

# Gang-gang

March 2006

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

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## Monthly Meeting

8 pm Wednesday

8 March 2006

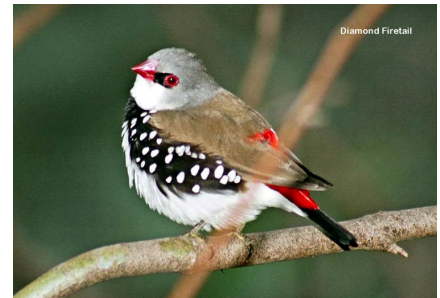
Canberra Girls Grammar School  
corner Gawler Cres and Melbourne  
Ave, Deakin. The meetings are held in  
the Multi-media Theatre at the School.  
Enter off Gawler Crescent using the  
school road signposted as Gabriel  
Drive. If that car-park is full, enter  
using Chapel Drive.

Our first speaker will be **Ben Pitcher**, who completed an honours thesis at the ANU under Rob Magrath. Ben's talk is "Vocal recognition in the White-browed Scrubwren". Following will be a talk by the Pictures Librarian at the National Library of Australia, **Linda Groom**. Many of you will have seen the exquisite watercolours of George Raper at their one-day display at the Library. Come and hear how we acquired them! Linda's topic is "A detective story: the acquisition of the Ducie Collection of First Fleet natural history watercolours."

Everyone welcome

## What to watch for this month

As we move into early autumn, features of the Canberra bird scene are mixed feeding flocks (MFF) and birds migrating to warmer climates in small to large numbers. MFFs can form anywhere and are often characterised by a number of smaller species, ranging from 3 to over 10, which seem to feed co-operatively in a very busy manner at all levels, such as on the ground, in the shrubs and in the tree canopy. While one or two species may be most conspicuous, keep a watchful eye on all the birds as often there may be one of two uncommon species quietly feeding in amongst them. There have been a number of MFF in the Chapman area since mid-February where, unusually, the core species were **Dusky Woodswallows** and **Red-rumped Parrots**, with a good sprinkling of **Diamond Firetails**. However, a number of different birds can provide the trigger, and several species of **Thornbills/Weebill** are also often present. A feature is how rapidly they can move through an area, with hardly a bird to be seen only an hour later.



Diamond Firetail (*Stagonopleura guttata*)

Photo by Lindsay Hansch

Of the migrants, the **Rainbow Bee-eater** often passes through/over Canberra in early March. These can be easily heard and seen quite high overhead, with their characteristic "purr purr" call and orange underwing making them relatively easy to identify. They can also migrate at lower levels, such as along a creek line or river. Also look out still for **White-throated Needle-tail** and any related **Fork-tailed Swifts** passing through on their way



Rainbow Bee-eater  
(*Merops ornatus*)

Photo by Geoffrey Dabb

back to the Northern Hemisphere, particularly on storm fronts. Numbers appear to have been relatively low during February, but they can be seen right until April. As the month ends, start looking/listening for migrating **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters**, which can be seen in large numbers, particularly on still days after a cool crisp night. While these are the most spectacular as they are the most numerous, other honeyeaters such as the **Red Wattlebird** and **Noisy Friarbird** also migrate.



## Follow That Bird

— Sydney's birding company

The following small well serviced birdwatching tours have pick up and drop offs available from Canberra's city centre.

All include three star accommodation and all meals. Please contact us for an itinerary for any of these trips.

### March 2006

**Newcastle Waders Afloat** \$550

31–3 April **Warrumbungles** TBA

### May 2006

8–14 **South-west Queensland**  
\$2,190

### July 2006

22–26 **Comboyne and Crowdy**  
**Head** start and end in Canberra \$1,495

### August 2006

9-23 **Eyre Peninsula** \$3,440

**For more information**  
visit our website, telephone or  
fax us on the numbers below

## Follow That Bird

Birds and Camaraderie

3/59 Central Rd, Avalon, NSW, 2107

Tel 02 9973 1865 Fax 02 9973 1875

Email: [tours@followthatbird.com.au](mailto:tours@followthatbird.com.au)

Website: [followthatbird.com.au](http://followthatbird.com.au)

The **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike** has also been seen migrating in small loose flocks of up to 20 birds. To learn more about the honey-eater migration, take part in our surveys in April.

*Jack Holland*

## Field Trip reports

Regrettably we have none this month.

