



Gang-gang

June 2004

News letter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

JUNE MEETING

Wednesday 9 June

Details pg 3

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Eastern Yellow Robin
(*Eopsaltria australis*)

Photo courtesy **Lindsay Hansch**

Field Trip Reports

Oakey Hill to Mt Taylor Walk 4 April 2004

Under cloudy and chilly skies a small group of members gathered near the ACTEW substation in Lyons to walk around Oakey Hill under Alistair Bestow's guidance. They would then move across to Mt Taylor with me showing the way. The main objective was to observe the birds in the context of the bushfire destruction the previous January and the regeneration that has occurred since then.

If nothing else, weeds have been spectacular regenerators, and the group walked amongst them, sometimes at knee height over most of Oakey Hill, where the birds were thin on the ground, despite the unusual sight of a pair of **Red-rumped parrots** as we set off along the ridge. As odd thornbills and pardalotes flitted past us on the way up the hill we heard the cry of **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos** in the distance. With time against us we drove across to Mt Taylor where I presented a sketchy picture of what had happened on 18 January 2003 and how the violence of the winds had created an eccentric and uneven burn. This, in turn, had created patches that were

still to show much sign of regeneration alongside those where weeds had triumphed and others that were carpeted with regenerating native shrubs and eucalypt seedlings, particularly wattles, and increasingly wild cherry (*Exocarpos cupressiformis*). We walked slowly through the woodland on the lower slope of the hill but the birds were very shy and low in numbers. Several common species were missing including Superb Fairy-wrens, Laughing Kookaburras, Double-barred Finches, both species of pardalote and even Noisy miners, which have conspicuously moved on to the lower reaches of the hill since the fires and opening out of the understorey. The large number of Dusky Woodswallows that had been present up to the previous week had obviously gone travelling. In the end the group came across a mixed flock, which is more common as the weather cools, consisting of a very patiently perching **Speckled Warbler**, a **Scarlet Robin**, **Red Wattlebirds**, **Yellow-rumped, Striated and Buff-rumped Thornbills**, a **Common Bronzewing**, a party of **White-winged Choughs**, an **Australian Raven** with very obvious hackles and a couple of **Gang-gang Cockatoos**. Rosellas, **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos**, various pied species, the

Letters to the editor

Please send letters, snippets etcetera intended for this column to the editor. Contact details are on page 12 of this *Gang-gang*. As with all sections of the *Gang-gang*, space allocated to this section each month will be limited. Therefore entries are more likely to be published if they are kept to a minimum length.

usual ferals (Starlings and one or two Indian Mynas) and an invisible but very vocal **Grey Currawong** brought the final total up to 22 species.

Despite our tracking efforts, not one migrating honeyeater was seen, though my wanderings over the same patch the following weekend was interrupted by wave after wave of them, probably six to eight hundred, mainly Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, in the course of about 40 minutes.

Doug Laing

East Basin/Molonglo Reach; Sunday 9 May 2004

Fourteen members/guests joined me on this relatively warm late autumn morning outing sailing up the Molonglo River on the all electric boat, the "E.L. Cygnet", to look at

late nesting darters and cormorants. I led the early shift, while Anthony Overs helped guide the second boat.

And we weren't to be disappointed, with **Darters** surprisingly still at most stages of nesting. Four female birds were still sitting very tightly, another nest had two still very downy chicks on it, while there were several nests with well developed non-downy young either still on them or within a metre or two. However, the undoubted highlight was one nest where two very small young could be seen continually snaking and spiralling their necks up past their mother's breast towards her bill. This nest had the male brooding when the second group went past both on the way up and on the way back. All in all over 35 **Darters** were seen, again spaced over the length of the Reach. In contrast to last

August's trip most were either in female or immature plumage, and less than one third were adult males. Despite the nesting activity the latter were generally not in full breeding plumage, with limited red-brown colouring on their necks.

Great, Little Black and Little Pied Cormorants were also seen, but only two of these species were still nesting, both at a very advanced stage. In one spot fairly close together there were at least 6 nests of the **Little Black Cormorant**, with up to 15 advanced young either still sitting on the nest or nearby. Amongst this group was one **Great Cormorant** nest with a fresh green twig, but containing 3 advanced young, one of which was seen being fed. This is the first record of this species nesting here in the two years that Jim the skipper has been taking his boat up the Reach, and completes the recorded nesting of all 4 species in this period.

