

Gang-gang

March 2012

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

MARCH MEETING

7:30pm Wednesday 14.03.12

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.

For the first presentation **Francis Lawrence**, COG member, author and adventurer, will outline his transition from the hunting parties of the old fashioned 1950s France to a respectful bird watcher, and his desire to experience wilderness wherever that may occur.

The second speaker will be **Will Feeney**, a Ph D student at the Research School of Biology, ANU, on "**Know your enemy: recognition of Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoos, *Chalcites basalus*, by the superb fairy-wren, *Malurus cyaneus***".

Cuckoos manipulate hosts to raise their parasitic offspring. The costs associated with hosting a brood parasite selects for host defences which in turn select for counter-adaptations in the

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What to watch out for this month

While summer is only just over, a number of migrant species may have already departed and I'm not aware of any reports of the **Horsfield's Bush-lark**, **Brown Songlark** or **Rufous Songlark** during February. Surprisingly, there were reports into the middle of February of up to three pairs of **White-winged Triller** at Callum Brae, including breeding activity such as males still singing in full breeding plumage, nest building and most remarkably of an active nest mid-month where at least one advanced chick was seen being fed. To me this very late breeding activity is very unexpected, particularly for a wet cool summer, and is about a month later than I've ever observed it.

Almost as soon as I sent my column to the Gang-gang editor last month the first dependent young **Eastern/Pacific Koel** being attended by **Red Wattlebirds** was reported. There have been a number since (eight in total by my count), in all cases with the same host, and for the first time **Koel** chicks have also been reported in the nest prior to fledging. From the chat line it was clear that **Koels** were still calling regularly in many suburbs towards the end of February. It is unclear to me why this is so widespread, as it was last year, and well after most of the eggs would have been laid for the fledgling/chicks reported over the past month. As has been observed it is also a time when **Red Wattlebird** numbers in gardens seem to be down. So it seems unlikely that they're still trying to breed, and it seems more plausible that they are trying to locate and collect young birds, and perhaps even feed their own "children". I'm aware that there is evidence for **cuckoos** doing this, but whether they also help escort them north when they migrate in the next month or so, is less clear.

Another puzzle is that some fledglings being fed have been seen where **Koels** had hardly been heard. There are some very interesting parallels with **Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoos** which also were hardly observed/reported before the New Year, but for which quite a few dependent young/juveniles have been reported since, to my mind many more than usual. Is it because the breeding season was so much better pre-Christmas that cuckoos hardly had to call to find suitable nests? Please continue to watch out for these two species, including whether the former stays around for most of March, as it did last year. Watch out also for any lingering **Brush Cuckoos**, again of which a number of juveniles were seen during February, or other **cuckoos** (which unlike **Koels** rarely call after New Year).

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Everyone welcome

(March speakers: Continued from page 1)

brood parasite. The evolutionary escalation of co-evolved reciprocal adaptations can result in a co-evolutionary arms-race.

Unlike most brood parasite-host relationships, **Superb Fairy-wrens**, *Malurus cyaneus*, do not eject **cuckoo** eggs. Work by Will's supervisor, Naomi Langmore, has shown that once parasitised their most effective defence is abandonment of a lone cuckoo chick. Therefore in this system, parasitism always results in the loss of the parasitised brood, and defences that prevent parasitism should in-turn be under selection.

In this talk, Will will be presenting work done he has done with Naomi (funded-in-part by a Canberra Birds Conservation Fund grant) investigating whether **Superb Fairy-wrens** learn to recognise **Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoos** and whether their response is unique compared to other threat types. He will also present preliminary results investigating the effects of group size (**Superb Fairy-wrens** are cooperative breeders) on aggression towards **cuckoos**.

(What to watch out for: Continued from page 1)

Reports of the **Superb Parrot** declined markedly in February, though there was still a flock of 50 reported mid-month, and a further report of a single male south of the lake/river at Woden. Most will have left the ACT by the end of February, but in the past few years they have stayed on much longer. So keep a close eye on any lingering birds in your local patch and make sure you record and report last sightings. Other species to look out for are the **Sacred Kingfisher**, **Rainbow Bee-eater** (listen for their characteristic pee-pee calls and orange wings in flight) and the **Dollarbird**, all of which have been reported during last month, but most of which will have left by early March. The same applies to **Fairy** and **Tree Martins**, very few of which seem to have been reported this year.

One species for which there have been a number of reports is the **White-throated Needletail**, though I feel less than might have been expected considering the number of afternoon storms there were in February. I have been looking for them in my local patch, but have failed to see any. In fact, this species seems to have eluded me since just after the 2003 fires when they were commonly seen in the storms that hit about a month later. This species can be seen into early April, so continue to watch for them along with the rarer (for these parts) **Fork-tailed Swift** (in contrast no reports of these so far).

Others species that leave by the end of March/early April are both **Gerygone** species, the **Australian Reed Warbler**, the **Mistletoebird**, **Leaden** and **Satin Flycatchers**. Like the last-named the **Rufous Fan-tail** is a passage migrant through Canberra after breeding in the mountains, and indeed already has been reported at the Botanic Gardens. In the last week or so of March start keeping an ear and eye out for flocks of migrating **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** which usually begins then, will this be as patchy as it has been for the past few years?

Apart from the triller and koel/cuckoo breeding mentioned above, the **Grey Butcherbird** seems to have had a very good breeding season with many chatline subscribers reporting them for the first time in their gardens (despite their now appearing on the GBS chart). Most of these have been brown birds likely dispersing after having been expelled from their parents' territories. A reminder again, please don't think that because summer is over so is the breeding season, continue to look out for signs as autumn has also been a time for significant breeding in Canberra over the past few years. **White-winged Choughs** are still on a nest in Narrabundah Hill, and **Noisy Miners** are also well known to nest in autumn. Late summer/autumn is also, for example, the main local breeding time for **Darters** and **Cormorants**.

