

Gang-gang

February 2012

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

FEBRUARY MEETING

7:30pm Wednesday 08.02.12

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

The first speaker will be COG member and well known photography enthusiast **Margaret Leggoe** on "**The Nankeen Kestrel Story**", showing images from a breeding event at Callum Brae during 2011.

The main presentation will be by **Professor Richard Kingsford**, Director of the Australian Wetlands and Rivers Centre, University of NSW, entitled "**Floods, droughts and river regulation – a water-bird story**"

Australia's waterbirds are mostly nomadic, capitalising on highly variable aquatic resources in the arid interior (70% of the continent) for feeding and breeding. Water-

(Continued on page 2)

What to watch out for this month

Two thirds of the way through summer is an appropriate time to ask what sort of a season has it been and have the cooler and wetter conditions helped bush birds make a recovery? Based on my local patch of NW Chapman/Coolleman Ridge and the southern half of the Narrabundah Hill area, the answer is a resounding NO. In fact it appears that there are even fewer birds than the very wet last season, and for the second year in a row since the January 2003 bush fires it has not been worth doing regular surveys there as even the more common spring migrants such as the **Grey Fantail**, **Noisy Friarbird** and **Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike** are only occasionally observed. This contrasts with my impressions gained from postings on the chat line etc in other parts of the Canberra Nature Park where both the bird life and breeding activity seems to have been very high. However, my correspondence with several subscribers who share an interest in these aspects has confirmed that they too are of the view that the season has been very patchy, with many species previously present missing from their areas, and that recovery, at least for bush birds, in the two better seasons since the prolonged drought, still has a very long way to go.

The one migrant species in my area that is clearly the exception to this is the **Eastern/Pacific Koel**, which as for last season has stayed well into the New Year, in fact has been more prominent by its calling etc towards the end of January, with at least three individuals identified in Chapman/Rivett. Again this may contrast with the observations of other chat line subscribers (the exact status of this species is hard to gauge as observers justifiably tend to report exceptions rather than regular sightings). So the question of whether this species has increased in numbers compared with the very good last year, and whether it will stay as long, is still unanswered. No signs of breeding have as yet been reported, so please watch out for this which as noted in my last column has expanded rapidly from the first record in Ainslie only a couple of years ago, with the **Red Wattlebird** as the only identified local host (though the **Noisy Friarbird** and **Magpie-lark** are other possibilities).

(Continued on page 2)

Everyone welcome

(February speakers: Continued from page 1)

birds, unlike most aquatic organisms, can move between catchments, exploiting habitat wherever it occurs. In Australia, patterns of resource availability for waterbirds are mostly pulsed with peaks of productivity, coinciding with flooding and differing in time and space, affecting individuals, species and functional groups of waterbirds. Australian waterbirds are no different to waterbirds elsewhere as their behaviour reflects broad-scale resource availability. They respond to changing patterns of resource distribution with rapid movements at spatial and temporal scales commensurate with the dynamics of the resource.

The most serious conservation threat to waterbirds is a bottleneck in resource availability leading to population declines, increasingly forced by anthropogenic impacts. River regulation and other threats (e.g. draining) reduce wetland habitat availability and decrease the probability of viable resource patches. It is axiomatic that waterbirds need water and such population bottlenecks may occur when the availability of water across the continent is limited. The rehabilitation of regulated rivers with environmental flows and protection of naturally flowing rivers in the arid region is essential for long-term sustainability of Australia's waterbird populations.

This talk explores our current understanding of waterbird ecology and the effects of water resource development on rivers and wetlands. .

(What to watch out for: Continued from page 1)

The other species which has clearly had a very good spring/summer and breeding season in the ACT is the **Superb Parrot**, with well over a hundred birds including many begging juveniles having been recorded around the AIS, the Cook horse paddocks and Hawker Oval. In this time there has only been the single report south of the lake/river, of a male bird at Callum Brae. In former years both of the above species usually had left the ACT by mid-February, but in the past few they have stayed on much longer. So keep a close eye on proceedings in your local patch and make sure you record and report last sightings.

While summer is far from over, other species that have may have already departed include the **Horsfield's Bushlark** (there were several reports of this species following the first sighting in early December), **Brown Songlark** (also a few further sightings), **Rufous Songlark** and **White-winged Triller**. As noted previously the last two were present in surprising numbers this year, particularly the former, given the reasonable conditions inland, but the last reports of them were on 8 January and 24 December, respectively. Both species are much quieter and harder to identify post breeding and may have left early, and by the time this issue of Gang-gang reaches you in early February any records of these species will be very significant.



Rainbow Bee-eater
(*Merops ornatus*)

Photo by Geoffrey Dabb

Other species to look out for are the **Sacred Kingfisher**, **Rainbow Bee-eater** and the **Dollarbird**, most of which will have left by early March. In fact over the past few years the last-named has left well before then. However, after mid-January there were a number of reports of the **Dollarbird** moving into the suburbs, as they tend to do post-breeding, so continue to keep an eye and ear out for them, in particular the duller juveniles which tend to stay round a bit longer before the long journey north. The **Brush Cuckoo**, which seems to have been more common in the high country this season, will also be largely gone by the end of February, but some may pass through Canberra gardens on their way through. Again this species will be quiet and be very difficult to separate from the more likely **Fan-tailed Cuckoo**.

