



Gang-gang

May 2007

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

Monthly Meeting

**8 pm Wednesday
9 May 2007**

*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.*

The short talk, intriguingly entitled "Where do Noisy Friarbirds sleep?" will be given by long-time COG member **Dr Michael Lenz**.

This will be followed by a main talk from **Dr Kat Munro**, who completed her PhD at the University of Cambridge in the UK, but carried out field work as a Visiting Fellow at ANU. Since finishing her PhD in March 2006, she has been carrying out further research on the Grey Fantail. Her talk is entitled "Infidelity and aggression in the Grey Fantail". Further details are on Page 5.

Everyone welcome

What to watch for this month

We're now into May, and the outwards migration season is nearly over. Certainly for this year there have not been many **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** reported and most that were seem to have departed several weeks earlier than usual in the second half of March. From mid April there were some reports of migrating flocks of predominantly **White-naped Honeyeaters**. The reason for this unusual pattern is unclear; perhaps it reflects a lack of food in the mountains due to the dry conditions, even with the February rain. However, the **Dusky Woodswallow** is one species that is still being reported, and particularly over the Easter weekend a number of observers saw them migrating about 50-100 metres overhead, calling and circling while feeding as they drifted slowly north. This species is often still present until the second week of May, and also seems to be overwintering in increasing numbers, often near water. The **Grey Fantail** may also stay over winter, as may the **Yellow-faced** and **Fuscous Honeyeaters**, **Olive-backed Oriole** and **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike** in small numbers. Other migrants don't go too far away and stay inland where it is slightly warmer.

On the other hand species also come from further south or from the higher parts near Canberra and spend the winter in the ACT. The **Swift Parrot** is an example of a species that travels from much further south (from Tasmania) to overwinter on the mainland. Look for this species in the local area where gums are flowering from April to September - they are noisy birds while feeding/flying so can be spotted relatively easily.

The altitudinal migrants spend the summer season in the higher country and spend the winter in Canberra. Round Easter the first **Flame Robins** started appearing in the open paddocks to the west, numbers will gradually build up and the coloured males will join the brown birds which usually arrive first. Look for them on the ground or on low perches such as rocks, stumps and fences. The **Scarlet Robin** arrived about a month earlier and is less of a migrant, but is more common in the ACT during winter. Pairs can be found, often calling, in woodlands close to Canberra, though they generally avoid gardens.

However, the **Rose Robin** likes gardens, and over the past 10 years or so has

Photo by Harvey Perkins



Flame Robin
(*Petroica phoenicea*)



often stayed over winter, sometimes in the one spot for a number of days. Perhaps a few **Pink Robins**, another species with a southern distribution, may be reported this winter. The **Golden Whistler** is an altitudinal migrant which likes gardens - usually these are grey/brown birds, but if you're lucky a lovely male may stay around for a while. Of the honeyeaters the **White-eared** arrived round the beginning of April though, at least in the Chapman area, it has been less conspicuous than in previous years. The **Crescent Honeyeater**, a rarer winter visitor, also come into gardens, particularly if nectar sources are available, and also like water baths. Similarly the **Eastern Spinebill** is a nectar feeder and mainly found in winter, though some do stay around all year, particularly in gardens in which flowering is continuous.

With the continuing drought a number of species usually associated with the drier areas to the west of Canberra have been observed. One is the **Pied Butcherbird**, which has been seen a number of times over the past month, including a very rare observation south of the lake on the NW edge of Cooleman Ridge, Chapman. The related **Grey Butcherbird** has also been seen more frequently than usual, including in urban areas and in some gardens where it rarely ventures. Another inland species seen recently at West Macgregor is the **Zebra Finch**. On the other hand the rain in February seems to have triggered a breeding event in the **Australian Wood Duck**, with at least four broods of very young ducklings seen on dams at the NW end of Cooleman Ridge during April. At the same time **Grey Teal** ducklings were reported elsewhere. Both species were not reported breeding between March to May in the ACT Bird Atlas.

Keep an eye out for all the above species, plus those that don't migrate to any extent over the next few winter months. While this period is generally accepted to be a relatively quiet time in the ACT, bird watching can still be very rewarding. — **Jack Holland**

Field Trip reports

Sunday 1 April 2007 — East Basin/Molonglo boat cruise

A full boat load on the MV "Darter" joined me on a perfect clear and crisp morning for this now annual trip up the Molonglo Reach to view the **Darter/cormorant** nesting. One advantage of using the bigger boat is that it is quicker (though still very quiet) and allowed us also to go up the mouth of Jerrabomberra Creek where Jim the skipper had recently seen large numbers of water birds. And we weren't disappointed with an estimated 125 **Black Swans**, 60 **Pacific Black Duck** and 45 **Silver Gulls** making up the bulk of these, plus close to 20 Darters, mostly immatures or females resting, many with wings held out for drying, on the bank/jetty at the old Kingston Boat Harbour. However, the undoubted highlight was a **Pied Cormorant** sitting tight in a dead tree near the mouth of the creek as we sailed up the eastern side of East Basin towards Molonglo Reach, its much longer flesh/horn coloured bill and yellow patch before the eye clearly diagnostic as we passed close by. This was only our third record on these trips, although earlier we had suspected this species as it flew past.