Autumn is also the time to start looking out for mixed feeding flocks (MFF). In fact there has been a ground feeding one based on **finches** (mainly **Red-browed** but with some **Double-barred**, **European Gold-**



Leaden Flycatcher
(*Myiagra rubecula*)

Photo by Margaret Leggoe

finches and **Diamond Firetails** and also **Southern White-face**, **Yellow-rumped Thornbills** etc) at the south-west corner of the Narrabundah Hill reserve since late January. A number of chat line postings have remarked about the association of post-breeding **Superb Fairy-wrens**, **White-browed Scrub-wrens** and **Brown Thornbills** in their gardens, as indeed there has been in my GBS site, with the latter two regular in my garden for the first time since the 2003 fires.

As noted in my February column, the next two months or so will be a time of significant change, with many species moving out of or through Canberra on their way north to escape the winter. As usual keep your eyes and ears open for what might move through your local area, and please record all significant observations (including when species are last seen), as well as any autumn breeding activity, and ensure these are reported for inclusion in the COG database. — **Jack Holland**

Field Trip Reports

Sunday 29 January — The Settlers Track, National Park

Eight COG members and guests spent an enjoyable long half day on The Settlers Track at the southern extremity of Namadgi National Park. The first third is a fairly new track, opened in 2010, enabling one to start at Brayshaw's Hut on the Boboyan Road and walk west to Waterhole Hut and yards on Grassy Creek. The route then leads south-east on the Grassy Creek Fire Trail to Westerman's Homestead, thence north-east back to the starting point. This is a 9 km walk through varied country, with the first third being largely forested and the remainder more open country through grassland.

Considering the time of year and the warm weather, we obtained a fairly good bird list, making summer contributions to COG's database for three grid cells. We observed 32 species in all. Unexpectedly, the **Buff-rumped Thornbill** was the most abundant, closely followed by **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** and **Striated Thornbills**.

At one point, the person at the head of our group had an uncomfortably-close encounter with a large Red-bellied Black Snake. Fortunately, it was pointing away from him, and took off at high speed!

This area is highly recommended both for its natural history properties and its European cultural heritage. It helps the visitor to gain some understanding of how the pioneers lived from the time of settlement of that area in the mid-1830s until the 1980s when the land was incorporated into the National Park, and sheep and cattle grazing ceased. An excellent brochure covering the Track is available from the Namadgi NP Headquarters, or online at <http://tinyurl.com/83rd9b5>. — **David McDonald**

Thursday 2 February — First Thursday of the Month Walk — ANBG

A group of 13, including some regulars from the third Wednesday monthly walk, met me for a stroll around ANBG. The weather was cool and grey skies were not the best viewing conditions for birds. We walked up through the rainforest area and around the top of the rainforest loop where the natural bush meets the developed gardens, and then across and down past the western



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2012 tours

July: Top End (in 2 parts)

August: Gulf Country

August: Alice Springs

September: Strzelecki Outback

November: New Caledonia

November: SW Western Australia

2012 Plains-wanderer weekends

24 & 25 November

1 & 2 December

15 & 16 December

29 & 30 December

2013

February: Tasmania

February: New Zealand

June: Top End

July: Gulf Country

August: Alice Springs

September: Strzelecki Outback

October: Yorke Peninsula to
Ceduna

2013 Plains-wanderer weekends

23 & 24 November

7 & 8 December

See itineraries, checklists and
latest news on our website

www.philipmaher.com

mallee, across the eucalypt lawn to the Sydney Gully, finally passing by Tom's seat and the **Satin Bowerbird's** bower in the Myrtaceae beds, ending with coffee and cakes at the cafe.

The Rutaceae beds at the top of the gardens where there were flowering correas and tall eucalypts provided our best birds, including **Leaden Flycatcher, Eastern Yellow Robin, Striated Thornbill, Grey Fantail, Grey Shrike-thrush, Brown Thornbill, Common Bronzewing** and many young **Eastern Spinebills**. We ended with 25 species, mostly the usual suspects found on a gardens' ramble, and it was good to use the new *Birds Brochure and checklist*. Participants agreed this new walk is a good idea and liked the 8.30am start.

The next walk in the trial will be Thursday 1 March, meeting at 8.30am at the Southern Cross Yacht Club carpark in Yarralumla. — **Jenny Bounds**

Wednesday 15 February — Wednesday walk — Mount Majura

On 15 February 24 members attended the lower slopes of Mount Majura (which actually appears, from the TAMS map, to be in the Mount Ainslie section of Canberra Nature Park). We were guided through their favourite patch by local residents Chris Ledger and Geoff Alves; many thanks, folks - and doubly so for the lemon slice at the conclusion of the walk. We recorded 33 species of birds, mainly a collection of the commoner bush birds. The highlights were

- a juvenile **Common Bronzewing** picking up Acacia seeds very close to the observers
- a female **Collared Sparrowhawk** displaying its square tail as it soared overhead and
- a troublesome juvenile **cuckoo** which provided several minutes of entertainment as it flitted - silently - from tree to tree near the group. Opinions varied as to whether it was a **Fan-tailed cuckoo** or a **Brush Cuckoo**. The eventual decision was in favour of **Brush Cuckoo**.

Several honeyeater species (**Red Wattlebird, Noisy Friarbird and Brown-headed Honeyeater**) were enjoying the large amount of Eucalypt blossom, mainly *Eucalyptus meliodora* (Yellow Box) and *E. bridgesiana* (Apple Box).

— **Martin Butterfield**

Sunday 19 February 2012 — East Basin/Molonglo Reach — Boat cruise

Under calm waters and clear conditions 19 members and guests joined me on the MV Darter and EL Cygnet for this annual trip to view the darter and cormorant nesting on Molonglo Reach. For a variety of reasons this was a month earlier than last year, including that the breeding season seemed to be largely over by then.