Of the rarer ducks one female **Hardhead** was seen by the first group, and there were several **Pink-eared Duck** on the eastern shore of East Basin, close to where the Reach flows into it. Several **Australasian Grebe** were also seen, but again no confirmed Hoary-headed Grebe, surprisingly considering the relatively deep water, though each bird needed to be examined closely given the identification difficulties that their non-breeding plumages present. Also on the eastern shores of East Basin two **Black-fronted Dotterel**, which alerted us to their presence by their "dinking" call.

Round thirty five species were seen for the morning, again testament to the richness of this area. These included a number of land birds, the highlight of which was an accipiter species that allowed us very good views while perched on a tree on the bank. As usual this posed some identification difficulties, and consensus was not reached as to



Darters on Aspen Is. (*Anhinga melanogaster*) Martin Butterfield

whether it was an immature male **Brown Goshawk** or female **Collared Sparrowhawk**, though I favoured the former based on the fairly short, solid and well feathered legs and largish head with a hint of a brow rather than a stare. This was confirmed as a first year male Brown Goshawk, by the second group, which also got a good look at it.

The second group had a **Whistling Kite** soaring around for most of the two hours they were out. Early on, it was chased by a female **Nankeen Kestrel**, and at one stage it was eating something from its feet while on the wing. On return it tried three times to catch one or two juvenile moorhens on the eastern shore of the basin. This was very close to the boat, and participants had great views.

Finally, 4 late migrating **Dusky Woodswallows**, in a tree on the eastern shores of East Basin, were seen by the first group. By contrast two **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos** were flying over the lake from Bowen Park on the second group's return, both fitting farewells to a very enjoyable morning.

This is the fourth trip COG has had of this kind within a year, but it continues to be popular and rewarding. For those who missed out, there will be further opportunities next breeding season.

In fact a further trip was arranged at short notice on Saturday 15 May when some 38 **Darters** were seen, including good numbers of juveniles and immatures. Two females were still on nests; there were at least three nests with still-downy young, one lot was being fed as we passed (the same group as reported on above, but much grown, according to Jim the skipper); and three just fledged had been still nest-bound last week - hopelessly clumsy still. One overbalanced and fell in as the group watched, but came up safely. Another great trip, in watery sunshine, but with a wintry nip in the air. A few surprises -

Dusky Woodswallows were still around; a perched **Brown Falcon**; and the **Whistling Kite** put in another appearance.

Jack Holland

16 May 2004 - Boorowa Trip

Twelve COG members met at 7 am in Boorowa to join Anthony Overs for the Swift Parrot survey. Some had stayed overnight and had had some success in locating **Swift Parrots** on Saturday, so we were hopeful of doing the same. The day turned out to be a typically glorious autumn day with just a little wind at times. First of all we reduced the number of cars from 6 to 4, then set out for 'Spring Forest' property where we saw **Striped** and **Black-chinned Honeyeaters**, the latter being a first for some of our party. Other interesting birds that we don't see in Canberra included **White-browed Babblers** and a **Pied Butcherbird**. We tried very hard to find a **Mistletoebird** for Sylvia but she has still heard them but not seen them!

We drove on to Cowra to see if the trees outside the Japanese Gardens were flowering. The blossom was very sparse and as a result we didn't find our target species. On the way however we were treated to good views of three **Black Kites**. Next stop was Koorawatha Nature Reserve. Here we saw three **Turquoise Parrots**. They sat for ages, despite the wind, and everyone had a very good look at them. We walked further along the valley and saw several species of honeyeater including **Brown-headed, Yellow-tufted, Yellow-faced, White-naped, White-plumed** and **Fuscous**.

After a relaxing lunch in Koorawatha (I have it on good authority that they make a mean Egg and Bacon Roll and Steak and Salad Roll at the café there!), we went on to a property named '**Ksharthra**'. A flock of about 50 **Noisy Friarbirds** were feeding in

June Meeting

8 pm

Wednesday

9 June

*Canberra Girls Grammar School
cnr Gawler Cres and Melbourne
Ave, Deakin*

Our **short talk** for the evening will be on the Garden Bird Survey 2004-05 by our very own GBS coordinator, **Martin Butterfield**.

Continuing the 'counting birds' theme, the **main talk** will be given by COG member **Nick Nicholls** of CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems. Nick will address the perennially debatable topic of 'Methods of Surveying Birds'.