Also along the eastern side of the basin were several **Cattle Egret** feeding amongst the stock, but as we entered the reach we found it surprisingly quiet, particularly on the water, which remained the case all the way to the Dairy Flat Bridge. The reason for this is not clear, though it was rumoured the large congregation of birds at Jerrabomberra Creek is in response to mass feeding of bread etc, with this no longer allowed at former spots such as Orana Bay in Yarralumla. Nevertheless, we soon witnessed four large but still downy **Darter** chicks on a nest, with a male on a nest nearby, both on the north bank. Surprisingly we only encountered one more nest with downy chicks - this was well upstream, though three other recently fledged birds were seen nearby, identified by their plumage and clumsy short flights. However, at least six birds were also seen sitting tight on nests, with nesting largely restricted to two more spots on the southern bank. Up to 38 **Darters** were counted along the reach, a number of them flying very high, often being briefly mistaken for raptors. While we saw about 40 **Little Black Cormorants** at their usual spot where the river widens appreciably, surprisingly there was no evidence of any nesting activity for this species. The only other cormorant nesting was the **Great Cormorant**, and in bigger numbers than have been recorded previously, with over 12 seen in the one relatively small tree, with seven of them on nests, and a further three dependent young which, while well grown, were making persistent begging noises.

The number of both species still sitting on nests with relatively few nestlings seen was a surprise for the time of year;

Photo by Lindsay Hansch



Pied Cormorant
(*Phalacrocorax varius*)

perhaps it reflects a pause in nesting for a month or so with the low water levels and then a recommencement when the river lake filled again with the storms in mid February. For the first time I can recall there was no nesting in COG grid cell M14 close to the two bridges, even though numbers are usually pretty low there. Land birds too were relatively quiet, though the total of 38 species seen or heard was about average based on previous years. The 18 participants, most of them first timers, had a very enjoyable morning, as I did even though it is probably close to my tenth trip in four years. Every time you go, the Reach seems to be different, and I certainly look forward to leading my next trip to view this now very regular breeding phenomenon.— **Jack Holland**

15 April 2007 — Honeyeater migration

The outing to view migrating **honeyeaters** was held on yet another lovely autumn day, so typical of the season this year. However it was a bit too warm for the honeyeaters, and with a northerly breeze and some high cloud around, it was a definite no-show. We were positioned along Smiths Rd south of Tharwa at the northern end of the former pine plantation, a site that has proved worthwhile on good migration days, however only a couple of flocks of less than 20 birds appeared, and even they were confused as to where to go. In the end we counted more **White-winged Choughs** than honeyeaters – a large loose aggregation of at least 57 birds. The local **Wedge-tailed Eagles** and a male **Flame Robin** provided some interest in lieu of honeyeaters. We moved on to Tharwa Sandwash to improve the species list for the morning, though even here it was quieter than usual. The weather is the main factor in determining if there will be large honeyeater movement. Just the day before at the same location on Smiths Rd, when the morning was probably just one degree cooler but without the northerly breeze, the Field Naturalists counted at least 2000 in two hours. However, this season it also seems that the honeyeater migration began unusually early with large numbers reported moving in mid-March, something that hasn't happened for several years now. Perhaps the prolonged dry summer has depleted food resources in the mountains. — **Nicki Taws**

Easter 2007 — Willandra National Park

Visions of swimming off the homestead pontoon quickly disappeared when the 25 participants in the COG Easter camp arrived at Willandra National Park. Instead we were greeted by a dry, cracked riverbed, with the only available water coming from a bore which was used to generously sprinkle the green lawns in the homestead precinct. This did prove to be a boon for the local birds which were attracted to the resulting puddles. Many an hour was spent watching **Mallee Ringnecks**, **Brown-headed Honeyeaters**, **Peaceful Doves**, **Spotted Bowerbirds** and up to 50 **White-winged Choughs**, among others, drinking and bathing.

A reconnaissance spotlighting trip by two carloads of COGites on Good Friday night yielded **Owlet Nightjar**, **Banded Lapwing** and **Inland Dotterel**, and the following morning we were able to take the whole group out to see the lapwings and four Inland Dotterels. The photographers of the group were able to get close enough to get some very good pictures. We continued north through the park with frequent stops which yielded **Stubble Quail**, **Singing Bushlark** and an abandoned **Emu** with nine eggs. Geoffrey Dabb had suggested we drive out of the park to the north and then travel east, up to Roto and home via Trida. This circuit included mallee where the highlights were



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2007 Birding Tours

Top End
14–29 May
Darwin, Kakadu NP, Kununurra
& Mitchell Plateau

**Gulf of Carpentaria
Cairns return**
17–28 June 2007

New Caledonia
22–28 July 2007

2nd Outback (Strzelecki) Tour
7–25 September 2007

**Central Coast NSW
inc nearby national parks**
1–14 November 2007
Barrington, Gloucester & Copeland
Tops, Munghorn Gap and several
others parks

**All the above tours are
accommodated**

**Plains-wanderer Weekends 2007
late November and December**
Itineraries are on the AOS website

www.philipmaher.com



Inland Dotterel
(*Charadrius australis*)

Photo by Lindsay Hansch

Yellow-plumed and Grey-fronted Honeyeaters, and open farmland which yielded **Black-faced Woodswallow** and **White-fronted Chat**, as well as **Crested Bellbird** in the roadside shrubs.

Willandra has a range of accommodation options, including the homestead, a cottage, the mens' quarters and two campgrounds. 10 of us occupied the mens' quarters, while 15 chose to camp. The social side of a COG outing was not neglected with happy hours and after dinner chats in the campground. Excellent facilities were available in the men's quarters, where we had a sitdown communal dinner for 25 on the Saturday night. Despite the very dry conditions, we managed to record 78 species for the weekend.
— Sue Lashko

Future Field Trips

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

Registration Form should be completed for each field trip.