We first travelled across East Basin and into the Molonglo Reach. Very soon on the south bank we encountered the first **Australasian Darter** nests. By the time we had reached close to the Dairy Road bridge we had seen a total of 25 of these, equal to the maximum ever observed there (on my first trip in April 2003!). In several cases the chicks were already quite mature and sitting up to several metres from the nest, many chicks were quite big but with still lots of down showing, sitting tight on their nests (in one case we suspected up to six together). A couple of much smaller young were also seen spiralling their necks up past their parent's breast begging for food. There were also quite a few birds still sitting tightly on nests, mainly females (the experience is that these are often males). One bird still seemed to be carrying nesting material, but only one very exposed nest was seen on the north bank.

In contrast with last year there did not appear to be many juvenile birds, as judged by their generally more buffish colour and lighter back of their necks, though it can be difficult to separate these from females. Numbers of adult male birds seen were also relatively low. Altogether about 80 free flying darters were seen on the day, about equal to the previous highest, and when you add around 40 chicks still in the nest, the evidence remains very strong that the clearing of the wil-



Australasian Darter
(*Anhinga novaehollandiae*)
Photo by Ian McMahon

lows from the north bank, together with the lifting of the drought conditions over the past two years, has had limited impact to date, at least on **Australasian Darter** presence and breeding.

However, this same conclusion can no longer be drawn for **cormorants**. On the reach, only a single **Great Cormorant** was seen, where the reach opens up much wider about 0.5 km west of the first bridge. While this had white flanks indicative of breeding, no evidence for breeding was found for any **cormorant**. In fact only two **Little Pied Cormorants** were seen on the day, flying over East Basin. By contrast well over 200 **Little Black Cormorants** were seen (this is more than the maximum of 150 birds previously estimated several times at the breeding site mentioned below), firstly on East Basin, then resting on the eastern bank, but as we moved up the reach they joined us and could be seen communally fishing and resting in the river at close quarters.

The skipper indicated this group had been on the lake for the past few months, and also confirmed the lack of activity again this year at the former significant **Little Black Cormorant** breeding site near the mouth of Sullivan's Creek, and that there has been limited cormorant/darter breeding closer to Black Mountain peninsula. However, several postings on the COG chat line over summer have noted that **Darters, Little Black and Little Pied Cormorants** are breeding again on the Molonglo River well downstream (west of the Tuggeranong Parkway) of the Scrivener Dam.

As for the past three years the river was very quiet in respect of other water birds, with low numbers of common species seen on the open water and gallinules closer to the bank. The highlight was a flock of about 70 **Australian White Ibis** on the east bank of East Basin. One boat heard a couple of **Australian Reed Warblers**, which were otherwise quiet as they are towards autumn. Land birds seen included more than 50 **Welcome Swallows** on overhead wires, a **Sacred Kingfisher** seen from our boat, and a relatively late **Dollarbird** seen by the other boat, as well as around 10 **Dusky Woodswallows**.

We returned via the south-east corner of the basin to look for activity around the former Kingston Boat Harbour and up the mouth of Jerrabomberra Creek. This uncovered several more **Great Cormorants**, some **Black Swans** with half-grown cygnets (the only other breeding activity seen for the day) and a somewhat elusive **Black-fronted Dotterel** feeding on the exposed mud, a legacy of the water being about 50 cm lower than usual due to the dam wall problems.

At 43, the total number of species was much higher than the previous year. All participants, a number of them repeat clients, enjoyed the trip, as I did in now my thirteenth trip since we started in 2003. My special thanks again to Jenny Bounds who was happy to help lead the second boat when numbers made this one viable. As the popularity of this trip remains very high I intend to run it again next year, which will be the 10th anniversary of when we started running them.

— Jack Holland

Future Field Trips

Before the start of each trip, each participant must sign a COG Field Trip Registration Form which acknowledges the participant's responsibilities. The form reads as follows:

I declare I am capable of undertaking this trip having: discussed with the Trip Leader any limitations I have (e.g. medications, physical), assessed the risks to myself and my property, and ensured I am adequately equipped.

I will follow the instructions of the Field Trip Leader, and advise them before moving away from the group.

Saturday 10 to Monday 12 March – Ben Boyd NP – Weekend (still a few places)

This trip focuses on birdwatching in the southern end of Ben Boyd National Park. We will camp at the Bittangabee camp ground (fees apply). Be aware that the road to Bittangabee is gravel and can be a bit rough.

We hope to find a variety of birds in various habitats including the heathland and coastal areas. Possible highlights include **Southern Emu-wren**, **Tawny-crowned Honeyeater** and a chance of a **Striated Fieldwren**. We will also spend some time trying for **Ground Parrot** and studying the sea birds off Green Cape. At night we will spotlight for mammals and owls with a chance of a Wombat and Long-nosed Bandicoot.

Registration is essential. The trip will be restricted to 20 participants and filled on a first reply basis. Please contact Kathy Walter or John Goldie on 6241 7639 or email walter.goldie@optusnet.com.au to book. More detailed information will be provided closer to the day.

Saturday 17 March – Gungahlin Hill/Gungaderra Grasslands - Morning

This area is of particular interest at the moment because of construction at Crace. Previous visits have seen **Speckled Warbler, Sacred Kingfisher, Dollarbird, White-winged Triller, and Leaden Flycatcher**, and there might even be a **Superb Parrot**. The walk will be undulating and explore both the woodland immediately adjacent to Crace and the Gungaderra Grasslands east of the woodlands. The walk should take about 2 – 3 hours.

Meet at 8.30 am at the dirt parking area just off the Barton Highway. Because the Barton Highway is a divided road at this point you need to be driving towards Civic coming from the big roundabout near Gold Creek. Look for the pull off to the left, at the end of the open area of Crace just before you get to the wooded rise, or if you miss the first “exit” watch for the other end of the track, which is about another 250 m along the Barton Highway.

No booking required. Any questions please contact Margaret Robertson (billrobertson@netspeed.com.au)

Saturday 17 March - 'Scottsdale Reserve' Bredbo - Planting

What and Why? Help COG, Bush Heritage Australia and Greening Australia plant trees and shrubs to enhance and connect habitat for threatened bird species. The main tree planted will be Drooping Sheoke, *Allocasuarina verticillata*, to provide food for the Glossy Black cockatoo which depends on the availability of seed from these trees to survive.

