

Gang-gang

May 2008

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

Monthly Meeting

**8 pm Wednesday
14 May 2008**

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

The short presentation will be by **Belinda Cooke**, the new **Swift Parrot Mainland Recovery Officer**, who will be updating COG on the 2007 season movements of this threatened species and reminding members of the upcoming 2008 surveys. As part of her presentation Belinda will be showing a short Swift Parrot DVD, for which most of the footage was collected by Geoffrey Dabb.

The main presentation will be by **Sue Lashko and Julie McGuiness** on 'Birding in Ecuador' - a journey through cloud forest, the coastal plain, the altiplano (high plains) of the Andes, the dry south and the Amazon rainforest - all in a country the size of Victoria.

Everyone welcome

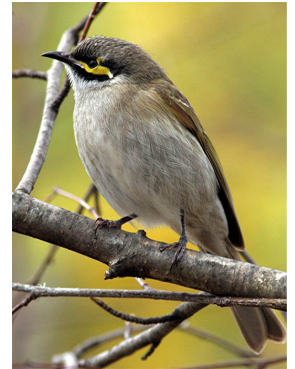
What to watch out for this month

Again the past month has been relatively quiet in respect of unusual bird sightings or of migrants passing through. Exceptions have been **Red Wattlebirds**, **Silveryeyes** and **Pardalotes** migrating, with particularly large numbers of **Striated Pardalotes** reported on the move. However, the real surprise has been the numbers of **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** migrating in the first half of April, with some **White-naped Honeyeaters** joining these flocks towards the end of this time. I have been familiar with this mass migration for over 30 years, including helping with a number of surveys as well as leading outings to see this phenomenon. Over this time there have been many changes to the pattern including that Point Hut no longer seems to be as important a route as it once was.

The feature this year (and last) have been the almost unprecedented numbers that have been passing over Lindsay Hansch's house at Jerrabomberra. During the Murrumbidgee surveys in the 1980s nearby "Tralee" was a known spot for good numbers and was included during surveys. Another feature here is that they seem to be starting so early in the day, compared with Point Hut where 9:00 am was about when things began. Whereas in the past it was thought they gathered together early in the day west of the river, it now seems they are now overnighing east of the Murrumbidgee; exactly where is unclear, though there have been reports of lots crossing the lower part of the Woden Valley, around Pearce/Torrens.

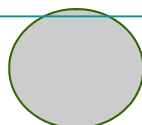
While the highest counts seem to have been to the east of Canberra, Belconnen also seems to have had good numbers, again with birds reported both early and late in the day, so they are possibly roosting in the suburbs or in the nature parks. In complete contrast, my family and I have hardly seen any in our patch in NW Chapman/Coolman Ridge. This is a complete change from when we first bought our block in the autumn of 1974, when even on cloudy/windy afternoons there would be a continuous stream coming over heading North-east.

Photo by Geoffrey Dabb



**Yellow-faced Honeyeater
(*Lichenostomus chrysops*)**

Continued on page 2



What to watch out for this month *(continued from page 1)*

So my concerns expressed in earlier columns seem to be groundless, and it will be interesting to see if the migration is maintained into May. By this time most of the summer migrants will have left Canberra, with the **Dusky Woodswallow** (very good numbers of this species have been reported moving through) and **Olive-backed Oriole** (also some reports) amongst the last to leave, well into May.

Reports of the species that move down from the mountains and higher country in late March/April to overwinter in Canberra have been patchy, mainly of the **Golden Whistler** in gardens and the **Scarlet Robin** in the woodlands close to suburbs. Judging from reports **White-eared** and **Fuscous Honeyeaters** didn't appear to have arrived in numbers yet by mid April, when the first reports of the **Flame Robin** were posted, typically of female/immature birds. One species that has been reported surprisingly widely in the suburbs where it usually rarely ventures is the **Grey Butcherbird**, which does seem most likely to move closer in to Canberra at this time, as does **the Grey Currawong**. Keep an eye out for these species in your patch.