Sunday 13 May — Botanic Gardens — Bush Birds for Beginners

This morning walk will be the first for 2007 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 from 9.15 AM, meeting at the bus shelter. Please book your place with Anthony (6254 0168, or by email to anthony.overs.reps@aph.gov.au), who will be happy to discuss whether this outing is suitable for you. Please also don't forget to bring your binoculars and field guide.

Wednesday 16 May — Midweek walk.

Meet at 9:00am in the car park opposite the main entrance to Duntroon (UBD Map 60 C12; or for the GPS equipped 35:18:14.87 S; 149:08:43.58 E). The provisional agenda is to walk along the banks of the Molonglo covering the area between Clare Holland House and Moreshead Drive. A side trip to Hopkins Road in Duntroon to check on the babbler may also be included if wished.

Sunday 27 May — Morning walk, Callum Brae: Getting to know your woodland birds

Jenny Bounds (ph 6288 7802) will lead a ramble of about 3 hours through Callum Brae NR, targeted for those who are learning their woodland birds and for new members/beginners. This is one of the newest Yellow Box - Red Gum reserves in Canberra, and has a good range of woodland bird species - some which might be expected are **Speckled Warbler, Scarlet Robin, Double-barred Finch, Varied Sittella** as well as various little brown birds, such as **thornbills** and **Weebills**, which should be around in feeding flocks at this time of year. Note that numbers will be limited to ensure that everyone has the best opportunity for viewing and learning, so please phone Jenny to book your place. Meet at 7.30am at the main gate to Callum Brae NR off Narrabundah Lane, just down from the corner of Mugga Lane and Narrabundah Lane in Symonston (the Mugga Lane Zoo used to be on this corner and the Therapeutic Goods Admin building is further down Narrabundah Lane). There is good roadside parking. The reserve is flat to gently sloping; wear sturdy shoes, hat etc, bring water bottle and field guide, and some morning tea for afterwards. Should finish around 10.30-11am.

9-11 June — Far South Coast, long weekend campout/caravan park/accommodated

For this long weekend COG will visit the far south coast, and our stay will be centred on the town of Merimbula which offers a variety of habitats for bird watching. We will be undertaking some joint outings with the Far South Coast Birdwatchers, notably visiting and learning about the Panboola Wetlands and Heritage Reserve, in which they have a key management and maintenance role. We may also sample either of the two bird routes they have developed, walk along the Merimbula boardwalk and/or bird watch on some private land. Overall the proximity of a number of National

Parks/reserves and the mix of habitats ranging from open grasslands, bush, forests and heath, to beaches, lakes, rivers, dams and swamps, as well as the sea/ocean should ensure a large variety of birds should be seen over the weekend.

However, it is the weekend of the Merimbula Jazz festival and accommodation bookings are already heavy. Therefore COG will be staying at the Scrymgeour's property, Timbarra, near Wyndham outside of Merimbula. This property has plenty of camping spots, as well as some basic more sheltered accommodation, an outside toilet and a communal BBQ. There are also some very good spots for birdwatching on the property as well as nearby. Alan and Lyn Scrymgeour retired to Timbarra a number of years ago after being active members of COG and for some it will be an opportunity to renew acquaintances, and for others to meet them for the first time. Those intending to participate should contact John Cummings on 6254 6741 (H) or by email on cummingsj@missionaustralia.com.au. Information will be provided to participants in late May/early June.

Intending participants who prefer to stay in more comfortable accommodation in town are strongly advised to book now. While there are two caravan parks close to the centre of town, as well as a range of other accommodation such as motels and apartments both central and further out, bookings are expected to be heavy - Bega may be another alternative. John Cummings can provide some details of options.

23 June, Saturday — Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve- Superb Lyrebird survey

Since the January 2003 bushfires Peter Fullagar and Chris Davey have been monitoring the return of the **Superb Lyrebird** to an area of the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. They wish to get an idea of the present distribution within the Reserve and are asking COG members to join them for a morning's survey. They are calling for expressions of interest to join them at 8.30am to walk the trails and to record the location of calling birds. Depending on the trails walked the survey should take about three hours.

This outing will be a repeat of the very successful surveys conducted in 2004, 2005 and 2006. If interested and for further details please contact Chris Davey on 62546324 (h), email chris_davey@aapt.net.au.

Report of April COG meeting

Bob Shobbrock's short talk on 'Garden Birds Near the Warrumbungles' was beautifully illustrated with a large variety of birds that Bob has photographed in his backyard. The value of patience and a bird bath were clearly evident from the number of images he managed to capture of birds going about their daily lives.

Professor David Lindenmayer then discussed the results of a nine-year study, the Nanangroe Woodland Experiment, carried out near Jugiong on the southwest slopes of NSW. This experiment began when State Forests of NSW purchased 20,000 ha of land to grow pines to feed the pulp mill at Tumut. Rather than the whole area being cleared before planting the pines, many woodland remnants were left. David's study focuses on 52 of the remnants which are surrounded by pines, 10 newly planted pine sites, 52 matched woodland remnants surrounded by grazing land, and 10 paddock sites in the grazing land. The woodland sites are of four types: red box and stringybark; swamp gum; yellow box and white box; and Blakely's red gum, and vary in size from 0.5 to 10 ha.

May Meeting

"Infidelity and aggression in the Grey Fantail" — Dr Kat Munro

Male fantails have very large testes for their body size. In other bird species, this indicates that females mate with more than one male, and males therefore must compete against one another by evolving larger and larger ejaculates. Fantails present an anomaly: most birds who mate multiply either gain help with rearing offspring, or choose males on the basis of traits such as plumage colouration, that indicate the quality of the male's genes. Fantails appear to do neither of these things: males are not brightly coloured, and they raise offspring in a male-female pair.