Another species to keep an eye out for over the next couple of months is the **White-throated Needletail**, for which there have al-

ready been a number of early reports. This species is most likely to be seen feeding very actively high in the air, sometimes in very large flocks on an approaching storm front, but may also be observed at ground level after the storm has passed, or even in clear skies unrelated to rain events. Watch for them scything through the air chasing insects, along with the rarer (for these parts) **Fork-tailed Swift**. It will be very interesting to see if they are more abundant this year after a series of poor years during the drought and also the last wetter season.

As noted above in contrast to my local experience breeding has been widely reported including **Crested Shrike-Tits**, **Long-billed Corellas**, **Brown Goshawk**, **Australian Hobbies**, both **Brown** and **Stubble Quail**, **Leaden Flycatchers**, some more **Grey Butcherbirds** feeding young and the **Australian Owlet-Nightjars** at Campbell Park. For me the highlight has been two instances of a **Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo** fledgling being fed by **Superb Fairy-Wrens**, and a further one by **Yellow-rumped Thornbills**, a surprise considering the general paucity of the bronze-cuckoos this season. Topping this was an immature **Brush Cuckoo** being fed by **Leaden Flycatchers** in Campbell Park. Please don't think that because summer is over so is the breeding season, continue to look out for signs as autumn has also been a time for significant breeding in Canberra over the past few years.

Waterbird breeding records include a **Black-fronted Dotterel** on a nest with three eggs in a crack in the bitumen car park, and **Spotless Crake** dependent young, in my earlier days considered the least common crake in Canberra, but observed much more frequently now. As we moved through December and into January waterbird sightings seemed to decrease, with further records of **Freckled Duck** and **Red-kneed Dotterels**, and an **Azure Kingfisher** regularly reported from Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, unusually for this area seeming to hang around. Also seen but only present briefly were 32 **Plumed Whistling Ducks** at Kelly's Swamp and up to 43 **Australian Shelduck** at Bungendore.

A surprise over summer in my local patch has been the high number of **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos**, with over 50 seen together while feeding on a variety of wattle pods, grass seeds or ripening fruit. Also the **Grey Butcherbird** has been calling consistently, other observers have also noted this species recent move into the suburbs, where it rarely was recorded years ago. This further illustrates that things are never static, but always changing, and that surprises pop up regularly. The next three months or so will be a time of significant change, with many species moving out of or through Canberra on their way north to escape the winter. As usual keep your eyes and ears open for what might move through your local area, and please record all significant observations (including when species are last seen), as well as any autumn breeding activity, and ensure these are reported for inclusion in the COG database.

— Jack Holland



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2012 tours

Mid May Gulf Country
Cairns, Georgetown, Karumba,
Gregory R, Cloncurry & Mt Isa

1 — 13 July Top End
Darwin, Kakadu NP, Kununurra

17 — 23 July
Alice Springs/MacDonnell
Ranges

6 — 25 September
Strzelecki Track, Outback

31 Oct — 7 Nov
New Caledonia

11— 19 November
SW Western Australia

Check our website
www.philipmaher.com

Field Trip Reports

10-11 December 2012 — Plains Wanderer Weekend

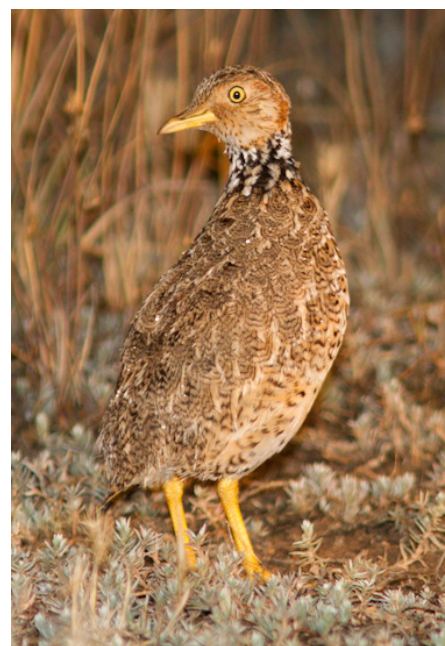
13 COG members travelled to Deniliquin for a (long) day and a half with Phil Maher and Robert Nevinson on 10-11 December. The weather, predicted to be miserable, was kind to us, and the birds were spectacular.

The weekend started with a 6.30am pickup on Saturday for a morning in the forests of Murray Valley National Park. The trip down to the forest yielded one of the great birds of the weekend, with excellent views of an adult **Spotted Harrier**. **Gilbert's Whistlers** were heard, but sighted only fleetingly, and it was interesting to see a **Rainbow Bee-eater** burrow in a flat, sandy area.

The afternoon at the Wanganella swamps gave us great views of **Little Grassbirds**, **Spotted** and **Baillon's Crakes**, and hundreds of **Black-tailed Native-hens**, as well as many of the expected waterbirds. Late on Saturday afternoon, two **Major Mitchell's Cockatoos** circled above the group for several minutes, giving everyone a chance to admire them, before we moved on to the Plainswanderer site. **Barn Owls** were plentiful along the road, and the evening yielded the sought-after **Plainswanderers** - both male and female birds were seen and admired at close range - as well as **Inland Dotterels** and **Banded Lapwings**. We finally got to bed at about 1am.