## Future Field Trips

### Rob Roy Forest/Woodland Reserve; Sunday 5 March – morning outing

The first morning walk of March will be COG's first visit to the Rob Roy Nature Reserve on the SE fringe of Canberra. The reserve is surrounded by leasehold land so it is little visited, but last year produced a **Chestnut-rumped Heathwren** and **Glossy Black-cockatoos**. Michael Wright and Alastair Smith found these birds and will jointly lead this walk. A variety of other bush birds should be seen. The area we will be visiting involves a relatively long walk that encompasses some rough terrain so good walking boots are an essential accoutrement, as is a reasonable standard of fitness. Please take plenty of water, a hat and sun block. Meet at 8 am at the end of Haxton Place Conder. Please contact Alastair (6161 8608) or on [membership@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:membership@canberrabirds.org.au) for more information.

### Taylor's Creek; Sunday 12 March - atlassing opportunity on private properties.

Taylor's Creek catchment lies between Tarago and the east side of Lake George. In October 2004 COG conducted a blitz-style outing for the Taylor's Creek Landcare Group who were keen to know of the birdlife on their properties. On the 2004 outing 24 COG members helped survey 31 two-ha sites on 8 properties across 11 rarely-visited COG grids, resulting in 89 species recorded on a less than ideal morning. The survey covered a variety of woodland and forest types, plus wetlands and grasslands. The outing in 2006 is in Autumn but will visit the same sites and follow the same format, ie. small survey teams will each visit a number of sites on different properties during the morning. We will finish with a lunch provided by the Landcare group, and a roundup of the findings for the morning. Anyone is welcome to attend, and each survey team will have an experienced birder to form the nucleus of the team. If you are interested in joining this outing, exploring some new territory and meeting some enthusiastic landholders, please contact Nicki Taws, on 6251 0303, Mobile 0408 210736 or email [ntaws@bigpond.com](mailto:ntaws@bigpond.com) so that survey teams can be organised.

### Wadbilliga National Park; Saturday 18 - Monday 20 March – long weekend camp-out.

For this Canberra Day long weekend COG will be holding a camp-

out in the Wadbilliga National Park, an area which as far as I know we've never been to previously. We'll be camping at the lovely Cascades camping ground within the park, alongside the Tuross River. This has 3 wood BBQs, a number of picnic tables and a single pit toilet, but otherwise it will be a bring everything camp. It's a good 2 hours drive from Canberra, best via Cooma and Numeralla which is sealed all the way until the turn off, 13 kilometers from the campsite.

We'll be exploring the park for its birds and other wildlife, visiting such places as the Tuross Falls and the Wadbilliga Crossing. This will include some spotlighting for night life, the area is known to have lots of possums and Greater Gliders. There are platypus in the River. Birds expected to be seen or heard include **Superb Lyrebirds, Pilotbirds, Olive Whistlers, Bassian Thrush, Spotted Quail-thrush** and hopefully **Powerful Owl**.

Interest in participating in this camp-out has been relatively low to date, and we still lack a leader who is familiar with the area. While it will go ahead, it is likely to have to be a rather exploratory trip of this area, which seems not to be well known to COG members. For further information, or if you can help with leading, or are able to provide information as to the best bird spots, please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on [jack.holland@deh.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@deh.gov.au)).

## **Honeyeater migration - Saturday 8th April & Sunday 23 April**

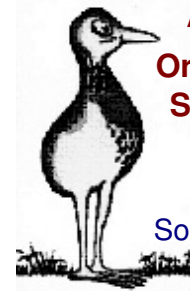
**Note: This was originally listed as an outing for Sunday 2 April in the 2006 COG Field Trips Program but the committee has decided another survey should be conducted in order to examine changes in migration routes since the 2003 fires, in particular the effects of the removal of the dead pines at Angle Crossing, which previously provided a major route.**

The autumn movement of thousands of **Yellow-faced** and **White-naped Honeyeaters** from the mountains to the coast and further north is a feature of the Canberra birdwatching calendar. Some of the best locations to count the migrating birds are along the Murrumbidgee River Corridor. COG has conducted several surveys in the past where observers are located at various points along the MRC on the same day to count the number of honeyeaters passing though. The last honeyeater survey was held in the autumn of 2003 after the bushfires, and we are organising the survey again for this autumn.

Two survey dates have been set to cover the expected peak of the migration season, to allow for inclement weather, variations in the migration pattern and the availability of observers. Anyone is welcome to participate, inexperienced observers are teamed up with experienced watchers, and it's a great way to learn about our honeyeaters, plus the other birdlife you might see along the river. Please register your interest with Nicki Taws 6251 0303, 0408 210 736, [ntaws@bigpond.com](mailto:ntaws@bigpond.com), so that we can form teams and allocate sites."