Dr Munro's research has aimed to answer three major questions:

- 1) Is the female fantail really promiscuous, as suggested by male morphology?
- 2) If so, why does the female mate with more than one male?
- 3) What effect does this behaviour have on the relationship between the male and female of a pair?

At our May meeting, Dr Munro will address these questions with observations, genetics and experiments held over four seasons of work on Mount Ainslie. Come and hear what she has found out!

Birds have been sampled in seven years between 1997 and 2005 with 124 species recorded regularly and 74 species studied in depth. There has been an increase in forest birds but a decrease in woodland birds in the remnants surrounded by pines. Overall, the species richness is little changed, although there have been some extinctions and some colonisers, the latter including **Olive Whistlers** and **Superb Lyrebirds**. **Dusky Woodswallows** have declined in both types of remnants, but **White-throated Treecreepers** have increased in all sites; **Brown Treecreepers** are now lost from the pine remnants but have increased in the paddock remnants; **Grey Fantails** and **Brown Thornbills** have increased only in the pine trees; **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos** and **Sacred Kingfishers** have declined in the four type sites, whereas **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** have increased in all site types. 42% of bird species show no change.

As the ground cover and the litter layer are changing, there may be a correlation with what is happening with the birds. Patch size may also be a factor. Some woodland birds have been lost from small remnant patches first, yet some forest birds have colonised the smallest patches first. David concluded by saying that the bird assemblage will be increasingly dominated by forest rather than woodland birds, although there is another 15 years of work to be done at Nanangroe.

David then made brief mention of a new study being done at Mulligans Flat – but that will be the subject of one of his talks in the future!

News from the committee

COG Forward Plan

Last year members were asked to suggest possible projects for COG to undertake or to assist with financial support. The Committee appointed a small group comprising Bruce Lindenmayer, Tony Lawson and Jack Holland to examine these proposals and develop a forward work program. The Plan has been reviewed and endorsed by the Committee.

The Forward Plan takes into account the core COG objectives:

- To encourage interest in, and develop knowledge of, the birds of the Canberra region;
- To promote and co-ordinate the study of birds; and
- To promote the conservation of native birds and their habitats.

Realistically, the Forward Plan takes into account the capacity of COG to undertake projects and recognises the many activities already being undertaken by COG members, including surveys, data recording, the website and chat line, publications and conservation, as well as the monthly meetings and outings.

The Forward Plan includes both projects to be undertaken by COG members, and also financial support to other projects which are in accord with COG's objectives.

The Plan recognises two categories of projects – major and minor. Major projects are likely to need more manpower and or money to come to fruition. Smaller tasks should be completed relatively quickly and are likely to need only modest resources. Within each category projects have been listed in the order in which they are likely to start. Some have already started.

The following projects have been given high priority

Major tasks/funding

1. **Review of 25 years of the GBS** — Finalisation of this review has already been given a high priority by the COG committee. While costs for the proposed scientific publication should be low, these could be considerably higher if it is decided to publish a new version for the general public.
2. **Develop sets of display material that can be used primarily for COG exhibitions** — but would also be useful for educational purposes and for interesting young people and the public in general in birds.
3. **COG database update** — review and document existing system and incorporate various improvements as the opportunity allows.
4. **Provide ongoing financial support to the Mulligan's Flat/Goorooyarroo ecological community research project**
5. **Examine the Impact of the Common Myna on the Native fauna of the ACT** — COG would provide financial support over a period to supplement other funding for a Ph D student at the ANU or UC.
6. **Update the ACT Bird Atlas** — COG cannot simply update the atlas from data obtained since 1989: we would need a (paid) coordinator and an intensive survey effort over 2-3 years. There should be more focus

on breeding records. Expert advice is likely to be needed on timing – given the current drought conditions, should we wait till conditions improve? A scoping study should be undertaken first.

Project 1 is underway. Project 2 is to commence in 2007. Projects 3 to 5 are expected to commence in 2008. Project 6 is unlikely to start before 2009.

Smaller more immediate, less expensive projects

1. **Updating COG pamphlet on bird-attracting garden plants.**
2. **Purchase of recording equipment to record further bird calls**, with a view to producing another CD of bird calls.
3. **New members'/visitors' packs and members' nametags** - name tags are to be issued to each member and their use at COG meetings strongly encouraged. Brochures on local bird issues would be made available to new and potential members.
4. **Develop pamphlets/brochures for the reserves making up Canberra Nature Park** – using a three-tiered approach:
 - (a) Pamphlets (similar to that for Mulligans Flat) for a small number of key sites such as Campbell Park, Callum Brae and Jerrabomberra Wetlands;
 - (b) Fact sheets including bird lists and maps, for other sites, to be made available on the website; and
 - (c) Bird route pamphlets for some of the key areas of the ACT, following the examples produced by other bird clubs.
5. **Support for CIMAG initiatives to reduce populations of Indian Mynas** (and Common Starlings).
6. **Review the need for enhancements and additions to the COG website, and as necessary incorporate.**

Minor projects 1 and 2 are underway. Projects 3 and 4 would begin in 2007. Project 5 and Project 6 would be undertaken as the need arose.

A summary listing all of the suggested projects is being prepared, and will be available on request. There were many valuable suggestions that have not been included in the Forward Plan at this time, reflecting concerns about the available manpower to undertake them and judgements about priorities.