Where? Scottsdale Reserve Bredbo. Transport within the Reserve to the planting site will be provided for those who do not have a suitable 4wd vehicle.

When? Saturday 17 March. Arrive at Scottsdale shearing shed at 9.00 for 9.30 welcome and briefing, before moving to the planting site by 10.00. Planting will be finished in time to return to the shed for a BBQ lunch (provided).

What to bring? Please bring hat, sunscreen, long sleeves, gardening gloves, long pants, sturdy boots, appropriate clothes for the weather, and a water bottle. Tools will be provided. The planting holes will not be pre-dug so digging holes will require a reasonable level of fitness.

RSVP essential: Contact Nicki Taws, Greening Australia Capital Region, ntaws@bigpond.com 0408 210736.

Please mention if you have a 4wd vehicle.

Wednesday 21 March – Mulligan’s Flat - Morning

Big Dam area of Mulligans Flat. Meet at 9 am. A mudmap for the access off Horse Park Drive will be sent closer to the date to COG Chat-line and to the COG Wednesday Walkers email list.

No booking required. — Martin Butterfield

Saturday 24 March – Tharwa Sandwash - Morning

Tharwa Sandwash has bush birds, Brown Goshawk, Black-fronted Dotterel, occasionally a White-bellied Sea-eagle, and is a good spot for robins in winter. This is a flat walk, although side tracks overlooking the Murrumbidgee River are very weedy and one needs to avoid numerous wombat holes. The walk should take about 2 hours. Those interested may then wish to drive the short distance to Namadgi Visitors Centre and stroll around the woodland there.

Meet at 8.30 am at the Sandwash carpark. To get to Tharwa Sandwash, take the Naas Road south out of Tharwa (the one leading to Namadgi Visitors Centre, NOT to Tidbinbilla). A little past the small one-lane bridge, take the road to the left (Smith’s Road, but not signposted at time of writing). Drive past the shearers’ quarters and over the temporary bridge on the Gudgenby River. Take the gravel road off to the left (should be able to see Tharwa Sandwash sign) and follow along to carpark.

Carpooling at 7.45 am at Kambah Village Shops (corner of Drakeford Drive and Boddington Cres), especially for those from north of Tuggerangong or unsure of how to get to Sandwash.

No booking required. If you have any questions please contact Sandra Henderson (shirmax2931@gmail.com)

Sunday 1 April – NO LONGER Callum Brae, INSTEAD Festival of the Forests

The COG Committee has decided to again staff a stall at the National Arboretum Festival of the Forests. Therefore, Sandra won't be at Callum Brae, AND would love some help on the COG stall at the FoFs.

Even if you can't help on the COG stall, this will be an excellent opportunity to visit the National Arboretum, see the new COG Logo in action, check out various COG handouts, and visit the wide range of stalls of other community organisations.

Please contact Sandra Henderson ([shirmax2931\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:shirmax2931[at]gmail.com)) with offers of help staffing the COG stall.

Thursday 5 April – Location TBA – Morning

This is the third of three trial Thursday walks which will be led by Michael Robbins and/or Jenny Bounds.

No booking required. Michael Robbins ([mrobbins\[at\]home.netspeed.com.au](mailto:mrobbins[at]home.netspeed.com.au)).

Friday 6 to Monday 9 April – Cocoparra NP – Easter Weekend

The advertised venue of Yathong is not available for Easter. It has been decided to move the campout to Cocoparra National Park. The park is about 350 kms west of Canberra. Facilities consist of dry toilets and gas barbeques. Open fires are not permitted, so warm clothes are required.

Registration is essential. Contact Noel Luff on 6288 3291 or (preferably) by email: [noelluff\[at\]homemail.com](mailto:noelluff[at]homemail.com).

Tuesday 10 to Saturday 14 April – Yathong Nature Reserve.

Yathong is located in the mallee between Cobar and Hillston (200 kms north west of Cocoparra). Facilities consist of refurbished shearers quarters with a full kitchen, refrigerators, showers, flushing toilets and beds. You are required to bring bedding and food. Camping is not permitted. Costs are \$22 per person per night, making a total of \$88 per person for the four nights.

Registration is essential. Contact Noel Luff on 6288 3291 or (preferably) by email [noelluff\[at\]homemail.com](mailto:noelluff[at]homemail.com).

Sunday 15 April – Mount Rogers – Morning (National Arboretum now 13 May)

Many species have been seen in this area over the years including **Australian Owlet-nightjar**, **Painted Button-quail** and **Collared Sparrowhawk**. **Superb Parrots** have generally left the area by this time but their movements have been different this year compared to other years so may be possible. Enjoy good views over Belconnen, with mostly easy walking, but with some uphill sections.

Meet at 8.30 am at the Wickens Place carpark. The walk will take about 2 hours but there are plenty of tracks going back to the carpark if people want to leave earlier.

No booking required. Contact is Steve Wallace ([skcbf\[at\]bigpond.net.au](mailto:skcbf[at]bigpond.net.au)), ph.62582706).

Wednesday 18 April – Location TBA - Morning

Advice will be sent closer to the date to COG Chat-line and to the COG Wednesday Walkers email list.

No booking required. — Martin Butterfield

Sunday 22 April – K2C bird surveys, Bredbo region.

COG will continue with the K2C surveys that have been running since April 2010. The surveyed properties have healthy populations of many of the rarer woodland birds such as **Diamond Firetail**, **Hooded Robin** and **Speckled Warbler**, and the autumn **honeyeater** migration will be in full flight. We will be visiting the same sites to continue the monitoring and see if we can add to the property lists. The surveys will be undertaken in 'blitz' fashion; that is, observers in small groups will visit a number of sites on one or more properties before regrouping for lunch and a sharing of the survey's findings. Less experienced observers are welcome to join in the survey as each team will have at least one experienced observer.

