

Gang-gang

March 2005

News letter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

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Who is this shady character, and why is he lurking? Prize to be announced...

Field Trip Reports

COG Summer Camp: Ben Boyd National Park 11-14 February

The second annual COG Summer Camp proved a very popular and successful birding and social event. Thirty campers found their way to shady Saltwater Creek campground for a relaxing weekend and enjoyed perfect weather. Besides looking at birds people walked, swam, chatted, knitted, read and slept. The water was warm, again enticing the COG Nymphs who this year remembered their bathers. Despite the relaxed ambience a wide variety of habitats was explored and a total of 100 species was seen.

Green Cape and Boyd's Tower produced a variety of sea birds including Wandering and Yellow-nosed Albatross, five species of Shearwater, Caspian Tern and a large pod of dolphins. Bittangabee camp area gave good views of Tawny Frogmouth, Rose Robin, Crested Shrike-tit, Black-faced Monarch, Brown Gerygone and Varied Sitella. Barbara Jones of Far South Coast Birdwatchers had suggested some hotspots at Bulls Creek and Snake Track. Bulls Creek yielded Beautiful Firetail, Yellow-tufted Honeyeater and Crescent Honeyeater, while at the Snake Track site Pilotbird, Mistletoebird and Olive-backed Oriole were added.

Saltwater Creek campsite, the beach, and the heaths and woodlands to its north and south proved excellent birding spots. Fantail, Horsfields and Shining Bronze-cuckoos, Australian Owlet-nightjar, Bassian Thrush, Wonga Pigeon, Glossy Black-cockatoo, Peregrine Falcon, Tawny-crowned Honeyeater, Southern Emu-wren and Striated Fieldwren were notable records. Those arriving on Thursday afternoon had excellent views of two Hooded Plovers on the beach with one young, a goodly proportion of the NSW population of these birds. Other campers reported that on Thursday morning there had been three young, but sadly by Friday morning only the adults were present. Predation by Australian or Little Raven was suspected.

Trevor Lipscombe

Monthly Meeting

8 pm Wednesday 9 March 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 Margaret Peachey of the RSPCA. Margaret will tell us how the RSPCA handles injured birds and will give us guidance on what we should do when we encounter them.

Our **main speaker** will be long-time COG member and photographer extraordinaire, Graham ("Steve") Stephinson. His talk is entitled "West with the grey nomads" and will feature landscapes and critters avian and otherwise from his and Helen's 2004 five-and-a-half month marathon journey to NW Australia. Come and be envious!



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.

May 2005

Gluepot, Mungo and Wyperfeld 2-8th
(excludes airfare) \$ 2130
Start Canberra End Adelaide
Leader Alan Morris

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

Visit our website or telephone for
more information

Follow That Bird

Birds and Camaraderie

3/59 Central Rd, Avalon 2107

Tel 02 9973 1865 Fax 02 9973 1875

email tours@followthatbird.com.au

website followthatbird.com.au



Striped Honeyeater (*Plectorhyncha lanceolata*). Lindsay Hansch.

Lake Burley Griffin, Saturday 19 February

Six other members joined me on this ad hoc trip on the EL "Cygnet" with the specific objective to obtain more accurate numbers of the **Darter**/cormorant breeding in the willows etc along the eastern bank of Black Mountain Peninsula. This was in part due to hearing that the ACT Water Skiing Association is proposing to develop a training facility at this very spot.

The pattern observed on 15 January was confirmed except that there was at least one **Little Black Cormorant** nest in the initial group of **Little Pied Cormorant** nests close to the entrance to Sullivan's Creek. Again the main breeding area was over a couple of 100 metres up to the start of Gary Owen Drive (rather than beyond this as previously noted in error), most of which should be able to be observed from the adjacent bike path. A total of 15 Little Black Cormorant and 7 Little Pied Cormorant nests were confirmed, with breeding of the former at all stages including immature birds and a couple of nests containing dark downy young. By contrast the latter seemed to be either sitting on the nest or have recently fledged very orange (particularly around the face) juveniles present.