However, the Forward Plan is envisaged as a rolling three-year process and members will have an opportunity each year to put forward further proposals for consideration.

As mentioned, before any project to go ahead it must be subject to sufficient resources, and the COG committee welcomes volunteers to put their names forward to help with any of the projects listed above. This should be done to Tony Lawson on 6161 9430, or by E-mail on tlawson@home.com.au. Tony is also happy to answer any queries members may have, and to forward a copy of the summary of all the suggested projects.—**Jack Holland, President**

Help save bird habitats in the Central Molonglo Valley — send an e-mail or letter NOW to ACT politicians

The ACT Government is likely to decide the future development footprint of the Molonglo Valley in May. A briefing paper prepared by the Conservation Council with a vision for a conservation area in the Central Molonglo is on its' website: www.consact.org.au (then click on the link to the Molonglo Valley item). There will be copies available at the May COG meeting for members without internet. Jenny Bounds on ph 6288 7802 can also provide information.

COG and other environmental groups support the Conservation Council's proposal. The area we want protected is broadly north of Coppins Crossing, west of William Hovell Drive and south of Drake-Brockman Drive in Belconnen, bounded by the Molonglo River to the west, and incorporates what is known as the Kama woodland where the largest group of Brown Treecreepers known to occur close to the urban fringe still survives.

COG and other groups have not opposed urban development in the East Molonglo Valley which lies north of Weston Creek; this is largely former pine forest and degraded rural land. However, there are still concerns about some issues including development close to the river and the lake proposed by the planning authorities.

What is at stake?

- A population of 13 species of birds of prey, unique so close to a capital city, including **Wedge-tailed Eagle** and **Peregrine Falcon** territories.
- The last two breeding territories in the ACT of the **Little Eagle**, which COG has nominated for listing as threatened.

- A population of threatened **Brown Treecreepers**, which won't survive with urban development surrounding them.
- Significant impacts on bird and other wildlife corridors, eg from the Molonglo River through to Black Mountain/Aranda Bushland.
- Endangered communities of Yellow Box-Red Gum Grassy Woodlands and Natural Temperate Grassland.

The Committee suggests members send a letter or email, using the points below, adapted in your own words:

I am writing about the urban development proposals for the Molonglo Valley.

The Central Molonglo Valley should not be developed for housing, as this would destroy endangered woodlands and habitats for a number of threatened and declining bird species, including the Brown Treecreeper, the Superb Parrot and the Little Eagle, and will impact significantly on an important wildlife corridor.

The Little Eagle will be lost as a breeding species in the ACT, and the Brown Treecreeper population at the Kama woodland will not survive if the Central Molonglo is developed.

I want to see the habitats for a unique group of 13 species of birds of prey in the Valley and threatened woodland birds protected. I want a viable wildlife corridor maintained from the Molonglo River through to the Pinnacle NR, Aranda Bushland and Black Mountain.

I support the Conservation Council of the South-east Region & Canberra's proposal for the protection of endangered ecosystems and threatened birds in the Central Molonglo Valley. I want its rich biodiversity conserved for future generations to experience and enjoy.

signed

XXXXXX

Contact details for ACT Minister for Environment and Minister for Planning, ALP representatives for the Electorate of Ginninderra and local Commonwealth representatives.

<p>Jon Stanhope MLA Chief Minister and Minister for the Environment Legislative Assembly GPO BOX 1020 Canberra, ACT 2601 Tel: 6205 0104 Fax: 6205 0433 stanhope@act.gov.au</p>	<p>Andrew Barr MLA Minister for Planning Legislative Assembly GPO BOX 1020 Canberra, ACT 2601 Tel: 6205 0011 Fax: 6205 0157 barr@act.gov.au</p>	<p>Mary Porter MLA Legislative Assembly GPO BOX 1020 Canberra, ACT 2601 Tel: 6205 0100 Fax: 6205 0040 porter@act.gov.au</p>
<p>Wayne Berry MLA Legislative Assembly GPO BOX 1020 Canberra, ACT 2601 Tel: 6205 0021 Fax: 6205 0498 berry@act.gov.au</p>	<p>Bob McMullan, MP Unit 8/1, Torrens St Braddon ACT 2612 Tel : 02/6247 4396 or 6247 4037 Fax : 02/6247 3457 Bob.McMullan.MP@aph.gov.au</p>	<p>Senator Gary Humphries Shop B12, Canberra Centre, Bunda St Canberra ACT 2600 Tel : 02/6247 6444 Fax : 02/6257 4140 senator.humphries@aph.gov.au</p>
<p>Senator Kate Lundy Unit A, Ground Floor, Law Society Building 11 London Circuit, Canberra ACT 2601 Tel : 02/6230 0411 Fax : 02/6230 0413 senator.lundy@aph.gov.au</p>		



Limited Edition

Framed and unframed Wild Bird Photographs

by Stuart Harris
& David Cook

See our range at
naturefocus.com.au

Email us at
stuart@naturefocus.com.au
or david@naturefocus.com.au



Note: Special COG Prices, with \$10 from every purchase being donated to the Canberra Birds Conservation Fund

COG subscriptions due.

The COG Subscription year is 1 July to 30 June. We have kept subscriptions to \$35 again this year as COG is still in a healthy financial position. Our membership numbers seem to have plateaued so we hope you will all continue with your membership and encourage your friends and acquaintances to join. Please check the mailing label on the envelope of your CBN to see whether or not you need to renew for 2007/08, as some people have paid in advance. If you are unsure, call the secretary or check with the Treasurer at the next meeting. We offer three ways to pay:

- Cash or cheque at meeting;
- Cheque or money order to our PO box, PO Box 301 Civic Square ACT 2608; or
- Electronic transfer to our bank account. Details of the bank account are available on the electronic membership form on the website. Please use your COG ID or surname and initial as the description on the transfer.