Don't miss it. It's sure to be an enjoyable and thought-

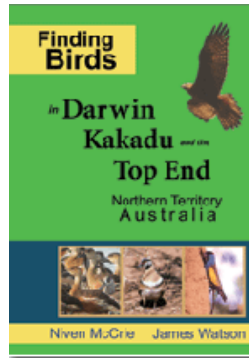
the flowering Ironbarks and Anthony told us that they would stay there until the food ran out, which could be for some time. It's interesting that they are able to stay so close to the ACT but not in it! Other interesting species for the trip were **Little Lorikeets, Diamond Firetail, Southern Whiteface, Speckled Warbler, Dusky Woodswallow** and **Brown Treecreepers**. Although we didn't see **Swift Parrots**, we did see 58 species and we thoroughly enjoyed the day. Thanks to Anthony, Jack and others for sharing your knowledge with us.

Lia Battison

COG SALES

- **Finding Birds in Darwin, Kakadu and Top End** by Niven McCrie and James Watson. \$24.00.
- **The Birds of Prey of Australia Field Guide** by Stephen Debus, \$12.50 (Special Price)
- **Messant Calenders 2004**, "Birds of Australia" and/or "Australian Wildflowers", \$8.00.
- **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 - \$9.00
- **Birds of Queensland's Wet Tropics and Great Barrier Reef** by Lloyd Nielsen - \$25.00
- **Guide to the Bird Habitats of NSW (ACT)** NSW Atlassers -\$27.00
- **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
- **Field Guide to the Birds of Australia** by Pizzey and Knight -\$35.00
- COG Birds of Canberra Gardens - \$25.00
- COG Atlas - \$12.00
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- 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.



Nursery Swamp – Sunday 23 May 2004

On Sunday 23 May a group of us walked in to Nursery Swamp. For many of us this was the first time we'd seen the place after the big fires. The area was 'well burnt', but the regrowth was profuse. Those of us looking at the ground noticed *Indigofera*, silver wattles, native bluebells and a dozen other small plants growing well. The creek, we were told by those who were familiar with the place pre-fire, has changed from having a rocky bottom to being filled with sand washed down from the hill tops. The eucalypt canopy was almost totally gone, but the epicormic growth on the trunks and lower branches was thick and lush, and well used by the thornbills and scrubwrens. **Fan-tailed Cuckoos** (which remained unseen) and **Grey Shrike-thrush** provided a fine accompaniment on our way up to the saddle. The swamp itself was mostly very quiet in bird-life, though a fine avian performance was provided for us as we left – **Scarlet Robins**, **Flame Robins**, and **Golden Whistlers**, and our lunchspot by the fen had a visit from a **Restless Flycatcher**. There was a noticeable absence of **Spotted Quail-thrush**, but not surprising given the lack of cover, and although we didn't see any lyrebirds, we did see fresh scratchings. Most of the 'fair-weather' birds were also absent, having sought greener pastures. We were delighted by several sightings of male **Superb Fairy-wrens** still sporting their brilliant blue.

A great day was had by all (including myself who managed to sprain an ankle). It was particularly great to see the fire recovery process in action. A big thank you to David McDonald for running the trip.

Nicki Munro

Report of April COG Meeting

The short talk was presented by members of the University of Canberra software development team, USEE Software. They have set up the COG Observation Information System (COGOIS), which will enable online recording of observations and the retrieval of observation information by species or area. Feasibility testing will be carried out over the next two months, with volunteers entering observations and retrieving information. This is not designed to replace the paper system of recording observations, but it is hoped that it will encourage more members to submit records.

The main speaker was Adrian Manning with a presentation entitled 'A multi-scale study of the Superb Parrot: implications for landscape-scale ecological restoration.' He focussed his PhD studies on the South-west slopes of NSW, where the Superb Parrot lives in scattered open woodland of Yellow Box and Blakely's Red Gum, mostly on privately-owned agricultural land. His research indicated that the main threats to the parrots are:

- The clearing of hollow-bearing trees
- The clearing and modification of feeding grounds
- Poor regeneration
- Illegal trapping of the birds for aviculture

- Road kills especially as the parrots feed on spilt grain and wild grass seeds on roadsides, and have a low trajectory at take-off
- Competition for nest hollows from feral bees and starlings.

At the macroscale, Adrian found that Superb Parrots are plentiful on the SW slopes during the breeding season before moving to north/central NSW for the winter, and that there is also a population in the River Red Gums along the Murray and Murrumbidgee Rivers. He noted significant inter-seasonal changes related to the abundance of plant productivity and drought.

His mesoscale study involved 81 sites, each measuring 15 km by 18 km, on the SW slopes. 65.4% of sites had Superb Parrots present, with 1493 individuals recorded. He found that the birds were using the whole landscape but had no strong relationship with watercourses.