## **Oolong/Dalton; Sunday 9 April – day outing**

COG has visited the Oolong Sanctuary near Dalton in 2002 and 2003. Gianni, the owner, has kindly agreed to another visit from COG this year as part of a community day where the local community will also be invited to participate. The property has a dam, some pleasant woodland, some wet soaks, open cleared land and for the energetic there is the option of a walk up the hill at the eastern part of the property that provides excellent views of the district. There are lots of opportunities for a wide range of bush birds. Gianni is keen to develop the property for wildlife and birds, as can be seen from the website [www.pcug.org.au/~gianni](http://www.pcug.org.au/~gianni). We'll meet at the Shell Service Station on the Federal Highway, Watson,



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Ornithological  
Services P/L**

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

[enquiries@philipmaher.com](mailto:enquiries@philipmaher.com)

## **2006 Birding Tours**

**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.** Accommodated.

**1 — 8 August 06**  
**New Caledonia birding tour**

**15 August – 2 September 06**  
**Strzelecki Track Outback Tour**  
Accommodated. Check website for availability.

## **2007 Birding Tours**

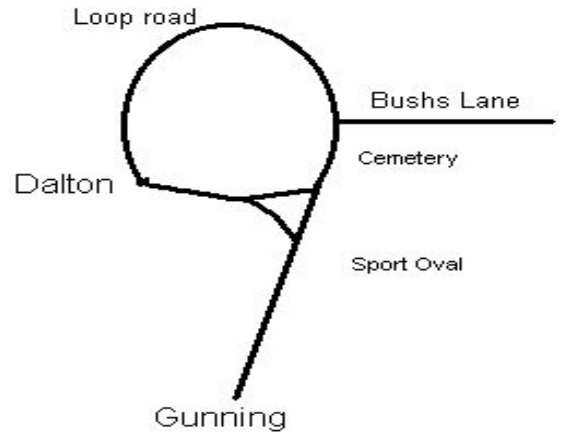
**7– 24 April 07—Thailand**

[www.philipmaher.com](http://www.philipmaher.com)



for some car pooling at 7.30 am, for a 7.45 am departure. Please bring a hat binoculars, good walking shoes and your lunch. The property is on a slight slope, but most walking is on reasonably level ground. There are, however, options to walk on steeper slopes.

To get there, we'll drive along the Federal Highway as far as Sutton, and continue through Gundaroo to Gunning. From the town of Gunning, on the old Hume Highway, proceed towards the village of Dalton for about 10 km., leave the bitumen road at the Loop road. The sport oval and the cemetery are on the right. Proceed on the gravel road for about 200 m to the Bush's Lane street sign. The Bush's Lane is to the right opposite a hay shed. Proceed on this lane. The entrances to "Dalton Park" and the Oolong Sanctuary are about 1km from the Bush's Lane sign. Please park your car on the parking area near the entrance.



Alistair Bestow will lead this outing but is not available until mid March. In the meantime Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on [jack.holland@deh.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@deh.gov.au)) is the contact.

**NOTE:** Oolong Sanctuary has approached COG for assistance with leading bird walks during the annual Oolong Community Events to be held on 25 and 26 March. If you are able to do so, particularly if you are familiar with the sanctuary (perhaps through an earlier COG walk) please let me know. Please note that only leaders are sought for these days which are two weeks before the planned outing for COG members on Sunday 9 April. *Jack Holland*

## Munghorn Gap Nature Reserve Friday to Monday 14-17 April; Easter long weekend campout



Regent Honeyeater  
(*Xanthomyza phrygia*)

Photo by Geoffrey Dabb

The COG Easter camp-out for 2006, usually the most popular camp-out for the year, will be at the Munghorn Gap Nature Reserve, 35 km north east of Mudgee, about 5.5 hours from Canberra. Through the NSW NPWS COG has been able to secure a very good campsite for this trip, it's off the road, large, shady, and with a toilet. However, we will need to take everything else, including water and firewood. Munghorn conserves sandstone pagoda country, and forms a transition zone between the SE, NW and western parts of the state, so that a variety of coastal, western and northern birds occur there. 164 bird species have been recorded, including **Regent Honeyeater**, and a wide variety are resident in the well forested reserve. Other interesting areas, such as the Goulburn River National Park are in the vicinity.

Unfortunately the original leader for this trip is no longer able to do so. While she is still willing to put together the info pack, including maps and a bird list, and make multiple copies, she will not be able to co-ordinate people coming, answer questions from potential attendees, or lead the camp over Easter. So we are looking for some-one to take over this task. If you are able to, we would be very grateful if you could contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on [jack.holland@deh.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@deh.gov.au)). He will put you in contact with the original leader, who is happy to pass on information, etc.