On Sunday morning we started out at 7.30am, and were treated to a male **Little Bittern** flying past the group in reedbeds close to the Deniliquin North Public School - Robert, who assisted Phil Maher by flushing the bird, reported a **Little Bittern** nest with three eggs in the reeds. On then to the rice fields, to search out an **Australasian Bittern**, which was also delivered - a bird leaping onto a bank between rice bays to give us excellent if brief views. For most on the trip this was a "lifer". The list was at 149 species when Robert spotted four **Ground Cuckoo-shrikes** on a roadside bank of bare earth to bring up the 150. These handsome birds very obligingly posed for numerous photographs, as did many of the species seen over the weekend.

As we headed back to town, the trip list rose to 151 species courtesy of a **Black-faced Woodswallow** and, as well as those mentioned above, included **Azure Kingfishers**, **Nankeen Night-herons**, two **Black Falcons**, **Red-kneed Dotterels**, **White-winged Fairy-wrens**, many dozens of **White-necked Herons** and **Great Egrets**, **Swamp Harrier**, five different **woodswallow** species, many **Superb Parrots**, **Cockatiels**, **Royal and Yellow-billed Spoonbills**, **Diamond Doves**, **Striped, Spiney-cheeked** and **Singing Honeyeaters** and **Glossy Ibis**. — Sandra Henderson



Plainswanderer
(*Pedionomus torquatus*)
Photo by Julian Robinson

(NOTE: The bird is facing away from the camera and looking over its shoulder)

14 December — Wednesday Morning Walk

14 members and guests visited the Kama Reserve, between William Hovell Drive and the Molonglo River. The weather was great: sunny and low 20s with no rain and a gentle breeze.

Overall we recorded 36 species with six of them breeding records.

The undoubted highlight was a dependent young **Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo** interacting with its parent **Superb Fairy-wren**. This should count as two breeding records since the cuckoo was DY (Dependent Young) while the fairy-wren was CF (Carrying Food). Other contenders for bird of the day were five **Varied Sitellas**,

at least four **Brown Treecreepers** (two being very young and noisy birds rated as as DY), three **Superb Parrots** which overflowed the Reserve heading to the far side of the Molonglo and a female **White-winged Triller**. An occupied **Red-browed Finch** nest was located and many **Tree Martins** and **Red-rumped Parrots** were seen inspecting hollows.

Despite the heavy blossom on many *Eucalyptus rossii* these trees did not seem to be attracting many birds or insects. **Honeyeaters** were scarce with only **White-plumed Honeyeaters** in numbers, together with a single **Noisy Friarbird** and a single **Red Wattlebird** when back at the cars.

It was disappointing to note the amount of St Johns Wort, Saffron thistle and other invasive weeds in the Reserve. It is to be hoped that Canberra Nature Park gets them under control as soon as possible. — **Martin Butterfield**

18 January—Wednesday Walk

17 members and guests had a most enjoyable, albeit un-cold, morning walk to Ian Anderson's property at Burra. Many thanks Ian for inviting us and guiding us around the property.

The visit started by everyone registering on the redesigned - and greatly improved (thank you Michael Robbins) - sign-up sheet. Once we started birding we did well, ending up writing down a good haul of 38 species on and around the property, including **Crested Pigeons** and **Galahs** seen on the approach road, but **NOT** including the **Helmeted Guinea-fowl** seen grazing on the verge.

The highlight was a **Yellow-faced Honeyeater** nest attached to a vine outside Ian's cottage. A quick peek showed two eggs in the nest, but as the bird was in the vicinity no further disruption was offered. A **Peregrine Falcon** nest was also seen but the chicks had fledged and left a few weeks ago.

A good crop of **Thornbills** was harvested with **Yellow-rumped**, **Buff-rumped** and **Yellow** seen before we moved from the parking area and **Striated** and **Brown** added later. A **Speckled Warbler** warbled convincingly and a **White-throated Gerygone** emitted the "tinkling fall of diamonds call" as well as a young bird (little white on the throat) presenting very good views close to the group. **Red Wattlebirds**, **Noisy Miners** and **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** were common in the trees and one **Noisy Friarbird** and one **Eastern Spinebill** added to the diversity of the area.

As it is still summer (indeed, some would say this is the first summery weather since November) we saw a couple of migrants in **Dollarbird** and **Dusky Woodswallow**.

A full list of species seen will be posted on the Trips page of the website in due course.

Details of the February outing will be advertised on the Chatline and the Trips page of the website (and hopefully in a *Gang-gang*) when arrangements have been made. — **Martin Butterfield**

22 January — COG OUTING

Due to recent rain, this outing was once again switched from the Brindabellas to venues around Uriarra. Starting at the Homestead Dam, we were welcomed by a flock of some 60 **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos** and then four **Yellow-tailed Blacks**. Features at the dam were **Hardheads** and **White-faced Herons** and a **Fan-tailed Cuckoo** calling in the nearby woodland.

With an overcast sky, things were quiet initially at Uriarra Crossing, but were enlivened by a soaring **Little Eagle** pair, a **Wedge-tailed Eagle** and flocks of **Little Ravens** and **Red-browed Finches**. Rhonda added some real interest on discovering three **Tawny Frogmouths** huddling on a branch, Lindsay added a **Sitella**, Sue a **Mistletoebird** and we then collectively added all five local species of **thornbill**.

Over to Uriarra East, where things were so interesting that no one wanted to break for lunch. A very unusual sight was a flock of 20 **Grey Fantails** calling and fluttering like butterflies as they hawked for tiny insects.