Adrian's studies at the microscale included observations of flying, feeding on the ground and in trees, and the number of trees, shrubs, logs and rocks in the landscape. He found



Dollarbird (*Eurystomus orientalis*)

Photo courtesy **Lindsay Hansch**

that most activity occurred before 9am, and he made the unexpected discovery that no observed birds were feeding on the ground or in shrubs. Of the nest trees, just over half were Blakely's Red Gum, 27% were dead trees and 10% were Yellow Box. He recorded a 56% return rate to nest trees.

With many of the scattered paddock trees towards the end of their lifespan, Adrian stressed the need to

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protect existing paddock trees and the urgent need to regenerate paddock trees in a scattered pattern across the whole landscape, as well as possibly installing nest boxes. He believes that local organisations, such as councils, need to be involved in landscape restoration and such work needs to be part of a plan for centuries over the whole landscape. His presentation ended with the message that the key to Superb Parrot survival is the integration of conservation and production.

Report on May COG Meeting

The short talk on 'identifying the grey raptors' was given by Dick Schodde. There have been 11 reports of Grey Goshawk in the ACT in the last 10 years, usually during drought periods. Reports of Grey Falcon have been rejected by the Rarities

Panel because they have been based on appearance (which is very similar to the Grey Goshawk), rather than 'jizz'. The table below gives a summary of the differences to look out for.

The main talk, given by Matt Cameron, was entitled 'Impact of El Nino on **Glossy Black-Cockatoo** foraging ecology and reproduction'. Matt carried out his research in Goonoo State Forest in central NSW, where he found about 300 birds, which feed almost exclusively on the seeds of *Allocasuarina* and *Casuarina* spp. This dietary specialisation makes them susceptible to changes in their food supply caused by drought.

Matt began his research in 2000, before the drought, and completed it in 2003, at the peak of the drought. There is a close relationship between

rainfall and cone production, and over the study period cone production declined as the drought progressed, until no cones at all were produced in 2003. Glossy Black-cockatoos prefer young cones produced the previous year. When food is plentiful, cone abundance on a particular tree is not a significant factor, but by 2003 the birds were strongly selecting trees on cone abundance. Over the study period, birds were obtaining less food each year and so had to forage on more trees and within more sites, and on older cones, as the canopy seed bank became progressively depleted in both quality and quantity.

What is the effect of this on the birds? Matt assessed cockatoo productivity by determining the proportion of juveniles in the population, observed by monitoring water points in summer (breeding occurs in winter) and by monitoring nests. Between 1999 and 2003, the proportion of juveniles declined as the rainfall decreased. Rainfall determines the abundance of young cones the following year, and the amount of food available is therefore fixed at the beginning of the breeding season. If not enough cones are produced, the birds don't breed. If it is a good year for cones, all the birds breed.

This relationship between food supply and drought, which in turn affects breeding, poses several management issues. There is a need to increase the extent and quality of *Allocasuarina*; local connectivity is

	Grey Goshawk (grey phase)	Grey Falcon
Appearance	pale grey upper paler under black bill, orange sere	pale grey upper under same grey as upper black bill, orange sere
Habitat	woodland	open country
Shape	horizontal wings when gliding long, big, rounded tail rounded wings	horizontal wings when gliding dumpy shortish tail pointed swift-like wings similar shape to Peregrine
Flight	2-5 flaps, then glide	heavy, deep wingbeats
Hunting	by stealth perch and pounce hunter	hunts in air, dives very fast on prey, knocks out with feet
Perching	shows long, bare legs long tail	big talons, short tarsi

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Australian Hobby (*Falco longipennis*)

Photo courtesy **Lindsay Hansch**

important to facilitate access to food as birds have to move in drought years to obtain enough food; the birds must maximize breeding opportunities in good food years; and links between coastal and upland populations are important.

Sue Lashko

Future Field Trips

Green Cape – 12-14 June 2004 - Long weekend accommodation

For our outing over this long weekend in June COG has booked the two duplex cottages associated with the lighthouse at Green Cape.



Spotted Bowerbird
(Chlamydera maculata)
 Photo courtesy **Rhonda Abbott**

Peter Fullagar (6161 4808) will be leading, and in mid June he expects to see a mix of sea birds as well as whales close to shore (depending on the weather). In the nearby heath there are some specials such as the **Ground Parrot** and the **Tawny-crowned Honeyeater**, and there is likely to be a range of birds in the woodlands, also close by.

