

Gang-gang

June 2008

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

Monthly Meeting

**8 pm Wednesday
11 June 2008**

*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.*

There will be three shorter presentations at this month's meeting.

Martin Butterfield, COG's Garden Bird Survey (GBS) co-ordinator will give a brief talk on the GBS, including plans for the coming year.

There will be a rerun of the DVD by **Geoffrey Dabb** entitled *Birds of the Riverina: Oolambeyan National Park* which unfortunately had to be truncated at the April meeting, when the spare DVD player was not fully up to the task.

And **Anthony Overs** will talk about his bird banding experiences at Gluepot Reserve in November 2007. This will be a great opportunity to see excellent photos of birds in the hand, and learn a little about Gluepot and its inhabitants.

Everyone welcome

Field Trip reports

Wednesday 21 May – Midweek walk

The four birdwatchers who ventured out despite the fog had an unexpectedly pleasant morning's walk. The fog had begun to thin as we went through the Narrabundah Lane Gate and headed to the right to climb into the deserted zoo. This area was most productive with highlights being **Double-barred Finch**, **Speckled Warbler**, **Thornbill**, a fleeting view of a **Rainbow Lorikeet** and a very good views of **Pacific Black Duck** as well as **Little Corella**.



Photo by Geoffrey Dabb

Double-barred Finch
(*Taeniopygia bichenovii*)

The sun was out as we headed towards the open area near the Boral Quarry. Here we saw **Flame and Scarlet Robins** and lots of **Yellow-rumped Thornbill**. On our return walk to the gate we revisited the dams and the nearby large healthy eucalyptus trees. One of the dams has mature and small regrowth eucalyptus trees near its wall. Here we were treated to a delightful display of bathing honeyeaters (**White-naped**, adult and immature **White-plumed** plus one or two **Yellow-faced**). **Rufous Whistlers** had been observed in the trees as we approached the dam and a male **Golden Whistler** was seen bathing just as we got to the dam. As we were about to leave the dam a male **Red-rumped Parrot** was spied in an overhanging leafless branch. We saw 36 species altogether. — **Julienne Kamprad**

Renewal of subscriptions

Our treasurer, Lia Battison will be away in July. It would be appreciated if members could pay their 2008-2009 subscriptions at the June meeting.



Future Field Trips

The Guidelines for the conduct and advertising of COG field trips are published on the COG web site. Both trip leaders and members/participants should familiarise themselves with these guidelines. In particular, the Registration Form should be completed for each field trip.

Saturday/Monday 7-9 June—Jervis Bay – Long weekend campout

This trip is full and Green Patch campground is booked out. If you wish to go on the waiting list contact walter.goldie@optusnet.com.au. Camping is also available at Vincentia.

Midweek walk – Wednesday 18 June

This month's midweek walk will be at the Australian National Botanic Gardens. Meet at 9 AM at the bus shelter.

Sunday 22 June – Tidbinbilla – Lyrebird survey

Since the January 2003 bushfires Peter Fullagar and Chris Davey 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 to join them for a morning's survey. They are calling for expressions of interest to join them at 8.30 AM to walk the trails and to record the location of calling birds. Depending on the trails walked the survey should take about three hours.

This outing will be a repeat of the very successful surveys conducted at this time of the year since 2004. If interested and for further details please contact Chris Davey on 62546324 (h), email chris_davey@aapt.net.au.

Please note that for this year the survey will be conducted on the Sunday, NOT on the Saturday.

Sunday 6 July – Googong Dam

Ian Anderson will lead an extended morning walk to the Googong Dam area. Meet at 8.30 am at the carpark near the entrance. The walk may include a visit to Tin Hut Dam at the other end of Googong Dam and perhaps a visit to nearby Burra Creek. Bring appropriate clothing including something warm and perhaps wet weather gear. Also bring water, morning tea and lunch. Please contact Ian (6281 0609 or iananderson@grapevine.com.au) for further details and to book your place.

Sunday 20 July — Repeat Robin Twitchathon — Extended morning by bus

Photot by Lindsay Hansch



Jacky Winter
(*Microeca fascinans*)

The ambitious aim of this repeat outing is again to try to observe all of the seven species of robin that occur in the ACT in the one day, plus the **Jacky Winter**. In particular we will be concentrating on finding the species we missed out on in July 2005, as well as the identification of the female/immature **Red-breasted Robins**, which are expected to be the subject of the July Bird of the Month talk.