Due to winter coming when bird activity is typically at its lowest round Canberra, and because I'll be away, this will be my last column for a couple of months. Good birding wherever you will be in this time. — **Jack Holland**

Field Trip reports

Saturday 8 – Monday 10 March 2008—Lacmalac / Goobarragandra River

The Canberra Day long weekend was celebrated in style by 18 campers, including three young adults, on the banks of the Goobarragandra River outside of Tumut. A combination of open forest, riverine and woodland habitats was explored from here.

This camp site, the Thomas Boyd Trackhead on the Hume and Hovell Walking Track and on the edge of Kosciusko National Park, was large and spacious. Most of the campers were lucky enough to get a riverside site except for the couple who parked their caravan up the slope so they could look down and keep an eye on proceedings. The site, while not having showers, was well appointed with hot and cold running water, a clean ablutions block and washing up facilities. For those who wished to, it was easy enough to have a bucket shower in the block.

Photo by Julian Robinson



The site and surrounding area did not give a huge bird list with 46 species being recorded. The ability to observe some of these species up close was one of the beauties of the spot. From our camp alone we observed over a dozen species with **Golden Whistlers** visiting with begging young, **Brown** and **Striated Thornbill**, **Eastern Yellow Robins**, flocks of **King Parrots**, **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters**, **Satin Bowerbirds** and others all flocking to the trees above the camp site where one could sit in one's chair with a cup of tea and see all of the collection of avian fauna without the need of optical devices or indeed moving. The views of **Superb Fairy-wrens** that had lost half of their blue were interesting and the ability to observe them closely was wonderful.

Eastern Yellow Robin (*Eopsaltria australis*)

Crested Shrike-tits, Eastern Whipbirds, Shining Bronze-cuckoo, and New-Holland Honeyeaters were all seen within the confines of the camp site.

This camp's location on the Hume and Hovel trail allowed good walking in both directions through a variety of habitats. The trails covered some hilly sections and provided good views of many juvenile **Satin Bowerbirds**, juvenile **Olive-backed Orioles** with their distinctive bronze patterns on the wings, **Rufous Fantails** and a pair of **Mistletoebird** males having a to do over the attendant female. The other track followed the river and was flatter though through many different habitats. Once again good views were had of **Rufous Fantails**, **White-browed Scrubwrens**, **Red-browed Firetails**, an albino **Laughing Kookaburra** and an **Australian Hobby**. The camp was a wonderful way to spend the weekend among good company, great views of some common birds that we all enjoy looking at closely and leisurely

and some other walks that allowed the viewing of birds that will soon depart for more northern climes. The companionship was good and enjoyed around the camp fire. The area was well stocked with fig and apple trees offering fruit for the picking. Some of the group set up a spotting scope and had views of Saturn and its rings during the evening. One of the group made and cooked a damper in the camp oven and then shared this delicacy with the group when it was ready. This made an excellent hot dessert.

For a camping spot only three hours from Canberra this is a spot to be enjoyed with its river and the riparian vegetation and the ability to observe closely its avian fauna. Combined with the walks and different habitat this was indeed a camp that provided everything. — **John Cummings**

Saturday 29 March 2008 — Black Mountain Peninsula

A full complement joined me on the MV Darter on a breezy though sunny autumn late afternoon to investigate cormorant nesting activity. And in respect of **Little Black Cormorants** no-one could have been disappointed as we saw an estimated 150 of this species, with close to 75% of these in a stretch of about 50 metres only a few hundred metres west of the Sullivan's Creek bridge. These were spaced out over 4-5 large but quite dead trees, and closer inspection revealed a large number (over 30) nests, all of which had birds sitting on them, except for one which contained several relatively large chicks. This was repeated but on a much smaller scale several times further on. However, no birds were apparent at the relatively open spot closest to the bike path.