One cottage has been booked for Thursday to Monday, and the other from Friday to Monday. The cottages each hold a maximum of 6 people, consisting of separate rooms, the master bedroom with a queen size bed, one with two single beds and a double sofa bed in the family/lounge room. There will also be the opportunity to camp at Bittangabee Bay, only 8 km away.

The costs per person are \$32 per night including the COG admin fee. Information for participants including final costs was made available to registered participants at/after the May COG meeting. Full payment is due by the June COG meeting.

At the time of going to print there was still one place available as it has been difficult to achieve the right female/male/couple gender balance for the double sofa bed. This is for one male from Thursday to Monday sharing the sofa with one person to sleep on a camp stretcher or similar. Another possibility is a single male for Saturday and Sunday evenings



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enquiries@philipmaher.com

2004 Plains-wanderer Weekends

- ◆ 27 and 28 November
- ◆ 4 and 5 December
- ◆ 11 and 12 December
- ◆ 18 and 19 December

18–28 Sept **Forests and Woodlands of Central NSW including Bird Routes of Barraba & Baradine**
New accommodated tour taking in the best of the forests and woodland of central NSW. Starts/finishes in Melbourne

2005 Birding Tours

12 -28 March: New Zealand
 NZ options: 11 Feb pelagic for **NZ storm-petrel**; 1-2 March Kapiti Island for **little spotted kiwi**

9–14 March: Tasmania

16–23 March Kangaroo Island

24–30 April: New Caledonia

18–29 May: Gulf Country Q'ld

4–19 June Top End incl Kununurra

8–26 August: Strzelecki Track

Plains-wanderer Weekends 2005

- 26 & 27 March (Easter)
- 26 & 27 November
- 3 & 4 December
- 10 & 11 December
- 17 & 18 December
- 31 December & 1 January

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Crimson Rosella (*Platycercus elegans*)

Photo courtesy **Rhonda Abbott**

only. If you are interested please contact asap Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au).

Mt Majura NR search for the Glossy Black-Cockatoo; Saturday 26 June – evening; Sunday 27 June – morning; Note the additional time

Steve Holliday will lead the late Saturday afternoon outing to observe the vulnerable species, the **Glossy Black-Cockatoo**, when they come in to drink at dams in the Mt Majura Nature Reserve towards evening. Up to 10 birds have been observed doing this recently. Meet Steve (6248 0910) at 3.45 pm sharp at the small carpark in Mackenzie St near the end of Grayson St Hackett for a short flat walk of about 10-15 minutes to the dam. It should be okay to park in the street if there isn't enough room there.

For those unable to make this time, or if they are not seen then, Tom Green has agreed to lead a repeat of the very

successful May mid week walk when up to 10 of them were seen on the upper slopes of the mountain feeding on Allocasuarina. We will be walking up the main trail instead of going via the dams, therefore it is only a moderate climb. Meet Tom (6247 0630) at 9 am the same spot as above to spend a couple of hours looking for these birds.

Botanic Gardens; Sunday 11 July – Bush Birds Beginners morning – note originally advertised for Saturday 10 July.

This morning walk will be the first for 2004 aimed specifically to help beginners and new members identify birds and to learn about their calls. The Botanic Gardens are especially suitable for such an outing, as they allow the opportunity to observe a range of local bush birds in a variety of habitats. Due to the available food supply they are also a relative haven for birds during winter. Anthony Overs will lead this outing, which will consist of a stroll through this lovely part of Canberra for several hours from 9.30 am, meeting at the bus shelter. Please book your place with Anthony (6254 0168, or by Email on anthony.overs.reps@aph.gov.au), who will be happy to discuss whether this outing is suitable for you. Please also don't forget to bring your binoculars and field guide.

Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve Superb Lyrebird survey; Saturday 17 July or Sunday 18th July depending on weather – Note additional outing

Since the January 2003 bushfires Chris Davey and Peter Fullagar have been monitoring the return of the **Superb Lyrebird** to an area of the

HIDEAWAY FOR TWO!

Guerilla Bay / Burrewarra Point

Lovely, clean and quiet self contained 1 bedroom flat amid trees, own courtyard and garden, adjacent Burrewarra Point clifftop reserve. Close unspoiled walks, beaches. Over 120 bird species seen in the local area, half from the property and lots of other interesting fauna and flora. Reasonable rates.

Contact Joan and Trevor Lipscombe 02 6262 7975.