Transport will be by two 12-seater buses. As this involves a total of 24 people, a decision has been made not to allow tag-a-long vehicles, otherwise the outing becomes logistically very unwieldy. 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. It will run

until mid afternoon so that the buses can be returned late that afternoon, so please bring morning tea and lunch. Costs will be about \$15.00 per person, including the COG admin fee, depending on the number of participants. To book please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@environment.gov.au), so that your seat on the bus can be reserved.

Winter is the best time for this and we will be visiting several spots in the ACT where these species are likely to be present. The exact itinerary will not be determined until closer 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. If any member is aware where a particular species can be reliably found and viewed with such a big group, especially the Rose, Pink and Red-capped Robins, could you please let Jack Holland know.

Sunday 3 August — Lake Ginninderra — Waterbirds for beginners morning

This is the second of our bird walks in 2008 that is aimed specifically at beginners or new members. Meet Anthony Overs (bookings essential on 6254 0168 or anthony.overs.reps@aph.gov.au) at 8.30am in the car park at the western end of Diddams Close on Ginninderra Peninsula (also known as Diddams Close Park - see Yellow Pages Map 38, ref A9). We will walk the shores of the peninsula around to the eastern side, then back to the car park along Diddams Close. We should be able to view several species of waterbirds up close, focusing on the identification features of the common species such as the various ducks, "waterhens" and cormorants. A variety of bush birds are also likely to be seen. Bring your binoculars and field guide.

Help needed

4-6 October – Round Hill NR – long weekend campout.

We are still looking for a person to lead this outing. Please contact Anthony Overs (6254 0168 or anthony.overs.reps@aph.gov.au) if you can help.

Committee news

- COG has been represented at some recent community events. Lia Battison coordinated a COG information table at the recent launch of the Kosciuszko to Coast project, and Chris Davey organised COG's presence at the opening of the new Sanctuary at Tidbinbilla. In the light of these experiences, the committee will convene a small subgroup to examine the current exhibition materials.
- COG was advised formally by the Chief Minister of the listing of the **Little Eagle** as a vulnerable species in the ACT.
- Work on developing a set of bird routes brochures is progressing.



Australian Ornithological Services P/L

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

enquiries@philipmaher.com

2008

27 July — 2 August
New Caledonia birding tour
incl. Lifou and Ouvéa Islands

5 — 24 September

**Strzelecki Track
Outback Tour**

2008 Plains-wanderer Weekends
29 & 30 Nov; 6 & 7 Dec; 20 & 21 Dec
2008; 3 & 4 Jan 2009

2009

22 — 28 February 2009
Tasmania birding & mammal tour
including pelagic & Melaleuca flight

17 April — 2 May 2009

Vietnam birding tour
co-led by Uthai Treesucon

3 May — 9 May 2009
Thailand Pitta Tour
co-led by Uthai Treesucon

12 May — 1 June 2009
Borneo and Peninsula Malaysia
co-led by Dennis Yong

8 — 26 August 2009
**Strzelecki Track
Outback Tour**

www.philipmaher.com

- There will be no change to subscription rates for the 2008-2009 financial year. Individual and family rates will remain at \$35.
- Beth Mantle has volunteered to take on the Sales Desk, with Roy Harvey departing for overseas.
- The committee has been in contact with the ACT Government about the proposed sale of the Defence land at Newline.
- COG has been invited to participate in a regular Stakeholders Forum convened by ACT Parks, Conservation and Lands.
- Progress is being made with the digitisation of Canberra Bird Notes, starting with the very first issues. These will be made available on the COG website.
- Sue Lashko, with assistance from some members, is working on a series of Canberra Bird Route brochures.
- COG is assisting with bird walks associated with Science Week in August, and also with walks by CSIRO's Double Helix Club in September.
- COG will write to the managers of the Stromlo Forest Park about appropriate management of the grasslands to protect the white fronted chats.
- The Committee has started investigating the feasibility of a new edition of *Birds of Canberra Gardens*, which has been out of print for some time but is often requested.