In total 40 nests with birds sitting were seen, but only the single nest with young. This is both the most birds and the most nests (about double the previous highest) of this species seen in COG trips now spanning over five years. The obvious questions to ask are why the nesting was still at such an apparently early stage (we had strong evidence that there were still eggs in at least some of the nests), and what will be the success rate with winter only just around the corner? Perhaps the three weeks of warm weather in the first part of March triggered this. While this is pure conjecture, Jim the skipper noted he had seen very few of this species here before then. From previous COG trips we know that nesting of **Darters** continues right until the end of May, though cormorants usually finish breeding well before this.

Interspersed with their smaller cousins at the first spot were about half a dozen **Great Cormorants**, one nest with chicks close to fledging, and the other with a bird still sitting. About a dozen **Darters** were also seen in singles or twos spread most of the way along, but in complete contrast to the Molonglo River two weeks before we observed no breeding activity. All except two were in female or immature plumage, with the males only seen at the very bottom of the peninsula. Great views were had by all of several **Darters** in the water, snaking along with body fully submerged. This was also the spot where we saw the lone **Little Pied Cormorant**, which obligingly stayed on a dead log long enough for all participants to get good looks at its diagnostic features.

As for the Molonglo, water birds were relatively scarce, though we did manage to see one **Eurasian Coot** this time, with the skipper confirming they seem to have disappeared off the lake for the past year or so. A bit of a surprise was a male **Chestnut Teal** consorting with some **Pacific Black Ducks**. Land birds were also relatively scarce, with the undoubted highlight being good views of a very late **Sacred Kingfisher** as we sailed past Spinnaker Island on the way home.



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2008

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

5 — 24 September
**Strzelecki Track
Outback Tour**

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

2009

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

17 April — 2 May 2009
Vietnam birding tour
co-led by Uthai Treesucon

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

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

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

www.philipmaher.com

A smallish egret flew over (and back) close to disembarkation. Most identified it as a **Cattle Egret**, but there were some powerful views that it was a **Little Egret**. All participants agreed it was a very pleasant way to spend a reasonably balmy autumn evening. Certainly both the Black Mountain Peninsula and the Molonglo now seem to be firmly entrenched as significant annual **Darter/cormorant** breeding spots, with late summer/autumn the peak breeding time.
— **Jack Holland**

Saturday 5 April—Birding by Bike or the "Tour des Birds de LBG"

In a climatic contrast to the heat of last year it was a brisk four degrees when a group of nine left Mr Spokes (supplemented by two plant sale attendees a little later). As birdlife has seemed a tad absent from West Basin recently, with the agreement of the group, we went towards East Basin.

After looking at the first of many **Darters** – posing nicely in the shadow of Commonwealth Avenue Bridge – our next point of call was the fruit bat colony at Regatta Point. The cooler weather had certainly not diminished the size of the colony, but possibly made them more active. A short pedal to Commonwealth Park added a few birds to the list, as did the second stop on Aspen Island. There were no **Pied Cormorants** in the area this year. After checking four very cute **cygnets** in Bowen Park (and hearing **Little Corellas** overhead) we headed through Kingston and investigated Norgrove Park, a very well set out wetland area. Of particular interest were two each of **New Holland Honeyeater** and **Clamorous Reed-warbler**.

Heading into Jerrabomberra Wetlands we initially found birds hard to come by. However a flock of 60+ **Straw-necked Ibis** took off from the grazing land opposite Tadorna hide and were seen closer up as we approached Kelly's Swamp. This was livened up by a female **Australian Shelduck** and a **Great Egret**. After removing several bindii burrs from our tyres (and only two of us needed to replenish the air therein before we got back to the cars) we signed in to the sewage ponds where the most exciting bird was a **Musk Duck** on Pond 6. All up I recorded a pleasing 48 species for the trip (not counting the bats). — **Martin Butterfield**

Sunday 13 April—Honeyeater migration

Once again the weather conspired against us for the COG outing to count migrating honeyeaters. And if the forecast didn't put anyone off, the 6.30 am rumble of thunder and subsequent downpour certainly did. At Tharwa I was joined by just two hardy souls, both non-members and one visiting from South Africa. However by the time we had waited (in vain) for any late arrivals, we had had excellent views of the target species (**Yellow-faced Honeyeater**) feeding on lerps in the very lerp-y Redgums, and the clouds had peeled away to leave us with a gloriously fresh sunny morning.

