



Gang-gang

November 2005

News letter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

Monthly Meeting

8 pm Wednesday

9 November 2005

Canberra Girls Grammar School cnr 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 carpark is full, enter using Chapel Drive.

The November meeting will begin with a brief outline of the preliminary results of COG's bird blitz on 29-30 October, and the awarding of prizes.

Our **short talk** for the evening will be by **Dr Penny Olsen**, who will share some of the highlights from her new book on

Wedge-tailed Eagles, to be published by CSIRO Publishing in its Australian Natural History series. Unfortunately the book won't be available for purchase on the night, but COG members will be able to place their orders for autographed copies at a special price of \$34 (rrp\$39.95). The books will be available for collection at the COG Christmas party.

Our **Main talk** will be from Professor Henry Nix, whose topic will be that enigmatic pigeon of Central Australia, the **Flock Bronzewing**.

Everyone welcome

What to watch out for this month

While most **Australian magpies** are by now feeding fledged young, November-December is the time of the highest nesting activity in the ACT. All the "summer" migrants should have arrived, though I've yet to hear of a report of the **Rufous Fantail**. While breeding behaviour is sometimes obvious, looking for signs of nesting often needs some patience and some detective work, as even large birds such as the **Pied Currawong** can be very surreptitious nesters. The "nest workshop" to be held at Campbell Park on Sunday 13 November (details later in this issue) comes highly recommended as a way for members to brush up on their skills.

However, please err on the side of caution when checking to confirm nests and nesting behaviour as even minimal disturbance can lead to birds deserting the nest or give clues to predators where nesting is occurring. Above all make sure that valuable records are not lost but are entered into the COG database. Breeding records are the most valuable records of all, but for many species these are very under-represented in the database.

Jack Holland

Field Trip Reports

Leeton area, Labour Day long weekend, 30 Sep – 03 Oct 2005

Over the October long weekend 15 COG campers headed west into the Riverina on a campout guided by David McDonald. The group stayed in perfect weather at the Whitton Punt Reserve, a beautiful spot along the Murrumbidgee some 15 km west of Leeton.

The first and perhaps most abiding impression was one of greenness and also woodland carpeted with multi-coloured flowers, some native, others exotic; a shock to all after years of drought.

In the red gum forest surrounding the campsite we were treated to many views of **Superb Parrots** as well as **Yellow Rosellas**. A **Spotted Harrier** flew through as did a flock of **Masked** and **White-browed Woodswallows**. We all enjoyed the sweet song of **Pied Butcherbirds**. At night we listened to the calls of **Southern Boobooks** and the screech of a **Barn Owl**.

The first venture away from the campsite was to Billenbah State Forest where our first sighting of **Red-capped Robins** was made. Good views were had of a young **Black-eared Cuckoo**. Also present were **Chestnut-rumped Thornbill**, **Western Gerygone** and a party of **Grey-crowned Babblers**.

The group then spent the afternoon at Fivebough Swamp in Leeton, guided by



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January 2006

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February 2006

7-11th **Exotic Hong Kong** with Dion Hobcroft \$ 2200
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18-22nd **Divine Lord Howe Is.** \$ 1780

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Newcastle Waders Afloat \$ 550

31-3rd April **Warrumbungles** \$ TBA

May 06

8-14th **South West Queensland** \$ 2190

July 06

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local natural resources management expert, Mike Schulz, to whom we are very grateful for sharing his time and expertise. In terms of diversity of waterbirds that can be seen in one place this must be one of the premier sites in southern Australia. The list of birds seen was long. Most noticeable were the thousands of **Black-winged Stilts**. Also present were **Ibis** (Glossy, White and Straw-necked) and ducks - many including Blue-billed. We also enjoyed good sightings of **Magpie Geese**, **Intermediate Egret**, **Spoonbills**, **Whiskered Tern**, **Baillon's Crake**, **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper**, **Red-kneed Dotterel**, **Black Kite**, **Swamp Harrier**, **Brown Quail** and **Little Grassbird**. Alas, the Brolgas and Bittern the place is known to contain were not seen.

The following morning Mike guided us to Brobenbah Hills, a private property NE of Leeton. Here the woodland was carpeted with wildflowers and birds were plentiful, including Rainbow **Bee-eater**, **Cockatiel**, **White-browed Babbler**, **Rufous Songlark**, **Jacky Winter**, **Pallid Cuckoo**, **Inland Thornbill** and **Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater**. From there the party moved to Binya State Forest near Griffith, where a search was made for the **Painted Honeyeater**. One bird was eventually located and stayed perched for a long time allowing everyone to get a good look. Others of this species were heard. Also present there were **Striped Honeyeater**, **Mulga Parrot** and lots of **White-winged Trillers**.

On the way back to the camp, at Darlington Point, a farmyard was spotted invaded by thousands of **Little Corellas**. Nearby on the Sturt Highway a solitary **Long-billed Corella** was also seen.