By far the most common species here was the Little Black Cormorant with more than 120 birds seen compared with about 35 Little Pied Cormorants. Numbers were difficult to estimate due to their mobility. As previously, scattered along this area were at least seven active **Darter** nests, again with breeding at all stages. Three of these were further down the peninsula. Of the 16 Darters seen, 7 were males in breeding plumage. Again only several **Great Cormorants** were seen here, with no confirmed breeding activity, though there were more of this species round Springbank Island, including at least 10 fishing with their smaller cousins at the start of the trip.

The extent of breeding compares with that on Molonglo Reach, with more Little Black Cormorant, about the same Little Pied Cormorant but fewer Darter nests present. It is hard to see how the water skiers won't have an impact on this breeding activity of growing regional importance.

Jack Holland

2004 COG Christmas Party

Twilight of the bush capital

When the pardalote says 'John Howard'
and no Gang-gang answers back,
and the last bluebell has flowered,
and no bronzewings line your track,
When Noisy Miners hold their tongues,
and wattlebirds are dumb,
and parrots croak with tired lungs
'The *turtledove* has come';

When whizzing bikes the black paths ply
where legless lizards lay,
and sharp-clawed cats in ambush lie
for jaunty wrens at play,

When Gungahlin sprawls to Hackett
over plains that broilgas strode,
and you can't endure the racket
from that busy 6-lane road,

When the day's first light at dawning
makes you feel that something's wrong;
there's just traffic noise each morning
and no cheerful magpie song,

When concrete covers Kellys Swamp,
and starlings claim each post
where Singing Bush-larks used to romp –
WE'LL MOVE DOWN TO THE COAST
Geoffrey Dabb

I wish I was a waterbird
I'd swim across the lake
On the way I'd meet a Swan
And maybe even a Crake.
I guess you can tell my little poem
Was composed upon the hop
Although it's very very wet
I hope the rain don't stop.

Lia Battinson

My apologies to Jenny Bounds for being unable to do justice to her necessarily dark photo - it does accurately reflect the evening though! (Acting ed.)



It would be hard to imagine a wetter party, but while feet (and ankles, shins...) were dampened, spirits were not. The impeccably impartial triumvirate of judges selected David McDonald and Geoffrey Dabb as joint winners of the poetry competition. Lia Battinson got a very honourable mention for her atmospheric and spontaneous contribution.



This White-faced Heron (*Egretta novaehollandiae*) was not present, but would have been right at home in the conditions.

Photo by Geoffrey Dabb.

"This delightful short poem was published, without a title or poet's name provided, in Pollard, J 1967, Birds of paradox: birdlife in Australia and New Zealand, Lansdowne, Melbourne, p. 69. Let's call it simply 'Crakes'."

Do you know the crakes that creep in the creek?
Or does nobody know them but me?
There's the spotted crake, and the spotless crake,
And the little crake -- that's three.
They creep in and out of the reeds and grass;
They're as shy as ever can be;
You must lie quite still, and hold your breath,
If a crake you want to see.

beautifully read by David McDonald

“WHY DO WE DO IT?”

COG members collect records of the birds they see for many different reasons. Some members are dedicated atlassers, regularly visiting “their” patch over many years. Some are habitual explorers, delighting in discovering the birds of obscurely named nature reserves or inaccessible mountain tops. There are those who record everything everywhere, and those who record only the unusual; those who do it in the birdy spots and those who target the unbirded places.

Members submit their records to COG because, well, if they’ve been recorded them anyway they may as well go into the large pool of bird records to be used for the greater good, and hey, who doesn’t like to see their observer code in the Annual Bird Report.

COG records are used for a variety of purposes. One of which members may be unaware is the supply of data to help in environmental impact assessments. As the major repository of bird records in our region, particularly the ACT, COG regularly receives requests from government agencies, private companies and individuals trying to assess the effect a proposed development may have on birdlife.

Recent examples of requests relate to proposals in the Majura Valley, the Mt Tennant dam, and windfarms on Molonglo Ridge and near Tarago. For some areas we have a wealth of data, eg. Campbell Park, Jerrabomberra wetlands. In some cases we don’t have very many records, usually from areas that are inaccessible or seemingly birdless – the tops of barren windswept ridges, for example. The records that we do have rely solely on what members collect and submit. Observations that don’t make it into the database are not able to be used.