Registration is essential. Anyone interested in participating is asked to contact Nicki Taws. PH. 6251 0303,mob.0408 210736 or Email [ntaws\[at\]bigpond.com](mailto:ntaws[at]bigpond.com).

Sunday 29 April – Booroomba Rocks to Mt Tennent Fire Trail – All Day

This is a reasonably easy 7.5 km all day bushwalk in northern Namadgi National Park, involving a short car shuffle. From Booroomba Rocks carpark we will use the Australian Alps Walking Track to slowly walk down Booroomba Creek to Bushfold Flats. After lunch we will then walk out to the gate on Apollo Road via the southern end of the Mt Tennant Fire Trail.

The Booroomba Creek section involves a descent on a narrow track, followed by a flat section around Bushfold Flats and a steepish descent on the firetrail with loose gravel underfoot, and finally a short climb back to Apollo Road. It should be suitable for reasonably fit folk who are steady on their feet.

At this time of year in these wet creek and dry forest habitats we might expect to see **Eastern Yellow** and **Scarlet Robins**, various **thornbills**, **White-browed Scrubwren**, **Red-browed Finch**, **Brush Cuckoo** and, if we are lucky, **Superb Lyrebird** and **Pilotbird**. Raptors are a good possibility in the open country.

Meet at 8.30 am at the Namadgi Visitors Centre carpark, where we will arrange the car shuffle logistics and carpool if possible. Bring lunch and water.

Please pre-register with Julie McGuinness by email: [julie.mcguinness\[at\]bigpond.com](mailto:julie.mcguinness[at]bigpond.com) (preferably), or by phone 0428319882, to facilitate car shuffle organisation.

Saturday 5 May – Australian National Botanic Gardens (Beginners' walk)

This morning walk will be the first for 2012 aimed specifically to help beginners and new members identify birds and to learn about their behaviour and calls. The Botanic Gardens are especially suitable for such an outing, as they allow the opportunity to observe a range of local bush birds in a variety of habitats. Due to the available food supply they are also a relative haven for birds during late autumn/winter. Anthony Overs will lead this outing, which will consist of a stroll through this lovely part of Canberra for a couple of hours.

Meet at 9.15am at the ANBG bus shelter.

Registration is essential. Please book your place with Anthony (6254 0168, or [anthony.overs\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:anthony.overs[at]gmail.com)), who will be happy to discuss whether this outing is suitable for you. Please make sure to bring your binoculars and field guide.

Lake Ginninderra Water skiing trial- help wanted

There will be a trial on Lake Ginninderra to look at the feasibility of allowing a water skiing and water boarding area on the lake. The trial will go from April through to sometime in December 2012, after which there will be a period for public comment.

The area under consideration is along the western edge of the peninsular between the peninsular point and the boat ramp.

For us to have an informed input into the decision making process I believe we need to take the opportunity to gather information on any disturbance caused to the birds in the area. I have asked that we are told when the events will be conducted so that it will allow us to document any disturbance. In addition, I would like to survey the birds using the area both along the eastern edge (control) and the western edge of the peninsular. This will mean walking along the edge or cycle/foot path to determine the number and species of birds using the area.

We need to gather as much information as possible so if there is anyone interested in helping please contact me ([chris_davey\[at\]aapt.net.au](mailto:chris_davey[at]aapt.net.au)) Tel: 62546324 and I will provide you with instructions, a map and data sheets.

— Chris Davey

Committee news

- Submissions have been drafted on two issues:
 - EPBC Act referral for Throsby School, calling for a whole of landscape assessment for Throsby, and reiterating COG's position that there should be no development east of Horse Park Drive as this best protects/buffers the Superb Parrot breeding sites and important reserves from the huge Gungahlin urban population.
 - Little Eagle Action Plan (main comment is the need for priority actions to be included given the critical situation of breeding pairs in the ACT)
- COG committee representatives met with residents concerned about possible development (new embassies) on Stirling Ridge.
- COG has been invited to a meeting convened by ACT Govt to discuss the **Spotted Dove**; this came out of responses to the *Draft ACT Pest Animal Management Strategy* to which COG sent a submission on last year.
- A group of COG members met to discuss options for the COG database into the future. The option of possible affiliation with a larger database system will be further investigated.
- COG will again be represented at the Festival of the Forests at the National Arboretum on 1 April.
- A contract has been signed for redevelopment work on the COG website.
- Jenny Bounds and Alison Russell-French will represent COG at the BIGnet meeting in Cowra.
- The COG Forward Plan will be discussed by the Committee in March. If you have ideas which should be included in the Forward Plan please contact Chris Davey. (You can find the existing plan in the March 2011 *Gang-Gang*).

ANUgreen

ANUgreen held a successful bird survey on Saturday, 28 January, with expert input from COG members. Volunteers who participated commented that it was highly enjoyable and learned a lot. Our next survey is scheduled for Saturday, 14 April, and we are hoping that COG can continue to support us.

As with past surveys, this will be an education exercise and awareness raising effort for the wider ACT community. COG members will be asked to lead a team of 2-3 volunteers. The 2-hectare 20-min search method will be used, and each team will do a maximum of 6 neighbouring sites.

To raise the robustness of the data collected, this April survey will be a trial run on a number of target species common around ANU. Chris Davey and Michael Robbins have kindly agreed to run a workshop on teaching volunteers how to identify them.

There will be a thank you BBQ following the surveys, so please join us afterwards.

Please contact the ANUgreen Biodiversity Officer Tim Yiu (tim.yiu@anu.edu.au) for registration and inquiries.

New Layout Editor

Thank you to Janette Lenz who will be taking over as Layout Editor for *Gang-gang* from April.

Photo Ops 7 — What is a realistic bird photo?