Lia spotted a juvenile **Horsefield's Bronze- Cuckoo** being fed by a tiny **Yellow-rumped Thornbill**, and we were all surprised to see a **Black-fronted Dotterel** pair on the tarred road. Peter and Duncan solved the puzzle, when they found a nest with three eggs in a 10cm wide crack in the bitumen car park. Things quietened again after lunch but we added **White-winged Triller**, **Olive-backed Oriole**, **Dusky Woodswallow** and **European Goldfinch**. Thanks to all those eagle eyed birders we recorded a total of 54 species

. — **Bruce Lindenmayer**

Private outing

On the morning of Saturday 17 December a small group of COGers, — Ian Anderson, Tony Willis, Dave Clark and Robin Eckermann — took a stroll through the lower SE slopes of Mt. Ainslie - compensating for an abbreviated visit to Campbell Park where much of the territory is still a "no go" zone. To their surprise and delight, they came across a pair of **Southern Boobooks** just a little down from the old quarry. Robin was able to record the sighting in the accompanying photograph.

Summary of COG's 2011 field trips

49 trips were listed on the COG website for 2011. Two pelagics were held over one weekend. 46 trips went ahead; of the three cancelled, one was because of appalling weather, one due to lack of participants, and one never got off the ground.

The 34 trips with complete lists and three with partial lists were attended by 242 participants of whom 153 were COG members, at least for part of 2011. Trips such as the BA campout and Lyrebird Survey at Tidbinbilla accounted for quite a few of 89 non-members who participated. Only six non-members participated in more than one trip. A total of 143 people participated in only one trip, and 31 in two trips. The most trips attended by one person was 22, with another person attending 17 trips. 63 people attended between three and 12 trips. — **Michael Robbins**

Photo by Robin Eckermann



Southern Boobook
(*Ninox novaeseelandiae*)

Future Field Trips

Before the start of each trip, each participant must sign a COG Field Trip Registration Form which acknowledges the participant's responsibilities. The form reads as follows:

I declare I am capable of undertaking this trip having: discussed with the Trip Leader any limitations I have (e.g. medications, physical), assessed the risks to myself and my property, and ensured I am adequately equipped.

I will follow the instructions of the Field Trip Leader, and advise them before moving away from the group.

Sunday 5 February – Jerrabomberra Wetlands – Morning

To celebrate World Wetlands Day, during this morning outing we will visit both Kelly's Swamp and the Sewerage Works. Depending on numbers, the group may be divided into two, so a volunteer to lead a possible second group would be appreciated. Bring hat, sunscreen, water and, if you have one, a telescope. Meet at 7.30 am in the carpark at the end of Dairy Road, Fyshwick.

No booking required. Sue Lashko (6251 4485)

Friday 10 to Sunday 12 February - Wee Jasper valley - Weekend

This will be a repeat of successful weekend visits to the Wee Jasper valley conducted by COG some years ago. We will stay in the somewhat rustic shearers' quarters of 'Wee Jasper' Station, a working sheep station. Details of the property are online at <http://www.weejasperstation.com.au/ShearersQuarters.html>. You will need to bring your own food, drinks and bedding.

Note: if you dislike mice this field trip may not be for you!

Registration is essential. Please contact the leader, David McDonald, at phone 6238 3706 or email [david\[at\]dnmcdonald.id.au](mailto:david[at]dnmcdonald.id.au) to register or for further information. Details, including the costs of the accommodation, will be available from David upon request.

Wednesday 15 February – Location TBA - Morning

Meeting place and other details of trip will be advised on COG Chat-line and to the COG Wednesday Walkers email list. No booking required. — **Martin Butterfield**

Sunday 19 February - East Basin/Molonglo Reach (Electric/powerd boat Cruise)

This will be the outing/cruise for 2011-2012 on the upper parts of Lake Burley Griffin (East Basin) and the adjacent Molonglo River Reach, where late summer or early autumn is the peak time for nesting, with three species of cormorant and darters known to breed there (reports early in the New Year indicate breeding is happening as in past years). 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 am and will cost \$20, payable in cash on boarding. We propose to travel in the MV “Darter” which can carry 16 people, and though it has a motor is very quiet at slow speeds. If numbers exceed this the electric boat the “E.L. Cygnet”, which takes a maximum of 10 passengers, may also be used. 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 Landmark Apartments. This car park may be accessed off Bowen Drive (going either way).

Registration for this field trip is essential. Please book your place on the boat with Jack Holland (on 6288 7840 AH or by email on jack.holland@environment.gov.au). As of 25 January there were still plenty of places available.

Thursday 1 March – Location TBA – Morning

This is the second of three trial Thursday walks which will be led by Michael Robbins and/or Jenny Bounds.

Venue and meeting time will be advised via the Chatline.

No booking required. — **Michael Robbins** ([mrobbins\[at\]home.netspeed.com.au](mailto:mrobbins[at]home.netspeed.com.au))

Saturday 10 to Monday 12 March – Ben Boyd NP - Weekend

This trip focuses on birdwatching in the southern end of Ben Boyd National Park. We will camp at the Bittangabee camp ground (fees apply). Be aware that the road to Bittangabee is gravel and can be a bit rough.