So we urge you to go forth and observe, in new and different places, even the seemingly birdless, and please put pen to paper and submit your records. You never know when your records will be the best data we have on the birds of a particular area – and it may be the surest way you can help us achieve one of COG’s objectives; to promote the conservation of native birds and their habitat.

(COG Observation Sheets are available at monthly COG meetings).

Nicki Taws, Record Management Team

Report of February COG Meeting

Chris Davey delivered the short talk, entitled ‘An Encounter with the Birds of the Tibetan Plateau’. He gathered his information in September 2004 from his involvement in a joint CSIRO and Chinese Government project to look at Tibetan birds and pikas. The project site was about 5 hours’ drive north of the Tibetan capital, Lhasa, in an area of green plains and rolling hills, grazed by yak, sheep and goats. At this altitude of 2500 to 5000 metres there are no trees. This region is the source of the major rivers such as the Brahmaputra and the Mekong which supply 85% of Southeast Asia with water.

The pika is a very small (180 gram) lagomorph, ie a close relative to the rabbit, but while most lagomorphs store food for the winter, the pika does not and so has to feed every day. It is both a pest because of its burrowing habit, and an important keystone species as it is a main food source for raptors and its burrows are used by some birds, such as snow finches, for nesting.

With the absence of trees in the region, most birds are ground or cliff nesters. However, raptors have adapted to the arrival of electricity in Tibetan by building their nests on power pylons.

The main speaker, Emeritus Professor Henry Nix, delivered a passionate and engaging ‘Reanalysis of the Birds of the Leichhardt Overland Expedition to Port Essington 1844-45’. By exploring the diaries of early explorers, Henry found that the impact of European settlement and the introduction of sheep and cattle on the environment, including the vegetation and animals, happened very quickly. Koala and Echidna, which had been the two main foods for Aborigines, underwent a population explosion when Aborigines were displaced.

Pre-settlement records of birds are very sparse. Dampier and the early Spanish and Dutch explorers, as well as the early French and English marine explorers, mentioned the coastal birds. However, it was not until John Gilbert joined Leichhardt’s expedition from the Darling downs to Port Essington in 1884 that a comprehensive list of Australian birds was compiled. Gilbert made lists at a number of camps where the expedition stopped for 4 or 5 days. He had a brief from John Gould to collect new species so it may be that his lists ignored the common birds, ie those previously collected, so they may not be comprehensive. In addition, Gould’s list was in Latin, yet Gilbert had no Latin.

Unfortunately, Gilbert was speared and killed by Aborigines in the Gulf Country in 1845. His diary and specimens got back to Gould in England but the diary then disappeared until 1938. Subsequently, two books on the expedition, ‘Strange New World’ (a ‘dreadful’ book) by AH Chisholm in 1942 and ‘The Explorers’ by William Joy in 1962, had a

huge impact on the way Gilbert and Leichhardt were perceived. Chisholm took everything Gilbert wrote as “certain” and everything Leichhardt wrote as “nonsense”. Joy’s book, too, is full of inaccuracies and is highly critical of Leichhardt while “overinflating” Gilbert. Leichhardt was, in fact, an exceptional scientist, probably the best trained in the nineteenth century. His diaries and notebooks provide very accurate descriptions and very good maps. He took a special interest in the food value of birds.

Henry reported on his analysis of the birds reported on the expedition compared to their abundance in the latest atlas. Emus were abundant on the Leichhardt expedition whereas very few were reported in the atlas. Cotton Pygmy-geese, relatively common then, and Squatter Pigeons, shot every day for food, suffered a severe decline in the twentieth century, but have made a remarkable recovery in the last 20 to 30 years. Leichhardt found Black-shouldered Kite only on the Darling Downs, but with clearing and thinning of trees and grazing, they are now widespread. By contrast, there were huge numbers of Flock Bronzewing in the southern part of the Cape York Peninsula in the 1840s, yet few were reported in the atlas, perhaps due to lack of atlassing. The expedition did not report Crested Pigeons and Scaly-breasted Lorikeet at all, and barely recorded Yellow-throated Miner, Galah and Cockatiel, yet they are now widespread and plentiful. Leichhardt gave a very good description of the Sandstone Shrike-thrush, yet the Ground Cuckoo-shrike was not recorded. The accuracy of Gilbert’s records was brought into question by his recording of Chirruping Wedgebill, an arid species, at Peak Downs, and “a riflebird”, a rainforest species, recorded in a very dry spot, which Chisholm took as Victoria’s Riflebird. Henry concluded by saying that Chisholm’s book was “not a history, but a hatchet job.”