We spent a lovely two hours at Tharwa Sandwash notching up 37 species including **Diamond Firetail**, **Double-barred Finch**, **Brown Treecreeper**, **Southern Whiteface** and **Scarlet Robin**. Towards the end of the morning a couple of small flocks of honeyeaters headed east along the river so we decided to head up Smiths Rd to the honeyeater counting site. In the ten minutes we stayed there we saw two flocks each of about one hundred honeyeaters gathering in the trees and setting off across the paddocks in true migration style. Just enough to give a taste of what a good migration day would be like, which is what every other day this month has been. — **Nicki Taws**

Wednesday 16 April - O'Connor Ridge

A bunch of folk met at O'Connor Ridge for a very pleasant walk. The highlight was a group of four **Speckled Warblers** — closely followed by a party of three of the same species over 100m distant. As we didn't see birds moving through ahead of us it suggests that there were two successful breeding events, for this relatively uncommon species, in the area around the bike path in 2007/08. As we walked close to the GDE one of the group announced that they had seen a **Grey Falcon**. However, on closer examination of the branding, they changed this to a faded-black Commodore. (I was so envious of the mental dexterity in the punchline, that I couldn't resist repeating it here.) — **Martin Butterfield**

27 April — Gungahlin Hill Nature Reserve

A cold and blustery morning saw five hardy souls face the elements and enjoy the bird life in this small area of the Canberra Nature Park network. The Gungahlin Hill Nature Reserve is easy to get to and has a variety of habitats ranging from stony, dry sclerophyll forest to open grasslands. Luckily, for most of the outing we were able to get out of the wind and by following up the feeding flocks of **Yellow-rumped Thornbills** were able to have good views of 14 species including **Scarlet Robin** and **Varied Sittella**. Surprisingly, the **Crimson Rosella** was in very short supply with a single

group of five birds the only ones recorded. Also missing was the **Brown Goshawk** and begging young that had been seen a couple of weeks previously but not surprising given the conditions. — **Chris Davey**

Woodland Autumn Surveys Reports — Jenny Bounds

Mulligan's Flat - Sunday 30 March 2008 — Road closures for the new urban development meant we could not gain vehicle access to the reserve gate for our survey and had longer than usual walk ins and a windy, dusty spot in the new carpark in Forde for morning tea. While there were some interesting sightings, volunteers reported low numbers of birds. Two **Jacky Winters** around the newly scattered logs for the research project north of the large dam, **Scarlet Robins** at six sites (usual for autumn/winter), **Speckled Warbler** on the western ridge, and several large flocks of **Striated Thornbills** (one of 80 birds) were the most interesting records. Winter altitudinal migrants which come to the lower woodlands, **Golden Whistler** and **White-eared Honeyeater**, were also recorded. 40 species total for the survey. It is noticeable that the grass layer at Mulligan's continues to be very eaten down by overgrazing kangaroos. The winter survey will be **Sunday 29 June**, meeting at 8.15am.

Callum Brae - 24 March 2008 — It was a fairly quiet morning except at one site where a large congregation of various birds stayed in and around the site for some time. The species in the flock included **Diamond Firetail**, **Crested Shrike-tit**, three **Olive-backed Orioles**, **Double-barred Finches**, **Speckled Warbler**, **Western Gerygone**, **Rufous Whistler**, **Grey Fantail**, several **thornbills**, **weebills** and **Superb Fairywrens**. A total of 40 species for the morning.

Jerrabomberra Woodland - 29 March 2008 — Another quiet morning at this location, with early mist across the valley. Summer grass growth has been good in this area and has not been eaten down to the ground as at Mulligan's Flat. A total of 35 species included **Diamond Firetail**, **Speckled Warbler**, a flock of 18 **Little Corellas**, a few **Yellow-faced** and **White-naped Honeyeaters** and a **Brown Goshawk**. Most of the summer migrants had gone, with only one **Rufous Whistler** and one **White-throated Gerygone** calling, and no **White-plumed Honeyeaters** around (as is usual).

