

# Gang-gang

November 2006

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

## Monthly Meeting

8 pm Wednesday

8 November 2006

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

The short talk will be by **Tom Green**, back by popular request. His topic: "Arid-zone whitefaces".

And for something completely different, **Judith Scarl**, PhD candidate at Cornell University, NY, and currently Visiting Fellow at the Department of Botany and Zoology at the ANU will address "**Galah Gossip: vocal communication in a common Australian cockatoo**".

Galahs are highly social parrots with a rich system of vocal communication. We hear them squawking and carrying on in local Canberra parks, but what are they saying? What kinds of information do galahs put in each specific call? How might they modify their calls to convey a specific message? Many kinds of parrots are wonderful mimics: do galahs use mimicry when they communicate in the wild? Judith's talk will address these questions and discuss basic aspects of galah communication.

Judith started her "parrot career" in Costa Rica in 2003, working on **Orange-fronted Conures** *Aratinga canicularis*. Over the course of her PhD she has gained a wonderful appreciation for the expression "silly galah," keeping all ten of her fingers attached to her hands, and the colour pink.

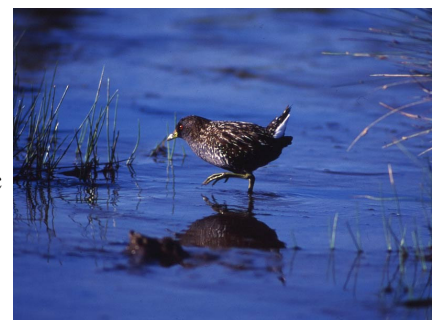
Everyone welcome

## What to watch for this month

By November all the spring migrants should have arrived, though I've yet to hear of reports of **Satin Flycatchers**, **Cicadabird** and the **Rufous Fantail**, passage migrants on their way to the mountains to breed. Also no reports so far of the **Common Koel** and the **Channel-billed Cuckoo**, both of which are more often heard than seen, and in particular the former has been recorded much more frequently in the ACT over the past 10 years or so.

The **White-winged Triller** seems to have been particularly common north of the lake, but has been slow to reach the southside, in Chapman at least. This species is listed as threatened in the ACT, but its presence in any numbers in our region is clearly drought related, which explains its presence and local breeding over the past few years. It may be expected that the severe drought will otherwise significantly affect breeding, especially those species which are just commencing to, or still need to, start. By popular request we are running our very successful Nest Workshop at Campbell Park again this spring, but a couple of weeks later than for the past 3 years, as this was the only available spot in our busy spring program. It will be interesting to see how this later timing and the drought impact upon the amount of breeding there this year. Getting those breeding records into the COG database will be ultra important this season.

In the past Canberra has usually proven to be oasis in the drought, but with the increasing severity of water restrictions this may no longer be the case. Certainly the days of the **White-winged Triller** and the **Leaden Flycatcher** nesting in my GBS site as they did in the 1980s seem long gone. One positive effect of the dry conditions seems to be, however, the 3 species of crake (**Australian Spotted, Spotless and Baillon's**) and 2 species of rail (**Buff-banded and Lewin's**), plus the **Little Bittern** seen at Kelly's swamp over the past few weeks. Once these were rarely seen, but records of these cryptic species seem to have been becoming increasingly common there over the past 5 years or so of drought conditions.



**Australian Spotted Crake**  
(*Porzana fluminea*)

Photo by Steve Stephenson

Jack Holland

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## Field Trip reports

### Nangar National Park – October Long-weekend Campout, 2006

Twenty-two participants enjoyed the long-weekend in Nangar National Park near Eugowra. Most participants camped at Terarra Creek, whilst others stayed in Eugowra and Forbes. The weather was fine and about 120 species were seen over the weekend.

The Park vegetation is dominated by eucalyptus-blackpine, scribbly gum-blackpine and blackpine-ironbark.

In the Park about 80 species were seen. Some of the birds observed on 'Bird Hill' were large flocks of **White-browed** and **Masked Woodswallows**, nesting **Dusky Woodswallow**, **Brown Treecreepers** feeding young, **Diamond Firetails**, **Crested Shrike-Tit**, **Hooded Robins** and great views of **Turquoise Parrots** feeding young, as well as a **Black-eared Cuckoo**, the last two being lifers for some. Also seen in Nangar were nine species of honeyeater, including **Spiny-cheeked**, **Striped** and **Blue-faced**.

On Sunday we visited Back Yamma State Forest where about 50 species were recorded and then on to Gum Swamp in Forbes where another 50 species were recorded, including close-up looks at a **Baillon's Crake**; a pair of **White-bellied Sea-Eagles**; and **Straw-necked Ibis** 'circling the Moon'.