Great News for birds in the Central Molonglo Valley



Little Eagle
(*Hieraetus morphnoides*)

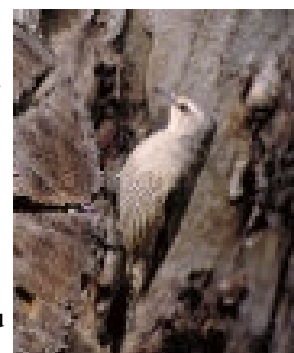
Photo by Julian Robinson

The ACT Government recently announced a moratorium on development of Central Molonglo for 20 years, to enable better assessment and evaluation of vulnerable species including **Little Eagle** and **Brown Treecreeper**. Saving the Central Molonglo from housing has been a key focus for COG, the Conservation Council and other community groups over the past couple of years. Central Molonglo is a large area of woodland and grassland near Belconnen, to the west of William Hovell Drive and south of Drake-Brockman Drive.

This is a really good result, as the existing Territory Plan zoning should remain on the land, and it will allow time for research, particularly on the Brown Treecreeper population there, to inform future decisions. We are also expecting that the Kama Nature Reserve, a key habitat for the Brown Treecreeper, will be declared before too long.

There are still some issues with the Molonglo Valley development (East Molonglo), including a good buffer for Kama woodland on its southern boundary, ensuring the Molonglo River is enhanced as a wildlife habitat/corridor, and getting the lake proposal dropped; a final decision re the lake has not yet been announced. Thank you to those members who responded to COG's call and wrote letters last year to politicians, supporting the conservation of the Central Molonglo.

— **Jenny Bounds**



Brown Treecreeper
(*Climacteris picumnus*)

Photo by Graham Stephinson

From the press

By courtesy of Nature magazine:

WASHINGTON: Four decades after scientists showed that migratory birds use Earth's magnetic field to orient themselves during their seasonal journeys, researchers have at last found a molecular mechanism that may explain how they do it.

If the hypothesis is true, the planet's magnetic field lines - which arch around Earth from north to south - may be plainly visible to birds, like the dashed line in the middle of a road.

The work, described in the online edition of *Nature*, identifies for the first time a molecule that reacts to very weak magnetic fields. The experiments prove the plausibility of a long-hypothesised method of avian navigation that has had a credibility problem because no one had ever found a molecule with the required sensitivity.

"This is a proof of [the] principle that a chemical reaction can act as a magnetic compass," said Peter Hore, of the University of Oxford, who with his fellow chemist Dr Christiane Timmel led the research. Professor Hore is testing similar molecules, called cryptochromes, isolated from the eyes of migratory birds.

Professor Devens Gust, a chemist at Arizona State University who worked with Mr Hore and Ms Timmel, said the molecules "seem to have the right structural and chemical features to allow them to show this effect".

If cryptochromes or other chemicals in a bird's eye behave as the new molecule does, they could provide the foundation of a bird's magnetic sense. Depending on how far north or south a bird is from the equator, these molecules could be expected to send different signals to its brain, telling the bird whether it is veering east or west and pinpointing its latitude. No one knows how a bird would perceive this input. Light looks like light; sound sounds like sound. What would magnetic information "feel" or "look" like?

"It could be a bright or dark spot that would move around" in the bird's field of vision, Professor Hore said. "As in a video game, the goal might be to keep that spot centred. But maybe not."

Gleanings from the Chatline

A small selection of items from the COG Chatline which caught the Editor's eye

(NOTE: Reports of sightings of rare species have not been endorsed by the Rarities Committee)

Some of the more spectacular sightings in May were:

- About 20 **Red Wattle Birds** in a red flowering gumtree in McKellar on 1 May (reported by Rod)
- 40 **Short-billed Corellas** in Kaleen on 2 May (Damien Farine) and a flock of 100+ **Corellas** in Narrabundah on 3 May (Geoffrey Dabb)
- a flock of some two hundred **Little Ravens** heading north over Newline on 3 May (Leo Berzins)
- over 30 **Swift Parrots** at the water tank at Mt Majura on 4 May (Wallaces) [*Editor's note: many other COGers were not so lucky in their searches for the Swift Parrot*]
- Also on 4 May, a count along the section of Limestone Avenue (Ainslie/Braddon) with Grey Box (many flowering) came to about 200 **Red Wattlebirds** and 1 **Noisy Friarbird** (Michael Lenz)
- Two **Superb Parrots** over Hawker Primary School on 5 May, either side of a flyover by a pair of hunting **Hobbies** (Paul Mahoney)
- At Mt Majura on 5 May more than 100 **Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos** moved slowly northwards through the pine forest just over the saddle beyond the water tank, some apparently eating pine cones in tree tops (Robin Hide.)