A wonderful escape from Canberra.

David Rees

Stoney Creek Nature Reserve; 19 October 2005

On a mild, overcast Wednesday morning seven of us set out on a leisurely amble through the Stoney Creek Nature Reserve. This reserve is approximately 80 ha with a small parking area and gate located on the Captains Flat Road 4.5km from the Kings Highway. On the advice of a local cogger, Graeme Clifton, we set off on our amble in a vaguely anticlockwise direction. The most obvious bird of the day was the **Striated Pardalote**. I believe we heard them calling throughout the entire walk. However as bird species were not plentiful we chased up bird calls and admired the beautiful display of bush flowers. Surprisingly an **Australian King Parrot** called and sure enough after a 5-10 minutes search we saw the red and green parrot flash through the trees. I had never seen one in the area and Graeme had seen only a few and then only in the spring migration time. **Varied Sittellas** were sighted as well as **Buff-rumped**, **Yellow and Striated Thornbills**. **White throated Treecreepers** were plentiful. During the latter part of the walk we saw a good number of **Leaden Flycatchers**, both male and female, a male **Mistletoebird**, a **Sacred Kingfisher**, both **Rufous** and **Golden Whistlers** and several **Olive-backed Orioles**, one of which treated us to a fine mimic chorus. We saw two raptors, a **Wedge-tailed Eagle** and a **Nankeen Kestrel**.

There were plenty of nests. In the parking lot we could see two **Australian Magpie** chicks in the nest and during the walk we had

a nest building display by one of the plentiful **Noisy Friarbirds**. There were unoccupied nests of **Wedge-tailed Eagle** and possibly a **Brown Goshawk**.

The bird call skills and persistence of our small group were needed to see the 35 species for the walk. Alex McLachlan kindly shared his knowledge of wild flowers to add colour to the pleasant morning outing.

Julienne Kamprad

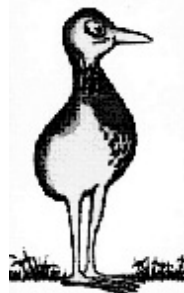
Callum Brae Woodland Reserve; 23 October 2005

This joint outing with the Friends of Grasslands (FOG) was to be to the Jerrabomberra Grassland Reserve, but about a fortnight previously Environment ACT had advised that the designated meeting point along the Monaro Highway was unsafe, and we were left with no option but to move to the nearby Callum Brae. The day started promisingly with about 20 participants and very high moisture levels in the grass after a thunderstorm late the day before. Surprisingly no-one had to be redirected from the original spot, given that the change had come too late to be published in *Gang-gang* and the new details could only be announced at the COG meeting or through the chat line, which is becoming an increasingly effective way to reach a large proportion of the COG membership.

The choice of the alternative venue proved to be a very good one, with a very interesting range of plants in this grassy woodland, though the birdwatchers in the group initially found it very difficult to look at the ground rather than up, while trying to ignore calls etc in the trees. However, after a settling in period participants managed to achieve a good mix of bird and plant watching, and we wandered through the reserve for a couple of hours slowly making our way to the SE corner, for a possible attempt to enter the grassland reserve through a 400 m or so corridor. When we finally got there, this did not eventuate as an electric fence and private land had to be negotiated.

This was my first visit to the reserve and I was impressed by at first the extent of regrowth considering that the lease was only given up a few months ago, and then (visually at least) by the almost English parkland nature with many mature trees with branches quite close to the ground, and lastly by extent of surface water in a series of dams the SE corner. The biggest surprise here was a pair of **Clamorous Reed Warblers** in a relatively small patch of reeds in one of the dams. Overall the bird life was very impressive with 55 species seen or heard during the morning, highlights being the newly arrived migrants, the **Sacred Kingfisher**, **Dollarbird**, **Leaden Flycatcher**, **Rainbow Bee-eater**, **Olive-backed Oriole** and **White-winged Triller**. There was also plenty of nesting activity with a pair of **White-throated Gerygones** seen building a nest, two **Dusky Woodswallow** nests in close proximity, one with a **Willie Wagtail** on a nest in the same tree, two **White-winged Chough** nests, one with a bird on and another with two young, and a **Yellow-rumped Thornbill** entering a nest. Near the reserve entrance a pair of **Little Corellas** and **Sulphur Crested Cockatoos** were examining nest hollows and displaying.

The plant life too was very impressive, with over 50 native species seen including 5 grasses, 11 daisies, 3 peas including a glycine and a swainsona, bulbine lilies, early nancy, sundews and stackhouseia, as well



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as 4 species of eucalypt. COG is indebted to Margaret Ning and Geoff Robertson of FOG for showing us these with such enthusiasm and patience, and putting up with our often being distracted if a bird called or flew past. These joint outings are very valuable and add a wider dimension in that a more detailed examination of the habitat and plant life in which they are found help us understand why birds may occur at a particular spot and not nearby. It will certainly be my policy to continue such outings, which are mutually very beneficial.