Majura Field Range - Thursday 3 April — Paul Fennell and Jenny Bounds did this survey on a cool and overcast morning following a change, but very few birds were around (a few mixed feeding flocks of small birds and a small number of migrating honeyeaters). The ground/grass layer in the woodland is very eaten down by overgrazing kangaroos.

Goorooyarro North NR - 1 April 2008 — Nicki Taws picked a beautiful, autumn morning for the the survey of Gooroo North. Lots of the late-leaving migrants were still around - **Rufous Whistlers**, **Grey Fantails**, **White-throated Gerygones**, **Mistletoebirds**, several **Scarlet Robins** but no Red-caps sighted. Very few honeyeaters, just a few **Spinebills**, one **Brown-headed**, and a group of four **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** at the end of the survey (although this part of the ACT never seems to be big on the honeyeater migration route). The undoubted highlight was a family group of three **Hooded Robins**, one of which was immature, and most likely the fledgling from the nest of two chicks which Nicki found in the December survey, only 100m away. Nicki concludes it would be so interesting to put a tracking device on this bird and follow its movements!

Campbell Park/Mt Ainslie - 4 April 2008 — Michael Lenz reported on his survey in the woodlands on the footslopes of Mt Ainslie. Several **Rufous Whistlers**, also both **Gerygones** and many **honeyeaters** (mainly **Yellow-faced**), not migrating but roaming and feeding in trees, saplings, bushes and on the ground. **Pardalotes** were widespread, with limited presence of other small species.

Newline - Saturday 5 April 2008 — Sue Lashko reported a great morning with these highlights from Newline woodland survey: **Little Eagle**, **Speckled Warbler**, **Double-barred Finch**, **Southern Whiteface**, **Peaceful Dove**, two **Brown Treecreepers**, two **Crested Shrike-tits**, 43 **Striated Pardalotes** in a dead tree with a disinterested **Grey Butcherbird**, flocks of **Red Wattlebirds** feeding among the many buds on the eucalypts, three **Noisy Friarbirds** and small flocks of **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** moving through. — **Jenny Bounds**

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 11 May—Botanic gardens – Bush Birds for Beginners

This morning walk will be the first for 2008 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 9.15am, 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 21 May – Midweek walk

The May Wednesday walk will be to Callum Brae. Meet at 9.00 am at the gate off Narrabundah lane (see the map on the COG website for details).

Sunday 25 May—The Pinnacle – Morning walk

This walk will be led by members of the Field Naturalists Association of Canberra. Meet at the entrance to The Pinnacle, on Springvale Drive, Hawker (opposite the junction with De Salis Street, Weetangera). A two hour walk will take us through several distinct habitats including remnant stringybark forest, rocky outcrops, gullies, grassland areas and 20-year-old plantings of mixed species of native trees. Views over the Molonglo Valley and to the Brindabellas are spectacular. Mixed feeding flocks of small birds can be expected (including **Scarlet Robins, Speckled Warblers, Varied Sittellas, Golden Whistlers**). Sturdy footwear is essential as is clothing suited to expected weather and weather changes. Contact Rosemary Blemings (6258 4724 or roseble@tpg.com.au) for more information and to book.

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

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

Sat 21 June – Tidbinbilla – Lyrebird survey

Since the January 2003 bushfires Peter Fullagar and Chris Davey have been monitoring the return of the Superb Lyrebird to an area of the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. They wish to get an idea of the present distribution within the Reserve and are asking COG members to join them for a morning's survey. Join them at 8.30 am to walk the trails and to record the location of calling birds. Depending on the trails walked the survey should take about three hours. This outing will be a repeat of the very successful surveys conducted at this time of the year since 2004. If interested and for further details please contact Chris Davey on 62546324 (h), email chris_davey@aapt.net.au. Please note that for this year the survey will be conducted on the Sunday, NOT on the Saturday.