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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. For the more energetic, Guerrilla Bay and Burrewarra Point are within walking distance. The wetlands at Barling's Beach are only a few kilometers away. Rich birding is available in almost any direction, the Eurobodalla Botanical Gardens are a favourite spot. The front beach at Rosedale is patrolled by the resident white sea-eagle. Tariff - \$50 per night; \$250 per week (\$300 per week in school holidays); 3 night weekend \$125; 15 December to 31 January - \$400 per week.

Further details contact – Greg or Sallie Ramsay, 31 MacRobertson St, MAWSON, ACT 2607, phone 6286 1564 or e-mail at greg.ramsay@argel.com.au

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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.

Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve.

They wish to get an idea of the present distribution within the Reserve and are asking COG members who know the call of the Lyrebird to join them for a morning's survey. Although details are yet to be finalised they are calling for expressions of interest to join them at 8.00 am to walk the trails and to record the locations of calling birds. At this stage they envisage the survey will take about three hours.

Further details will be announced in the July *Gang-gang* and at COG meetings. If interested please contact Chris Davey on 6254 6324 (H) or Peter Fullagar on 6161 4808 (H).

Bungonia all day outing; Sunday 25 July 2004

A winter's day's birding is planned for the spectacular area around Bungonia Gorge. Hopefully many of the wildflowers will be in bloom by then and this should mean a big range of honeyeaters should be seen. While there in April the leaders also saw **Superb Lyrebirds** from the picnic table and a **Peregrine Falcon** gliding through the gorge – they saw 30 odd species in the half day they were there.

After meeting at 9.15 am at the Visitor's Centre (\$7 Park use fee applies), we will head down to the look-outs to see the view (and birds) before heading off on one of the easy walks. After a picnic lunch, at a different lookout, we will walk along a woodland track where Koalas have reportedly been seen.

There is a good camping area at Bungonia (including a new camp kitchen etc) for those that wish to make a weekend of it (or sleep-in a little bit longer). Bungonia can be accessed via Tarago on dirt roads or it is approximately 30 minutes east of Goulburn on a sealed road. Contact John Goldie on 6241 7639 (H) for more details. The usual warnings

about the weather, footwear etc apply for being out all day in winter.

NOTE – this outing is being advertised to the Illawarra Bird Observers Club (IBOC) as an informal joint outing. A more formal shorebird outing based on the Shoalhaven is being planned for the weekend of 4-5 December. More details later, but in the meantime pencil this date into your diaries.

Wednesday walk – 19 May Goorooyaroo Nature Reserve

An opportunity to visit this newly declared Nature reserve. Meet at 9 am at the car park at the SW corner off Horse Park Drive (see map on the COG website at:

<http://www.canberrabirds.dynamite.com.au/GoorooyarooNR.htm>.

The **Two Dams Walk** would be a suitable one. This leaves the car park and go directly through the first paddock to the west fence and then south to the Burnt Stump lookout. From there the group could retrace its steps downhill to the pipeline track and follow that up to the creek draining the most southerly of the marked stock dams. There are a couple of flowering Yellow Box in this area. Then follow the creek up to the dam, which is set in a nice grove of trees. Go NW over a low ridge to another dam in Brushtail Valley. This second dam is about 45 mins brisk walk from the car park. Bring some morning tea or lunch.

Other surveys/Activities of Interest to COG Members

The next **Cowra Woodland survey** will be held over the weekend of 19-20 June. If you are interested in participating please contact Sue Proust on thebradybunch8@bigpond.com.



Rainbow Bee-eater (*Merops ornatus*)
Photo courtesy **Rhonda Abbott**

Mulligan's Flat Survey - Sunday 27 June 2004

This is the winter survey of this woodland site. Regular surveyors, please let me know if you are available in the week before on phone 6288 7802 - home. I will send a reminder by email in that week.

Meeting time is 8.15am (winter timing), at the carpark/gate to the reserve off Gundaroo Road. Wear sturdy shoes and bring clipboard, pencil etc. Morning tea will be provided as usual afterwards, bring your mug or cup.

Jenny Bounds

NATIONAL BIRD AWARENESS DAY

The day after World Environment Day, **Sunday 6 June 2004**, marks the first National Bird Awareness Day.

This event is being run by Birds Australia in association with Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA).

Experienced birdwatchers are required to help run tours on the 6th aimed at introducing novice or less experienced birdwatchers to birding in their local environments. These tours will be based around CVA offices, and tours will be assisted by a



Red-capped Plover

(*Charadrius ruficapillus*)

Photo courtesy **Rhonda Abbott**

CVA officer.