## Honeyeater migration—second day—Sunday 23rd April morning survey – see details above.

## Tallaganda State Forest; Monday 24th April, - evening owl search

This will be an evening field trip (before the Anzac Day Holiday) in search of the **Powerful Owls** that inhabit the gullies in this area. We will spotlight and play calls from about 8 pm till 10 pm or when owls are seen. Some walking on roadways in the dark will be required. Car pooling would be desirable. Expressions of interest to Tom Green on 6247 0630 or [tomgreen@netspeed.com.au](mailto:tomgreen@netspeed.com.au) please. More details next month.

## Longer Term trips

## Jamberoo Valley/Barren Grounds NR: Friday night - Sunday, 26-28 May

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The accommodation for this trip to a favourite COG spot will be at Ben Ricketts Environmental Reserve with self-catering cabins about 1 km from Barren Grounds. They are nicely furnished, with the majority of beds being bunks, but very open plan. Be aware that cabins may need to be mixed genders. For those with web access the address is [www.benricketts.org.au](http://www.benricketts.org.au) if you want to look at photos of the cabins. We will explore several marked walking tracks on the property, which pass through rainforest, very tall eucalypts, creeks and a waterfall, offering opportunities to see the rich variety of native plants and animals. We will hopefully do some spotlighting as **Sooty Owls** are sometimes heard at night.

We will also visit Barren Grounds and neighbouring areas where there are a range of walks from easy to medium difficulty. Barren Grounds Reserve is in the Southern Highlands about 2 – 2.5 hours drive north of Canberra. It is famous for its specialty birds as well as its flora - flowering heath in spring and summer, and banksias in winter. The reserve is rich in bird life. On the heath, we are most likely to come across various honeyeaters and possibly **Southern Emu-wrens**. If we're lucky, we might even see a **Ground Parrot** or **Eastern Bristlebird**.

There has been sufficient interest for this trip, which will now go ahead and a deposit has been paid. However, due to the gender mix the total number of participants has been capped at 15, and therefore the cost will be \$50 per person, at the upper limit of that advertised. A full payment needs to be made to the Treasurer COG, PO BOX 301 CIVIC SQUARE ACT 2608 by the 8 March COG meeting. A waiting list is being opened in case of any cancellations. If you want to be placed on this list, or for any other information please contact Kathy Walter or John Goldie on (H) 6241 7639.

### Wednesday walk – 15 March – Callum Brae NR

For the March mid week walk we will be returning to the Callum Brae Nature Reserve, where we will look for **Little** and **Long-billed Corellas** and other early autumn birds. Meet at the gate on Narrabundah Lane at 9 am. Please bring a hat and water/morning tea.

Photo by Stuart Harris



Little Corella (*Cacatua sanguinea*)

## Other Surveys/Activities of Interest to COG Members

**The Friends of Grasslands will be visiting the Scabby Nature Reserve on Sunday 26 March.** They will visit the area between Mt Scabby and the upper Sams Creek swamp near Yaouk where there are some magnificent mature stands of snow gum with tiny patches of *Sphagnum* Bog and the extensive *Carex* mire. The latter has provided a 12,000 year history of vegetation followed by significant European disruption. The site is reached via Shannons Flat and Yaouk, a two hour trip with a possible stop at the Mt Clear camp ground and the ancient stone terraces on the Murrumbidgee. Once there, the active can follow Sams Creek or climb the lower slopes of Mt Scabby while the sane stroll amongst the woodlands. Bring lunch. The meeting place Monaro Highway just south of Johnson Drive, Calwell, at 8 am to travel in convoy. Talk to Margaret Ning (6241 4065) if you plan to come and to arrange car pooling.

### Australian Native Plant Society (ANPS) ACT Region (formerly SGAP)

COG member Ian Anderson will be talking about attracting birds to the garden the next ANPS meeting on Thursday 9 March at CSIRO Discovery Centre, commencing at 8 pm. While the emphasis will be on plants and gardens more than individual bird species, COG members will be welcome.

### Birds Australia Southern NSW and ACT Group Seminar “Birds in the Urban Landscape”

Saturday 25 March 2006, 1:00-5:45 pm, Sydney Olympic Park Armoury Building 22 (entry via Jamieson St). Speakers include Kate Ravich, Richard Major, Geoff Dabb, Catherine Price, Mark Branson, Holly Parsons, Kris French, David Tierney and Alan Morris. Topics include: the Birds in backyards project; managing urban populations of Bush Stone-curlews; species controlling urban diversity in cities; North Head case study.

Registration fee: \$30 members; \$40 non-members. Registrations to Birds Australia Sydney, PO Box 1322, Crows Nest NSW 1585. Further info: [rosella63@bigpond.com](mailto:rosella63@bigpond.com); 02 9436 0388.

