

Gang-gang

May 2010

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

MAY MEETING

7:30pm Wednesday 12.05.10

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

For the bird of the month, **Philip Veerman** will outline the diagnostic features of the **Little Eagle**, **Whistling Kite** and **Black Kite**, three look-alike species that often cause identification difficulties. As the Little Eagle is an ACT threatened species, it is important to be certain about the identification of all three.

The main speaker will be **Rob Heinsohn** from the Fenner School of Environment and Society at the ANU on "Ecology and Evolution of the enigmatic **Eclectus Parrot**".

Eclectus Parrots (*Eclectus roratus*) exhibit a form of reversed plumage colouration not found in other birds. The females are a striking red and blue while the males are shiny green. Unlike most other parrots they breed polyandrously (where multiple males mate with one female) and can control the sex of their offspring. This talk summarises the major findings of a 10-year research program conducted on a wild population of Eclectus Parrots on Cape York Peninsula in northern Australia.

Everyone welcome

What to watch out for this month

It was a pleasure to receive the 2008-2009 *Annual Bird Report* (ABR) with the April *Gang-gang*. As usual, I very carefully read this summary of the year's bird life in the ACT in order to give me a very good feel for what birds occurred, where and when during this period. One of the things that struck me was how some species, which I rarely see, are regularly reported by others, and how the many reports by different observers come together to form such a powerful record of the birds seen for the particular year. My congratulations to all of you, and also on your behalf I'd like to offer congratulations to the whole team involved in another excellent ABR delivered in such a timely manner. It shows once again the importance of capturing your observations into the COG database.

It has also allowed me to compare breeding seasons with some of the late breeding reported during the past month, as well as migrant departures. Further waterbird breeding has been reported, with more young ducklings/chicks observed of the **Australian Wood Duck**, **Pacific Black Duck** and **Australasian Grebe**, plus some **Black Swan** cygnets. A walk along Molonglo Reach on 26 April revealed large **Australasian Darter** chicks still sitting on nests, including four close to fledging in one very bare and exposed site less than 20 metres from the bike path. **Eurasian Coot** chicks were also reported which seemed very late, though the ACT Bird Atlas reveals that this is right at the end of their breeding season. It would appear the significant rain in mid-February triggered this breeding activity.

More significantly there were also reports of further land bird breeding activity with **Weebill** observed feeding dependent young during April, and a remarkable breeding report by Michael Lenz of 10 groups of **Noisy Miners** at the end of the month, eight with dependent young and in two cases with young still in the nest. Again the ACT Atlas reveals this as the end of the breeding season for the former, but very late for the latter,



Photo by David Cook

Weebill
(*Smicrornis brevirostris*)

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

with the latest ABR not recording any breeding activity for either species past Christmas. A surprise was the report of **Western Gerygones**, not just present, but also singing and still holding down territories at the end of the month. Another surprise was **Speckled Warblers** photographed carrying nesting material early in the month, well out of the breeding season according to these two sources, except for an outlier of dependent young early in April. Whether breeding will continue through autumn is unclear; for example, the **White-winged Choughs** on the NW edge of Cooleman Ridge completed nest building, but then abandoned.

Early in April there were further reports of **Rufous Fantail**, **Rufous Whistler** and **Leadend Flycatcher**, as well of one report of **White-throated Needle-tails**, and there were some **Fan-tailed Cuckoo** reports towards the middle of the month, in my experience the cuckoo most likely to be reported during the winter period. A surprise has been a number of independent reports of **Scarlet Honeyeater**, one of the few “unusual” bush birds reported over the past year or so. So keep an eye out for this species, in particular the spectacular male, near any significant flowering. A number of different eucalypts seem to be doing, or are about to do this, following the good rains over summer. If you’re lucky you could be attracted by its call, though I believe none of the birds reported were calling.