Sue Lashko

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.

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.

Future Field Trips

Brooks Hill; Sunday 6 March – morning woodland birds, plants and animals

Brooks Hill is one of those small reserves that quietly goes about its business of looking after the woodland flora and fauna on which it is located. Often passed on the Kings Highway, but not often visited, it is located between Queanbeyan and Bungendore. When travelling from Queanbeyan, the car-park for the reserve is located on the right hand side at the bottom of the last hill before the last flat stretch of about 4 km in length, before Bungendore.

This will be a joint outing with the Field Naturalists Association of Canberra (FNAC), so there will be an opportunity to share some of our knowledge of the birds, with the knowledge of the plants and animals of the woodland. We'll meet at the carpark at 8.00 am for a morning walk up the slopes of the reserve (along ye olde Kings Highway in fact), before completing the loop along a gravel track, past the small dam, and back to the carpark. It should be a pleasant 2-3 hours. Please bring a hat, binoculars and a drink, and it would be preferable (but not essential) if your interest was registered with the leader, Alistair Bestow 6281 1481.

Wee Jasper/Lake Burrunjuck area, 18-21 March – Canberra Day long weekend – accommodated

COG will be returning to Wee Jasper on this long weekend, staying in the comfortable 'Wee Jasper' station shearers' quarters. It is a spot close to Canberra, with lots of interesting birding, along with opportunities to simply relax, swim, fish, walk and enjoy this lovely locality by the Goodradigbee River. Visiting the limestone caves and dining at the 'Stables' restaurant could also be on the agenda. The birding was excellent on our September 2000 visit, and is sure to be this March as well.

Participants can arrive on the Friday afternoon/evening and stay through to Monday. Some may care to come for shorter periods, if space is available. The shearers' quarters have been renovated for groups like us. The accommodation is bunk bedrooms: there are plenty, so ample space for singles, couples and even four-to-a-room, if you prefer. You bring bedding and food. A large kitchen, fridges and BBQ are available, along with a pleasant common room. The cost is modest, perhaps \$12-\$15 per person per night, depending how many participants we have.

Further information may be obtained from the trip leader, David McDonald, phone 6231 8904. Bookings are essential; please advise David if you plan to participate in this field trip.

Goonoo State Forest; 25-28 March - Easter camp-out

The COG Easter campout will be at the Goonoo State Forest area NE of Dubbo. This is a large area of ironbark forest with substantial areas of allocasuarina. We should be able to find an active **Mallee Fowl** nest site as well as a couple of dams where the **Glossy Black-cockatoos** come down to drink. **Yellow-plumed Honeyeaters** are also present. A trip to the Dubbo zoo is also planned. Not only is it a good spot for wild birds, but it also has a very tame mallee fowl, not to mention the other attractions.

COG has been kindly offered the ability to camp on a 200 hectare private property just south of the Goonoo. Water will be available and the COG loos etc will be arranged. The property is itself very interesting and contains a lot of good habitat. **Speckled Warblers** are common there, for example. The owners are keen to get a bird list plus any other tips we can give. A range of accommodation options will be possible on this trip for those who do not wish to camp. For example, folk can still stay in Dubbo if they prefer, which is about 30 mins away.

If you are interested in participating please contact David Rees (02) 6242 4517, or by E-mail to david.p.rees@csiro.au. Owners of 4WDs are especially encouraged to come, as car pooling for trips into the forest in 4WDs is the best means to explore this area.

Angle Crossing; Sunday 10 April - Honeyeater migration morning

The autumn movement of thousands of **Yellow-faced** and **White-naped Honeyeaters** (and lesser numbers of other species) from the mountains to warmer climes along the coast and further north is a feature of the Canberra birdwatching calendar. Despite the fires in January 2003, for the past two years we have still counted thousands of honeyeaters passing through the Angle Crossing area on a good migration day.