Continued on page 6

- On 8 May, Cooleman Ridge provided views of numerous finches: **Diamond Firetail, Double-barred, Red-browed, and European Goldfinches** all within 100metres of each other. Also **Southern Whiteface** and lots of **White-plumed Honeyeaters** and two male and one female **Flame Robins** (Tobias Hayashi)
- Six **Black-fronted Dotterel** at Fyshwick Sewage Ponds on 10 May (Frank Antram)
- At Stromlo Forest Park on 14 May at least 30 **White-fronted Chats**, three **Flame Robins**, an **Australian Kestrel**, a **Brown Falcon** and many **Pipits** and displaying **Skylarks** (Marnix Zwankhuizen)
- On 19 May, Geoffrey Dabb mused aloud — I wonder if the parliamentary triangle, or a part of it, would have a reasonable claim to a top ranking for the highest number of birds in Australia for the same sized area. Over the last few days I have noticed flocks in the hundreds of cockatoos and wood ducks, just in the area between Treasury and the John Gorton building. There are also large numbers of Galahs, not to mention the bush birds in the shrubberies and eucalyptus plantings. Quite a few honeyeaters too. [*Editor's note: Regrettably there were no responses*]
- Campbell Park on 17 May a large flock of **Double-barred Finches** - 13 birds. On the day it was also a bit of a honeyeater nirvana - **White-eared, White-naped, Fuscous, Yellow-faced, Brown-headed Honeyeaters** along with **Red Wattlebirds** and **Noisy Miners**. Lerps seemed to be the attractant. Even the **Australian Ravens** were working the leaves (Con Boekel)
- The National Regent Honeyeater Recovery project reported on 23 May the release of 27 **Regent Honeyeaters** back into the wild. The birds, all fitted with radio transmitters, have been released into the Chiltern National Park. Community involvement is playing a vital part in monitoring activities. A bird has already been re-sighted next to a wild bird - the first wild Regent Honeyeater in the park for 18 months! Chiltern National Park was selected as the release location because it provides a relatively large, intact, protected area of habitat for the species. The releases coincide with good Ironbark and White Box flowering providing a critical food source for the birds.
- At Yerrabi Pond on 26 May, nine **Musk Ducks**, all either females, sex unknown immatures or ducklings, a total of 33 **Australian Grebes**, 31 of them in non-breeding plumage and one of the remaining two pretty obviously well-advanced in the moult out of breeding plumage. There were also at least 13 **Hardheads**, two **Little Pied Cormorants**, one **White-faced Heron** and an **Intermediate Egret** (Bruce Ramsay)
- Although Kaikoura, New Zealand, is not strictly in COG's area of interest, Stewart May shared with the chat line this photo of a **Salvin's Mollymawk** taken on a pelagic trip in February.
- As well as the usual prime birding locations, other local hot spots during the months were Telopea Park, the National Gallery's Sculpture Garden, and the water hole behind the visitor centre at Namadgi National Park.
- On 29 May at Googong Dam in a once-grazed field beside Burra Ck, Julian Robinson and Lindsay Nothrop came across a plethora of **Hooded** and **Flame Robins**, a startling discovery in the late afternoon sun to see at first one, then two, then a counted nine robins, all sitting perched on top of waist-high stalks watching the watchers. There were at least six Hoodeds and at least four Flames, with a total of 15 to 20.