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## Australian Bird Study Association's Science Day & AGM: Saturday 25th March 2006

The Association will hold its Science Day in conjunction with its next AGM here in Canberra at the Yarralumla Uniting Church Hall, Denman Street, Yarralumla. The theme of the Science Day will be "Raptors: nocturnal and diurnal" with a selection of five speakers talking about aspects of their biology. The meeting will commence at 10:00 and conclude by 4:00, followed by the AGM.

Interested persons are invited to complete a registration form (available from the Association's web page—[www.absa.asn.au](http://www.absa.asn.au) and click on the events link). Registration form and cheque can be returned to the following address - Australian Bird Study Association, c/o Dr A.O. Nicholls, CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems, GPO Box 284, CANBERRA ACT 2601. Alternatively Nick Nicholls expects to be at the COG March Meeting with registration forms.

Registration includes morning and afternoon refreshments and lunch and the opportunity to participate in one of two excursions scheduled for Sunday morning. One will be to the Molonglo Valley to look at the potential conflict between urban expansion and the local raptors. The second will be to the Gorooyaroo NR to hear about the long-term habitat manipulation experiment planned by David Lindenmayer and colleagues in collaboration with local ACT authorities.

## Montague Island Shearwater study

**Conservation Volunteers Australia** has places available on its annual Montague Island Shearwater study from 30 March to 1 April. The Shearwater Study was formally started in 1960 when it was realised that three species of shearwaters – Sooty shearwaters, *Puffinus griseus*, Short-tailed Shearwaters, *Puffinus tenuirostris* and Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, *Puffinus pacificus* occur in mixed breeding colonies on the Island.

Participants will work alongside scientists to identify, weigh, measure and band shearwater chicks and adult birds present in the burrows on Montague Island. The cost of, \$495 per person, twin share or double room, includes all meals, accommodation, NPWS guide, island tour, including lighthouse and museum, research activities and return boat transfers from Narooma.

For further details contact Joanne Davies, Nature Programs Manager, PO Box 423 Ballarat Vic 3353, Phone: (03) 5330 2600, Fax: (03) 5330 2922 mobile 0404 840 209 or [www.conservationvolunteers.com.au](http://www.conservationvolunteers.com.au)

## Ethno-ornithology Research and Study Group (ERSG)

Robert Gosford of the ANU has advised that the above discussion group has established a website at <http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/ethnoornithology/>. The aim is to help bring together researchers, students and others interested in this discipline. Further details are available from the website or from Robert Gosford at [kami-bob1@hotmail.net.au](mailto:kami-bob1@hotmail.net.au)

## Molonglo Valley Urban Development—Progress Report

Late last year, COG sent a submission to the ACT Planning and Land Authority in response to the release of the Structure Planning Study (SPS) for housing development in the Valley. The SPS is not a detailed plan, but a broad blueprint of the three areas identified as urban capable - east (north of Weston Creek), central and west (SW and west of Belconnen). Information about the SPS is available on the ACTPLA website: [www.actpla.act.gov.au/molonglo](http://www.actpla.act.gov.au/molonglo). The Conservation Council's submission is on its website [www.ecoaction.net.au](http://www.ecoaction.net.au) under *Latest News*. The following is an extract from the COG submission.

*Jenny Bounds, Conservation Officer ([conservation.officers@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:conservation.officers@canberrabirds.org.au))*

"While our Group does not oppose utilising the footprint of the former (burnt) pine forest area in the East location for urban development, COG is generally disappointed with the Structure Plan which we believe will impact negatively on a large and diverse population of birds of prey in the Molonglo Valley as well as woodland birds, including threatened species. We do not support development which would destroy or significantly alter the mosaic of woodlands, grasslands and riverine ecosystems and rural lands in the Valley, which make up important birds of prey habitat as well as habitat

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for the assemblages of birds and animals which provide their prey base.

COG is particularly concerned about the following issues:

- The Valley is an important hunting and breeding ground for 12 species of birds of prey. We understand this is an area unique to Canberra, and indeed in the Australian SE highlands, in its number and diversity of these species for a small area close to the city. Such a large number of birds of prey indicates **that** a large assemblage of other fauna, including birds, lives in the habitats in the Valley
  - further studies relating to the impacts of urban development on these birds of prey have not yet occurred; we are especially concerned that these have not been carried out prior to the announced Structure Plan; and
  - the proposed Structure Plan is likely to have a significant and negative effect on the habitat for these birds.
- Development in the central area is likely to impact negatively on birds in the ... woodlands, especially the threatened Brown Treecreeper of which a small population still occurs there; Brown Treecreepers have also been recorded in the nearby ... ;
  - this species has managed to survive in small numbers in this relatively undisturbed location over some years (COG surveys in the 1980s confirm the presence of a small population of the birds then);
  - this species has progressively disappeared from other woodlands around the urban fringes of Canberra as urban development has spread and reduction and fragmentation of habitat has progressed;
  - even in the largest woodland reserves of Mulligan's Flat and Goorooyaroo, Brown Treecreepers have declined and are now likely to be extinct in those reserves;
  - the small population of threatened Brown Treecreepers is unlikely to survive there into the longer term under this Structure Plan with urban development on both sides of the woodland;
  - to better protect the ... woodlands, development should NOT occur in the central area; this area should remain as 'broadacre' use, or development should be limited to the northern part of the area; and
  - at the very least, a study should be undertaken of the likely impact of the Molonglo Valley development on Brown Treecreepers.
- An inadequate wildlife corridor is proposed between the central and east areas ... to conserve the significant variety of birds in this corridor. This needs to be significantly wider or preferably no development should occur on one side (eg no development or limited development in the central area – see above).
- Again while not opposing urban development in the East location, COG remains concerned about its impact on the Molonglo River Corridor, especially the proposal to establish a pond/lake and a Group Centre right on the River:
  - the sensitive river corridor should receive the maximum protection from urban effects, rehabilitation of degraded areas could be undertaken, and there should be a much wider buffer established between the urban areas and the river corridor;
  - the river corridor is a thoroughfare for birds, particularly small birds on migration, as well as providing nesting sites for birds of prey;
  - development and destruction of habitat near the river is likely to impact negatively on some species of birds and is likely to alter migration patterns of some species; and
  - if options for a pond/lake on the river are to be developed, there should be a full environmental impact assessment undertaken prior to any development activity.

COG notes that the documents make reference to the central and western areas not needing to be developed in the foreseeable future, with the eastern area being favoured to take the substantial amount of the expected population growth. COG strongly recommends that neither the central area, in particular, nor the western area, be developed at all.

COG also notes the preliminary and broad nature of the documents currently available, and looks forward to being able to comment in the future on much more detailed plans for particular areas and proposals as they are developed."



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## From the Committee

Apart from its more routine business, the committee considered a number of other topics at its January meeting:

- We continue to wrestle with the problem of an appropriate level of insurance for volunteers on projects for which we are receiving government grants.
- COG has been invited to hold a stall again, at the Tidbinbilla Easter Extravaganza. While this is a great opportunity to promote COG to the general public in a pleasant, open-air venue, we have just received notification that the event has been moved from Easter Sunday to the following Sunday, 23 April, and thus clashes with the second day of our Honeyeater migration survey. Nonetheless, we are seeking an organiser to take out the display equipment and pack it up at the end of the day, and to organise volunteers to talk to the public during the day. Expressions of interest to [cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au) or to the secretary. It's a great event, with face painting, the Gecko Gang, and all kinds of other entertainment for the children, so think about taking yours along and helping for a few hours.
- COG's website (<http://www.canberrabirds.org.au/>) continues to attract much patronage, and more is predicted when the data input system is operational, so we have upgraded.
- We have received indirect comments from the general public about the extent of the bird feeding at Orana Bay. This is a difficult issue for us, as we all enjoyed feeding waterbirds (in moderation) as children, and it is an excellent introduction to birdwatching. Any suggestions as to how to manage this issue welcomed.

**Conservation issues** currently under notice are:

- the Mt Spring Wind Farm, north of Hall (15 turbines) - Jenny Bounds has made a brief site visit, and we are awaiting further information on the project as the proposals are developed - this is in very early stages of development; one possible issue is any impacts on the resident pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles at the nearby Mulligans Flat and Gooroo reserves;
- the Kinleside woodlands near Hall where COG has woodland project monitoring sites - this area is being assessed for possible urban development, and COG has input views through the Conservation Council, suggesting that the whole area should be managed for conservation purposes, to protect the resident Hooded Robins and other woodland birds there;
- the water skiing trial on Lake Burley Griffin - COG is seeking more information from the NCA
- the site for the ACT Dragway in the Majura Valley (this is not seen as a priority issue - see previous Gang-gangs, but we maintain a watching brief).

If you would like any further information on any of the above issues, please contact the relevant committee member.