To witness this spectacle, and to help count the honeyeaters, meet Nicki Taws at 8:30 am at Tharwa, in the first car park on the left immediately after crossing the bridge. Bring something to sit on, a hat, sunscreen and morning tea. Enquiries to Nicki (6251 0303, ntaws@austarmetro.com.au). As usual if the weather's not the best for honeyeaters we will visit the Tharwa Sandwash for some general birding.

Frogs' Hole Creek, Frogmore; Saturday-Sunday 23-24 April – over night campout on private property

COG has been invited to observe the birds on this property at Frogmore, 26 km to the NE of Boorowa, and about 2 hours drive from Canberra. This is an undulating bush block of close to 150 ha, and encompasses a range of habitats including the creek from which it takes its name. Over the past 5 years close to 120 different species have been recorded here, including a number which are close to their eastern limit such as **Cockatiel, Striped, Blue-faced and Black-chinned Honeyeater, both Babblers, Gilbert's Whistler and Apostlebird**. While not all of these could be expected in April, a good range of species, some of which are seldom seen in the ACT, can be expected.

We will be camping overnight at a lovely spot near the creek on a take everything in, take everything out basis. Participants should aim to arrive early afternoon on the Saturday, and it is expected we'll stay until latish on Sunday afternoon, taking advantage of the Anzac Day holiday on the Monday. This will be partly an exploratory trip for which numbers may need to be restricted. Car pooling will be encouraged, so if you're interested please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au).

Wednesday walk – 16 March – “Callum Brae” woodlands

A morning walk in the new nature park taking in the Callum Brae woodlands to look at the birds that are there in early autumn. Many of the summer migrants should still be there as well as other specials such as the **Peaceful Dove**. Meet at 9:00 am in Narrabundah Lane, about 300 m east of its intersection with Mugga Lane.

Longer trips


None at this time

Other surveys/Activities of Interest to COG Members

- The friends of Mt Majura have invited COG members to join them on a discovery walk on **birds and their habitats on Mt Majura**. This will take place on Saturday 5 March, meeting at 8.00 am (sharp) at Mackenzie St Nature Park entrance opposite Grayson Street. COG member Geoffrey Dabb will lead this walk – everyone is welcome to join in.
- The next **Cowra Woodland survey** will be held over the weekend of 12-13 March. If you are interested in participating please contact Sue Proust on thebradybunch8@bigpond.com.



Tawny-crowned
Honeyeater
(*Phylidonyris melanops*)
Photo by Geoffrey
Dabb.
From Ben Boyd NP
COG camp - see page 1.



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

Notices

8 DAY EXPEDITION TO FIND PRINCESS PARROTS. Alan Cowan is hoping to arrange an eight-day expedition for May 24-31 (dates to be confirmed) to try to find Princess Parrots. The itinerary is Broome to Kunawarritji, then north on the Canning Stock Route as far as Well 43, returning to Broome. This is a privately-organised trip and will be led by George Swann, with a maximum group of seven. Cost \$A3212 per person Broome to Broome. Interested people please contact Alan urgently on 02 62813038.

COWRA WOODLAND SURVEY will be held over the weekend of **12-13 March**. If you are interested in participating please contact Sue Proust on thebradybunch8@bigpond.com.

MULLIGAN'S FLAT SURVEY - Sunday 3 April 2005. The autumn survey is on 3 April, meeting at the usual place, the carpark/gate off the Gundaroo Road, 7.15am. Regular volunteers note your diaries. Confirm if you are available in the week before. I will email a reminder to those on my list. Bring clipboard, pencil etc and wear study shoes. Morning tea afterwards - bring mug or cup. (note: the survey has been moved from the usual end March timing due to Easter). Jenny Bounds 02 62887802.

WOODLAND BIRDS SEMINAR 2005. I will be coordinating for COG a second seminar on a woodland birds theme, **proposed for 4 June 2005** around the timing of World Environment Day. This will be along similar lines to the very successful seminar COG hosted at CSIRO Discovery in 2003, which attracted 140 people. A Steering Committee has been formed to guide the preparation. The theme is likely to be around woodlands/woodland birds and on-ground actions for recovery. We are expecting to link the seminar with other key events relating to woodlands and woodlands research, with COG hosting in collaboration with other organisations.