Photo by Stewart May

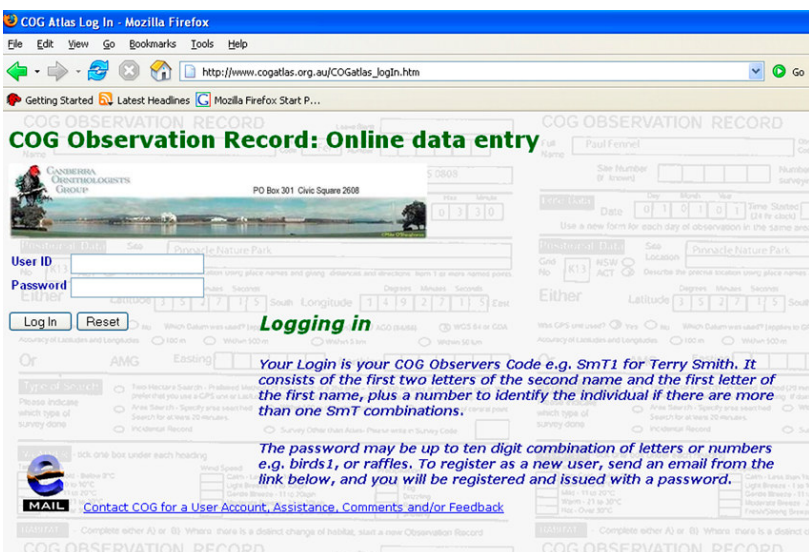
Salvin's Mollymawk
(*Thalassarche salvini*)

COG Atlas Online — <http://www.cogatlas.org.au/>

The COG online data entry system has now been operating for a little more than a year. There are just under 1000 record sheets entered by approximately 30 users, reporting 800 observations. As with any online application there were a few teething problems, but Tony Muzik-Smith, the program's designer has made several modifications to make data entry easier and to remove bugs. The system is now working quite well as long as users don't take too many liberties with it.

If you want to use the system, go to the site and send me an email. When I reply you will find that your log on is your COG observer code (mine is FeP1) and there is a password. Once you are online you can update your contact details and change your password. Contact details, such as phone and email address, are important if there are any questions to be asked about any of the data entered on the system.

The online system is closely modelled on the COG Observation Data Sheet, so regular contributors on paper should have little trouble using the system. For those who need more information about how to use the system there is a detailed set of User Guidelines on the opening page of the site. This is a PDF document that can be read online, or printed off for easier reference. For those people who are new to bird surveying, there is a comprehensive set of instructions on how to go about surveys.



Now a lot of people, including myself, find they hate reading user guides, and adopt a trial and error approach to mastering new software. This is often successful, but unless the software has been absolutely bullet-proofed by extensive trials by idiot users, even the most computer savvy person may find problems not anticipated by the program developer. **Therefore I am quite happy to demonstrate the program for any user in his or her own home**

to show them how easy it is to use. Use the email button on the opening page to contact me, or use my phone number that is in the User Guide. I make this offer to encourage as many people as possible to record their observations in the hope that COG can get more people turning their observations into hard data in our database.

I am sure all COG members are aware of the importance of bird data for preserving our environment. COG gets many requests for bird data for environmental surveys and for making environmentally sound planning decisions on land use and environmental policy. While our data is not the most perfect set of observations, it is the ONLY data available. So it is very important that all observations are recorded.

Now that you have decided to use the system, I would strongly advise you have a look at, or even read carefully, the User Guide to give yourself an overview of the system. There are two main data entry pages corresponding to the Site Data (front of the COG observation sheet) and the Species Data (back of the COG observation sheet). You can download these sheets from the COG Website (http://www.canberrabirds.org.au/Forms/COG_obs_form.pdf) if you wish.

Most of the problems appear to be with getting the location, grid reference and lat/longs right. There is a set of standard locations in a drop down box that contains all the required data for the sites listed. If the site is not listed, then there is another box to enter the location data. Note that Mandatory fields are printed in RED.

There are three options for entering the species data. The first is the best in that it mirrors the COG Observation sheet, so is much faster when more than one or two species have to be recorded. I have a mouse with a wheel that enables the pages to be scrolled up and down quickly. This I find very useful for skidding through the page, to stop at the species required. This helps develop a good understanding of the Systematic List which corresponds to the listing in Pizzey and other field guides.