We hope to find a variety of birds in various habitats including the heathland and coastal areas. Possible highlights include **Southern Emu-wrens**, **Tawny-crowned Honeyeater** and a chance of **Striated Fieldwren**. We will also spend some time trying for **Ground Parrot** and studying the sea birds off Green Cape. At night we will spotlight for mammals and owls with a chance of Wombat and Long-nosed Bandicoot.

Registration is essential. The trip will be restricted to 20 participants and filled on a first reply basis. Please contact Kathy Walter or John Goldie on 6241 7639 or email [Walter.goldie\[at\]optusnet.com.au](mailto:Walter.goldie[at]optusnet.com.au) to book. More detailed information will be provided closer to the day.

Wednesday 21 March – Location TBA - Morning

Meeting place and other details of trip will be advised on COG Chat-line and to the COG Wednesday Walkers email list. No booking required. — **Martin Butterfield**

Saturday 24 March – Tharwa Sandwash - Morning



Photo by Stuart Harris

Black-fronted Dotterel
(*Elseya melanops*)

Tharwa Sandwash has bush birds, **Brown Goshawk**, **Black-fronted Dotterel**, occasionally a **White-bellied Sea-eagle**, and is a good spot for **robins** in winter. This is a flat walk, although side tracks overlooking the Murrumbidgee River are very weedy and one needs to avoid numerous wombat holes. The walk should take about two hours. Those interested may then wish to drive the short distance to Namadgi Visitors Centre and stroll around the woodland there.

Meet at 8.30 am at the Sandwash carpark. To get to Tharwa Sandwash, take the Naas Road south out of Tharwa (the one leading to Namadgi Visitors Centre NOT to Tidbinbilla). A little past the small one-lane bridge take the road to the left (Smith's Road, but not signposted at time of writing). Drive past the shearers' quarters and over the temporary bridge on the Gudgenby River. Take the gravel road off to the left (should be able to see Tharwa Sandwash sign) and follow along to carpark.

Carpooling at 7.45 am at Kambah Village Shops (corner of Drakeford Drive and Marconi Crescent), especially for those from north of Tuggerangong or those unsure of how to get to Sandwash.

No booking required. If you have any questions please contact Sandra Henderson [shirmax2931\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:shirmax2931[at]gmail.com).

Sunday 1 April – Callum Brae - Morning

This is not an April Fool's joke. However, you will need to remember that Daylight Saving time ends at 3 am, and not arrive early.

Callum Brae is usually good for small bush birds, **rosellas** and other parrots, and has resident **goshawks** and **kestrels**, and is one of the locations for COG's regular woodland surveys. Callum Brae is a large-ish reserve, with several dams and gullies. Most of the walking will be on management tracks which are mown quite frequently, but we will venture into the grass in parts – the thistles aren't as bad as last year but gaiters would help keep irritating grass seeds out of socks.

Meet at 8.30 am Eastern Standard Time at the Narrabundah Lane entrance to Callum Brae. The walk will take about three hours. There is limited parking right at the gate, but a large number of cars can park across the road from the entrance.

No booking required. If anyone would like a Callum Brae bird list or has questions please contact Sandra Henderson [shirmax2931\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:shirmax2931[at]gmail.com).

Thursday 5 April – Location TBA – Morning

This is the third of three trial Thursday walks which will be led by Michael Robbins and/or Jenny Bounds.

No booking required. Michael Robbins ([mrobbins\[at\]home.netspeed.com.au](mailto:mrobbins[at]home.netspeed.com.au)).

Friday 6 to Monday 9 April – Cocoparra NP – Easter Weekend

The advertised venue of Yathong is not available for Easter. It has been decided to move the campout to Cocoparra National Park. The park is about 350 kms west of Canberra. Facilities consist of dry toilets and gas barbecues. Open fires are not permitted, so warm clothes are required.

Registration is essential. Contact Noel Luff on 6288 3291 or (preferably) by email [noelluff\[at\]homemail.com](mailto:noelluff[at]homemail.com).

Sunday 15 April – National Arboretum - Morning

This walk will look at how local birds have taken to the habitat provided by the National Arboretum. We will visit the Cork Oak Plantation and the Himalayan Cedar Forest before moving on to look at the Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park (STEP) block and other areas of unique plantings. Hopefully the **White-fronted Chats** will still be present.

Bring hat, sunscreen, water and binoculars. Members of the Friends of the Arboretum are also welcome to attend.

Meet at 7.30 am at the front gates. We will need to park near the front gates as vehicle entry is not possible.

No booking required. — **Chris Davey**

Layout Editor Required

COG invites expressions of interest from members who might be willing and able to take over as layout editor for *Gang-gang*.

After five years, Greg Ramsay thinks it is time for some new blood with fresh ideas to take over. He will be available to assist with training and backup from time to time as required.

Anyone with desk-top publishing experience – or with good word processing skills – would be capable of doing the job.

If you are interested, please contact Greg on 6286 1564 or gramsay@grapevine.com.au to discuss.

Rare Blackbird

This leucistic Blackbird has been living in the woodland of Rufford Abbey Country Park, Nottinghamshire, for the last four years. Leucism is a genetic mutation that prevents pigments from being deposited normally in its feathers and is not the same as albinism..

Over the last four years the bird has steadily shed its black feathers for white feathers and is now completely white with no visible pigmented feathers.



Have you seen this bird?



This unusual **Superb Parrot** was seen near Hawker College on 18 January.

Any further records of it could be useful evidence of the movement of **Superb Parrots** in the district.