Except for a reasonable amount of activity on two days either side of Easter at the beginning of the month, the **Yellow-Faced Honeyeater** migration did not really get started until we had a couple of much colder, near zero, nights towards the middle of the month. **White-naped Honeyeater** have been recorded with them; numbers of these normally increase into early May, when they are the dominant species. Surprisingly, migration seemed to have reduced significantly by the final weekend in April, despite some favourable conditions. Many of the earlier reports have been from outside the Canberra suburbs, and Lindsay Hansch seems to be the only member reporting large numbers migrating over his place in Jerrabomberra. While the chatline is not an entirely reliable source as reporting is voluntary, it seems to me that the significant movement through the suburbs, which has been a notable and spectacular event in Canberra since well before I joined COG over 30 years ago, is greatly diminished these days.

Good numbers of **Grey Fantail** have been reported moving through all April and at the end of the month **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike** were still present, as were both **Dusky Woodswallow** and **Olive-backed Oriole**, traditionally the last migrants to leave, extending their stay into the first week or so of May. However, small numbers of all of the above later leaving species, and the **Fuscous Honeyeater**, stay over winter, depending on the season.

Of the birds that move into Canberra over the autumn/winter period, **Eastern Spinebill** and **White-eared Honeyeater** seem to have arrived by mid April. By contrast there have been very few **Flame Robins** reported until the end of the month, when good numbers moved into my local patch in the SW corner of the former Narrabundah Hill pine forest. From now on **Rose** and **Pink Robins** (one report of each already) may also be present, with the former much more likely to visit gardens, though numbers have been low in the past few years. The latter has a southern distribution, including Tasmania, as has the **Crescent Honeyeater**, which also visits Canberra gardens in small numbers over winter (again few in the past couple of years). The **Swift Parrot** also travels from Tasmania to overwinter on the mainland. Look for this species in the local area where gums are flowering; they are noisy birds while feeding/flying so can be spotted relatively easily, with the first sighting reported only just as we were going to press, despite the availability of flowering gums.

— Jack Holland

Field Trip reports

Brindabellas Spotlighting — Saturday 10 April

The weather was distinctly cooler in the mountains at dusk compared to the nice sunny day which had just passed in Canberra. As night was falling, 15 of us had dinner beside a fire in the Bulls Head picnic shelter while getting to know each other. The first activity was a spotlighting walk around the picnic area in case something was in the area and also to practise our spotlight technique. We then proceeded slowly in the cars down Bendora Dam Road spotlighting the tall eucalypt forest for birds and mammals. A Greater Glider came into view and we all got out to have a better look at this beautiful animal - for some it was a first sighting.

(Continued from page 2)

Anthony Overs gave us a short talk on how surveyors use playback calls for nocturnal birds and animals when doing threatened species research. Using these techniques we walked a bit further down the road and played for owls. A **Boobook** responded quite closely, but we weren't able to find it to look at.

The group then continued down Bendora Dam Road and Warks Road alternatively driving for a kilometre or more (spotlighting while going) and then walking for awhile spotlighting and playing calls. Unfortunately we didn't see or hear any more owls, but we did get to see a number of Greater Gliders and a Common Brushtail Possum. Eventually rain descended upon us, so the rest of the evening was called off and we headed home. Two lucky participants saw a **Southern Boobook** owl on the way home near Stromlo Forest Park. — **John Goldie**

K2C bird survey — Sunday 18 April

The inaugural K2C bird survey was held on Sunday 18 April across 23 properties in an area stretching from Williamsdale in the north to south of Bredbo. The survey's aims were to monitor birds in woodlands and grassland where conservation actions are being undertaken, and to provide feedback to landholders involved in K2C (Kosciuszko to Coast) on the outcomes of their conservation actions.

The 21 COG participants were grouped into small teams and allocated a number of sites to survey across two or more properties during the morning. A fog had not been on the agenda when leaving Canberra on a beautiful bright morning. However, Michelago to Bredbo was enshrouded in what was reportedly the first decent fog of the season, which took an hour or more to clear into a typical sunny autumn day.

The 38 survey sites covered a variety of vegetation types and qualities ranging from Lovely Grassland (i.e. Love Grass paddocks, either untreated or being revegetated with native trees and shrubs), and one truly lovely native grassland site, through to Yellow Box and/or Apple Box woodlands, some with degraded understorey, some being revegetated with tubestock or direct-seeding, some regenerating naturally, and some other very intact box woodlands.