We will need a number of people to assist with administrative type tasks in the lead up to the seminar, some of which can be handled through the COG Office computer in Civic or at home (if preferred), eg setting up email lists to publicise the event, arranging printing of publicity flyers and distributing, doing mail outs, and handling registrations/enquiries. On the day itself, I will be looking for assistance with setting up tables and displays, organising supplies for and setting up afternoon tea etc, carparking guides etc. If you will be in town then and can assist, please let me know, on phone 6288 7802 - Jenny Bounds.

BASNA GOES TO CANBERRA! Birds Australia Southern NSW & ACT Group Seminar and Annual General Meeting **Saturday 2 April 2005** 12noon – 4.30pm **BUSHFIRES AND BIRDS** National Library Lecture Theatre, Canberra. Registration*: Members \$25 Non members \$30 Students \$20. Speakers include: Jack Baker *Fire Sensitive Birds & Adaptive Management*; Dr Jamie Matthew *Post Fire Changes in bird populations in dense mallee habitat*; Chris Davey *Impacts of the 2003 Bushfires on the Superb Lyrebird at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve*; David Lindenmayer; Ian Fraser *Land of Fire; 20 million years of practising*. * **Registrations close 21 March 2005.** Late registrations will incur an additional \$5 fee. In addition there is a Saturday evening dinner at University House; Fire Recovery Inspection & Honeyeater Migration Trip, & Lake Burley Griffin/Molonglo River Darter & Cormorant Breeding Trip organised. For further information or to register contact Lise at BASNA on; Tel: 02 9436 0388 Fax: 02 9436 0466 PO Box 1322, CROWS NEST NSW 1585 Email: rosella63@bigpond.com.

CANBERRA BIRD BLITZ

When? Sat 29 and Sun 30 October 2005. Yes, we've extended it to a weekend, in case of bad weather. And to celebrate Bird Week, of course.

Who by? Every COG member within easy travelling distance of the ACT – that is, 301 of you (families or individual members)!

Where? ACT only, not COG's broader area of concern. We aim for a *minimum* of one survey for every COG grid cell in the ACT, depending on permission from EACT and private landholders for access to certain areas. Depending on how we count the part-grids, that is between 150 and 165 grids (each grid is an area bounded by 2.5 minutes of latitude and longitude, or approx 3.5 km by 4.5 km).

How? A standard 20-minute survey of 2 hectares (100 metres by 200 metres a good guide), totally within the grid. It may be necessary or preferable in some grids to use an alternate approach, namely a survey within 500 metres of a central point, with start and finish times recorded and for a minimum of 20 minutes but without upper time limits. Bird abundance to be recorded, as well as indications of breeding. Use a COG datasheet for each survey to record the birds you see (datasheets available at COG monthly meetings, from the COG office in the Griffin Centre on Tuesday mornings, or from our website www.canberrabirds.org.au – or contact the organiser).

Which grids can I survey? We'd like you to nominate the grids you'd like to take responsibility for. A clipboard will be passed around at the March COG meeting for your nominations – or email the organiser on allanbm@ozemail.com.au or phone her on 6254 6520. In the allocation of grids, preference for formal grid ownership and responsibility will be given to COGites who regularly survey those areas. This doesn't mean you can't survey them also – the more the merrier! – but we'd like you also to take on at least one, and up to five, other grids as your special responsibility. Even if you can't get out and about on those days, please try and participate by surveying in your suburb at least. If you're uncertain about where the grids start and end, come and check the maps at COG meetings, or ask the organiser. The maps in the annual bird reports will help – try *Canberra Bird Notes* 28(4) December 2003, page 184, for guidance. We'll publish a final list of who is responsible for what in *Gang-gang* nearer the time; and interim lists will be on display at COG meetings.

Do I have to do it by myself? No. You can if you like, but you might prefer to take on more grids and go with a few friends. If you're unsure of your ability to identify birds correctly but would nevertheless like to participate, let the organiser know – she'll match you up with a member who has agreed to take along beginners or visitors.

What if I think I see a rare bird? Birds listed as 'rare' will only be added to the overall total of species seen after vetting by COG's rarities panel. Your datasheet must be accompanied by a completed unusual bird report form (available from meetings, office or website) and, preferably, a digital photo (so take your cameras, just in case!). Given certain changes in the status of our birds, an updated rarities list will be published in *Canberra Bird Notes* and on our website before the blitz.