Some time ago I posted to the COG chatline a photo of two treecreepers on adjacent trees – a **Red-Browed Treecreeper** on a smooth-barked tree and a **White-browed** on a rough-barked tree. The point of the image was as an illustration of ecological niche theory at work, suggesting that the two similar birds could exist in the same environment because they have different foraging habits.

A sharp-eyed viewer commented that the photo looked almost too good to be true and I had to admit that in a way he was right. The photo was a composite, though not in the way that might be supposed. The very mention of ‘composite’ raises eyebrows, hackles and the question – “how much manipulation ‘should’ be allowed in bird photography”? Of course the answer will depend on the person and on what the photo is used for, but my own ‘photo code of ethics’ prevents me from making up scenes that didn’t exist (other than obvious fun shots).

So I wouldn’t put the two treecreepers adjacent on those trees if they weren’t there simultaneously in real life, just as I wouldn’t put a **Corella** against a full moon if it wasn’t actually against that exact full moon. But there’s a complication, a reality that I’d suggest not only allows scope for legitimate manipulation, but actually *requires* manipulation at times to more closely illustrate the real-life situation.

The problem is that the camera lies. Not malevolently, but as a consequence of the difference between eyes and cameras and the difference between real life and what can be reproduced on paper or screen. In the case of the treecreepers, while I was standing there looking at two clear, sharp treecreepers foraging simultaneously on adjacent tree trunks, crying out to be photographed, the camera saw one treecreeper in focus and the other as a lovely blur. This happened because one tree was a little closer to me than the other, and eyes have a greater range of focus – a greater depth of field – than a telephoto lens. Why? I can think of three reasons: our eyes aren’t telephoto so they naturally have a greater depth of field (physics); eyes use a smaller sensor than SLR cameras; and eyes automatically adjust focus to whatever we are looking at, so we aren’t aware of any difference in focus that might actually exist.

To get the photo of the treecreepers, I had to take a photo focused on one of the birds, and immediately another photo that was identical except that I focused on the other bird. The two photos were merged later during processing.



White-throated and Red-browed Treecreepers together, Guy Fawkes River National Park



A Long-billed Corella peering from the nest under a full moon at Callum Brae

I would argue – strenuously – that the merged shot is a more accurate depiction of reality than what the camera saw directly, but the fact remains that it was ‘manipulated’ to get there. The same effect is used oppositely to advantage by portrait photographers (and bird photographers) who want to show their subject against a soft innocuous background. If we look at Mary in the studio having her photo taken, we see her sitting in front of an ugly backdrop of some kind. But by using a lens with a smaller depth of field than our eyes, the photographer gets an image of Mary floating in a beautiful creamy-smooth cloud of a background which is, of course, just the ugly backdrop out of focus. While this may result in a more pleasing image, it’s not what we actually see if we stand beside the camera.

Another image based on the same principle is the **Corella** against the moon shot. A friend and I saw this wonderful little scene while in Callum Brae one evening, watching the **Ibises** and **Cockatoos** roosting. Once again the scene really

existed exactly as shown, but a photograph only showed the silhouetted **Corella** against a bright soft blob, not a moon. So again I took two photos, identical except one was focused on the moon and one on the bird, then merged them later in post-processing (more difficult than it looks, in this case).

It's one thing to argue for getting closer to real life, but other uses of post-processing manipulation arise not when you are trying to re-create reality, but rather to improve on it. Two very common examples in bird photography are increasing the colour saturation (which is generally but perhaps mistakenly believed to make photos look better) and removing branches that get in the way. Is it wrong to remove a branch in the corner that spoils the composition? Most people wouldn't have a problem with this, unless the photo is to be used for a scientific or evidential purpose. But to go one stage further, is it wrong to remove the branch that crosses or obscures part of your bird? Hmmm, definitely more hmm this time, because now you actually have to 'invent' the part of the bird that was obscured behind the branch. A couple of times I've taken photos in this circumstance and deliberately moved slightly for a second shot to get a nearly identical view but with the branch blocking a different part of the bird. When the bird doesn't move this works well because you don't need to invent any of the bird, you just take the missing bits from one shot and put them in the other. Is that more ethical?

There's no definitive answer to such a question, of course, but given the ease with which photographs can be modified in the digital age it's one worth considering. And reconsidering.

It's not even simple to define what we're asking when we say "how do I make a photograph realistic?" Reality, from the point of view of vision reproduced in another medium, is not absolute. The camera simply never reproduces what we see. There are those who proudly state that such and such a photo is 'SOOC' (Straight Out Of the Camera), as a mark of the integrity of their image that implies worthiness greater than another photo that's had its contrast and brightness adjusted. But it's a fiction. No photograph displayed on paper or screen can ever reproduce the shades of light and dark we see in real life and all cameras (and film) are set by manufacturers to produce what looks good, not a literal translation of the light values in the scene. Every photo is an interpretation.

Consider the colour saturation issue mentioned earlier. You might think that saturation (loosely, the 'brightness' of colours) is a pretty straightforward characteristic and should be reproducible. You also might think that there's a 'correct' saturation setting of an image that emulates real life. Well no, not once you realise that the same object viewed under different light (darker, lighter, filtered, directional, sunlight, cloud or artificial) will vary enormously in apparent colour saturation. Which is the correct depiction of the object? Even if you specify the lighting, every film and camera will still produce different colour values of the same object dependant on the camera design and on user settings. Choose a different film and you get different colours. Change your camera settings from "landscape" to "faithful" and you get very different colours. (Faithful, the one that you'd think was close to reality is usually awful, a very poor version of what you saw). The only thing we can be certain of is that the camera lies about saturation as much as it does about focus and depth of field.

My **Crimson Rosella** was photographed recently on a gloomy early evening, an evening with enough thick cloud to make the world thoroughly drab, almost grey. Even the **Crimson Rosellas** looked grey. But take a photograph and lo! – one brilliantly coloured rosella. We know that our eyes see less colour information as the light gets poorer, until in near darkness we only see in black and white. But the camera doesn't share this limitation and happily increases the exposure to compensate: gloom becomes midday with no effort whatsoever.