Sunday 6 July – Googong Dam

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

Other activities of interest to COG members

Summary of the Bird Interest Group Network (BIGnet) meeting held in Canberra over the weekend 5-6th April 2008.

The Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG) was host to the Bird Interest Group Network (BIGnet) meeting held in Canberra over the weekend 5/6 April 2008. Sixteen groups and clubs from the ACT and NSW, including Alison Russell-French and Graeme Hamilton from Birds Australia, met at the National Botanic Gardens to discuss items of common interest. The theme of the meeting was how better to improve advocacy for the long-term conservation of our birds and their habitats and to provide input to the Birds Australia document *Directions for the Decade 2008-2017* issued as a Supplement to *WingSpan* Vol 17, December 2007.

Alison Russell-French gave a presentation titled '*Directions for the Decade 2008-2017 — Communication and networking strategies for a more authoritative and effective advocacy for bird conservation*'. Adrian Manning (ANU, Fenner School of Environment and Society) gave a presentation on the Mulligan's Flat/ Goorooyarroo research project highlighting the idea that clubs and groups can play a vital role in research whilst Lauren van Dyke gave a presentation on the Kosciuzsko to Coast (K2C) project. In addition, club reports, highlighting group and club activities and particular conservation concerns, were presented.

Five core issues emerged from the discussions: develop strategies for effective conservation messages; national database for national and local use; developing effective dissemination strategy for State of Australian Birds reports; developing strategic approaches to influence decision makers; and review of the *Environmental Protection, Biodiversity and Conservation (EPBC) Act*.

An early morning bird walk followed by breakfast showcased the Mulligan's Flat research project. The walk was well attended and included Jon Stanhope, Chief Minister and Minister for the Environment, Water and Climate Change.

It is envisaged that the next BIGNET meeting will be held in the Blue Mountains in September 2008 when the possibility of improving advocacy through the development of a national database will be discussed. — **Chris Davey**

Seeking to influence - a community advocacy workshop

Saturday 24 MAY (8.30am - 1pm) — Havelock House, Turner.

The workshop is for Friends of Grasslands (FoG) members and others, to improve their advocacy skills. The objectives of the workshop are to improve FoG members' understanding about, support for and participation in advocacy, to develop others similarly and to provide an opportunity to share experiences, and to strengthen future advocacy efforts. The aims on the day will be to define and demystify advocacy, to learn about alternative approaches, and to consider examples and future opportunities. Trish Harrup and David Shorthouse will both be speaking at the workshop. Further information will be provided to intending participants before the day, and two case studies will be presented on the day. The workshop fee is \$10. Morning tea will be provided. Numbers are limited to around twenty, so please register early. Contact Bernadette O'Leary bernadette.oleary@fog.org.au for further details, or Janet Russell janet.russell@fog.org.au to register.

Wanderings through the COG database: Brown Treecreepers

The table included as an insert lists all grid cells within the ACT where the reporting rate of **Brown Treecreepers** was more than or equal to 0.1 between 1986 and 1989 and between 2003 and 2007.

Between 1986 and 1989, that is, during the ACT Atlas period, there were 44 cells whilst in 2003-2007 there were 17 cells with a reporting rate of 0.1 or over. Ten of the cells had a reporting rate of 0.1 or over during both periods. When comparing the two periods, six cells appear to have a higher reporting rate over the last five years than during the Atlas period with an additional two cells showing a possible increase. Six cells showed no change with an additional cell possibly showing no change. Two cells showed a decrease or possible decrease between the two periods. Brown Treecreepers have not been reported in six cells and they are possibly gone or virtually gone from an additional two cells.

In summary, eight cells show an increase or possible increase, seven cells show no or little change, two cells show a decrease and the birds appear to have gone or virtually gone from eight cells. An analysis of these data by Nick Nicholls indicates that there has been a statistically very significant decline in the recording rates from 0.2813 (confidence limits 0.1790 - 0.4127) to 0.0956 (0.05556 - 0.1594) within the ACT over the two periods. It is not possible to determine whether there has been a change in the average number of individuals reported during a visit because during the Atlas period abundance was not reported. If reported anywhere within the COG area of concern over the last five years, the average has been 3.29 individuals.