In every case, we would like you to complete a membership form with your current details. These are available from the Treasurer or can be printed from the COG website. If you pay by bank transfer, please use the electronic membership form on the website and email to cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au.

GBS Notes

Two comments on the COG Chatline have noted more small birds than in the recent past and asked whether this might be due to **Common Myna** trapping in their areas.

The author of these words was interested (and pleased) to record a nesting event for **Red-browed Finch** in his new site. References do note that this species can breed at this time, but there are only eight breeding records in the GBS system for this species and, while some dependent young (DY) records are in weeks 5-19, none record nest with young (NY).

Questions have been raised from time to time about the impact of "Rural" sites on GBS results. There are currently six "suburbs" in the GBS database that are not part of the mainstream locales for Canberra gardens. The areas concerned are Hoskintown, Sutton, and Gundaroo in New South Wales and atypical ACT sites in Crace, Fyshwick and Pialligo.

Thus it seemed opportune to compare the "rural" sites with the rest of the GBS. This note gives a few initial ideas: more detailed investigations will be reported on in due course.

	No of records in GBS DB*	No of species recorded	No. of species unique to type of suburb
Rural suburbs	953	144	5
Other suburbs	63888	226	93
Total	64841	231	na

* A record is one species in one site in one year

The 5 species only recorded by the rural sites are **Black-winged Stilt**, **Australasian Shoveler**; **Powerful Owl** (noted in the ABR for 2004/05 as possibly in error), **Little Egret** and **Spotted Harrier**. Although not yet a GBS site I have just added **Painted button-quail** to the list for El Rancho, Carwoola, which is a first for the GBS (although there have been birds seen in the site at Hoskintown which the reporter of that site says might have been these pigments of the imagination). It is noted with great pleasure, and some astonishment, that the bird performed exactly as required for the Wednesday walkers' outing to the site!

There are also differences in seasonality between the rural and typical sites, including issues typified by comments in the ABR regarding records for **White-eared** and **Brown-headed honeyeaters** being more regular at the Hoskintown site. As the GBS year draws to a close it may be interesting to contemplate what the survey can do to inform debate about the drought (which is hopefully also drawing to a close). That will best be addressed in another forum, but the thought is offered here for analysts in the readership to contemplate how they might try to get a handle on this issue. — **Martin Butterfield**

Other activities of interest to COG members

Woodland Surveys

Mulligans Flat Survey - 31 March

Jack Holland coordinated this survey as I was out of town. The total species count was low by usual standards at only 35 species, but the regular autumn/winter species were around - **White-eared Honeyeater**, **Golden Whistler**. Highlights included two **Hooded Robins** near sites 21/22, **Scarlet Robins** at a number of sites (about the usual abundance of this species in the autumn) and a **Collared Sparrowhawk** at site 22. There was very little movement of honeyeaters on what was a clear, cool morning. Thanks to the regular volunteers. The June survey is likely to be Sunday 24 June, but will be confirmed - please note your diaries. — **Jenny Bounds**

Jerrabomberra Grasslands Reserve - 14 April

Due to various circumstances this survey at our new site in the woodland area behind the grasslands had to be done later than other woodland sites. The total species count was low at 34 species over the 7 sites, but I was pleased to record three **Scarlet Robins** at one site, a pair of **Crested Shrike-tits** at another, a number of **Southern Whiteface** and **Speckled Warblers** (both reasonably common species there), as well as mixed flocks of various small birds including **thornbills** and **pardalotes**. Spring/ summer migrants had gone, and although it was a fine, clear and still morning, there were no honeyeaters moving at all, in contrast to a visit on 27 March when hundreds of **Yellow-faced** and **White-naped Honeyeaters** were seen crossing the woodland from SW to NE. In March, we also recorded two **Brown Treecreepers** near one of the sites, but they were not seen or heard on the April survey; good news that they are still in the area, as I had not recorded them in the reserve for over 12 months. — **Jenny Bounds**

Goorooyarroo Nature Reserve (South) Woodland Survey — 8 April 2007

Dave and Kathy Cook, Prue Buckley and I began the fourth year of COG woodland surveys at this site on a pleasant autumn morning. As usual there were plenty of common woodland species to be seen, but Dave managed to turn up an ACT rarity when he found an adult **Pied Butcherbird** in woodland between COG sites 4 and 5. Apart from this highlight several uncommon/declining woodland species were found – including **Speckled Warbler** (1), **Southern**

Whiteface (3), **Scarlet Robin** (2), **Varied Sittella** (4), and **Dusky Woodswallow** (1). Six **Little Ravens** flew over one site, two **Wedge-tailed Eagles** were overhead at another, and several **honeyeater** species including **White-eared**, **White-plumed** and a single **Fuscous** were present. There was some evidence of migration with a flock of 30+ Noisy **Friarbirds** heading north, and a couple of small flocks of **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters**. A total of 42 species was recorded during the morning. — **Steve Holliday**

Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater Surveys

The dates for the **Swift Parrot** and **Regent Honeyeater** surveys for 2007 are the weekends of 19-20 May and 4-5 August. There are usually several COG members who participate by going out to the western slopes or the south coast. Why not form your own group and go to your favourite spot where gums are flowering or survey local reserves such as Mulligans Flat/Campbell Park/Mount Ainslie as swift parrots do pass through Canberra in most years, even if only briefly. For further details contact Belinda Cooke, the new Swift Parrot Project Officer, Department of Environment and Conservation, NSW on swiftparrots@yahoo.com.au, or Freecall 1800 66 57 66

Notice to all contributors to the COG database: A change to the recommended map datum.