You can demonstrate the same effect even more dramatically when you take a very long exposure of a landscape under moonlight – amazingly beautiful bright colours appear in a scene in which we saw no colour at all. It's a fine proof that the camera really does lie, at least if our eyes are taken as the definition of Truth. And while sometimes the camera fibs in a nice way, at other times it has to be helped by judicious manipulation to better show what we really saw.



**A young Crimson Rosella in the gloaming
at Callum Brae**

— Article and photos by Julian Robinson

COG'S BIRD BLITZ 2011

At the January COG meeting, prizes for the October 2011 bird blitz were awarded. The following COG members were “lucky draw” winners for their participation in the blitz, and received packs of greeting cards generously donated by Steve Stephinson:

Mark Allen, Joe Barr, Erin Brown, John Buckley, Brian Chauncy, Chris Davey, Malcolm Fyfe, Bill Graham, Jane Green, Bill Handke, Rod Mackay, Duncan McCaskill, Julie McGinniss, Lucy Randall, David Rees, Margaret Robertson, Ben Walcott and John Waldron.

Prizes of books donated by Susan Robertson, Joe Barr, Alison McKerras and others were also awarded on a “lucky draw” basis for significant effort, ie participation over both days of the blitz or submission of ten or more datasheets. The winners were:

Ian Anderson, Sue Beatty, Con Boekel, John Buckley, Susanne Gardiner, Kay Hahne, Jack Holland, Shirley Kral, Sue Lashko, Michael Lenz, Duncan McCaskill, David McDonald, Harvey Perkins, David Rosalky, Nicki Taws and Philip Veerman.

The “lucky draw” prize for participation in every COG blitz to date was a bottle of Mt Majura vineyard wine, kindly donated by Stuart Harris. The stalwarts in the running were Ian Anderson, Darryl Beaumont, Muriel Brookfield, Matt Frawley, Stuart Harris, Jack Holland, Shirley Kral, Bruce Lindenmayer, Gail Neumann, Sue Lashko, Susan Robertson, Philip Veerman, Tony Willis and myself, with the winner being Tony Willis.

The prize for the best bird recorded was a delightful framed photo of a **Shy Albatross**, donated by Steve Stephinson. Contenders were Frank Antram (**Australian Painted Snipe**), Stuart Harris (**Yellow-tufted Honeyeater**), Paul Fennell (**Olive Whistler**), Sue Lashko (**Olive Whistler**) and Alison McKerras (**Barn Owl**), with the last-named being the lucky winner.



Yellow-tufted Honeyeater
(*Lichenostomus melanops*)

Photo by Lindsay Hansch

Finally, a prize of a painting of **White-browed Woodswallows** by Viv Pinder was awarded, again by lucky draw, amongst the observers of a vulnerable species, with the winner being Malcolm Fyfe for his record of a **White-winged Triller** at Jerrabomberra Wetlands Nature Reserve.

Many thanks once again to all who participated in the blitz and to the persons who donated prizes. And please everyone record in your diaries the date of the **2012 blitz: 27-28 October**.

A detailed report on the outcomes of the 2011 blitz will be published in a forthcoming issue of Canberra Bird Notes.

— **Barbara Allan**

Garden Bird Survey Notes

I apologise for the lack of these ramblings over the past few issues, but other matters have distracted me.

The Chatline has had a few interesting items directly related to GBS sites over January and February:

- **Superb Parrots** in Kaleen;
- **Spotted Dove** in Higgins and O'Connor;
- **Grey Goshawk** and **Rainbow Lorikeets** (unrelated sightings I believe) in O'Connor;
- **Eastern Koels** breeding in Watson and Page; and
- **White-throated Needletail** in Carwoola.

White-throated Needletails in the GBS

The sighting of a single **White-throated Needletail** in Carwoola is the only one I noted in the last two months of Chatline records in the Archive. This led me to look at the pattern of recording this species over the life of the GBS.

Both series are clearly very variable and there seemed no point in trying to identify a significant trend. It may be relevant that the 'peak' year, year 22, was 2002-03 and thus contains the 18 January bushfires. Does that explain the apparent drop in more recent years?

