher than usual numbers of small birds at most sites, and a good total count of 58 species. The reserve looked the driest for years, with little new grass growth and very few wildflowers, although water levels were still good in the dams. Highlights included five **Superb Parrots** near the large dam, **Red-capped Robins** at three sites, **Scarlet Robins** at three sites, a **Little Friarbird** and a **Latham's Snipe** near site 16, a flock of 80 **Little Ravens** overhead, **Varied Sittella** at site 6, a pair of **Australian Hobbies**, and **Leaden Flycatchers** with young. Flowering Yellow Box attracted numerous **Noisy Friarbirds**. After the survey we had a look at the reported **Black Honeyeater** site on the eastern side of the reserve, but by this time it was late morning and quite warm, and although many other birds were around (**Little Lorikeets**, **White-browed Woodswallows**, **Jacky Winter** etc), the Black Honeyeaters failed to show. —
Jenny Bounds



Red-capped Robin
(*Petroica goodenovii*)
Photo by Harvey Perkins

Jerrabomberra Grasslands Reserve — Thursday 14 December 2006

This was the first survey at this new reserve, with seven sites in a good quality woodland area adjacent to the grasslands off the Monaro Highway. This woodland is surrounded by leaseholds and grazing continues at certain times of the year under conservation management regimes. Of 42 species in total, I recorded a number of locally threatened or declining species - **Diamond Firetail**, **Crested Shrike-tit**, **Jacky Winter**, **Varied Sittella**, **White-winged Triller** and **Dusky**



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Woodswallow. Dollarbirds were at several sites, mostly sitting quietly. Unfortunately, the small group of **Brown Treecreepers**, which were known to be resident in this area some 18 months ago, seems to be gone; I have not recorded them there in several recent visits. However, this will be a valuable new site in the woodland project given the range of species of interest on site. — **Jenny Bounds**

Myna Matters Update

The Canberra effort to reduce Indian Mynas has now spread to the north coast of New South Wales where local community groups are using our trap to reduce mynas before they take hold up there. The local councils and catchment management groups are collaborating in this effort. The last report from Coffs Harbour is that after making up 10 of our traps from the plans on our website (www.indianmynaaction.org.au), Coffs Harbour residents removed some 250 Indian Mynas in 2 months.

The trapping activity in Canberra continues, with now some 8100 Indian Mynas taken out of the Canberra area as at the end of December.

Hot spots for mynas still remain throughout Canberra and Queanbeyan, but where people have made the effort to reduce myna numbers by trapping and better waste/pet-food control, the change has been remarkable — much fewer numbers of mynas around in backyards, rosellas back breeding in nesting boxes that had previously been used by mynas for many years, and many more native birds in gardens. This gives us the message we need to get more people involved.

Myna Matters Bulletin #7 (the December 2006 issue) can be seen by going to the CIMAG website, where you can also find the application form to join CIMAG, the CIMAG Strategy and information about these environmental pests and what you can do about them.

Bill Handke

Canberra Indian Myna Action Group

(02 6231 7461 / handke@grapevine.net.au)

COG SALES

MUDBRICK COTTAGE

Mallacoota

Our mudbrick cottage is available for rental for all those nature lovers out there!! It is set amongst the trees in Mallacoota, Victoria (approximately 4 hours drive from Canberra). It is only 10 minutes walk to the beach, 5 minutes walk to the golf course and about 15 minutes walk to town. It sleeps 4-6 upstairs and there is a sofa bed downstairs. It is fully self-contained with a kitchen and laundry. Contact Barbara de Bruine

(02) 62583531.

PASSIVE SOLAR HOUSE

South Rosedale

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

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

(02) 6286 1564

or e-mail gramsay@actewagl.net.au

- **'The Long Paddock** - a Directory of Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves in NSW' by Rural Lands Protection Board - \$31.00
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AvIan Whimsy #49

William Swainson — From goose to parrot

Superb Parrots (*Polytelis swainsonii*) have become a regular feature of Canberra summers, though it is not clear if this reflects a welcome growth in numbers or if factors such as drought are simply pushing them further south than normal. There is almost as much mystery about the person for whom they were named, a passionate English naturalist and artist named William Swainson, who seemed not to know his limits at crucial points of his career. This can of course lead to greatness, but it can also land one face down in a pile of something unpleasant.