The **honeyeater** migration was a feature of the morning, particularly the **Yellow-faced**, with about one-quarter **White-naped** and a smattering of **Fuscous** and **White-eared**. Once the fog cleared they popped their heads up over the ridge on the eastern side of the Murrumbidgee and streamed through some of the sites in their hundreds. At one site, a 15 year old tree-planting near Williamsdale, over one thousand were counted in 20 minutes using the east-west planted windbreak as a corridor to cross the cleared paddocks.



Glossy Black-Cockatoo
(*Calyptorhynchus lathami*)

Photo by Stuart Harris

The most significant record of the morning was of three **Glossy Black-Cockatoos** at the aptly-named "Cockatoo" property on the southern end of the Tinderries. The cockatoos flew over the survey site in box woodland at the foot of a large granite hill, heading for the stands of Drooping She-oak higher up.



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2010: Celebrating 30 years of plains-wanderers

23 June to 7 July

Top End

Darwin, Kakadu NP, Katherine,
Kununurra & optional Mitchell Plateau
flight

11 to 15 July

Alice Springs &
MacDonnell Ranges

22 to 28 August

New Caledonian birds, butterflies and
flora tour

4 to 22 September

Strzelecki Track Outback Tour
31st Strzelecki tour!

Plains-wanderer Weekends:

6/7 & 20/21 November
4/5 & 18/19 December 2010

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and latest news are on the website**

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Other significant sightings were **Hooded Robin** on six properties, **Diamond Firetail** on ten properties, **Brown Tree-creeper** (five properties), **Speckled Warbler** (three properties), **Scarlet Robin** (three properties), **Southern Whiteface** (nine properties), and three **Peaceful Dove** at the most southerly property surveyed. A total of 83 species were recorded for the morning; nine of these were wetland species recorded on a couple of large dams on the surveyed properties including **Musk Duck** and **Australasian Shoveler**.

After the morning's survey the participants gathered for a bbq lunch at the Bush Heritage Australia property, Scottsdale, to share their different experiences and findings. For making the first survey a success, a big thankyou goes to:

- the COG volunteers for providing their expertise;
- the landholders for permission to survey on their properties;
- Lauren Van Dyke for assistance with survey organisation; and
- Bush Heritage Australia for providing facilities at Scottsdale, paying for lunch, initiating the idea of the survey and providing mapping and technical support

The next survey will be in spring, Sunday 17 October 2010.

— Nicki Taws

Mid week Walk — 21 April — Turalloo Nature Reserve

15 members and guests gathered at Turalloo Nature Reserve for a tour of the TSRs and other interesting spots around Bungendore. The trip was essentially a repeat of one led by David McDonald in November 2009:

We ended with approximately 70 species/site observations covering 47 species. The most diversity was seen at Reedy Creek TSR with 23 species. Although Turallo NR is essentially established to preserve a grassland habitat it, and the nearby areas, delivered 17 species.

Part of the plan for the outing was to observe the honeyeater migration in the areas concerned, but the birds had other ideas. We recorded six species of honeyeaters but none of them were displaying migratory behaviours when we observed them.

We had enjoyable sightings of raptors with a resident pair of Australian Kestrels at Turallo (and two Wedge-tailed Eagles a little outside the Reserve) and a great view of a Little Eagle being severely harassed by four Australian Magpies at Doughboys corner. Other more interesting birds included Striated Pardalote inspecting a hollow at Turallo; an Eastern Yellow Robin at Reedy Creek; three Diamond Firetails on Mt Fairy Rd and Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoos at Mt Fairy and Sweeneys TSR.

I will try to analyse the records of the November 2009 and April 2010 outings and post the result somewhere accessible in the nearish future. — **Martin Butterfield**

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 16 May — Wanniassa Hills Reserve

Wanniassa Hills Reserve adjoins both Farrer Ridge and Isaacs Ridge. This outing will commence at 9am. Park at the Farrer Ridge gate off Erindale Drive (accessible via dirt track from Sulwood Drive (see map). This "parking area" is next to the underpass into Wanniassa Hills Reserve. The reserve is looking great at present after the rain over recent months. A visit in March turned up a **Peregrine Falcon**, although that's not guaranteed on the day! There are tracts of woodland as well as large grassy slopes, but be aware there is very little flat ground, so you will be going up and down gentle slopes much of the time (2-3 hours). Leader: Sandra Henderson



shirmax2931@gmail.com or phone ph 6231 0303. Bookings not necessary.