If you see this bird please notify Chris Davey
chris_davey@aapt.net.au giving date, place and numbers of any other **Superb Parrots** with it

ANU Bird Survey Program-2012

The Australian National University is preparing for its seasonal 5-year cyclic bird surveys, and it is hoped that COG members can provide the expertise required.

Four seasonal surveys will be carried out during 2012–13 (January, April, July, October). This data will build on the Lower Sullivans Creek Catchment Ecological Survey and Life in the Suburbs project. Our proposed survey area will include sites in the ANU, ANBG, CSIRO, Black Mountain Peninsula, Civic West and parts of Turner. There are a total of 31 UMUs across the study area, with 3 sites in each of them.

As with past surveys, we will focus on community learning. Most of the volunteers will be students with little experience in bird monitoring, so we will be pairing up COG experienced birdwatchers with students, to ensure a good learning process and quality data.

Surveys will be run from 8:00-11am. We will be using the 2-hectare, 20-min search method and datasheets from COG. We will require at least 16 COG members, who will monitor 1-2 students. Each team will complete 2 UMUs, with the whole process taking approximately 2.5-3 hours.

In return for COG's efforts, we shall provide a thank you brunch to all volunteers.

Please contact the Biodiversity Officer Tim (tim.yiu@anu.edu.au) for registration and further details.



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New Zealand South Island Wildlife & Wilderness <i>15 Day Accommodated Tour - Departs 4th February 2012</i> See three national parks, the Catlins, the Otago Peninsula & Stewart Island.	Flinders Range & Lake Eyre Basin Expedition <i>15 Day Camping Tour - Departs 22nd May 2012</i> Visit some of Australia's most spectacular outback locations.
Sri Lanka Wildlife, History & Culture <i>16 Day Accommodated Tour - Departs 11th March 2012</i> See the exotic flora & fauna of this enchanting island.	Kimberley Discovery <i>16 Day Camping Tour - Departs 2nd June 2012 & 26th June 2012</i> Explore the wildlife & gorges of this unspoiled wilderness area.
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Woodlands Survey Report

Mulligans Flat NR

Jenny Bounds and the team did the survey on Sunday 27 November, in cool and windy conditions, post the low pressure rain system which dumped several inches over Canberra in the days prior. The usual migrant species were around, both **Gerygones**, **Sacred Kingfisher**, **Olive-backed Oriole**, **Noisy Friarbird** and **Leaden Flycatcher**. **Tree Martins** were at one site near the large dam, as well as a **Brown Falcon**, a **Common Myna** and 50+ **Common Starlings**. Several **White-necked Herons** were reported around dams and water filled drainage lines. Seven **Superb Parrots** were seen near the main car park/western ridge and another bird north of the large dam. A pair of **Speckled Warblers** were in a mixed feeding flock near the Woolshed. **Grebes**, with two young, at the first small dam and an **Australian Spotted Crake** (first survey record for the reserve) at the large dam were the other highlights of 51 species. No **robins** were reported on this survey. Interestingly, a flock of around 20 **Magpies** was recorded just north of the Woolshed.

Gooroo NR South

Steve Holliday and Prue Buckley reported a pleasant morning for the last woodland survey of the year on Saturday 10 December. The reserve was looking very green, the dams were full, and birds were plentiful with 56 species recorded. A party of three **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos** was probably the most unusual sighting for here. Raptors included

Nankeen Kestrel, **Black-shouldered Kite**, **Wedge-tailed Eagle**, and **Brown Falcon**. Amongst other sightings were **Common Bronzewing**, **Superb Parrot**, **Little Corella**, **Dollarbird**, **Speckled Warbler**, at two sites, **Western Gerygone**, **Brown-headed Honeyeater**, **Varied Sittella**, **White-winged Triller**, **Dusky Woodswallow**, **Leaden Flycatcher**, and **Rufous Songlark** at two sites. **Mistletoebirds** were recorded at six of our nine sites. A **Red-browed Finch** with a piece of grass was either nest-building or preparing to display, while **Grey Fantails** were nesting at one site. Lots of nice plants (and weeds!) in flower including Blue Devil and Native Mint. The non-avian highlight was finding two colonies of Stencilled Hairstreak (*Jalmenus iclinus*) butterflies on *Acacia parramattensis* plants.

Majura Field Firing Range

Paul Fennell and Barbara Allan in company with the Defence environmental officer surveyed the Majura Firing Range sites on a sunny, still, bright and cheerful Tuesday morning, 7 December. Most eucalypt species were flowering profusely, although most flowers appeared to be a little bit past their best. Not many **honey-eaters** apart from the usual suspects of **Red Wattlebirds**, **Noisy Friarbirds** and **Noisy Miners**, except of course for the two **Lewin's Honeyeaters** Barbara spotted at Site 3 and the **Yellow-faced** heard at Site 8.