Anybody interested in helping out please contact:

Andrew Silcocks

A.silcocks@birdsaustralia.com.au

03 9882 2622

Any TBNER or Atlasser that would like to participate in a tour should register with

**Conservation Volunteers Australia
at 1800 032 501.**

The dates for the second **Swift Parrot and Regent**

Honeyeater survey is the weekend of 31 July/1 August.

Debbie Saunders, the co-ordinator of this survey, indicates that there are usually several COG members who go out to the western slopes or south coast. She is wondering if someone may be interested as a leader for a small group or whether there could be several groups. Alternatively, if there is someone willing to lead a bigger group she could try to organise a visit to private property between Boorowa and Cowra (as COG did for a non-survey weekend last year). Another alternative is that the local reserves including Mulligans/Campbell Park/Mount Ainslie could be surveyed as swift parrots do pass through Canberra most years, even if only

briefly.

If you are interested in helping in any of the above ways please contact Debbie on saunders@cres.anu.edu.au , Ph 6125 2635 or Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au).

Notices Notices Notices

The Tess Kloot Collection

In October 2003 the State Library of Victoria, 328 Swanston Street Melbourne Victoria 3000, accepted my extensive collection. This consists of ornithological and biographical files (567), newspaper cuttings (164), and an album containing photographs of people who have contributed to Australia's natural history (ca. 145). A separate component holds considerable biographical and pictorial material on Tom Iredale and his wife Lilian Medland.

The entire collection is housed in a series of archived boxes. An alphabetical catalogue accompanies the material.

At the suggestion of Mr Jock Murphy, Manuscripts Librarian, it stands as the TESS KLOOT COLLECTION.

Anyone seeking information covered by this collection is advised to contact the State Library. The reference number is PA 03/107.

Any information used for publication must appear with acknowledgement.

Tess Kloot

Avian Whimsy # 21

Scattering Bird Seed

Recently a much-respected (or at least well-known) COG member actually suggested a Whimsy topic. Oh frabjous day! This is a rare event indeed, though not unique; David, I'm still contemplating the question of lyrebird syrinxes, as suggested by you... No, this was a request for some musing on the topic of birds and seed distribution.

It was a problem that much occupied the great Charles Darwin, a very inventive, careful and practical scientist, as well as a brilliant thinker. In particular he was interested to test the idea that plants could move inter-continently by seed (he of course didn't have the advantage of knowledge of plate tectonics). He experimented extensively with seeds and salt water and showed that on average a seed could travel 1500km in known Atlantic currents in the 28 days that 14% of his seeds survived marine immersion. Nothing to do with birds of course, but he went further.

To test the possible role of birds as long-distance vectors, he wanted to show that seeds could still germinate after some time in the pretty ferocious environment of an animal's digestive system, so of course he experimented. He fed a variety of seeds to a variety of birds, recovered the seeds from their droppings many hours later, and germinated many of them. He even fed birds and fish containing seeds in their digestive systems to hawks, owls and pelicans in London Zoo, and recovered and germinated seeds from *their* droppings and regurgitated pellets!

This probably wouldn't get them across an ocean though, so Darwin wondered if the bird actually had to be alive to make the journey. He had already shown that pea-seeds are killed by a few days' immersion in



Black Noddy (*Anous minutus*)

Photo courtesy **Ian Fraser**

sea-water, so he floated a dead pigeon in sea-water for 30 days, then removed pea-seeds from its crop – he was no white-gloved gentleman scientist – and germinated them. Even a dead bird then can transport seed over great distances!

Seeds need not travel internally however, though burrs are mostly designed to travel in fur. A bird is probably less likely to encounter them and feathers are more likely than fur to shed a burr. There is at least one dramatic exception to this however.

There are 45 species of *Pisonia* throughout the Pacific, some of which are trees and often used by noddies for nesting materials and roosting. *Pisonia grandis* is such a tree, found on coral cays around northern Australia. Its small seeds develop sticky hooks which remain on the branched fruiting heads and, whether hanging from the tree or lying below it, are a formidable hazard for birds such as noddies. If the bird is fortunate it may collect only a small cluster and (if the tree is also fortunate) transport the seeds to another island. Many are loaded down irreversibly though, and die beneath the tree. (Even now the tree benefits from the fertiliser!)

Some other equally good stories about birds and seeds seem, sadly, not to be true. I must now alter my course notes to remove reference to *Eremophila* (ie emu-bush) seeds

requiring passage through an emu for germination; it seems, to my chagrin, that there is no basis for this otherwise excellent yarn. Even better is – or was – the story of the Dodo and the Tambalacoque tree.