The map indicates where to park and the access track. The Wanniasa Hills Reserve starts at bottom right of the image.

Wednesday 19 May – Sullivans Creek

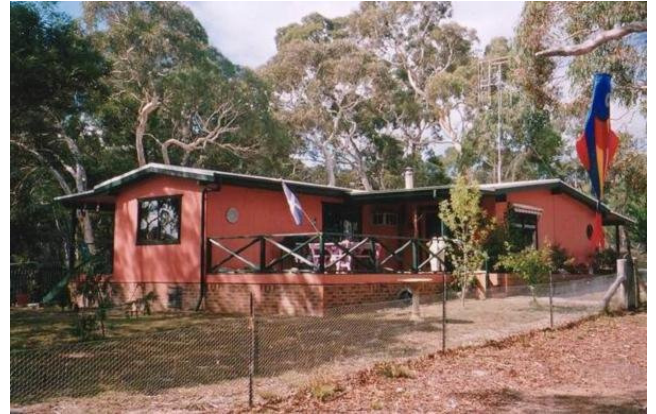
The Wednesday Walk will be a stroll along Sullivans Creek from the O'Connor Shops to Lake Burley Griffin and back.

The distance is likely to be about 4km in total. Meet at the shops at 9am on 19 May. The COG Committee has asked that members note the following: "Interested COG members usually meet informally at 9 am on the Wednesday after the COG monthly meeting, at a location usually decided at the previous month's trip. Often these trips are notified in *Gang-gang*. However, as this is

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an ad hoc group with no formal leader, it is best to check with a known frequent attendee, or on the COG chat line, to ensure you hear about these trips."

Saturday 29 May — Blue Range Hut



Photo by Julian Robinson

Satin Bower Bird (female)
(*Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*)

Meet at Blue Range Hut camping area at 8am for the first of several stops. The picnic/camping area is located approximately four km along the Blue Range Hut Road from the Brindabella Road. On the way back towards Canberra we will quickly check the Uriarra Homestead Dam before finishing off with some birding along the Murrumbidgee River. We should see a selection of **robins, honeyeaters, thornbills, bower-birds** and a few **waterbirds** at Uriarra Homestead Dam. Each stop will be no more than an easy walk. Leader: Dan Mantle, ph 6287 7860. Registration is not required.

Saturday 12 to Monday 14 June — Booderee National Park campout

The Queen's Birthday weekend campout will be held at Green Patch camp ground in Booderee National Park (Jervis Bay, south of Nowra). Possibles include: **Eastern Bristlebird, Ground Parrot** and **Southern Emu-wren**. Booderee National Park protects a very varied set of habitats so we should be able to work up a good list of sightings by taking some of the park's walks. We will aim to visit the Park's botanic garden, the abandoned site for a nuclear power station,

and a ruined lighthouse with magnificent views along coastal cliffs. Depending on the weather, the itinerary will include a spotlight walk.

The leader is Con Boekel who was associated with the management of the park for five years. Con knows the area well and will share some of his interesting park management insights over the weekend. Participants will be expected to book their own accommodation and to arrange for their own catering. They are also reminded that June is in winter and that we can't guarantee the weather.

Places are limited. First in, first served; definite bookings only please. More detailed information will be sent to participants on registration. As Con will be away until late May please register with Sue Lashko by email to smlashko@gmail.com or phone 62514485.

Saturday 19 June — 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 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 if the weather is inappropriate on the Saturday we would try to run the survey the following day.



Southern Whiteface
(*Aphelocephala leucopsis*)

Photo by Geoffrey Dabb

Saturday 26 June — Newline

This morning outing will be to woodland near the airport. Meet at 8am at the entrance to the road into Newline Quarry (look for a yellow sign) on the south side of Pialligo Avenue, about 1km east of the intersection with Glenora Drive (UBD map 71). This is a very busy road so take care when turning off Pialligo Ave. We should see a selection of woodland birds including **Brown Treecreeper**, **Jacky Winter** and **Southern Whiteface**. This is an easy walk but does involve some climbing over gates and through fences. Registration is not required. Leader: Sue Lashko, ph 62514485.