I have put another visit to the Jerrabomberra Grassland Reserve on the draft COG 2006 field trips program for a similar time next year. Hopefully there will be a better way to enter the reserve by then, particularly to get to the very promising and extensive patch of grassy woodland in the SW corner which Jenny Bounds and I briefly visited when we did a reconnoitre for this trip, but which we suspect few other members have been to.

Jack Holland

Future Field Trips

Remnants and Reveg; Sunday 6 November 2005- Morning outing

COG has been working with Greening Australia for the last 5 years documenting the habitat value of native revegetation on farms. This morning outing will visit a farm in the Gundaroo area where a large patch of revegetation is home to over 40 species of birds. Many of them should be breeding at this time of year. Also on the property is a magnificent remnant woodland where we will be able to compare the bird community with that of the revegetation.

Meet Nicki Taws at the Shell Service Station on the Federal Highway, Watson at 8 am to pool cars. If you can't meet here, call Nicki (6251 0303, 0408 210 736) to get directions.

Campbell Park; Sunday 13 November 2005– Morning Nest workshop

This trip was advertised in the 2005 COG Field Trips Program as Jindalee State Forest. However, recent visits by COG members have revealed that the best birding spots there were severely degraded. COG is taking up this with the appropriate authorities, and a decision has been made not to visit at this time.

Instead there will be a repeat of the very successful practical nest workshops held over the past two years at Campbell Park, arguably the best bit of grassy woodland in Canberra. This very informal outing has again been timed to co-incide with the peak of the breeding season. The morning will involve a short presentation including tips on the types of nests built by different species of birds, and how to find nests or nesting behaviour. This will be followed by several hours putting this into practice, looking for signs of nesting etc, which will also allow plenty of opportunity for bird watching. Let's hope this year is as successful as the past two years were.

This workshop is particularly suitable for beginners or those relatively new to birdwatching, though more experienced members are also welcome. We won't be walking very far as there is a "hot spot" close to the car park where most of the nesting occurs. If you are interested in participating, please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 A/H or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au). We'd appreciate an idea of the numbers intending to come in case assistance is needed with leading. We'd also be grateful for any tips on where birds are nesting shortly before the day. Meet at 7.30 am at the picnic tables at the far end of the car park.

Garuwanga via Nimmitabel; 18-20 November 2005 - weekend campout

Long time members Geoff Robertson and Margaret Ning have again invited COG to join them for a camp-out on their 240 ha property near Nimmitabel. Garuwanga is managed for conservation purposes and has a variety of habitats including open grassland and shrubland, Snow Gum woodland, large patches of forest, and *Casaurina nana* heathland. There are many amazing rocky outcrops and a large variety of scenery. On the north it is bounded by the Kydra (Numerella) River and the west by Winifred Creek, with several water courses crossing it.

Most of Garuwanga is accessible by foot or by car and we will be exploring the property and adjoining areas for its bird life. Late spring will be a prime time to see all the summer migrants and for nesting. COG added 7 new bird species when we visited in November 1999 and a further 4 in April 2003. To date there have been 310 native plant species, over 90 bird species, 20 reptiles, at least 10 native mammals and 4 frogs recorded at Garuwanga. It is therefore appropriate that it will be a joint camp-out with the Friends of Grasslands.

Participants can arrive either Friday evening or Saturday morning. They will need to bring their own bedding and food.

The property has plenty of places to pitch a tent. There is some limited other accommodation and access to the house, which has a modern kitchen, electricity, limited hot water and a flush loo, will be available. It is expected a number of the meals will be shared.

To register your interest and to obtain further details including how to get there, please contact Jack Holland on 6288 7840 (AH) or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au.

Saturday - Sunday 3-4 December 2005; Shoalhaven Shorebirds – weekend camping/cabins

This visit to the coast will primarily be a 'wader weekend', but we will of course see plenty of other birds. We will meet in Culburra at 10 am on Saturday, which will give people time to drive from Canberra (it is about 3 hours via Kangaroo Valley). We will visit a number of good wader spots, including Culburra, Orient Point and Comerong Island over the two days. We will overnight in the Shoalhaven area at a caravan park and finish up after lunch on Sunday to allow time to drive back to Canberra. Some people may wish to travel down on Friday afternoon and do some early birding on Saturday morning. Telescopes will be essential. Sue will have the two COG scopes, but the more we have, the more we will see. For more information, contact Sue Lashko on 6251 4485 (AH) or by E-mail susan.lashko@cggg.act.edu.au

Wednesday walk – 16 November 2005– Cooleman Ridge

The Wednesday walk for November will be at Cooleman ridge on the SW fringes of Canberra. The President is proposing to show participants some of the birds and spots described in his recent CBN article on this area, which is regenerating after the January 2003 fires. We will be doing a loop walk of about 5 km, with a couple of moderate climbs. Meet at 9 am at the small parking area (street parking is also available) at end of Kathner Street CHAPMAN. Bring some morning tea.

Other Surveys/Activities of Interest to COG Members

A number of COG members will be visiting **Goulburn** on **Saturday 26 November**, to lead beginners bird walks for the **Goulburn Field Naturalists**. Places we propose to visit again are the lovely woodland at **Kenmore Dam** (with lots of orchids at the moment), the nearby **Kenmore Quarry** and **Wollondilly River**, and the **Gorman Road Sewage ponds** to look at waterbirds. There are limited opportunities for some other COG members also to attend – if you are interested please contact Jack Holland on 6288 7840 (AH) or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au.

Mulligan's Flat Woodland Bird Survey Sunday 27 November 2005

The date of the next survey will be Sunday 27 November, meeting at the gate to the reserve off Gundaroo road at 7.15am. Regular volunteers, please confirm your availability by phone on 6288 7802 or email me. I will send a reminder email a week prior to the survey. Wear sturdy shoes, bring clipboard, pencil and eraser, and mug for the usual morning tea and Tim Tams afterwards. (NB: Regulars who have already advised me regarding availability, no need to advise me again unless this changes.) *Jenny Bounds*

2006 COG Field Trips Program

The draft 2006 COG Field Trips Program is included for members' comments in this edition of *Gang-gang*.

There were few comments received from members following the requests in the September and October *Gang-gang*, and therefore the program has been drafted along the lines indicated in these two previous issues.

You will note that there are still a few gaps where we're looking for suggestions of where to go, and there are still a few organisers/leaders needed for some identified trips. If you can help with these, or if you have any suggestions for trips at any other time not listed on the draft program, please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au).

Waterski trial on Lake Burley Griffin

On Monday 10 October 2005, the Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads, the Hon Jim Lloyd MP, announced the approval of a water skiing trial in the East Basin of Lake Burley Griffin (LBG), starting in November. This is part of a move to "breathe life into the Lake" by allowing access to a much wider range of activities than at present. While COG had written to the NCA in June about earlier proposals for a trial, and although we did have some discussions with NCA staff at a meeting on 2 August, we never received a formal reply to our letter addressing the

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- **The Birds of Western NSW: A Preliminary Atlas** - NSW Bird Atlassers - **reduced** to \$5.00
- **Finding Birds in Darwin, Kakadu and Top End** by Niven McCrie and James Watson. \$24.00.
- **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 (RRP \$34.95).
- **Wildlife on Farms** - by David Lindenmayer RRP \$29.95, **special price** for COG members - \$25.00.
- **Where to Find Birds in NE Queensland** - Joe Wieneke - \$16.00.
- **Reptiles and Frogs of the ACT** - Ross Bennett - \$13.00.
- **Native Trees of the ACT** - \$6.50.
- **Birds of Rottnest Island** – by Denis Saunders & Parry de Rebeira -\$15.00
- **Birds of Rottnest Island** – a check list - \$1.00
- **Grassland Flora** – a Field Guide for the Southern Tablelands (NSW and ACT) – by David Eddy et al. - \$13.00
- **Our Patch** – Field Guide to the Flora of the ACT Region - \$13.00
- **The Nestbox Book** – Gould League - \$12.50
- **Birds of Queensland's Wet Tropics and Great Barrier Reef** by Lloyd Nielsen - \$25.00
- **Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT** – by Taylor and Day \$14.00
- Simpson and Days' **Birds of Australia CDROM** Version 5.0 **special price** - \$45.00
- COG Atlas - \$12.00
- COG Car Stickers - \$2.00
- COG Birds of Canberra Gardens Poster - \$4.00
- COG Garden Bird Survey Chart (New Version) - \$1.00
- COG Badges – two colour versions - \$5.00
- COG Birds of the ACT – Two Centuries of Change – by Steve Wilson - \$25.00
- COG Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the ACT - \$1.00
- COG Bird Songs of Canberra – Cassette - \$10.00.

COG T-shirts, Polo shirts, all above and other books on local flora and fauna available at the monthly meeting sales desk or by contacting Carol Macleay (for post and packing costs) on 02 6286 2624.

concerns we raised, particularly about the need for proper environmental assessments to be undertaken and made public before any trial commenced.

We are very disappointed with this lack of further consultation, particularly as we did not hear about the launch of the Recreational Policy for LBG by the Minister on Monday 10 October until the ABC contacted the Conservation Council about its views 30 minutes before it and the associated water ski trial were to be launched. It appears to us that only those with a "direct" interest in the lake, ie the 27 lake users, were consulted and informed about the proposals.

Jenny Bounds and I, together with Marg Peachey from the RSPCA, inspected the site of the proposed water ski trial on Thursday afternoon, 13 October.

Though we had only a very poor map (the one published in the Canberra Times of Tuesday 11 October seems to be the clearest) it is apparent that there have been some changes to the original proposal we discussed with the NCA. Not only has the location been moved several hundred metres to the west, it also seems to be reduced in scale. Initially it was to be a 600 metre slalom course running parallel to the shore directly opposite the Boathouse Restaurant/Clare Holland Hospice and the adjacent boat ramp (see map 59 in the Yellow Pages) with a turnaround as close as 60 metres from the eastern shores of East Basin (ie the W edge of Jerrabomberra wetlands). The proposal now is for a 370 metres course starting approx mid way between the boat ramp and the car turning circle and heading across the bay towards the N end of King's Avenue Bridge.

Despite the launch of the Recreational Policy for LBG by the Minister for Territories information is difficult to come by. For example this policy is not (nor an associated Press Release)

on either his or the NCA web site, and the best source of info seems to be the C/T article and a short press release put out by the ACT Chief Minister, and the transcript of the interview on 666 ABC radio on Monday morning. This confirms that it will be a 4 (rather than the 6 sought initially) month trial, mainly conducted on weekdays [though on up to 2 weekends as well], and that only one boat will be allowed at the one time. I also understand that it will involve a special boat type with a low noise and wake potential though we are unable to confirm this. Note too that it will be a slalom training course only for elite skiers.



Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Calidris acuminata*) David Cook

Despite these changes there are still concerns, including about the welfare of birds. A big one is the closed shop in which the discussions have been held, basically only with those with a "direct" interest in the lake (users forum). The NCA appears to have nothing in its charter at all on the need to consult. From the remarks made by the Minister and the images of him skiing on the lake, it is very easy to take the cynical view that it is all a "fait accompli", that the trial will be an overwhelming success, and it will be opened for general water skiing from next year. He certainly left the door open for that in his radio interview.

From the remarks made by the Minister and the images of him skiing on the lake, it is very easy to take the cynical view that it is all a "fait accompli", that the trial will be an overwhelming success, and it will be opened for general water skiing from next year. He certainly left the door open for that in his radio interview.

COG has written to the NCA expressing our concerns about the lack of consultation and seeking the documents upon which it was determined an impact on birds will not be severe, and seeking details of the proposed monitoring during the 4 month trial, as well as suggesting the southern bank of Central Basin may be a more appropriate location. However, there are things that concerned COG members can do.

1. Write to the Canberra Times or preferably the Territories Minister Jim Lloyd (C/- Parliament House Canberra) expressing your concerns. Do this in your own handwriting (or typing) choosing your own words using some of the issues expressed here (lack of community consultation, likely impact on birds, the need for at least one of the 3 basins to be reserved for passive recreation). The power of a few well crafted letters from concerned constituents as opposed to signing a form letter or petition is remarkable. In his radio interview the Minister claimed more people had written in support rather than against, I suspect very few people really knew what was going to happen.

2. Members who write letters should also consider sending them to their local Federal Member asking them to raise it with the Minister. In this case it should be Senator Gary Humphries, as letters from the same political persuasion are much more effective. It is much harder for a Minister to fob these off, especially when they get several letters about a topic. And don't forget E-mail is another legitimate way to voice your concerns. In this case it is jlloyd.mp@aph.gov.au, or Have your say on <http://www.garyhumphries.com>.

3. We are also looking for some members who are happy to do some monitoring of bird numbers along this stretch of the lake both before the trial starts next month and also during the ensuing trial. This should be along the foreshore starting from the mouth of Molonglo Reach to close the King's Ave Bridge and can probably best be done in the form of a 500 metre area search to be compatible with the COG database (land birds numbers would also be very useful). A fair bit of this has steep sides and therefore does not attract much loafing waterfowl, but there is also a sloping beach for about 200 metres or so W of the boat ramp which is much more attractive. Waterbirds are also fed here by the public, increasing their numbers.

4. Above all if you see anything that is beyond the bounds of the remit for the trial (such as two boats, general waterskiing or operating outside of the boundaries), please report it to the NCA (or write to the Minister, who alleges he wants to hear the views of the public) to register your complaint.

If you are concerned about this proposal please make your voice heard. Unless this is done it is inevitable that an increasing level of water skiing will occur on this valuable and currently relatively peaceful part of the lake.

Jack Holland



Leeton campers See trip report Page 1. David Cook

PASSIVE SOLAR HOUSE FOR RENT - 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. 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, the Eurobodalla Botanical Gardens are a favourite spot while the front beach at Rosedale is usually patrolled by the resident White-bellied Sea-Eagle.

For further details contact Greg or Sallie Ramsay, 31 MacRobertson St, MAWSON, ACT 2607, phone 6286 1564 or e-mail at greg.ramsay@actewagl.net.au

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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. Please contact Barbara de Bruine (02 – 62583531) for further information.

Notices

Gang-gang editor. The commitment required is as follows: For up to four hours once a month, collate emails from membership work with Sue Lashko to edit them. Then and put together a 12 page A4 newsletter using Microsoft Publisher. The current editor will provide you with the software, teach you how to use it and work with you until you are confident to take on the role yourself. You will need a PC, email access and general computer skills. Come on. Be brave and volunteer. Contact Jack Holland if you would like to be the next editor or send an email to gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au.

“The London Wetland Centre –a dream comes true”A Cumberland Bird Observers Club Memorial Lecture in association with the Sydney Olympic Park Authority. **by Hugh Mellor**, past Honorary Treasurer of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and past Chairman of the Council of The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust. **Monday 28 November Sydney Olympic Park Gate opens at 6:30pm \$15.00 Bookings essential on 02 9714 7888**

VACANCY - COG Newsletter Editor's Role

COG needs a new editor for *Gang-gang*. The Newsletter editor role **is vacant** and if we don't find someone by Christmas, we may not have a newsletter in the new year.

The role of the Newsletter Editor is not an onerous one, from start to finish:

1. Once a month from February to December, a band of willing newsletter contributors email their words and photographs to the Gang-gang email address before the last Wednesday in the month.
2. The master editor, Sue Lashko, casts her skilful eye over each written piece, correcting spelling and checking bird names and making any necessary changes before emailing the beautifully edited versions to you.
3. You then cut those words into the newsletter template (already developed by the current editor) and jiggle them around until they fit (3 hours).
4. After a quick proof read, you convert the newsletter to pdf format and email it to the printers with instructions to print. You also email the pdf to David Cook, our fabulous web creator for placement on the website (1 hour).
5. On Monday morning, you call the printer and make sure they received the pdf artwork. That's all then until next month.

The current editor will work with you for the first couple of months and always be on call until you are fully confident with the tasks. The current editor will also always be there to fill in for a month if need be. All necessary computer programs and training in how to use them will be provided. If you can use Microsoft word, and have email access, you can be the Gang-gang editor. Come on, take the challenge!

COG's draft Guidelines for the Advertising and Conduct of COG Field Trips

There has been a very limited response to date to these draft guidelines, and unless we hear from you they will be finalised as is and implemented from the first outing in 2006.

They were presented for the first time to the participants in the COG Field Trips Leaders workshop on 21 August. Some useful comments were made which were incorporated, but it was agreed the draft would benefit from comments from the wider COG membership before they are officially adopted and implemented in the 2006 COG Field Trips program.

To enable members to comment, the amended draft has been put on the COG web site under both Trips and News. Copies will also be made available at COG meetings etc, for interested members who do not have access to computers.

Readers will find the guidelines are mostly common sense but some issues may be contentious. The main ones are expected to be:

- A registration form for each trip including the right for leaders to refuse potential participants;
- How to ensure first aid is available;
- How to ensure for mobile phones or other forms of emergency communication are available; and
- The completion of bird lists for the COG and other databases.

Your participation and comments on these important draft guidelines are sought. Please provide any comments to Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au).

From the Committee

The committee welcomed two new members, Lia Battisson as treasurer, and Chris Davey. Apart from its more routine business, the committee considered a number of other topics at its October meeting:

- A contract has been signed with Tony Muzik-Smith, of FJC Technologies, to develop a web-based data input program for COG. It is hoped that we will be able to trial the new program early in the new year.
- On the recommendation of David McDonald, and following their successful use in the recent Riverina field trip, COG will purchase two UHF hand-held CB transceivers for use in COG field trips; they will be available for loan from the secretary.
- Following representations from COG members concerning Common Myna traps, an update on the project will be sought from Chris Tidemann.
- The committee reiterated its decision that it would not accept advertising on the COG website.
- The secretary, Barbara Allan, was elected COG's Public Officer.
- COG is investigating the cost of, and necessity for, insurance for volunteers.

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

A Visit to Namibia, 1-18 August 2005

Namibia is very dry and desolate! Especially in the Namib Desert, which is along the western side bordering the Atlantic Ocean. For orientation, the other borders are clockwise Angola, Botswana and South Africa. It was called German South West Africa, then in 1915 it came under South African rule. Now it is an independent country since 1990. Horst and I, Neville & Lesley Page (from COG) plus 4 others went on a wonderful guided environment tour with Mark and Jean Caulton of Pelican Safaris NZ (formerly of Durban, S. Africa).

The Namib This is the oldest desert in the world. Long and narrow, usually 150 km wide, it extends about 2,000 km from the Orange River northwards up into Angola. We followed the only road, which was in a flat valley between rows of dunes – an ancient river bed. Here we saw native salt bushes, a few tufts of grass, Ostriches, Ruppelle's Korhaan, plus Pied Crows (black with white vests). The most exciting find was on our way out. Mark was determined that he would find us the endemic Dune Lark *Certhilauda erythrochlamys* so that I could claim that as my World Bird #1000. And find it we did, in spite of high wind, by clambering up and down over smaller dunes with clumps of tall grass. Mark dubbed me the 'Lark of the Dunes' and later we celebrated with champagne. On our way back to the motel at Solitaire, we saw a Black Cobra cross the road (we stayed in the mini-bus), plus Oryx, a small Steenbok and a small herd of Springbok doing their famous 'pronking' by arching back, head down and leaping very high into the air.

National Botanic Gardens in Windhoek, the capital city of Namibia These Botanic Gardens looked so brown, parched and dry. Scorched – but only with the sun and lack of rain, no fire had raged through. It was August, and the rains don't come till Nov-Feb. Upon closer inspection we noted that many golden seed heads and brown seed pods were



Lilac-breasted Roller

Horst Hahne

visible, so the growing season must have been fruitful. We added a few birds to our list here in the gardens. A Rockrunner was running along the rocks. Blue Waxbills and Black-cheeked Waxbills (long-tailed finch-like seed-eaters) adorned a small bush. A small group of Helmeted Guineafowl pecked and scratched on the ground while Brown-throated Martins circled overhead. And finally a glimpse of the Damara Hornbill – a new species just split off from the Red-billed Hornbill, and a Monteiro’s Hornbill with a larger body and a larger, thicker red bill. These large birds, 42-65 cm in length, appear quite cumbersome with their heavy-set long decurved bills, and indeed their flight is rather heavy and ponderous. There are 10 species, the largest is 90 cm and found almost entirely on the ground, the Ground Hornbill. The names are wonderful: Pirit Batis, Long-billed Crombec, Black-chested Prinia .



Pied Crows Horst Hahne

Etosha National Park and the Etosha Pan This 23,000 km² park is situated in the north central part of Namibia. It surrounds a pan, or shallow depression 130 x 50 km. Etosha has been interpreted both as ‘great white place’ and ‘place of mirages’ - both are applicable. This salt pan, similar to Lake Eyre, is often bone dry, with just a few waterholes to sustain a stunning number and variety of big game animals. Some of the waterholes are enhanced by pumping up more water from the reserves below the surface – by solar-powered pumps. Also the waterholes near the three rest-camps are floodlit at night, with some benches provided for your comfort as you sit and watch.

We were all impressed by the big numbers of animals we saw at the various waterholes. A herd of 30 elephants in all sizes, as many as 22 giraffes at once, 300 Burchell’s Zebras. I didn’t bother to count the number of Black-faced Impala, a subspecies of impala found only in northern Namibia, or Springbok, or Oryx (Gemsbok). Red Hartebeest, Eland and Kudu were fewer in number, but no less impressive with their heads of spiralled horns. Each kind of antelope has their own unique style of horn – twisted, spiralled, curved, straight, long or short – an amazing variety.

There were many species of circling raptors and vultures perched in the tops of trees waiting for something to die, and one morning a White-faced Owl sitting quietly in a tree with its eyes closed. There were tall, stately Kori Bustards, little parties of Helmeted Guineafowl scuttling about (hors d’oeuvres for lions, Lesley said), trees full of iridescent blue-green Cape Glossy Starlings, ugly Marabou Storks with bare head and necks – but a very impressive wingspan, and as a contrast the beautiful Lilac-breasted Roller (lilac breast and aqua belly) and Namibia’s national bird – the Crimson-breasted Shrike. This attractive bird, slightly smaller than our Magpie Lark, is black with a thick white wing bar and brilliant crimson breast from chin to vent. A real beauty in the bleak desert! Thankfully we didn’t have to put up with the monotonous calling of the Cape Turtle Dove, as we saw many more Laughing Doves plus a few Namaqua Doves and very few Capes. We saw very small flocks of Red-billed Queleas in the rushes near the Namutoni Waterhole. These tiny (13 cm) thick-billed seed-eaters are often found in immense flocks of tens of thousands, covering many hectares of bush or crop-land. A huge flock is comparable to a cloud of locusts and just as devastating. It is the most numerous bird species in the world and there is research being done on how to reduce their numbers in certain areas. Hmm, we have the “Minimising Mynahs” project, perhaps theirs is called “Quashing Queleas”?



Marabou Storks Horst Hahne



We were sad to leave Etosha and its incredible numbers of wildlife, the sharply pointed termite mounds, the typical-shaped African tree - the Umbrella Thorn *Acacia tortillis*, the numerous smaller *Acacia nebrownii* shrubs just coming out in the familiar round yellow wattle-type blossom, the vast empty spaces, or the jostling at the waterholes by the animals themselves. But we’ve come away with loads of photos (excellent digitals from Horst and Neville) and stories and an increased knowledge of a magnificent country of which we knew very little. The memories are all good!

Kay Hahne

Scarlet-breasted Shrike

Namibia's national bird Horst Hahne

Avian Whimsy #36 Mistletoes are for Lovers (ie of birds!)

When you're as old and cynicised as I am, it can be almost refreshing to occasionally find that there are areas in which you're still naïve! For instance I had thought that it would no longer be necessary to write an article emphasising the environmental values of mistletoes, but it seems I was wrong. On a recent field trip a committed and practical landcare coordinator shocked me by mentioning that mistletoe removal is still practised by some landcare groups. I felt as though I'd been informed that they were still paying a bounty to kill Wedge-tailed Eagles!

One of the myths regularly peddled about mistletoes to justify their removal also has a raptor flavour. For instance the Canberra Times a couple of years ago reported uncritically on behalf of a couple of enterprising blokes up Yass way who were conning people into paying them to remove their mistletoes on the grounds that they were exotic! This of course is one of the excuses used by some unscrupulous members of the pigeon racing fraternity to destroy Peregrines. (In this case one assumes that Peregrines originated extra-terrestrially, since the perpetrators' British counterparts say the same thing!)

The fact is of course that the nearly 100 Australian mistletoe species – spread across two families – have evolved with their hosts here and been an integral part of the landscape for millions of years. In fact it is believed that the larger Australian family, Loranthaceae, evolved in Gondwana and spread from here to the rest of the world. For the best synopsis of systematic and ecological information on mistletoes that I've ever read, see David Watson's article in *Annual Review of Ecological Systematics* 2001, 32:219-49 – I can provide an electronic copy on request. Watson is an ecologist working at Charles Sturt University who is (objectively!) passionate about mistletoes. He believes – based on both observational and experimental evidence – that mistletoes are not only a natural part of the landscape, but a 'keystone resource'. By this he means that mistletoes contribute essential food and shelter to a wide range of other species, to a degree which is disproportionate to their very minor contribution to plant biomass and diversity.

The foliage is consistently high in nutrient and moisture – the host sees to that – and many invertebrates, plus their bird predators, take advantage of it. Mistletoe fruit and flowers are important to many birds (and mammals); in fact in many Australian forests mistletoes are the most reliable source of fruit. The foliage is denser than that of the host (be it eucalypt, casuarina or acacia) and is used preferentially as a nesting site by many species. In addition the interaction of the parasite with the host branches contributes to formation of hollows and ground litter, both important habitat components. (In another forum I could make an equally strong argument for their value to other animal groups too.)

Various studies have measured the relationship between mistletoe density and bird diversity and Watson has conducted a unique study of adjacent woodland areas, one 'natural' and the other where the landowner had removed mistletoes. (This study was done in our own backyard incidentally, near Gundaroo. There were two threatened bird species present; Brown Treecreepers occurred only where there were mistletoes and Superb Parrots preferentially.) Briefly, all these studies have shown a strong correlation between presence of mistletoes and a healthy landscape, as measured by bird diversity. More precisely, bird richness increases with mistletoe density until there are about 20 mistletoe plants per hectare. Beyond that we tend to be looking at severely disturbed landscapes, where mistletoe densities are unnaturally high with the load shared between less trees, and bird numbers drop off anyway. In this situation mistletoe removal *may* be beneficial to remnant trees, but until this is demonstrated it could equally represent wasted resources.

In other situations though mistletoe removal, by parkcare groups or well-meaning landowners, is actually bird-harming, environmental vandalism at least as damaging as cutting down trees. And I would suggest that a land restoration program should give emphasis to reintroducing mistletoes as a key habitat component. I await your response with even more interest than usual...

Ian Fraser ianf@pcug.org.au



Dune Lark Horst Hahne



Leeton campers See trip report Page 1. David Cook



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COG welcomes new members

Owen Holton, Theodore
Klaus Hueneke, Palmerston
Rebecca Montague-Drake and
Joshua Bean, Captains Flat
Wendy Whitham and Lloyd
Hooper, Hawker

Next newsletter

DECEMBER deadline
Wednesday 30 November 2005

Please send updates, articles, advertisements etcetera to
Editors *Gang-gang*
gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au
or send c/- The Secretary
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Civic Square, ACT 2608

Articles should be less than 500 words.
Field trip reports should be less than 300, except by prior arrangement with the editor. Bird photos welcome with written material or without.

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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

COG membership

2005-2006 membership: Individuals, families and institutions: \$35. school students (under 18): \$17.50.

Office (6247 4996)

COG no longer has an office in the Griffin Centre.

For all queries or access to COG's library phone Barbara Allan on 6254 6520

COG E-mail Discussion List

COG has an email announcement and discussion list for members and friends of COG: 'Canberra Birds'. Join the list by sending an empty email message to canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au.

Editor Canberra Bird Notes

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Gang-gang

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