### 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) 62583531.

### 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 Burrwarra 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

(02) 6286 1564

or e-mail

[greg.ramsay@actewagl.net.au](mailto:greg.ramsay@actewagl.net.au)



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## Poetry Corner

*Following are the entries in our Christmas Barbecue Poetry Competition. Test your literary erudition against the judges and see if you can pick the winner (answer below).*

### Male Lyrebird

*A chorus from The Birds' Noel  
by Judith Clingan  
Presented by David McDonald*

My role in life is to dance and sing  
I take joy in the world, especially in Spring  
I make a high mound on cleared ground  
and spend all day entertaining.  
I spread my tail in modest pride  
There's no tail to equal it among all  
God has made  
I open my throat and utter a note  
To bamboozle all those listening.  
I can mimic each bird, each  
creature, each sound  
I practice hard every day atop my  
display mound.  
I grunt, I call, I chatter, I trill  
The forest resounds to my singing.

### The Ornithologist's Warning

*By Suzanne Edgar*

When walking in a wild and bosky  
spot  
and hoping some rare bird will  
soon be seen,  
It's better, far, than moving at fast  
trot,  
to pause a while, concealed among  
the green,  
Where stealth, and silence, often  
prove the best  
as stratagems enabling sight and  
sound.

This ploy may yield a robin on her  
nest  
or fledglings as they flutter to the  
ground.

While fit and hearty comrades of  
the COG  
press on ahead through crackling  
twigs and leaves,  
nosing about like any sniffer dog,  
the artful watcher lags but never  
grieves,  
for she may be rewarded with the  
sight  
of warblers lurking in the dappled  
light.

### Lord Howe Nature Notes: I possession

*By Suzanne Edgar*

The Australian rock barnacle,  
hermit, hermaphrodite  
and stolid crustacean  
(sub-class Cirripedia  
or `feather-footed'),  
passes its whole life  
folded within a shell  
of bony plates  
clamped on a rock.  
It often lives  
a metre away  
from its intended  
but is lucky enough,  
when the yearning comes,  
to possess  
and what's more  
can cleverly uncoil,  
a soft flexible penis  
eight or nine times  
its body size  
in order  
to meet its mate.  
Darwin was astounded.

### Hiawatha's Childhood

*from The Song of Hiawatha,  
presented by Sue Osmond, (taken  
from 'The Poetical Works of  
Longfellow', given to Sue by her  
Great-aunt Alice, Book Week,  
1948)*

Then the little Hiawatha  
Learned of every bird its language,  
Learned their names and all their  
secrets,  
How they built their nests in  
Summer,  
Where they hid themselves in  
Winter,  
Talked with them whene'er he met  
them,  
Called them 'Hiawatha's Chickens.'

### FROM THE VERANDA

*By Kay Hahne*

Out on the Point at Green Cape in  
Lighthouse Cabins 1 and 2  
Each had a wide veranda with 180  
degrees of view.  
Here we spent a delightful time  
with our bins and telescopes,  
And none were disappointed, for  
we came with many high hopes.

A passing parade of Humpback  
Whales swam by every day  
Blowing, spy hoping and  
breaching, or slapping their tails in  
display.  
They came in groups from one to  
four, sometimes in close with a  
calf.  
Their antics and numbers made us  
ooh and aah, and often made us  
laugh.

Fur seals floating in a tight little  
pod, flippers turned up to the sky.  
They stayed in an oval in the exact  
same spot - we wondered how and  
why?  
They didn't drift into or away from  
the very same wave-splashed rock;  
They lazed and basked and slept  
all day, with nary a feed or frolic.

Shearwaters by the thousands:  
Short- and Wedge-tailed,  
Fluttering, Sooty;  
Gannets diving through the feeding  
flock, plus a Sea Eagle catching its  
booty.  
The sea and sky had magical  
moments of changing colours,

shades and hues:  
Steel grey, mauve, a pinkish  
tinge, clouds of cream and silvery  
blues.

But the best was on our first  
afternoon, while standing safely  
out of the rain;

A perfect, complete, double  
rainbow - the "pot of gold"  
seemed a cinch to attain.

Only within the inner bow was a  
mystical, misty, rosy glow;  
We stood spellbound for a good  
long while, then sighed as we  
watched it go.

The next afternoon was mild and  
warm - suddenly the wind from  
the South did blow.  
We ran for our jackets, the waves  
looked different, 'twas a sudden  
sea change, you know.  
The Albatrosses rolled in just over  
the waves - one by one they  
came:  
A Shy, a Royal, a Yellow-Nosed,  
and the Wandering of great fame.

Crested Terns with yellow beaks  
and Caspians with beaks of red,  
And several Arctic Jaegers,  
straight and true they quickly  
sped.  
But we didn't set foot on a Pelagic  
Ship, with ease we watched from  
shore  
Under cover of the veranda roof,  
and a cuppa - who could ask for  
more?