Sunday 25 July – Eden Pelagic

A pelagic birdwatching trip for COG members will be run from Eden Harbour on Sunday 25 July. We will travel to the edge of the continental shelf in search of seabirds, cetaceans and seals. At this time of year we may encounter several species of **albatross**, **petrels**, **giant-petrels**, **prions**, **skuas**, **storm-petrels** and **terns**.

We will meet at Eden Harbour at 6.45 am for a 7 am departure. We aim to return to dock by 3pm, thus leaving enough time to drive back to Canberra on Sunday afternoon. Organising travel and accommodation will be each individual's responsibility but no doubt there will be opportunities for car-pooling and an informal get-together for dinner/drinks in Eden on the Saturday evening.

As with all boating activities the trip will be weather dependent and rough seas could lead to the cancellation or postponement of the trip. Seasickness pills or other remedies are recommended for those prone to seasickness.

All participants should bring water, lunch, and sunscreen. More detailed instructions will be available closer to the day.

The cost will be \$100 AUD per person.

NOTE: This trip is now fully booked with a waiting list. However, should enough interest be noted, running trips on both the Saturday & Sunday (24/25th July) is still an option. To book the Saturday date we would need to confirm with the charter company shortly. A Saturday trip would involve the same costs and duration as noted above. Please book a place on this outing with Daniel Mantle (0413 554 500 or danmantle@hotmail.com), who will be happy to discuss whether this outing is suitable for you. The Saturday trip will be restricted to 12 participants and filled on a first reply basis.

News from the committee

- A response to the Draft Strategic Assessment for the Molonglo Valley urban development has been prepared by Jenny Bounds. The main recommendations are a wider river corridor, a bigger buffer for Kama woodland on its eastern boundary where houses are proposed and a survey of **Superb Parrots** in the Molonglo Valley.
- A submission was made regarding the Federal Golf Course unit re-development EIS. An objection was made to the de-concession of the golf club's lease and the building of residential units; the submission supported the Red Hill Regenerators' submission.
- Jenny Bounds gave a presentation at the Conservation Council Forum on Jerrabomberra/East Lake, outlining the main conservation issues.
- Con Boekel drafted COG responses to two matters, Consultation Draft of Australia's Native Vegetation Framework, and the Draft EIS on Kings Highway deviation in Kowen Forest (the main issue being inadequate fauna/bird surveys).
- The ten year data analysis report for the woodland surveys has been finalised and will be put on the website. The autumn survey round has been completed.
- Membership fees will remain unchanged for the 2010-2011 financial year. This is at least the 8th year that membership fees have remained at the same level. The annual fee is \$35 for an individual or a family, with a student rate of \$17.50. Unless you've joined COG since 1 April this year, your membership expires on June 30. A committee member will be taking renewals at the next two COG meetings, or you can pay by cheque, money order or EFT – see the membership form for details.
- Several members have asked that they be dropped from the Canberra Bird Notes' mailing list – please specify this when paying your fees and we'll endeavour to amend the mail procedures accordingly.
- Jenny Bounds represented COG at the BIGNet meeting at Centennial Park.
- The 2010 COG AGM will be held in November. This is a change from the usual practice of holding it in October.

— Sandra Henderson (Secretary)

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Garden Bird Survey Notes

There have been several recent chatline postings that are directly GBS-relevant:

- several sites have contributed to chatline information about the **honeyeater** migration. It seems that with the exception of the site in Jerrabomberra, relatively few **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** have passed through GBS sites this year;
- a **Restless Flycatcher** in Chapman. Reports of this species appear to have dropped in number in Year 15 and largely remained low;
- **Tawny Frogmouths** sighted in a site in Ainslie (and a pair are again roosting close to the Carwoola nest tree);
- a **Scarlet Honeyeater** sighted in another site in Ainslie;
- a **Peregrine Falcon** in Giralang;
- a **Rufous Fantail** in yet another site in Ainslie! and
- four **Swift Parrots** in Watson.



Photo by Geoffrey Dabb

Swift Parrot
(*Lathamus discolour* .)

The most frequent birds

In some situations it is useful to define an ‘indicator species’ where it could be expected that the bird will turn up in every sample of bird observations. Obviously this will be determined to some extent by the definition of an ‘observation’; if this is restricted to a short period of time it is less likely that a particular species will be seen than if a longer time period is used. This is shown by contrasting the reporting rate ‘R’, (giving the proportion of site-weeks in which a species is seen in a year) and the frequency ‘F’ (the proportion of sites in which the species is seen at least once in a year).

Over the 28 completed years of the GBS, only five species have ever recorded an R value of greater than 90%, and the highest average of the 28 yearly values of R is only 86% (Australian Magpie).

In contrast 16 species have a value of F of 100% in at least one year and the highest average of the 28 yearly values of F is 99.66% (again, Australian Magpie).

It may be significant that all except one of the outcomes of a value of $R > 90\%$ have occurred since Year 19 with the number of occurrences per year ranging from 1 to 5 with an average of 2.5. I do not speculate on the cause of this.

A review of the values of F shows that 91 species have been recorded in every year of the GBS and 16 species (not an identical set to the 16 in the bullet point above) have an average value of $F > 90\%$.

Cutting, eventually, to the chase, the seven most frequently recorded species are the same according to both measures, although the order within that set differs somewhat. The species are **Australian Magpie** (ranked 1st for R and F), **Pied Currawong** (R rank 2, F rank 4); **Crimson Rosella** (R rank 3, F rank 3); **Galah** (R rank 4, F rank 2); **Red Wattlebird** (R rank 5, F rank 6); **Magpie-lark** (R rank 6, F rank 7); **Sulphur-crested Cockatoo** (R rank 7, F rank 5).

All of these species have an average value of $R > 70\%$ and $F > 98\%$. The next most frequent species has an F value of only 94% so it might be considered that these seven are truly Magnificent in their Frequency.

Uses of GBS data

I have used GBS data several times to contribute to debate on the chatline on various issues.

— Martin Butterfield.

Other items of interest

Share your views on the Canberra Nature Park

The Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment is undertaking an investigation into the Canberra Nature Park (nature reserves); the Molonglo River Corridor (nature reserves) and Googong Foreshores.

Wednesday May 19, 5.30-8.30pm

Burns Club of Canberra

8 Kett St, Kambah

Monday May 24, 5.30-8.30pm

Belconnen Library

12 Chandler St, Belconnen

Wednesday May 26, 5.30-8.30pm

Ainslie Football Club

52 Wakefield Ave, Ainslie

The terms of reference are at: www.envcomm.act.gov.au. Everyone is welcome to attend.

RSVP: 6207 2626 or envcomm@act.gov.au for catering purposes.

Namadgi National Park

Notification of Closure — 2010 Feral Pig Poison Baiting Program

Namadgi National Park will be conducting its annual Feral Pig Poison Baiting Program in May. Vehicle access to all non public roads within the park will be restricted to park staff and essential services from the morning of Friday 7 May until close of business Friday 21 May 2010. Some areas may remain closed until Friday 28 May.

This closure will include all management and fire trails and people or organisations wishing to access these areas during the program are required to contact the Namadgi National Park Visitor Centre.

This is a 1080 poison baiting program and all individuals accessing the previously mentioned areas are strongly advised not to touch the green cylinder shaped baits or associated baiting equipment. 1080 is toxic to humans; domestic animals are also at risk of poisoning and should be kept away from areas of operation which will be marked with conspicuous red on white signs.

For further information, please call the Namadgi Visitor Centre on 6207 2900 or for access to restricted areas during the program, please call the program coordinator: Mike Rawnsley on 6207 2903 or 0418 548 957.

From the British Press

Scotland's *Herald* reported that last breeding season, a female **Osprey**, thought to be 24 years old, returned to the Loch of the Lowes Reserve, near Dunkeld in Perthshire, for the 18th consecutive year.

She subsequently mated with her long-standing partner and laid a clutch of three eggs, her 53rd, 54th and 55th recorded eggs.

At least two of the eggs hatched — her 45th and 46th chicks. Scottish Wildlife Trust experts expect that that will be her last breeding season.



Photo by Margaret Leggoe

Gang-gang Cockatoo
(*Callocephalon fimbriatum*)

COG SALES



Birds of
Canberra
Gardens



NEW! Birds of Canberra Gardens (\$20.00 for book only or \$25.00 with **Bird Calls of the ACT** CD included - members prices only)

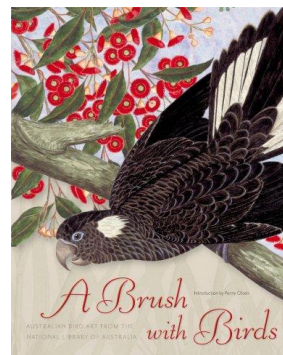
Nearly 230 bird species have been recorded in and around Canberra suburban gardens over the past 27 years in the COG Garden Bird Survey. The life and times of most of these birds are described in this book, illustrated with brilliant photographs and abundance graphs. *Birds of Canberra Gardens* describes the abundance and distribution of birds and discusses how and where to find them throughout the year. It also provides some ideas on how your garden may be made more attractive to native birds. *Birds of Canberra Gardens* is an excellent introduction to the birds of Canberra.

It demonstrates graphically the delights of nature that are available to us here in Canberra, as long as we open our eyes and ears.

Boom & Bust: Bird Stories for a Dry Country Edited by Libby Robin, Robert Heinsohn and Leo Joseph - \$27.00 for members.

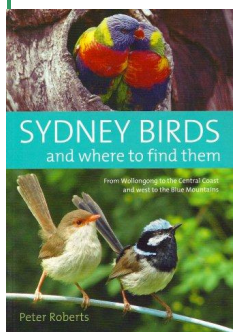
NEW! A Brush With Birds with Introduction by Penny Olsen (\$23.00 for members).

The paintings of Australian birds in *A Brush with Birds* are by artists whose work is represented in the National Library of Australia. They span the years from first settlement to the 1970s, telling us about the times as well as the birds, and showing how the style of bird art has evolved. This book is lavishly illustrated with vibrant and luscious art and it includes the stories of the artists behind the paintings. Enter the colourful world of birds such as the King Parrot, the Yellow-tufted Honeyeater, the Satin Bower Bird and the Red Goshawk, and be inspired by their beauty.



Owls: Frogmouths and Nightjars of Australia by David Hollands (\$55.00 for members)

NEW! The Owls of Australia: A Field Guide to Australian Night Birds by Stephen Debus, illustrated by Jeff Davies, photographs by David Hollands (\$20.00 for members)



NEW! Sydney Birds and Where to Find Them by Peter Roberts (25.00 for members)

Covering the Sydney Region from Wollongong to the Central Coast and West to the Blue Mountains, *Sydney Birds and Where to Find Them* features the 30 top bird-watching localities in and around Sydney. These birding hot spots stretch from Tuggerah Lakes on the Central Coast to Lake Illawarra near Wollongong and from the Blue Mountains in the west to some surprisingly accessible sites tucked away in the heart of the city. Each locality entry lists the key species to look out for, including rare and seasonal visitors. It describes how to access the location, both by public transport and road, and what amenities to expect; maps are featured wherever necessary. The main section gives precise details about where to look for certain birds. There is also a handy list of Sydney birds, each entry providing information on the best spots to find it, its rarity, and helpful tips about its habits and haunts, such as where it roosts or nests. This invaluable guide will take you to some beautiful places, many of which you may never otherwise discover.

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Avian Whimsy #81— Ones of a Kind — Part 1

As some of you are aware, I am fascinated by bird species which are the only living representatives of an entire family. They are the result of a set of very specific ecological and evolutionary events, hidden behind time's mists, each combination unique to the species, and most of which we will never know. Either when the species separated out a very long time ago – long enough to change substantially enough from its relatives to form its own entire family – it didn't ever give rise to other species, or all of its sibling species have become extinct, leaving it an evolutionary orphan.

I'm not a twitcher in the sense of focussing entirely on 'target species' to the exclusion of all else, but like all of us I have particular birds I especially want to see when I travel. I've seen some of the world's monotypic families and I'd love to see all of them, but I won't; even if I could afford it there would be other priorities for the money. However, I love a good daydream as much as anyone, so I decided to do some research to see what would be involved in such a quest. (If you're *actually* going to do it, please consult a more authoritative source than this one!)

The first issue is always 'whose taxonomy?' The birds don't post their genealogies on the web, so we must rely on taxonomists to assess the available evidence from a broad range of sources (for more detail see Whimsy #39, *Relating to Names*, back in March 2006). I've started with the *Handbook of the Birds of the World* list, (HBW hereafter, <http://ibc.lynxeds.com/>), the culmination of probably the greatest exercise in biological publishing in the era of modern printing. However, they take a very cautious approach (perhaps in part because the series was begun in 1992) and I have included another five species which are generally accepted as being out there on their own, and which the HBW is likely to adopt in time; these are **Magpie Goose**, **Magellanic Plover**, **Donacobius**, **Bearded Reedling** and **Rail-babbler**. So we have 28 very special birds to find, and here's how we might go about it.

We might as well start at home; **Emu** and **Magpie Goose** won't be much of a challenge, but the rare and nocturnal **Plains Wanderer** certainly is – in fact it's one of the very few Australian species that most people have to pay someone to find for them. We might as well snap up **Osprey** here too (especially if proposals are to be generally adopted to either recognise more osprey species or relegate the wonderful bird to 'just another hawk' within the huge family *Accipitridae*). Both these propositions are accepted authoritatively in Australia but not widely elsewhere.

Next, we'll start heading east into the rest of core Gondwana, starting with New Caledonia where the fabulous **Kagu** stalks ghost-like through the ancient rainforest understorey. From there it's a direct flight to New Zealand for **Stitchbird**, no longer regarded as a honeyeater, but something much more ancient and uniquely Aotearoan. You'll need to accept it in the context of reintroduced populations in a couple of North Island reserves though; it was snatched from the brink of extinction and there are apparently no wild unmanaged populations.

Then it's back on a plane again to cross the Pacific to Santiago, for a big detour to Patagonia in the far south. The chubby-dovey little **Magellanic Plover** potters around southern Chilean and Argentinian seashores for much of the year, but retreats even further south to breed on high lakes of Tierra del Fuego in spring. North again now, via Santiago to Lima, thence east to the Amazon basin. Above any number of quiet backwaters the huge and wonderful **Hoatzin** bumbles and croaks; this is a real prize, the only species in an entire Order! Below them **Limpkins** pick along the edge hunting giant snails and **Sunbitterns** spread their glorious wings before slipping back into the shadows. Little parties of **Bananaquits** (it's true!) try to pass themselves off as just another warbler as they work the flowers, and out in the lagoon the **Donacobius**, like a big black and tawny reed-warbler, sings from exposed vegetation. En route back across the Andes you might stumble across **Oilbirds** venturing from their daytime roosting caves to look for fruit. Good luck...

On the other hand you *really* don't want to be on those roads at night (daytime is scary enough), and we have to go to the Caribbean anyway, so the well-known Oilbird roost in Trinidad is probably safer in both senses. A short hop from there to Hispaniola for the **Palmchat**; the Dominican Republic end of the island might be a better bet than poor Haiti, and the bird is apparently common there. Next it's back to the mainland for the pretty little rufous-headed **Olive Warbler**, another whose general appearance gives no clues to its very special nature; the pine forests of the Nicaraguan mountains are as far north into North America as we need to venture.

OK, it's time to further deepen our already substantial carbon footprint and cross the Atlantic, but I think a break is required to gather ourselves and prepare for the next round of excitement – and maybe plant some conscience-salving trees. See you next month in Europe, Africa and Asia! — **Ian Fraser** (ianf@pcug.org.au)



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NEXT NEWSLETTER

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Wednesday 26 May 2010

Please send, articles, advertisements, updates etcetera to the Editors at
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Articles should be less than 500 words (300 for reports of 1-day field trips; except by prior arrangement with the editor).

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

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