Can members of the public join in? Yes. We are working on ways in which they can participate – details shortly.

Prizes will be awarded in many categories, and there will also be lucky draw prizes among all participants. COGites with skills or hobbies are encouraged to offer or sponsor a prize – for example, one hour's free computing tuition, one hour's gardening, a basket of home grown vegies, native plants.

What do I do with my datasheets? Bring them along to a post-blitz barbecue at Black Mountain peninsula starting at 5pm on Sunday 30 October; or post them immediately to COG, PO Box 301, Civic Square ACT 2608.

Barbara Allan, blitz organiser

From the Committee

At its 16 February 05 meeting, the Committee discussed the following, amongst other more routine matters; it also takes this opportunity to remind you of forthcoming events.

- The COG/BA "Pocket Guide" pamphlet on Canberra birds and where to find them has been a great success; more are on order.
- Options for a speeded-up version of the trialled online data entry program for COG are being examined. Please bear with us over the delays, but it is important to get this right.
- *We thank Martin Butterfield for the enormous amount of work he has put in to the Garden Bird Survey in his time as coordinator and wish him and Frances well in their new life in New York. David Rosalky has been appointed the new GBS coordinator.*
- We have been approached by the Friends of Mt Majura to be involved in a bird walk there on 5 March. See 'Field Trips' for details.
- COG has accepted the invitation of the organisers of the **Easter Extravaganza** at Tidbinbilla to have a display tent there on Easter Sunday. If anyone is available to put in two hours or so on that day to help Barbara Allan set up a display and answer questions from the public, please let her know (6254 6520).



Wonga Pigeon (*Leucosarcia melanoleuca*). Geoffrey Dabb. From COG camp, Ben Boyd NP; see page 1.

- Jenny Bounds will be COG's representative at the BigNET meeting at Bateau Bay in March.
- Reminder of the Birds Australia Southern New South Wales and ACT group seminar in Canberra on 2 April. Bookings and inquiries to Lise, BASNA, at rosella63@bigpond.com; 02 9436 0388; or PO Box 1322 Crows Nest 1585.
- Reminder of the second COG Woodland Bird seminar, on 4 June in the CSIRO Discovery Centre. Jenny Bounds will again be the organiser.
- COG members are reminded to keep Saturday 29 and Sunday 30 October free, in order to participate in our first all-Canberra bird blitz. Details elsewhere in *Gang-gang*.

Avian Whimsy #28

Sharing a Bird's Eye View

Sitting out in the yard the other day, I became aware of a white cocky; it was not just watching me, but seemed to be peering very intently. In fact in some ways it could see me better than I could see it. Equally interestingly, he and I share a view of the world that most of my fellow mammals lack. Sight is the most important sense for most birds, followed by hearing, with smell much less relevant for many (though by no means all; see Whimsy #1 back in July 2002). This order is the reverse of that for most mammals – humans are a major exception. Colour vision is much more important for birds than mammals – again, except for people and other primates.

The large size of a bird's eyes tells us much about their importance to their owner. An eagle's eyes are similar in size to ours, though the bird may have a body mass which is only 10-15% of a person's. A starling's eyes make up about 15% of its head mass; ours only make up about 2%. A large eye forms a large image, enabling much finer detail to be distinguished. This is visual acuity – the ability to distinguish adjacent similar objects – and that of birds of prey is proverbial. While often exaggerated, it is still up to three times that of humans. This means that an eagle can distinguish a rabbit from its surroundings at 1.5km; our best is about 500m.

The large size of a bird's eye is not always obvious to us, because much of it is covered by skin and feathers. It takes up so much room in the bird's skull however that there is little room for muscles to move it, which we rely upon to change focus. Instead a bird's neck is very mobile, giving it a very wide field of vision in practice, up to 360° in some cases. An owl can swivel its head right round to the rear and to 90° up to the sides.

When we move, our eye very cleverly moves in its socket to compensate for this. Because a bird can't do this, it will instead try to keep its head as still as possible to keep the retinal images fixed. Watch a pigeon walking; its head seems to bob, but in fact it is staying still while the body moves forward beneath it, then the head shoots forward again. A bird on a swaying branch also tries to keep the head still while the body is moving, as does a bird which is hovering.