Unfortunately there are 26 cells out of a possible 51 that have been inadequately covered over the last five years and so no determination can be made as to the reporting rate in these cells. There is a need to increase the number of visits to these cells, all of which had Brown Treecreepers reported during the Atlas period. If anyone wishes to know further details of where the birds were located within the 26 cells please contact me at chris_davey@aapt.net.au or Tel: 02-62546324. — **Chris Davey**

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



INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE

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

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

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

COG membership number (check your <i>Gang-gang</i> or <i>CBN</i> mailing label)	Title	Name
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Street Address	Town / Suburb	State	Postcode
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Telephone Home	Work	Mobile	Email address
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*Family memberships: List names of all family members covered by membership

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

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

Total \$:(office use only)

FURTHER INFORMATION ON PAYING YOUR MEMBERSHIP

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

Garden Bird Survey Notes

GBS-relevant highlights from the Chatline and elsewhere for late March – April include:

- **Swift Parrots** in Ainslie;
- **Brush Cuckoo** in the lower end of Gordon;
- **Brown-headed Honeyeaters** in Cook;
- **Southern Boobooks** in Florey, Holder and Torrens: all gardens, but not (yet) all GBS sites;
- **Migrating honeyeaters** all over; but ..
- suggesting that winter is soon a-coming in, large flocks of **Starlings** have returned to Ainslie;



Swift Parrot
(*Lathamus discolor*)

Photo by Tobias Hayashi

After completion of year 26 processing I found that observers have contributed 66,815 weeks of effort and recorded 5,083,251 birds. After totalling the numbers of birds of each species observed over the 26 years the long term values of ‘A’ can be calculated. The top 14 species cover all species for which more than 100,000 birds have been reported.

Common name	A	Common name	A
Common Starling	9.57	Australian Magpie	2.84
Galah	6.88	Common Myna	2.81
House Sparrow	6.41	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	2.63
Silveryeye	5.62	Red Wattlebird	2.15
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	5.39	Magpie-lark	2.03
Pied Currawong	3.95	Common Blackbird	1.66
Crimson Rosella	3.02	Eastern Rosella	1.51

At the other end of the scale there are 17 species for which only a single bird has been reported, giving a value of ‘A’ of 0.000015. The following table might be an interesting summary of the numbers of birds reported over the 26 years. I am sure the similarity of numbers in each interval is merely a coincidence.

Number of birds recorded	Number of species	Number of birds recorded	Number of species
>10,000	44	10 - 99	46
1,000 – 9,999	44	<10	48
100- 999	48		

I expect to attend the **JUNE** Meeting with a goodly supply of blank GBS Charts for handing out to observers. At this stage the printers are optimistic of being able to produce the old larger size, so folk will have a choice!

— **Martin Butterfield**

COG SALES

MUDBRICK COTTAGE

Mallacoota

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

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

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

(02) 6258 3531.

PASSIVE SOLAR HOUSE

South Rosedale

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

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

Contact Greg or Sallie Ramsay

6286 1564 or
gramsay@actewagl.net.au

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

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

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

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

Avian Whimsy #62—Picathartes: and win a dream!

It was all a bit dreamlike, and appropriately so. I had always wanted to see a tropical African rainforest and the mighty Korup National Park, adjoining Nigeria on the western border of Cameroon, is an extraordinary place. Its 125,000ha of lowland forest is of world significance and in 1986 the Cameroon government declared it the nation's first national park. We – a small international group of birdwatchers – had swayed across the enormous Mana River suspension bridge and walked 8km into our camp site through a dark steamy rampantly green world, tangled with vines. It was early April, the beginning of the rainy season, and fungi sprouted everywhere, helping turn trees and butterflies to soil and back again to trees and butterflies. There were fungal copes of tiny white and orange buttons, crops of yellow corrugated cups on logs, mauve parasols, huge vermilion and tiny pearly white brackets, among so many others. Columned termite mounds wore mossy domed caps. The birds however (over 400 species of them, apparently!) were remarkably inconspicuous. We could hear them but even seeing canopy movement, let alone identifying it, was a rare event. Every now and then the air would vibrate with the throbbing whop of one of the great **casqued hornbills** flying over, but the canopy might as well have been a ceiling.