Site 8, which is often very quiet, provided a number of interesting observations including **Grey Currawong**, **Scarlet Robin**, **Shining-bronze Cuckoo**, **Leaden Flycatcher** and **Varied Sittella**. **White-throated Gerygone**, **Rufous Whistlers** and **Olive-backed Orioles** were fairly prevalent, as well as **Buff-rumped Thornbills**. There weren't too many interesting birds away from the sites, apart from the usual sightings of **White-winged Choughs**, and the sighting of a **Wedge-tailed Eagle** soaring over the main firing range, one of a local pair of wedgies

Newline

Sue Lashko reported from her survey on Saturday 3 December, a perfect morning with birds, bees and butterflies attracted to the extensive flowering throughout the Newline sites. Breeding was recorded from **Striated Pardalote**, **Australian Wood Duck**, **Dusky Woodswallow**, **Galah**, **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike**, **Common Starling** and **Common Myna**. Highlights included **Dollarbirds** at three sites and **Sacred Kingfishers** at two, and large numbers of **Weebills** and **Striated Pardalotes** throughout. Only one **Brown Treecreeper** was seen, but hopefully the other was in a hollow. There was a good variety of small woodland birds, including **Jacky Winter**, **Double-barred Finch**, **Diamond Firetail**, **Speckled Warbler**, **Yellow-rumped Thornbill** and **White-browed Scrubwren**, as well as **Superb Fairy-wrens** in almost every dense shrub. Raptors included a **Nankeen Kestrel** and a pair of **Black-shouldered Kites**. A total of 43 species was recorded.

Symonston (Callum Brae sites)

Sandra Henderson also did the survey on Saturday 3 December in beautiful weather. Highlights were three **White-winged Trillers**, four **Black-shouldered Kites** (two immatures and two adults, the former causing great consternation among the **Corellas** and **Cockatoos**), a group of seven **Rainbow Lorikeets**, a couple of **Leaden Flycatchers**, the **Little/Long-billed Corella** pair sitting quietly in one of the survey sites, **Gang-gangs** calling, and no sign of the **Brown Goshawks**. 46 species in total, 36 of them in survey sites.

Jerrabomberra NR (woodland patch)

Jenny Bounds, with Alison Russell-French, did the survey on 7 December after a couple of postponements due to unsuitable weather. 41 species were recorded. Eucalypt re-generation, especially **Blakelys Red Gum**, has been massive at this location in the last 18 months; there was some flowering of **Red Gum** and **Yellow Box**. Weeds (**St John's Wort** and **thistle**) remain a problem there. Highlights were four male **White-winged Trillers** doing display flights in and around Sites 1 and 2 which are located on the edge of the woodland and grasslands. At Site 1, 19 species were recorded including the **Trillers**, **Dusky Woodswallow**, **Diamond Firetail**, **Speckled Warbler**, **White Plumed Honeyeater** (declining in recent years), **Rufous Songlark** and **Brown-headed Honeyeater**. **Trillers** and three **Diamond Firetails** were around Site 2. **Superb-fairy wrens** seem to have increased and were recorded at five of the seven sites, with another **Speckled Warbler** at site 5 where there are good bursaria patches. A **Collared Sparrowhawk** called persistently early in the morning, two **Wedge-tailed Eagles** soared overhead, and there were plenty of **Grey Fantails** and **Rufous Whistlers** about. Only one **Dollarbird** was recorded; usually there are two or three sites where they nest. Also absent **Sacred Kingfisher** (usually at site 2), and no **Buff-rumped Thornbills** which is unusual. Overall numbers of **Noisy Miners** appeared to be down on previous surveys - is this because of the significant re-growth?

Private leasehold property near Tharwa

David McDonald reported on the survey on 27 November in poor conditions: overcast with moderate to strong winds. The area was in fine condition, covered in beautiful native grasses, and free of stock then. **Rufous Songlarks** filled the site with their advertising calls, a sure sign that Summer had arrived. Two species of special conservation significance were observed, the **Brown Treecreeper** and **Diamond Firetail**. No sign of **Speckled Warblers**. Other expected migrants were present, including **White-winged Trillers** and **Noisy Friarbirds**, and two species of **cuckoo**. At one point David disturbed a **Southern Boobook** apparently asleep on a branch at about eye height. It flew grumpily to a higher branch and glared down until he left!

Avian Whimsy # 92: Gregory Mathews, a man of many names

Gregory Mathews is a towering but somewhat insubstantial figure of early 20th century Australian ornithology. My reading of him is that despite near-legendary outputs of work, his legacy is more in his endowment to Australia of his vast collections of others' work, and in forcing his contemporaries to think about how to respond to his flood-tide of new taxonomy.

Gregory Macalister Mathews was born in 1876 in Merrygoen, NSW (south of Coonabarabran). His father's surveying business was clearly doing well, as he attended The King's School Parramatta where he collected birds' eggs (then a perfectly respectable pursuit – indeed 'ornithology' often had 'and oology' appended). He then worked for six years on a cattle station near Charters Towers in which his father had purchased 'an interest' on his behalf. Here he watched birds while droving, while dabbling successfully in mining shares. Back in NSW as an orchardist, he married the older wealthy widow Marion Wynne in 1902, and sailed with her for England, believing that his destiny lay there. For a while he lived in the hunting and horsey set, then one day visited the British Museum, where he apparently had a road to Damascus moment and was inspired to produce an exhaustive work on Australian birds – surely one of the oddest moments in Australian science.

He miraculously transformed from dissolution to fanatical adherence to study, working 16 hour days, researching, writing and collecting books and skins – in time he obtained 30-40,000 skins (depending on your source) and 5,000 books, including the treasures of earliest colonial ornithology. He himself however professed that his interest was no longer particularly in living birds, but in classifying them. Until he amassed his own collection, his hours were divided between the two great British collections of Australian birds, the British Natural History Museum, and the Tring Museum of Lord Walter Rothschild. All his work on Australian bird taxonomy was conducted from the other side of the world. Volume 1 of *The Birds of Australia* was published in 1910; the last, volume 12, in 1927.