In the 1970s an ecologist named Stanley Temple published an extraordinary paper, purportedly demonstrating that the few living endemic Tambalacoque trees on Mauritius all dated from the last days of the dodo. He proposed (with supporting evidence) that the tree had relied on the dodo to abrade the tough pit in its gizzard to enable germination. So, a very neat piece of tapestry; a plant relying on an animal so entirely that its inevitable extinction will follow that of the animal, even after a lag time of centuries. Unfortunately for elegance it seems that Temple, an ornithologist, wasn't a good enough botanist to distinguish Tambalacoque saplings from those of others of the family Sapotaceae. There are in fact many Tambalacoques less than 300 years old on Mauritius. Dodos probably did eat Tambalacoque seeds, but the tree didn't rely on them and its rarity is not due to the tragic demise of the dodo.

Now how on earth did we get to there!? As I recall, my correspondent's idea was prompted by currawongs, cotoneaster etc. Sadly, my brain is rarely governable, and I now find that I've written aimlessly where the path led me, but not actually discussed such a useful aspect.

Still, that's what whimsies are for, and there's always another *Gang-gang* issue. Meantime, feel free to suggest ideas – you may be surprised where we end up! On the other hand, given that such an innocuous topic took us on a tour of Charles Darwin in the London Zoo, dead noddies and Mauritius, you may not be...

Ian Fraser ianf@pcug.org.au

GBS Central #2

There have been some good sightings around various GBS sites in the last month. However, I'll start with a "close but no cigar" entry.

The report (from Kathy Walter) read "while rushing out the door to work we heard a **Glossy Black-Cockatoo**. Unfortunately, it was not in our GBS, but it was definitely in the suburb somewhere." Obviously the temptations to (a) be late for work and (b) start a new site wherever the bird(s) were, the report concluded "So my aim now is to get a Glossy Black in our garden. Those casurina seedlings better grow quickly!!" It would be a good 'hit' indeed as there are only three GBS records and none for 7 years.

Possibly the top bird actually seen in a GBS site in the month was 4 **Swift Parrots** reported by Richard Allen from his site in Curtin. This coincided with the Survey day for this species. Parrots featured well in a message from Paul Mahoney: "On Saturday morning, **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo** looping around. My parrot list for the yard now covers **Crimson** and **Eastern Rosella** (and a cross), **Little** and **Rainbow Lorikeet**, **King Parrot**, **Gang-gang Cockatoo**, **Sulphur-crested Cockatoo**, **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo**, **Little Corella** and **Galah**."

My own list is quite long on parrots, although no lorikeets have made it to the foothills of Gossan Hill yet. We were graced (and deafened) by the presence of 67 Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos on 18 May (which didn't quite top the entry a few months ago of 80 from Martyn Moffat in Curtin). A surprise for my site on that day was the presence of a wide range of birds, including **Speckled Warbler**, **Varied Sittella** and **Scarlet Robin** inspecting the residue of a controlled burn the previous evening.

Steve Holliday reported his first rose

robin for the year on 12 May, noting that this was several weeks later than for the last few years.

I hope to report from time to time on the use of GBS data or methods. This month I have been in correspondence with a researcher from Melbourne who is hoping to use the GBS methodology to develop a new survey, with a focus on breeding activity. This has led me to contemplate a small project on the breeding activity contained in the GBS data base.

Finally an interesting question has

been asked by Rosemary Blemings. "Is there any evidence building up that shows "bush" birds are spending more time in adjacent gardens now that we have been so long without useful rain?" This is certainly an interesting topic for someone to follow up when we get this year's data entered up. In the meantime would readers let me know of any anecdotal evidence from their patch (es)? I'll try to summarise the answers (and other interesting material) next month.

Martin Butterfield

Next newsletter

JULY deadline
Wednesday 30 June 2004

Please send updates, articles, advertisements etcetera to
Tanya Rough,
Editor *Gang-gang*
rough.boden@apex.net.au
Ph: 6161 0151 (ah)

Articles should be less than 500 words (300 for reports of 1-day field trips; except by prior arrangement with the editor. Print photographs with or without articles are encouraged and welcomed.

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enhance native birds and the
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COG website

<http://www.canberrabirds.dynamite.com.au>

COG membership

2004-2005 membership: Individuals,
families and institutions: \$35. school
students (under 18): \$17.50.

Office (6247 4996)

COG maintains an office in room
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Office volunteers are not in
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COG has an email announcement
and discussion list for members and
friends of COG: 'Canberra Birding',
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Join the list at

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