Most birds don't have good binocular vision, with eyes on the sides of their heads so that their fields of vision barely overlap. Owls are an exception to this and I suspect that the owl's association with wisdom is related to this, because they look like us! Are we not outrageous? In the woodcock, the eyes are set so far back that the bird can get binocular vision behind it, though not in front! Closer to home, a Palm Cockatoo can also see behind its head. On the other hand a bird can focus sharply on up to 20° of its field of vision at once, compared with only about 2° for us. Using my dad's WW2 navigator's protractor, I make it that this means that at 10m, a bird can focus on 3.5m of field at once; we could only manage about the central 40cm of that. (Try it, using parallel chalk lines on the garage wall.) And yes, I could probably once have calculated that accurately using cosines, or something, but that knowledge has long been deleted from my hard drive...

Many birds can also get an effective binocular picture of the world by rapidly turning their head from side to side, superimposing 'freeze frames' on their retina. I've watched Azure Kingfishers do this from a perch, but of course they are also doing painfully complex calculations to allow for light refraction through the water.

And consider this; a pigeon can rapidly and accurately peck up seeds from the ground while simultaneously focussing sharply on distant objects on both sides to watch for predators! It does this by having two fovea per eye, where we have only one. The fovea is a specialised part of the retina where cone cells are concentrated, where we best see colour and detail; in us it is at the back of the eye, so that we see most sharply straight ahead. The pigeon's second fovea is in the centre of the retina, so it has a second sharp field out to the side.

But wait, there's more... All birds also have gradated focus, with near vision in the lower field, and distant focus higher

up, like wearing graduated lenses (which I'm still trying to get the hang of!). This means that they can focus on the area around their feet for food while simultaneously looking forward to the horizon for danger. And the eye changes as the bird grows, so that the focal distance alters to match the distance to its feet!

Most birds can also move their eyes independently of each other, and can contract just one pupil to cope with a light source from the side! All quite extraordinary in fact... And I've not even mentioned the clever things they can do with colour yet – we'll leave that for next time. Can you bear to wait? As ever, any feedback gratefully received. (Albeit only in my dreams...)
 Ian Fraser ianf@pcug.org.au



The eye of the eagle; it can pick out lunch at 1.5km.
Wedge-tailed Eagle (*Aquila audax*)
 at Coongie Lakes.
 Photo: Ian Fraser

GBS Central #10

As the nights draw in – at what seems to be an alarming rate – the birds seem to be getting ready for the onset of Winter. Some observers have reported that dollarbirds have been absent from their gardens, but a few have continued to be seen around the wider area.

Gossan Hill, the current locale of GBS Central, is still visited by an occasional leaden flycatcher but no longer in groups of 3 or 4. In contrast black-faced cuckoo-shrikes are becoming more common and often in parties of 4 or 5, probably preparing to merge into the larger flocks in which they travel.

Looking at the longer term picture at home base I have made a greater number of observations of laughing kookaburra in the last few months than I have for many years. Whether this is merely coincidental or some form of dispersal as a consequence of loss of habitat to the work towards my Favourite Freeway can only be guessed at.

As some of you will already know, Frances and I are also migrating. I have been informally advised that I have been given a job based in New York and expect to start there in the near future. I've aimed towards such a job for the last 15 years so have seized the opportunity. It does mean that I will have to give up the GBS Coordination position which I have found extremely rewarding and enjoyable. However, I am pleased to let you know that David Rosalky has agreed to take on this role, for which I thank him greatly.

I will continue my membership of COG and hope to continue membership of the chat-line. Occasional notes about birding matters will be offered for consideration by the Editor of Gang-gang: as my job is likely to take me to many countries some interesting tales should emerge.

Martin -

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 cliff top 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 kilometres 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@actewagl.net.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.



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 accommodation and Wonga)

Welcome New Members

Joan Adler, Belconnen
Olga Carder, Fraser
Ian Hufton, Yarralumla
Phillip Winn and Julie Lahn, ANU

Next newsletter

APRIL deadline
Wednesday 23 March 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.

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Canberra Birds Conservation Fund

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

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

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Gang-gang

If undeliverable, please return to
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