— Paul Fennell, COG Database Manager

**CANBERRA ORNITHOLOGISTS GROUP INC
MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL / APPLICATION
2008-2009**



INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE

- Membership fees are set at \$35 for 2008/2009 and are due 1 July 2008 for most existing members - check your *Gang-gang/CBN* label to confirm when your membership expires. Do not pay if your membership expires on or after 30 June 2009.
- Electronic fund transfer (EFT) is only available to renewing members. If you pay your subscription by EFT please complete the form on the COG website and then email it as an attachment to the COG secretary, Sandra Henderson at cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au
- Ensure your initials, surname and/or COG number are on the transfer - if we cannot identify your payment you could be struck off as non-financial.
- Transfer funds to:
 Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc
 St George Bank
 A/C number 050111462
 BSB 112-908

If you can assist with any of the following please circle the relevant topic(s):

- | | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Atlassing/Surveys | Data entry | Administration/Office | Leading outings |
| Publicity/Exhibition | Youth education | Publications | Conservation |

COG membership number (check your <i>Gang-gang</i> or <i>CBN</i> mailing label)	Title	Name
--	--------------	-------------

Street Address	Town / Suburb	State	Postcode
-----------------------	----------------------	--------------	-----------------

Telephone Home	Work	Mobile	Email address
-----------------------	-------------	---------------	----------------------

*Family memberships: List names of all family members covered by membership
--

- Individual - \$35
- Institution - \$35
- * Family - \$35
- Student (18yrs or under) - new \$17.50
- Canberra Birds Conservation Fund Donation \$.....

If you would prefer to be notified when *Gang-gang* can be accessed on the COG Website rather than be sent a printed copy, please tick here:

Total \$:(office use only)

FURTHER INFORMATION ON PAYING YOUR MEMBERSHIP

- Contact the treasurer, **Lia Battisson**, by email liabattisson@actewagl.net.au if you have any queries about paying your subscription.
- You can pay by cash or cheque at the meetings or by cheque/money order through the post - do not send cash. Mail your payment to: **The Secretary, Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc, PO Box 301, CIVIC SQUARE ACT 2608**

Garden Bird Survey Notes

Although I have been off sampling the delights of census development in the Pacific (and am heading that way again for the last part of May) the excellent archive facility has enabled me to extract some GBS-relevant highlights from the Chatline, and other sources, for late April to mid May. These include:

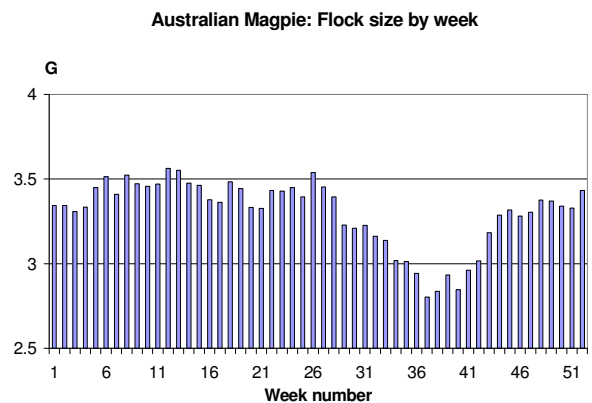
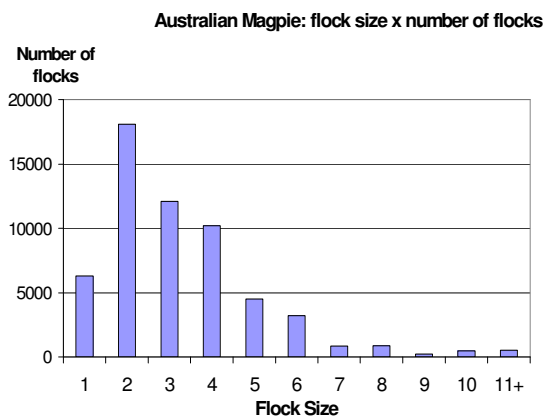
- a **Tawny Frogmouth** bouncing off our window in Carwoola while hawking bogongs;
- an observer adding; after many years in the survey, **White-browed Scrubwren** to their site list;
- **Superb Parrot** in Watson;
- up to 30 **Red Wattlebirds** in one tree in Wanniasa; and
- the **Honeyeater** migration still appearing to be going in the earlier part of the period.