Until recently the maps produced in Australia have used a local map datum known as Aus Geod 66. This has now changed to an international map datum known as GDA or WGS 84. Google Earth is set to WGS 84 as are all GPS units although in the latter case the datum can be changed. The consequence of this change is that a geo-coordinate will mark a different spot on a map depending on the datum used. For instance, a location marked with a the WGS 84 datum will be approximately 218 meters to the north-east of a location marked with the Aus Geod 66 datum.

After consideration by the Records Management Sub-committee, the COG Committee has decided to change the default map datum from Aus Geod 66 to GDA or WGS84 and the standard geo-coordinates to Latitude/Longitude degrees, minutes and seconds (hddd° mm' ss.s"). It will no longer be possible to record geo-coordinates as Universal Transverse Mecator (UTM).

The COG data entry sheet, the on-line data sheet and the base maps published on the Web and in the ABR will be changed as soon as possible after 1 July to reflect these changes.

Please note it is important to know the datum of any maps that are being used to determine locations. It is possible that many of the maps used by members are based on the old datum of Aus Geod 66. If there is no reference to the datum on the map then it will be based on the old datum. For those using GPS units the datum will need to be checked and changed to WGS84 or GDA and the geo-coordinates changed to hddd° mm' ss.s" if necessary. If connected to the Internet then the appropriate coordinates of your location can easily be determined using Google Earth. For any points of clarification please contact Chris Davey on 62546324 (h), email chris_davey@aapt.net.au.

Gleanings from the Chatline

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

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

While driving back from Captain's Flat around 1 PM on 31 March, **Martin Butterfield** noticed a huge swirling mob of birds with a dark spot in the middle. It turned out to be a flock of at least 100 **Little Ravens** mobbing an immature **Wedge-tailed Eagle**. The eagle soared higher and higher with the mob gradually losing interest. A second Wedge-tail then appeared from the same direction but could attract only one attacker.

John Layton's kitchen in Holt is emerging as a hot birding spot. From its window, John has recently had great early morning views of a **Sacred Kingfisher** (perched on his Hills Hoist for five-minutes) and, a couple of days later, of a raptor perched on a nearby power pole. Despite close inspection through his bins he could not decide whether it was a juvenile-plumaged **Collared Sparrowhawk** or **Brown Goshawk**. So far John has not advised when his kitchen will be opened to the general public for viewing, what the entrance fee will be, or what is on the breakfast menu!

Marnix Zwankhuizen reported a nice selection of woodland birds around 2:00 PM on 17 April at Callum Brae – vocal adult **Diamond Firetail**, female **Eastern Shrike-tit**, female **Speckled Warbler** in full song, a pair of **Wedge-tailed Eagles** patrolling overhead and a flock of passage migrants - 16 **Dusky Woodswallows** - resting and leisurely hawking for insects.

1.1	How many years, in total, have you contributed to the GBS?	1-2, <input type="checkbox"/> 3-5, <input type="checkbox"/> 5-10, <input type="checkbox"/> >10 <input type="checkbox"/>
1.2	Have you contributed over the past 5 years?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
1.3	How many years have you contributed at your most recent/present site?	_____ years
2	Have you changed the shape of your survey area at your most recent/present GBS site?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
3	Do you count species flying >100m above the site?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
4	Do you count species that you have heard and not seen?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
5	Do you count species passing through but not using the site?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
6.1	If for any one week you are away for 6 days do you record the species seen on the one day at home?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
6.2	If for any one week you are away for 6 days do you cross out the week number at the head of that column?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
7	For your most recent/present GBS site, how did you assess the size of the site?	Estimated by eye <input type="checkbox"/> Paced out <input type="checkbox"/> Measured off map <input type="checkbox"/>
8	How many individuals would you record if you saw an adult male and female Australian King-parrot not together but:	
	8.1 Within 30 seconds of each other?	1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/>
	8.2 Within 5 minutes of each other?	1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/>
	8.3 On different days within the GBS week?	1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/>
9	Please list the five bird species which present the greatest difficulty in assessing the numbers of birds on your site at any one time.	1 2 3 4 5
10	Any comments on GBS?	

Capertee Valley

The next tree planting weekend in the Capertee Valley is 18/19 August. For further details, please contact Tiffany Mason, PO Box 95, Lithgow, NSW, 2790 or phone (02) 6350 3115, Mobile: 0429 072 586, E-mail: Tiffany.Mason@cma.nsw.gov.au.

MUDBRICK COTTAGE

Mallacoota

Our mudbrick cottage is available for rental for all those nature lovers out there!! It is set amongst the trees in Mallacoota, Victoria (approximately 4 hours drive from Canberra). It is only 10 minutes walk to the beach, 5 minutes walk to the golf course and about 15 minutes walk to town. It sleeps 4-6 upstairs and there is a sofa bed downstairs. It is fully self-contained with a kitchen and laundry. Contact Barbara de Bruine

(02) 6258 3531.