Rufous Songlark
(*Cincloramphus mathewsi*)

Photo by Geoffrey Dabb

This was a time when the Australian birding community was seeking to assert its place in the world by producing a definitive list of Australian birds, a long-drawn out and politically delicate process involving strong characters and inherited inter-colonial rivalries. Mathews' work necessitated his membership of the checklist Committee, but his distance from his colleagues and the communications of the time certainly didn't expedite the already fraught process. One important aspect that he did bring however was his recognition of sub-species (basically a geographical race deemed sufficiently distinct from other races to warrant its own name – e.g. the **Brown Treecreeper** is *Climacteris picumnus*, while 'our' eastern sub-species is *C. picumnus victoricae*). We now see these taxa as 'species in process', but at the time Australians tended to ignore them. He also, quite properly from our perspective, insisted on strict application of the priority rule, whereby the first published name has to be the one used – there was something of a tendency to take the convenient option among some ornithologists. In the event the committee agreed on a compromise position whereby they agreed to accept name priority, if he agreed to retreat from the worst excesses of his compulsive splitting and re-splitting of genera and species.

This was undoubtedly a major flaw in his work – e.g. he divided the six **Australian woodswallows** into five genera and the **fairy-wrens** into six (we recognise only one of each) and he likewise put each **grasswren** that he knew of into a separate genus. Worse, there is a strong suspicion that much of it was in order to create opportunities to honour friends, relatives and suppliers. He constantly revised his published taxonomy, to general frustration, and there is now some evidence that quite a bit of what was published

under his name was written by his amanuensis, Tom Iredale (see Whimsy 42, June 2006). To facilitate all this he founded what was effectively his own journal, *The Austral Avian Record*.

In 1911, Iredale suddenly recognised a Western Australia sub-species of **Rufous**

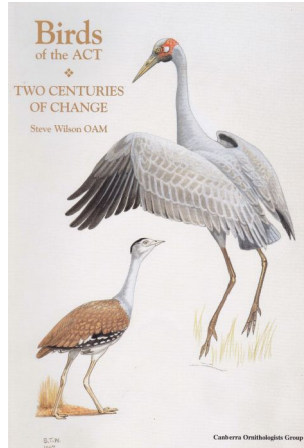
Songlark, which he called *mathewsi* – Iredale was generally very careful, but no-one now agrees with him. However just a few months later Mathews fortuitously discovered that the original naming of the species had been (via a very convoluted line of reasoning) invalid and lo and behold, the next available species name was... *mathewsi*! A surprising couple of coincidences, one might think.

In need of money, and with the Australian government unable or unwilling to find the money, he sold his huge skin and egg collections to Rothschild – this was regarded as bad enough in Australia, but worse, soon afterward Rothschild himself was in dire financial straits and sold his entire holdings to the Natural History Museum in New York. (There is general agreement that Rothschild was in some sort of thrall to a young woman with whom he had previously dallied – he never married – and who had his daughter. His niece Miriam muttered darkly of “blackmail” and Libby Robbins in *Flight of the Emu* referred mysteriously to an “indiscreet ex-mistress”, but one might equally reasonably think of maintenance payments, in concert with his extravagant spending on the museum.)

In 1939 Mathews donated his library to Australia, coming back to supervise its housing in the National Library. He died in 1949 and is buried in England, where he was honoured but had little scientific impact; here it was rather the other way around. Funny thing, ornithology; a little like life really. — **Ian Fraser**
calochilus51@internode.on.net

COG SALES

Birds of the ACT: Two Centuries of Change, *Steve Wilson OAM, Canberra Ornithologists Group*

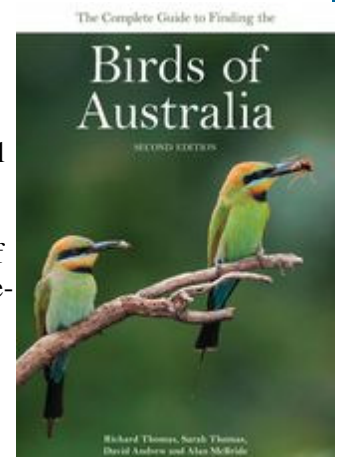


Published by COG in 1999, a number of this historic book were found in COG's dusty archives recently. The book provides a 'history of recorded birds' of the ACT for two centuries. It drew on knowledge of birds by local indigenous groups, early settlers, scientific publications, records of pre-COG bird-watchers and then on the garden survey. It contains a Margaret Preston woodcut and illustrations by Robin Brown. Many of the people who contributed to the book are still active members today.

A beautiful book for only \$10.

The Complete Guide to Finding the Birds of Australia **2nd Ed, Richard Thomas, Sarah Thomas, David Andrew ,** *Alan McBride*

First published in 1994, this was the first ever book of its type in Australia – a complete guide to locating every resident bird species. This fully revised second edition describes the best-known sites for all of Australia's endemic birds, plus regular migrants such as seabirds and shorebirds. It covers all states and territories, and is the first guide to include all of Australia's island and external territories. A comprehensive Bird Finder Guide details site information on all Australian bird species, and the authors provide valuable travel advice. Member's price \$32 – expected for the April meeting.



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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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