Photo by John Wal-

Tawny Frogmouth
(*Podargus strigoides*)

When we resided in Bruce our usual **Magpies** were a pair, plus in the appropriate season one or more juveniles. Around Carwoola I have noticed that the usual lawn patrol is three birds. Here are two graphs about Australian Magpies as reported in the 26 completed years of the GBS. The average flock size over the period was 3.30 birds and the biggest flock reported (from a site in Curtin) was 70 birds.



I don't have a copy of Gisela Kaplan's excellent book *Australian Magpie: Biology and Behaviour of an unusual song-bird* for comparison but the charts compare well with the extensive text in Volume 7 Part A of HANZAB.

I expect to attend the June Meeting with a goodly supply of blank GBS Charts for handing out to observers. The printers have been able to produce the old larger size, so folk will have a choice!

— **Martin Butterfield**

COG SALES

MUDBRICK COTTAGE

Mallacoota

Our mudbrick cottage is available for rental for all those nature lovers out there!!

It is set amongst the trees in Mallacoota, Victoria (approximately 4 hours drive from Canberra). It is only 10 minutes walk to the beach, 5 minutes walk to the golf course and about 15 minutes walk to town. It sleeps 4-6 upstairs and there is a sofa bed downstairs.

It is fully self-contained with a kitchen and laundry. Contact Barbara de Bruine

(02) 6258 3531.

PASSIVE SOLAR HOUSE

South Rosedale

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

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

Contact Greg or Sallie Ramsay

6286 1564 or
gramsay@actewagl.net.au

The following items plus various pamphlets (most free) and membership application forms are available from the sales desk at COG meetings.

- **Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT** by Taylor and Day - \$16.00
- **Birds of the ACT: Two Centuries of Change** by Steve Wilson - \$25.00
- **Bird Calls of the ACT** – CD - \$12.00
- **Bird Songs of Canberra** – Cassette - \$10.00
- **COG Car Stickers** - \$2.00
- **COG Badges** – red or grey - \$5.00
- **The Long Paddock: A Directory of Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves in NSW** by Rural Lands Protection Board - \$31.00
- **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
- **Where to Find Birds in NE Queensland** by Jo Wieneke - \$16.00.
- **Grassland Flora: A Field Guide for the Southern Tablelands (NSW and ACT)** by David Eddy et al. - \$13.00
- **Our Patch: A Field Guide to the Flora of the ACT Region** - \$12.50
- **The Nestbox Book** by Gould League - \$12.50
- **Woodlands: A Disappearing Landscape** by David Lindenmayer et al - \$34.00
- **Feather and Brush: Three Centuries of Australian Bird Art** by Penny Olsen - \$50.00

A range of substantially discounted titles, mostly from CSIRO Publishing, is also available at meetings or may be ordered via email/telephone by COG members only.

All these items plus COG T-shirts and Polo shirts are available at the monthly meeting sales desk

AvIan Whimsy #63

To See or Not to See? A sound argument!

On dipping into *Anoraks to Zitting Cisticola* last night, I was shocked to find that Sean Dooley, my favourite Australian birder – ie of those I haven't met! – shamelessly confessed to counting birds he'd only heard. Actually, that's a bit unfair in that it was only in the context of a twitchathon, so they weren't his rules. However, there is no such excuse in the case of at least one entire nation which generally rates highly on international scales of integrity and fairness (and not just piliferously). Just consider this quote from a trip report to Cameroon: "Luckily we are Swedes, so we don't have to see a bird to twitch it, the call is enough." Eh?! Surely a confession which is earth-trembling in its broad implications; are sanctions called for? In their case they went home without having seen a Picathartes, one of the *HGs of birding, but added it to their list on the strength of hearing one! (*Holy Grail, rather than Nelson, though come to think of it, I'd like to hear Roy-and-HG proclaim upon such heinous behaviour.) I can readily appreciate that such an approach would make birding a lot easier, especially in rainforest or mallee for instance, but really ...