PASSIVE SOLAR HOUSE

South Rosedale

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

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

(02) 6286 1564

or e-mail
gramsay@actewagil.net.au

COG SALES

- **The Long Paddock:** A Directory of Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves in NSW - Rural Lands Protection Board - \$31.00
- **Wet and Wild:** A Field Guide to the Freshwater Animals of the Southern Tablelands and High Country - M Lintermans and W Osborne, \$28.00 (RRP \$34.95).
- **Where to Find Birds in NE Queensland** - Jo Wieneke - \$16.00.
- **Reptiles and Frogs of the ACT** - Ross Bennett - \$13.00.
- **Grassland Flora:** A Field Guide for the Southern Tablelands (NSW and ACT) - David Eddy et al. - \$13.00
- **Our Patch:** A Field Guide to the Flora of the ACT Region - \$12.50
- **The Nestbox Book** - Gould League - \$12.50
- **Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT** - Taylor and Day \$16.00
- **Woodlands:** A Disappearing Landscape – Lindenmeyer et al \$34.00
- **Feather and Brush:** Three Centuries of Australian Bird Art – Penny Olsen - \$50.00
- **COG Car Stickers** - \$2.00
- **COG Badges** – red or grey - \$5.00
- **COG Birds of the ACT:** Two Centuries of Change - Steve Wilson - \$25.00
- **COG Bird Songs of Canberra** – Cassette - \$10.00
- **COG Bird Calls of the ACT** – CD \$12.00

All these items plus COG T-shirts and Polo shirts and various pamphlets etc are available at the monthly meeting sales desk or by contacting Bruce Ramsay via email to barkeramsay@velocitynet.com.au or telephone 02 6294 5881 (after 6.30 pm please)

Avian Whimsy #52 — And thereby hangs a tail

I'm intrigued by the evolutionary phenomenon whereby an organ gets 'borrowed' for another purpose, either doing double duties, or losing its original use as the new function becomes even more important. A duck's foot is used both for walking on land and as an efficient paddle. A penguin's wings however have lost their original function of flying through air in order to be really good at flying through water. (Of course this underlines the triteness of my opening sentence; *every* organ evolved from something else, and one could as well say that the penguin's wing was 'originally' a walking forelimb, and so on back through time.) Sometimes the transformation is profound; the essential three tiny bones that transmit sound from our ears were moved from the lower jaw, while the jaw itself started off as part of the gill arch of a 'fishy thing'.

A bird's tail was probably originally what it essentially is now – a lightweight stiff rudder to facilitate aerial manoeuvres, including fanning out to create drag when landing. Well, in fact of course that again depends on what I mean by 'originally'; if the original bird was something like Archaeopteryx – and I'm sure it was – then the original tail was actually a long wavy relatively heavy bony nuisance. The original *modern* bird tail derived when the bony tail shrank to a stump (the Parson's Nose in a different context) from which sprouted the lighter, stiffer and replaceable tail feathers. (These attempts to be precise and literal make for slow going, so maybe from now on I'll just assume you know what I really mean by an imprecise statement!) I don't know enough about aerodynamics to know why a forked tail is particularly efficient, but it can't be coincidence that some of the great aerialists – **swifts** (apart from **needletails**), **frigatebirds**, **terns** and **swallows** have all evolved them.

Many tails however have been co-opted for a second purpose, an obvious one being display. It's easy to be over the top in this if you're not too fussed about the flying aspect. An obvious example is that of the **lyrebirds**. If your loftiest ambition in the aerial department is a scramble to a roost or a glide down hill, it doesn't matter if the tail is up to 70cm long, with a couple of broad curving outer feathers, half a dozen pairs of long filamentous feathers and a couple of central wiry ones. (Though – and I'm doing it again – was the lyrebird's flight-unfriendly tail really enabled by a largely terrestrial lifestyle, or did it lead to it?) **Pheasants** and chooks (which include **peafowl**) are another case in point. They fly all right, but it tends to be explosive and direct and short-distance, with all the aerodynamics of a cannon-ball, so they can afford to radically redesign their tails for aesthetic purposes. It may not be coincidence that in the same family quail, having not opted for rear-end decorations, don't see much need for a tail at all.

Some flying birds of course do have ludicrous tail appendages, even using flight to show off more effectively, though they tend to get rid of them for the rest of the year. The first time I saw **Long-tailed Widows** fluttering above a South African veldt like overdecorated runaway toy kites – 40cm of broad black floppy tail on a 20cm bird – I thought I was dreaming. I can only imagine that the **falcons** are too busy laughing to scoop them up. Quite unrelated groups of birds, including **nightjars**, also contain such exhibitionists.

Other tail uses are more pragmatic. **Willie Wagtails** hunt mostly by running across the ground; doubtless the tail performs its primary function of aiding manoeuvrability here, but it (and wings) also are regularly fanned apparently to encourage small prey to flee from the sudden shadow. **Brush-turkeys** also do their serious steering on the ground, where the large flat vertical tail presumably assists with jinking runs through the forest.

Unlike Willie, the Brush-turkey has undertaken a major physical adaptation here by rotating the tail through 90°. **Needletails** have also made major changes, while turning their tails into effective props. The prop consists of the normal tail feathers (the retrices, for the record), but the vane – the 'feathery bit' – ends short, leaving the stiff shaft protruding to support the bird when it is clinging with feeble feet to a vertical surface. And I say 'turned their tail into' advisedly, because this short round tail is of little apparent use for steering, which I think is remarkable given the totally aerial lifestyle of the swifts.

There is more to this tale yet, but space decrees I must curtail it there.

Ian Fraser ianf@pcug.org.au



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Autumn Leaves Dairy Flat

From the branches of the plane tree
Just twelve dun leaves hung
But they all fell at once
When the red-rumps took wing

Richard Harding

Next newsletter

June deadline

Wednesday 30 May 2007

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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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

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

COG membership

2007-2008 memberships:

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

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

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Gang-gang

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