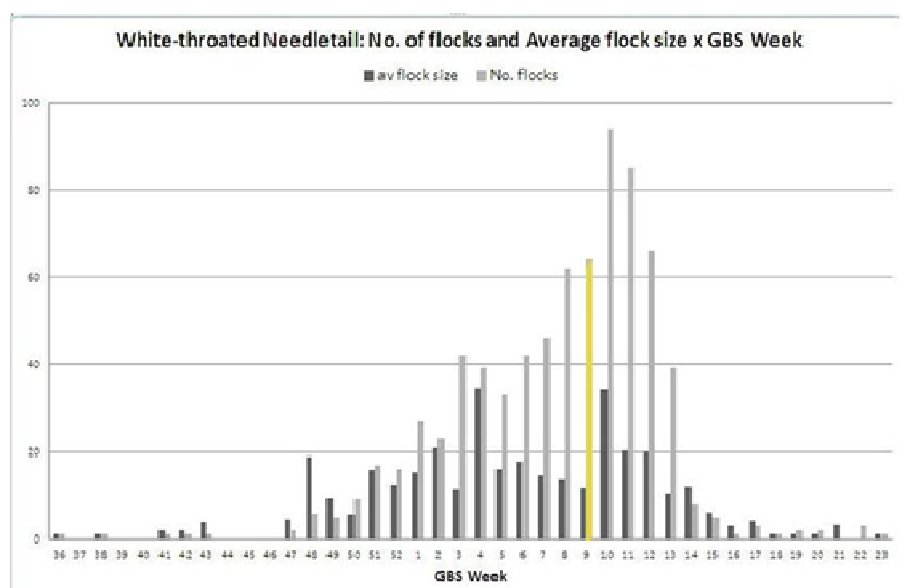
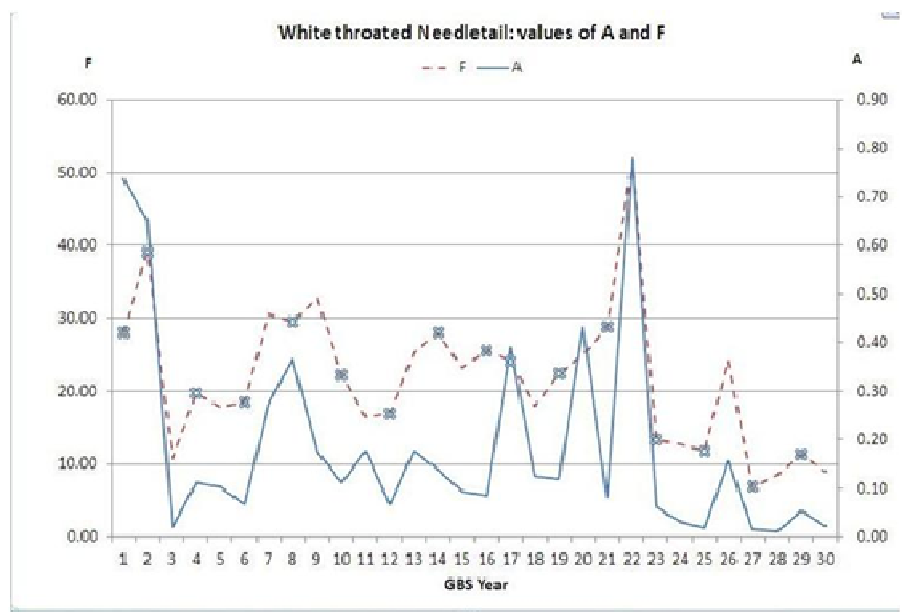
It is well known that **Needletails** are associated with weather systems, especially thunderstorms. It is thus not surprising that they are most commonly reported in late summer- early autumn. This note is being written in GBS Week 9 (highlighted in the second chart), just before the peaks of both numbers of flocks and average flock size.

Provision of data

Information about **Noisy Miners** was provided in response to a user query and passed on to a team investigating this species across Australia.

The data provided will form the basis of a note for *Canberra Bird Notes*.

— Martin Butterfield





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Speckled Warbler
(*Chthonicola sagittata*)
Photo by Margaret Leggoe

MUDBRICK COTTAGE

Mallacoota

Our mudbrick cottage (Blue Wren 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.

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Contact: Barbara de Bruine
(02) 6258 3531, or
barbdebruine@hotmail.com
or see

<http://www.stayz.com.au/25595>.

PASSIVE SOLAR HOUSE

South Rosedale

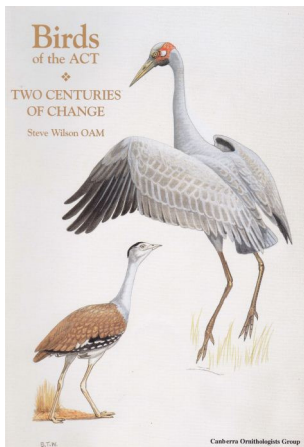
Arupingi is a passive solar house situated in a peaceful bushland setting in South Rosedale.

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@grapevine.com.au

COG SALES

Birds of the ACT: Two Centuries of Change, *Steve Wilson OAM, Canberra Ornithologists Group*

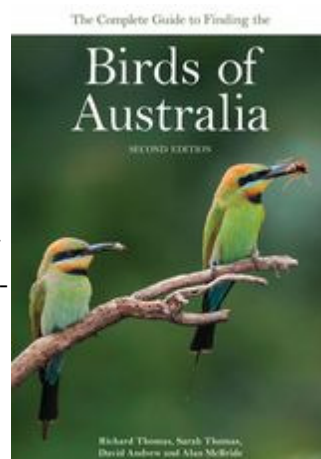


Published by COG in 1999, a number of this historic book were found in COG's dusty archives recently. The book provides a 'history of recorded birds' of the ACT for two centuries. It drew on knowledge of birds by local indigenous groups, early settlers, scientific publications, records of pre-COG bird-watchers and then on the garden survey. It contains a Margaret Preston woodcut and illustrations by Robin Brown. Many of the people who contributed to the book are still active members today.

A beautiful book for only \$10.

The Complete Guide to Finding the Birds of Australia **2nd Ed, Richard Thomas, Sarah Thomas, David Andrew ,** **Alan McBride**

First published in 1994, this was the first ever book of its type in Australia – a complete guide to locating every resident bird species. This fully revised second edition describes the best-known sites for all of Australia's endemic birds, plus regular migrants such as seabirds and shorebirds. It covers all states and territories, and is the first guide to include all of Australia's island and external territories. A comprehensive Bird Finder Guide details site information on all Australian bird species, and the authors provide valuable travel advice. Member's price \$32 – expected for the April meeting.



Old stock specials—\$20 or less

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- Australian Magpie: Biology and behaviour of an unusual songbird, \$20
- Kookaburra: King of the Bush, \$20
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- Herons, Egrets and Bitterns, \$10

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Also: – titles from CSIRO Publishing's *Australian Natural History* series (\$29.00 each for members): including: **Albatross, Mound-builders, Tawny Frogmouth, Australian Bustard.**

Also: – at the February meeting only – remaining T-shirts and Polo shirts (limited sizes only) \$10-15



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New members

COG welcomes the following new members:

J McGarva, Queanbeyan
S Mathews, Ainslie (rejoining)
M Sawyer, Hughes
R Simachila, Ainslie
R Comer, Lyneham
M Gregory, Lyneham
P Rooney, Forde
F Hatton, Watson

NEXT NEWSLETTER

April deadline

Wednesday 28 March 2012

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.

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Civic Square, ACT 2608

Newsletter distribution

Brian Fair and helpers

COG membership

2010-2011 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

Cog library

For all enquiries or access to COG's library phone Barbara Allan 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

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Gang-gang

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