Swainson was born in 1789 and at the age of 14 followed his father into the customs service. The sirens of natural history were already luring him though, and in order to travel he joined the army (albeit not as a combatant, but on the staff of the Commissary-General) and spent years enjoying and learning about the plants and animals of the eastern Mediterranean. Unwell, he left the army at age 26 on half-pay to pursue his real love. He was at the same time developing his considerable skills as an artist, at just the time that the new process of lithography was being introduced. This meant that the artist could draw directly onto a stone printing block (with a waxy pencil, to which oily inks adhered) rather than relying on an engraver to etch the copper plate with an interpretation of the artist's work. (The result was black and white; the artist made a colour template which teams of colourists followed, hand-colouring the books.) This was revolutionary for artists, who could now self-publish.

Swainson did just that, following a trip to Brazil which he undertook almost as soon as he left the army. Ah, the power of the call of the tropics on a young naturalist! (And on older ones, but I prefer not to dwell on that.) It wasn't a wildly successful trip, due to political upheaval there, but he collected enough to begin a series of subscription-paid books of Brazilian birds, and of shells, on which he had become an authority. They were published in sections, each section subsidising the next.

Meantime he had enthusiastically espoused the new classification system developed by W S MacLeay, the Quinary system. (MacLeay had already been a diplomat and judge in the Spanish-English slave abolition commission in Cuba and went on to play a major role in Australian entomology.) From the advantage of our perspective it was, quite frankly, weird. Groups of animals were allocated to one of three circles, containing respectively 'typical', 'subtypical' and 'aberrant' members of the group. The 'aberrant' circle was further divided into three circles (hence the five of the quinary). Associations of species in different circles were linked with lines. The leading biologists of the day took an interest – then shied away from the utter arbitrariness and inflexibility of it. Not Swainson though. He was excited by the evident links between tigers and zebras, on the basis that both are 'striped and impossible to tame'. Or baboons and whales with 'head very large, little or no tail', or macaques and rodents with 'tail relatively long, hare-lipped'. This did not enhance his standing, but it didn't totally destroy it either.

He contributed to the revolution in learning which accompanied cheaper printing processes, by writing for Lardner's Cabinet Cyclopaedia series. In the end though the demanding Dionysius Lardner got too much for him – myself, I'd blame Dionysius' parents for any personality problems – and Swainson emigrated to New Zealand with his family. From here, for reasons and in ways not at all clear, he was head-hunted in 1853 by the Victorian government to work on the colonial flora. With explicit disdain for those who had gone before, he listed 1520 'gum trees' and 213 casuarinas (where we now recognise about 14). He would have done more but ran out of names... No publication ensued and within two years he had died in New Zealand. He predicted 'surprise and almost incredulity amongst the botanists of Europe'. Indeed. Sir William Hooker of Kew – a man noted for his tolerance and tact – wrote to von Mueller 'in my life I think I never read such a series of trash and nonsense. There is a man who left this country with the character of a first rate naturalist, and of a very first rate natural history artist, and he goes to Australia and takes up the subject of botany, of which he is as ignorant as a goose.'

And the goose became a parrot.

(A brief afternote on that. HANZAB says that Swainson himself named the Superb Parrot – with a different, but invalid, name – in 1821, but without doubting the scholarship of that most excellent of publications, I don't easily see how he could have done. Help welcomed!) — **Ian Fraser** ianf@pcug.org.au



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COG welcomes the following new members:

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Con Boekel, Turner
Melissa Nickols, Woden
Bruce Williams, Wamboin
Sandy Sutherland, Yass
Leo Berzins, Queanbeyan

Next newsletter

March deadline

Wednesday 28 February 2007

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

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Gang-gang

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