At 3.45pm we left camp to walk another couple of kilometres to a site that to me was almost mystic and certainly the stuff of dreams. I don't remember exactly when I first read about **Picathartes**, but it was over 40 years ago and I suspect via either Gerald Durrell or David Attenborough, back in another world when ripping animals from the wild and incarcerating them in a faraway zoo seemed a reasonable thing to do. Nor do I remember why this bird had grabbed the attention of a boy who, though passionate about animals, was mostly obsessed by what my current guides would call 'hairy and scary'.

There are just two members of the family, both endemic to West Africa. The **White-necked Picathartes** (*Picathartes gymnocephalus*) is found to the west, from Ghana to Guinea; 'our' species, the **Grey-necked Picathartes** (*P. oreus*) lives around the 'elbow' of Africa, in Cameroon, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. Both are large passerines, about the weight of an Australian Magpie. Their relationship with other bird groups remains entirely unclear, and the birds are rarely encountered away from their nesting sites. These tend to be colonial, with big mud nests on cliffs which are angled at 70-80° so that they provide shelter from the rain. For reasons which are not understood the birds visit the nests at dusk and dawn even out of breeding season and this is what we were relying on, though a couple of the nests at this site were actually being prepared for breeding.

We'd intended to bird en route but the storm clouds were so stygian that in the forest it was hard to see our feet, let alone any putative birds. Curiously the light increased again as the rain started and it remained at the same slightly higher level until sunset. I must confess to feeling a bit negative about it all – it had been a gruelling trip and I was weary; we hadn't seen many other birds in the forest, so why would we see this very difficult one, especially as it was going to be dark and wet? We sat down, in my case across a sharp ridge of granite, and were exhorted not to move. And then something wonderful happened. In the steady rain – at some stage it ceased falling from the clouds but continued unabated from the foliage, as is the way in rainforests – my physical discomfort receded as I took in the beautiful pale granite cliff face and absorbed what was happening. I was actually sitting in Korup and the giant swallow-like nests I was looking at belonged to **Picathartes**; how dare I be anything but awed at such a privilege? Suddenly it didn't matter if the bird came or not – this was very special anyway.

But it did come. A swoop across the cliff face, a quick inspection of the nest and down to the ground, all a blur, then up onto a low rock ledge. Perfectly framed for me by two trees, this lanky grey bird with gleaming bare head, brilliant red crown and blue forehead seemed to peer straight at me. For five seconds, ten? I have no idea; the real answer though is 'forever', for the image is still bright and sharp in my mind and will be so throughout my life.

As a boy I never dreamt I would see a live **Picathartes**, or any of those wonderful animals which dwelt only in the magical world of the books introduced to me by my father. The only specific thought I can recall on the way out was regret that I would not be able to tell him that this dream he'd triggered had come to life. Beyond that I was just dripping wet and euphoric – and I knew that neither birding, nor much else that I could think of, got better than this.

Ian Fraser ianf@pcug.org.au

(Editor's note: Well worth waiting an extra month for this Whimsy!)



WONGA

Bawley Point

South Coast of N.S.W.

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

patricia.walker@bigpond.com

phone 02 6251 3136

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

Next newsletter

June deadline

Wednesday 28 May 2008

Please send, articles, advertisements, updates etcetera to the Editors at gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au or c/- The Secretary COG, PO Box 301 Civic Square, ACT 2608

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

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

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COG membership

2008-2009 memberships:

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

Membership inquiries—

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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

Office

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

COG E-mail Discussion List

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

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