No, you're right of course – it's simply a personal matter and we must all live by our own rules, whether it's in birding or simply the wider but more trivial areas of life and morality. It really comes down to a question of what the point of the birding excursion is. If surveying, either for an Atlas or for work, then the aim is to establish the presence of a species for a wider purpose than personal satisfaction. However if we're 'just birding' in the way that we all tend to be, especially in unfamiliar areas, then there seems little point in just noting down birds as we hear them. We could do that sitting by the road and not exploring at all. When I'm with a group – and in the enviable position of making the rules! – I insist that a bird can't attain the exalted position of being on our trip list on the basis of just having been heard. That way birding laziness lies.

Part of the point of the exercise for me is to be able to use such skill or even luck as I have, to find, *and then appreciate and enjoy*, the bird. And that, I think, is the essence of it; if I just go home and report, albeit only to my computer, that I've ticked so many species today, then it's a pretty shallow exercise. I do keep fairly meticulous records of trips, but I like to think that when I revisit those records I can recreate for myself an image of what each of those birds was doing when I saw it, and the impression it made on me. And to state the bleeding obvious, I can only do that if I see it.

On the other hand you could quite plausibly argue that I'm just saying this because my ears certainly aren't even as good as my much less than perfect visual abilities. I have to work much harder at learning calls than I do for visual cues, doubtless related to my notable musical inadequacies. I love music, but my abilities are limited to feeding the CD player; I have an effortless aptitude and seemingly boundless capacity to fail to put a name to a familiar piece of music. Nonetheless, like all of us, even I'm used to recognising the calls of most of the local regular species, and after only a few decades of practice too. Accordingly it was a shock the first times I birded in Africa and South America to realise that I recognised nothing that my ears were registering, though my homework enabled me to put names to most of the birds I saw. I felt as though I'd suddenly been stricken deaf.

So, I'm open to an accusation that I'm just trying to make a virtue out of my aural inadequacy by removing the need to rely on it. In fact, at one level I'm open to being convinced – at least I could then finally add Noisy Scrub-bird to my life list!

Ian Fraser ianf@pcug.org.au



WONGA

Bawley Point

South Coast of N.S.W.

Two well equipped timber cottages in 50 acres. Damp and dry warm temperate forest, kunzea and rock provide for a diversity of birds and other animals. A short walk down the driveway leads to sand dunes and beaches, sea birds and Hooded Plovers. Close to National Parks, lakes and historic sites.

patricia.walker@bigpond.com

phone 02 6251 3136

www.visitnsw.com.au (follow the links to accommodation and Wonga)

NEW MEMBERS

COG welcomes the following new members:

GR Plumb, Gungahlin
E&G Kay, Monash
M Strong, Greenway
I&J Nicol, Fadden
D&B Mantle, Duffy
M Lukacs, Queanbeyan
A Russell-French, Curtin
C Anderson, Canberra
L Stanners, Kingston
T Bell, Turner

NEXT NEWSLETTER

July deadline

Wednesday 25 June 2008

Please send, articles, advertisements, updates etcetera to the Editors at gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au or 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.

Photographs (prints or electronic) with or without articles are encouraged and welcomed.

COG info

President—Chris Davey, ph 6254 6324
Email: chris_davey@aapt.net.au

Vice President—Jack Holland
ph 6288 7840 (home)

Treasurer—Lia Battison ph 6231 0147

Secretary—Sandra Henderson 6231 0303
cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au

Address for correspondence

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

Newsletter distribution
Judy Collett and helpers

COG membership

2008-2009 memberships:

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

Membership inquiries—

Sandra Henderson ph 6231 0303
membership@canberrabirds.org.au
for changed address or other details

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

Office

COG no longer maintains an office. For all enquiries or access to COG's library phone Barbara Allen on 6254 6520

COG E-mail Discussion List

COG has an email discussion list for members and friends: 'Canberra Birds'. Join the list by following the links on the COG website or by sending an empty email message to canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au with the subject 'subscribe' without the quotation marks

Editor Canberra Bird Notes

CBN@canberrabirds.org.au

Gang-gang editors—Sue Lashko and

Greg Ramsay

Email: gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au



Gang-gang

If undeliverable, please return to
Canberra Ornithologists Group, Inc.
PO Box 301, Civic Square ACT 2608

SURFACE
MAIL

POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA