



Gang-gang

June 2005

News letter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

Monthly Meeting

8 pm Wednesday

8 June 2005

*Canberra Girls Grammar School
cnr 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 carpark is full, enter using
Chapel Drive.*

Our **short talk** will be by long-time COG member Tom Green, on those elegant but regrettably non-Canberran birds, the **pratincoles**.

Our **main speaker** will be Dr Maxine Cooper, Executive Director, Environment ACT. Dr Cooper's talk will be "**Environmental challenges for the ACT in the coming decade**". Come and hear where bird conservation fits in the broad spectrum of local environmental concerns. Dr Cooper has spent three and a half years in her current role, after stints with the Brisbane City Council and the Roads and Traffic Authority NSW. Her PhD in environmental planning was from the University of Melbourne, 1991.

Everyone welcome

Field Trip and Survey Reports

East Basin/Molonglo Reach; Sunday 8 May 2005

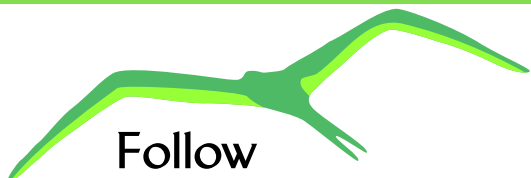
Only a small group joined me on the EL "Cygnet" on a glorious clear and still morning with the specific objective to view the late season darter/cormorant breeding in the willows etc along Molonglo Reach.

As for last year the **Darters** were still at all stages of breeding. Two birds (a female and male respectively) were still sitting tight on a nest, 4 nests had young chicks often spiralling their heads up towards the parent's bill, and 1 nest contained 3 large but still downy chicks. Including the nestlings over 50 **Darters** were seen, about half of which were in juvenile or immature plumage indicative of a very good breeding season. However, at least 10 males were also seen, with 5 of these close together around the Dairy Road bridge.

Great, Little Black and Little Pied Cormorants were also seen, but unlike at the same time last year nesting had finished for all these species. Over 70 **Little Black Cormorants** were seen close together; most of these were in adult plumage, including some still in breeding plumage. By contrast there were only a dozen **Little Pied Cormorants**, though some of these were juveniles with very orange heads. Numbers of **Great Cormorants** were higher than in the past, and again some were still in breeding plumage and several were very mottled indicative of recently fledged juveniles. A party of 20 was seen fishing in East Basin on our return.

Despite the continuing drought the number of species was well down on the same trip in 2004, with only 25 species confirmed. All of these were common except for the pair of **Australian Shelduck** on the bank of the mouth of Molonglo Reach. This is the first record of this species here in the over two years that Jim the skipper has been taking his boat up the Reach. Several **Hoary-headed Grebes** were also seen, in contrast to the Australasian Grebe which has usually been present. The former are the expected species considering the relatively deep water, though again each bird needed to be examined closely given the identification difficulties that their non-breeding plumages present.

This completes the third year that COG has made these trips up the Molonglo Reach and confirms another successful and very extended



Follow That Bird

Our small well serviced birdwatching tours with the following trips having pick up and drop offs available from Canberra's city centre.

All three star accommodation and meals are included. For an itinerary for any of the trips please contact us.

June 2005

Blue Green and Gold of Coffs Harbour
28- 3rd July \$ 1425
Especially for Canberrans, Start & end Canberra. Leader Alan Morris

October 2005

Eastern Australia
Part 1 Tropical Cairns 1st-6th \$ 2250
Leader Klaus Uhlenhut Start & End Cairns
Part 2 Lamington to Sydney \$ 3950
Leader Alan Morris
Start Lamington End Sydney

December 2005

Christmas Island \$ 2850
Leader Dion Hobcroft Start & End Perth

January 2006

Alpine Birds, Plants & Everything \$ 1485
Leader Dion Hobcroft

February 2006

Divine Lord Howe Island 18-22th \$ 1750
(excludes airfare) Start Lord Howe
End Lord Howe. Leader the Lord
of Howe himself : Ian Hutton

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breeding season for both Darters and cormorants. Given the regional importance of this site, as well as the one on the eastern side of Black Mountain Peninsula, it is expected that further trips will be offered next season, either on a formal or more ad hoc basis, to allow continued monitoring. Both sites are potentially vulnerable to a number of threats, be it willow removal, re-routing of roads or water ski training facilities.

Jack Holland

Future Field Trips

At its May meeting, the committee discussed the **COG policy on sharing costs on field trips** where car pooling is encouraged or occurs. The committee noted that there was a clear expectation that drivers should be recompensed for both fuel and running costs. Rather than set formal rates it was concluded that the exact amount should be agreed at the start between the driver and passengers. This policy applies to car pooling both for travelling to and from a venue such as Jervis Bay, and for sharing car seats, often in the 4WDs, when moving around to different sites once at the venue.

Jervis Bay; Friday to Monday 10-13 June 2005

Long weekend accommodated

This joint outing with the Field Naturalists Association of Canberra (FNAC) has proven to be the most popular for this public holiday weekend COG has run for some time and acceptances were closed on Sunday 15 May. By now participants will have received their information kits and planning to travel to Jervis Bay is well advanced.

A short waiting list is still open in case of any late withdrawals. Anyone wishing to be considered on this list should contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au).

Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve; Saturday 25 June or Sunday 26 June depending on weather - Superb Lyrebird survey

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

They wish to get an idea of the present distribution within the Reserve and are asking COG members who are familiar with the calls 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. This outing will be a repeat of the very successful surveys

conducted on 17 July and 21 August last year.

Further details will be announced at the June COG meeting. If interested please contact Chris Davey on 6254 6324 (H) or Peter Fullagar on 6161 4808 (H).

Robin Twitchathon; Sunday 10 July 2005

Extended morning by bus

STOP PRESS - On attempting to book buses for this trip, it was discovered none are available from any operator during the proposed weekend due to the school holidays when some major sporting events such as the Kanga cup are being held. This means that this event can not go ahead as planned using this form of transport on this weekend and leaves two options:

- 1) **moving it forward** to 17 July (the favoured option), or
- 2) travelling in **private cars (car pooling)**.

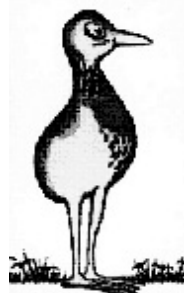
A decision will be announced on this and made by the June COG meeting and relayed to all who have indicated an interest - please forward your views to Jack Holland (details below).

The aim of this outing is to observe all of the seven species of robin that occur in the ACT in the one day. In particular we will be concentrating on the identification of the female/immature Red-breasted Robins, as a follow up to the May Bird of the Month talk. Winter is the best time for this and as we will be visiting several spots in the ACT where these birds are present. Transport is yet to be confirmed (see above). The point of departure will be the National Library car park at 8 am. This is quite central, close to where some species are expected to be, and where the parking is free. The overheads and slides from the May meeting will be available to participants, the latter on a laptop.

The exact itinerary will not be determined until close to the day, and will depend on recent reports of where these birds are, though there will be an attempt to stay within the ACT boundaries. It will run until mid afternoon, so please bring morning tea and lunch. Costs are expected to be in the order of \$15-20 per person, including the COG admin fee. In order to ascertain whether there will be sufficient interest to hire a second bus (if moved forward to July 17), please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au).

Mt Majura; Saturday 23 July 2005– evening Glossy Black-Cockatoo watching??

The intention of this outing was to repeat the very successful viewing last year of the **Glossy Black-Cockatoo** as these come down to drink at the dams near Mackenzie St, Hackett. However, the birds have not been seen here for some months, and while still present, they seem to have moved to a less accessible spot to the



Australian Ornithological Services P/L

PO Box 385
South Yarra 3141
Victoria
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enquiries@philipmaher.com

2005 Birding Tours

**The Good Food
Plains-wanderer Weekend
19 & 20 November 2005**
Combining good food, good wine
and good birding

2005 Plains-wanderer Weekends
10 & 11 December 2005
17 & 18 December 2005
31 Dec ember 05 & 1 January 06

2006
5 —11 February 06
Tasmania
Bruny Island, Derwent Bridge,
Melaleuca & pelagic trip. Accom.

23—30 April 06
Central Australia birding tour
Alice Springs, Uluru, Glen Helen
Accommodated

15—30 May 06
Top End
Darwin, Kakadu NP, Kununurra,
Mitchell Plateau, Lake Argyle Accom.

1 — 8 August 06
New Caledonia birding tour

15 August – 2 September 06
Strzelecki Track Outback Tour
Accommodated
check website for availability

7– 24 April 2007 Thailand

www.philipmaher.com

NE of the reserve. The reliability of observing them there and feasibility of moving the outing to this spot is still being investigated. Should this not prove viable an alternative outing will need to be held. If you have any proposals of where else to go for a mid winter trip (Sunday would also be acceptable) please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au).

Wednesday walk – 15 June – Newline Quarry

Meet at 9 am the entrance off Pialligo Avenue to observe the early winter birds resident at this site. In particular the front paddock seems to be one of the most reliable spots in Canberra for finding **Brown Treecreeper, Crested Shrike-tit, Varied Sittella, Speckled Warbler** and **Jacky Winter** (see p1 of the May 2005 *Gang-gang*). Note that some fences will need to be negotiated and that there are likely to be trucks rumbling up and down the sandy track, so some care will need to be taken. Bring morning tea.

Longer trips

Lord Howe Island Tour; 12-19 November 2005

This trip, advertised in the April and May editions of *Gang-gang*, is now fully subscribed, including the waiting list.

Notices

Conservation Council's World Environment Day Dinner Saturday 4 June - get a table together to support the Council's environmental advocacy work which has had some good outcomes for birds over the years - the establishment of the Mulligan's Flat NR is just one. Environment Benefit Dinner, 7pm Saturday 4 June, 2005. Four courses of organic and locally produced food, music & key note speaker. Bottled wine available. Majura Hall, Rosevear Place, Dickson. \$45 for tickets or \$40 for I-members & early bird before 20 May Bookings and enquiries 6247 7808. Thanks for your support.

Woodlands for Wildlife - recovery for our birds - **Seminar - Saturday 4 June**. As part of World Environment Day celebrations, COG in collaboration with Wildlife Research and Monitoring Unit of Environment ACT and ANU/CRES is hosting this free public seminar in Canberra, on the theme of woodland birds and on ground actions for their recovery, with a regional emphasis. This will be held at CSIRO Discovery Centre, Black Mountain, ACT, from 1.30pm (registration from 1pm), to 4.30. Dr Richard Schodde will chair the seminar. Speakers will discuss on ground research and projects for bird recovery in the ACT and surrounding region, and include Professor David Lindenmayer (CRES/ANU), Dr Geoff Barrett (CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems), and Dr Jack Baker (Birds Australia). Alison Rowell will discuss the results of the latest data analysis from the COG Woodland Bird Survey Project (statistical analysis by Ross Cunningham) and Nicki Taws and Suzi Bond (COG members) will give a presentation from a study about birds breeding in re-vegetation sites. There will be a panel discussion with the speakers. Jenny Bounds is coordinating this event for COG with assistance of a small steering committee. Jenny is seeking volunteers to assist in setting up on the day (from approx 11.30am), car park guides, setting up displays and afternoon tea. Phone Jenny on 6288 7802.

The next **Cowra Woodland survey** will be held over the weekend of **18-19 June**. If you are interested in participating please contact Malcolm Fyfe on Ph 6253 0772 or mfyfe@tpg.com.au.

Mulligan's Flat Survey - Sunday 26 June The winter woodland survey is on 26 June, meeting at 8.15am at



EMU TOURS

Nature Tours with the Focus on Birds

EMU TOURS TO MALAWI IN 2005

Richard and Roz are going back to Malawi for one more time! The experience of a lifetime—and wonderful birds - in the spring when migrants will be around and birds will be in breeding plumage. We shall include magnificent Nyika Plateau in the north and Liwonde NP. The tour will be for 14 days in mid-October (ask us for the dates). Unbeatable value at **\$2950** twin share ex Lilongwe - with all good accommodation (1 night a bit rustic!).

Reserve your place now.

Richard and Roz
emutours@austarnet.com.au 0428 38 5677

the usual gate to the reserve on the Gundaroo Road. Regular volunteers please let me know if you are available, by the week prior, by leaving a phone message on 6288 7802. I will send a reminder to those on my email list a couple of weeks before the survey. Bring clipboard, pencil and eraser, and mug for morning tea and wear sturdy shoes etc. New volunteers who may be interested in participating in the surveys, please contact me to discuss - you do need to be a moderately experienced birder, able to identify the local birds by sight and be starting to learn some calls.

The 2005 dates for the second **Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater survey** is the weekend of **6-7 August**. There are usually several COG members who participate by going out to the western slopes or the south coast. Why not form your own group and go to your favourite spot where trees are flowering or survey local reserves such as Mulligans Flat/Campbell Park/Mount Ainslie as Swift Parrots do pass through Canberra in most years, even if only briefly? Up to 60 birds were present in the Mt Majura Reserve from mid March to mid April 2005, where lerps were an important food source.

Field assistant volunteers (2) needed from early August to 20 December 2005 (dates somewhat flexible; will possibly consider hiring someone from approximately 1 Aug to 10 October or 10 October to 20 December) to assist an American Ph.D. student on a project involving acoustic communication and mate choice in galahs. (Really! Galahs! I know they're everywhere, but they're quite interesting!) Duties may include trapping and handling of large parrots, audio- and video-recording, nest monitoring, radio telemetry, possible tree climbing, resighting and behavioral observations, acoustic analyses, and data entry. Field experience, bird handling experience, experience with acoustics research/software, and radio-tracking experience preferred, but not required. This project is conducted in the northern suburbs of Canberra. This position will offer a great chance to gain experience in acoustic research and handling large parrots. Assistant must be willing to work long hours and 6 days/week, must be able to sit quietly and observe for long periods of time (sometimes without anything happening!) To apply, please send a cover letter, CV, and the names and contact details of four references (three academic, one personal) to Judith Scarl at jcs83@cornell.edu as soon as possible, and no later than 30 May 2005. Feel free to email or call +1 (607) 254 2131 or +1 (607) 351 4115 for further information.

Membership fees are now due

Membership fees stay at \$35 for 2005-6.

For most members these are **due from 1 July 2005**. Please check your *Gang-gang*/CBN label to check when your membership expires. Please don't pay now if it expires on 30 June 2006 or later.

You can now renew your COG membership by **electronic funds transfer** directly into COG's bank account.

Transfer money directly from your bank account through electronic banking to St George Bank, BSB 112-908, Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc, account number 050111462

\$35 for renewal (or \$17.50 for full-time students 18 years old or less), plus any Canberra Birds Conservation Fund donation. Make sure you state your details (ie initials, surname and COG number) on the transfer. Your COG number is on your GG/CBN label or check with Alastair Smith (details back page this *Gang-gang*). If we can't identify your payment you might be struck off as a non-renewer! Tell us separately by email, post or at meetings if any of your details have changed (eg address, phone number, email address, if you now wish to access *Gang-gang* electronically).

For the time being, this new arrangement is only available to renewing members.

You can still pay at meetings or through the post if you prefer that. Subscription form in this *Gang-gang*.

Contact Joan Lipscombe, Treasurer, 02 62627975, joanlipscombe@bigpond.com.au if you have any queries about paying your subscription.

COG SALES COG SALES

- **'The Long Paddock** - a Directory of Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves in NSW' by Rural Lands Protection Board - \$31.00
- **The Birds of Western NSW: A Preliminary Atlas** - NSW Bird Atlassers - **reduced** to \$5.00
- **Finding Birds in Darwin, Kakadu and Top End** by Niven McCrie and James Watson. \$24.00.
- **Wet and Wild** - A Field Guide to the Freshwater Animals of the Southern Tablelands and High Country" by M Lintermans and W Osborne, \$28.00 (RRP \$34.95).
- **Wildlife on Farms** - by David Lindenmayer RRP \$29.95, **special price** for COG members - \$25.00.
- **Where to Find Birds in NE Queensland** - Joe Wieneke - \$16.00.
- **Reptiles and Frogs of the ACT** - Ross Bennett - \$13.00.
- **Native Trees of the ACT** - \$6.50.
- **Birds of Rottnest Island** – by Denis Saunders & Parry de Rebeira -\$15.00
- **Birds of Rottnest Island** – a check list - \$1.00
- **Grassland Flora** – a Field Guide for the Southern Tablelands (NSW and ACT) – by David Eddy et al. - \$13.00
- **Our Patch** – Field Guide to the Flora of the ACT Region - \$13.00
- **The Nestbox Book** – Gould League - \$12.50
- **Birds of Queensland's Wet Tropics and Great Barrier Reef** by Lloyd Nielsen - \$25.00
- **Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT** – by Taylor and Day \$14.00
- Simpson and Days' **Birds of Australia CDROM** Version 5.0 **special price** - \$45.00
- COG Atlas - \$12.00
- COG Car Stickers - \$2.00
- COG Birds of Canberra Gardens Poster - \$4.00
- COG Garden Bird Survey Chart (New Version) - \$1.00
- COG Badges – two colour versions - \$5.00
- COG Birds of the ACT – Two Centuries of Change – by Steve Wilson - \$25.00
- COG Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the ACT - \$1.00
- COG Bird Songs of Canberra – Cassette - \$10.00.

From the Committee

The most important news item this month is that the committee has decided to relinquish, effective from the end of June, the office it has rented for many years in the Griffin Centre. It does so with some regrets. It has been good to have a central spot where the majority of our possessions could reside and where members could meet, and use the library etc, outside of monthly meetings. But the current Griffin Centre will shortly be replaced by a more upmarket model, and the old one will be demolished. Rent in the new Centre would be considerably more expensive than in the old. Given the limited use by members of the present office, we have decided to use a storage facility for our camping and display equipment and archives; and to keep the COG computer, current records, library, telescopes and GPS in a separate 'office' at the secretary's. The office telephone will be discontinued. If you would like to borrow a telescope or GPS, or a book from the library, please contact Barbara by phone 6254 6520 or email to cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au. She will bring the items to the next public meeting, or you may collect from her. For loans of camping or display equipment, please contact one of the office bearers, who will have access to the facility.

As a result of the closure of the office, **COG has a number of items of office furniture and equipment for sale**. If you are interested in purchasing any of them, please contact the secretary or turn up at the COG office on Tuesday 31 May, 7 or 14 June

(Continued on page 8)

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.

AvIan Whimsy #31 Twitch His Own

And I've permitted myself the 'his' in the title deliberately – for reasons that I'd rather not paddle in, twitchers nearly always seem to be blokes.

I've just read a book. That's not necessarily newsworthy – I've done it once or twice before. This one is from the US (but even that's not unique in my reading history), and I was simultaneously delighted by the writing and held in often appalled thrall by the content. It is *The Big Year*, by journalist Mark Obmascik. It is the true story of three Americans (men, of course) who in 1998 independently decided to have a 'Big Year', ie devote themselves to finding as many bird species as possible on mainland North America, north of the Mexican-US border. It is not about finding birds to enjoy them as most of us would understand. It is a ruthless competition, pure and simple – and the competition is not about pitting one's birding skills against the birds, but one's money and single-mindedness against that of other twitchers. The 'winner' admits to having spent US\$12,000 a month on the project, much of it on first class air fares. All three of them hired helicopters to tick off Snowcock – an exotic species...

I keep bird lists. I keep yard lists and state lists and country lists and trip lists and a life list. But I don't regard myself as a twitcher. I'd better not, because I loathe the concept as I define it (and others define it much more broadly and benignly). For me a real twitcher is one who doesn't enjoy and respect each bird for what it is, but collects them like stamps or train numbers. Keeping lists and looking to see new species does not, by my definition, make you a twitcher – but you are if the next bird is only interesting if it is new and once seen is of no further relevance. A past holder of the US Big Year record wasn't interested in even looking at a rare bird through a telescope once someone had found it for him; he was assured of its identity by his paid guide and that was enough for his purposes. I have long proclaimed that the day I don't enjoy watching a galah is the day I want to have my binoculars forcibly confiscated (and that of course is a death sentence!). I'm not referring either to once-off fund-raising twitchathons – unless that's all you're interested in of course.

Another aspect of this 'tick and rush on' mentality left me gaping incredulously. To claim a species for your US Big Year you don't actually have to see it – just hearing it, ticking it and dashing off is quite acceptable!! (Writing this article is really dragging the exclamation marks out of me!)

I can't imagine not being interested in everything I see (for that reason I was nervous the first time I ran a tour for COG – and was delighted to find that my fears were totally unfounded). Yet in *The Big Year* the Twitchiest of the three contestants berates a sea bird charter operator for stopping to enjoy whales – that was a 'waste of birding time'! (The operator, a woman, held firm.)

To the serious twitcher, the bird's welfare is of less significance than his list's welfare. There are horrifying stories from the US (alluded to also in *The Big Year*) about smashing through swamps in military-style vehicles to catch a glimpse of terrified fleeing rails. There is actually an incident in the book where the Parks Service allowed a pack of twitchers to tramp through a swamp reserve dragging ropes and rattles to flush out a rare Yellow Rail for their lists.

Imagine the pressure such an individual would put on a tour operator. (And I won't divert into questioning the 'ethics' of just buying a species for such a purpose.) There's good money in it, but I wouldn't run tours for twitchers for any money (even if I were good enough!). Denise Lawungkurr Goodfellow, a very good guide from the Top End, has just told me about a client who "refused to allow me two hours to wash my clothes after spending seven straight fifteen-hour days chasing species he wanted"! And I was told by one of my clients of a tour in New Zealand where a volunteer guide (repeat *volunteer*) was berated by a US twitcher for her 'failure' to find the elusive Blue Duck. I am delighted to be able to report that the Australians in the group took her part.

Last month I sought, and was rapt at finding, my first Mangrove Golden Whistlers out of Darwin. But I'm looking forward with equal joy to welcoming back my regular young Golden Whistler to my winter front yard.

My suggestion is – if it twitches, scratch it.

Ian Fraser ianf@pcug.org.au



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- 4 chairs
- 1 tall thin two-door locker
- 1 fan
- 1 small NEC bar fridge
- 2 card tables
- 2 sets grey metal shelving.

Barbara Allan COG secretary

Next newsletter

JULY deadline

Wednesday 29 June 2005

Please send updates, articles, advertisements etcetera to

Editors *Gang-gang*

gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au

or send c/- The Secretary

COG, PO Box 301

Civic Square, ACT 2608

Articles should be less than 500 words (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.

COG info

President

Jack Holland, ph 6288 7840 (h),
email jack.holland@deh.gov.au

Vice President

Nicki Taws, ph 6251 0303

Treasurer

Joan Lipscombe ph 6262 7975

Secretary

Barbara Allan ph 6254 6520

Membership inquiries

Contact Alastair Smith 61618608(h)
or alastair@homemail.com.au for
changes of address or other details

Address for correspondence

The Secretary

COG, PO Box 301

Civic Square, ACT 2608

Gang-gang editor

Tanya Rough 6161 0151 (h)
and **Sue Lashko**

Newsletter distribution

Lia Battisson and helpers

Canberra Birds Conservation Fund

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

COG website

www.canberrabirds.org.au

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 G5, Griffin Centre, Bunda Street, civic.

cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au

Office volunteers are not in attendance for regular opening hours. Members access by prior arrangement.

COG E-mail Discussion List

COG has an email announcement and discussion list for members and friends of COG: 'Canberra Birds'.

Join the list by sending an empty email message to canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au.

Editor Canberra Bird Notes

CBN@canberrabirds.org.au



Gang-gang

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

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