*Green Cape, NSW, 25-28 August  
2005*

Congratulations to

**Sue Edgar**

chosen as the winner by our  
discerning judges

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## Avian Whimsy #39 — Relating to Names

After a recent Whimsy on grebes, I got an aggrieved email from one of the more assiduous of my four readers. (Actually, I've just discovered that it was last April! How do these things happen???) His gripe was not with me, I was most relieved to see, but with taxonomists. His concern was the apparently ridiculous proposition that **Hoary-headed** and **Australasian Grebes** are not very closely related. I don't have the email now, but he was quite scathing – it is 'obvious' that they are close, and he detected a whiff of job creation I think. It is a point that I can readily understand; sometimes it is even more perplexing in the case of plants.

The issue of course is that modern taxonomy is not simply pigeonholing, but most fundamentally seeks to reflect the relationships of organisms. How long was it since they had a common ancestor, or were part of the same population? That tells us a lot about the history of the broader world. In the case of the grebes, the Australasian Grebe's genus, *Tachybaptus*, is world-wide so we assume that the ancestral Australasian Grebes arrived in the not too distant past. *Poliocephalus*, the Hoary-headed Grebe's genus, is restricted to Australia and New Zealand, with closest relatives in South America, the home of grebes. Presumably it is the 'original' Australian grebe, which had the country to itself long before the grebe-come-latelies arrived. But of course this doesn't help my correspondent – let's call him Al, for no good reason except that it's his name. He would quite properly say that I'm begging the question – how do I *know* that they're relatively distantly related?

The problem is that simple appearances don't tell us about relationships. Animals look the way they do because that makes them good at what they do. The ancestral grebe shape was clearly very successful, so what's the point of changing it? We would expect grebes to look superficially similar, even after being long separated. It's not so long ago (very few decades) that our treecreepers were regarded as one with the northern hemisphere creepers; we now know that they are very ancient indeed, probably more closely related to lyrebirds for instance rather than to the creepers. They look similar because that's the best shape for creeping on tree trunks and probing for insects. Similar story with **Sittellas** and **Nuthatches**. OK Al, I've still not answered *how* we know.

There must never be just one answer – conclusions must be reached by a variety of independent methods and cross-checked. The best-known new tool is probably the DNA hybridization method, pioneered by the US ornithologists Charles Sibley and Jon Ahlquist in their monumental reassessment of most of the world's bird groups and even species. Put simply (or rather, simplistically), they 'unzip' the paired strands of DNA, allow them to re-zip with a strand of the species being tested, then slowly heat the hybrid DNA. The less differences there are between them the more closely they are related – we assume that DNA changes take place at an overall constant rate, which of course is a major assumption. The differences also represent 'broken teeth' in the zip; the more there are of them the more readily the pair unzips. Hence the temperature at which they separate becomes a measure of relatedness; the closer they are, the more heat is required to separate them.

More recently the comparison of targeted specific genetic markers on both mitochondrial and nuclear DNA is being widely used, along with older methods such as skeletal differences, detailed anatomical studies, bio-geographical and fossil evidence. It is telling that usually the conclusions from these methods converge, but this is certainly not always the case. To be honest I don't know what evidence is used for the Australian grebe genera, but I feel more confident than Al that there is a body of it. In general in grebes courtship behaviour is regarded as relevant, along with DNA and anatomical evidence. Cladistics is (again very simplistically) the scientific art of pulling together all the evidence threads (biochemical, genetic, anatomical, behavioural, bio-geographical etc), giving scores to a large number of characters that are judged to have arisen within the group.

This has, of necessity driven by space limitations, been a very superficial coverage and there is a very great deal more to say on this. Meantime a little experiment. The seven common south-eastern herons and egrets (not bitterns, night heron or Striated Heron) fall into just two genera. What do you reckon, intuitively? The answer is that **White-necked Heron**, **Cattle**, **Great** and **Intermediate Egrets** are in *Ardea*, while **White-faced Heron**, **Little** and **Reef Egrets** are *Egretta*. At this stage I suspect that Al is tearing his hair at the perfidy of taxonomists and at my own credulity. But at least he's still reading!

(My grateful thanks to Harvey Perkins for his informed comments on methodologies.)

Ian Fraser, [ianf@pcug.org.au](mailto:ianf@pcug.org.au)



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Lendon family, Dickson  
Maree Munns, Michelago  
Robert Shobbrook, Dunlop

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April deadline

Wednesday 22 March 2006

Please send updates, articles, advertisements etcetera to the

Editors of *Gang-gang*

gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au

or send c/- The Secretary

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Articles should be less than 500 words (300 for reports of 1-day field trips; except by prior arrangement with the editor.

Print photographs with or without articles are encouraged and welcomed.

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