The Park was well worth the visit, despite the drought. On the way home some of the group stopped at Eugowra Rocks and heard about the hold up of the Cobb & Co coach by Frank Gardiner, Ben Hall and friends; and Conimbla NP which yielded **Rainbow Bee-eater** and **Fan-tailed Cuckoo** on the fringes.

The weekend was very well led, organized and researched by Margaret McJannett and Charles Bauer.

**Pat Moffat**

### Bungonia, 7-8 October 2006

The relatively small COG group who joined me on this joint outing with the Goulburn Field Naturalists Society (GFNS), were more than compensated for by the numbers of GFNS members as well as local Bungonia residents. After setting up camp we surveyed the birdlife in the Bungonia Village Park, the adjacent Bungonia Creek, and the nearby TSR. It was a warm though comparatively still afternoon, and bird activity along the creek was particularly good with many species using the pools of water to bathe or drink. This allowed for relatively relaxed birding as we sat or lingered in the shade, letting the birds come to us. In the later part of the afternoon we also examined some of the local sights in this historic village, such as the oldest still functioning Catholic church on the Australian mainland, and the ruins of an old inn and associated buildings such as a bakery and forge. Many GFNS members then joined us for a BBQ on a perfectly still warm moonlit evening, to top off a wonderful afternoon's activity.

By nightfall we had already managed to pick up 47 species, and with some further birding early in the morning managed to increase this to 57. Highlights were good views of both the **Yellow Thornbill** and **Clamorous Reed-warbler**, as well as **Shining Bronze-cuckoo**, **Restless Flycatcher**, **Double-barred Finch** and **Grey Butcherbird** either seen or heard. The **Jacky Winter**, so prominent on a rekkie only 6 weeks earlier, was relatively quiet, perhaps nesting, and a **Sacred Kingfisher** only called a few times and stayed out of view. The lighter sleepers managed to hear the clear calls of the **Southern Boobook** close by at about 4 am, though almost everyone heard the **Willie Wagtail**, known to have a nest nearby, as it called all night, typical for this species when it's a full moon. The local **Peacock** also called regularly, but the dawn chorus seemed to me to be predominately **Yellow-faced Honeyeater**, which together with the **White-plumed**, were very abundant along the creek line.

The following morning we moved onto a farm about 8 km south of the village, and on the edge of Morton National Park, where we did a circular walk of about 4 hours through the property, taking in some of the varied habitats including the best parts of the Jacqua Creek. Unfortunately the air was very dry and the wind soon came up, and though we mostly managed to keep out of it by sticking to the creek valley, bird activity seemed relatively quiet. Despite this we did manage to pick up 50 species for the morning, including **Sacred Kingfisher** (again quiet), both **White-throated** and **Western Gerygone** calling and **Brown-headed Honeyeater**. Good views of a **Speckled Warbler**, a listed species in NSW, were the definite highlight. One surprise was the paucity of spring migrants, with many species conspicuous in the ACT this spring not seen or heard.

As is appropriate for a joint outing, we also examined closely the local flora, including the argyle apple, *Eucalyptus*

*cinerea* growing in its natural habitat. We also found a rare (for the area) Gippsland Water Dragon as well as an Eastern Swamp Tortoise along the creek. Some of the area's very interesting geology was also examined, including the ancient sand hill that runs close by the house, and the evidence of a tsunami that had occurred in ancient times. Wombat holes/warrens abounded. While the rest of us were occupied watching a couple of skinks at the edge of a water hole, Julian photographed a **Shining Bronze-cuckoo** sitting quietly nearby that no-one else had noticed, proof that at least some COG members aren't solely fixated on birds.

Most of the group felt that due to the conditions we hadn't been able to really properly sample the bird life which might occur over all the habitats on the farm, and that COG should return, this time camping on the farm to maximise the chances by also picking up birds over the afternoon and evening/night. This is preferred in spite of the excellent facilities at the Old Bungonia School with the external shower and toilet block, large BBQ, and room in which to eat, plus its proximity to Bungonia Creek. Again many thanks to Diana and Ken for making these facilities available free of charge to COG, and for being such generous hosts, by making the time available to show us around, both in the village as well as on their property.

**Jack Holland**

### Castle Hill, Sunday 15 October 2006

A birding domino effect saw almost all the participants in this outing stop on the way to Tharwa at a hotspot by the Tidbinbilla Road near Castle Hill, north of the village. We observed 20 species in about 20 minutes. The highlights were **Restless Flycatcher**, at least three **White-winged Triller**, **Diamond Firetail**, and **Rufous Songlark**.

The main event took longer, but was even more rewarding. But before we set off, a flock of **Little Corella** was near and helping to dismantle the wounded Tharwa Bridge when we assembled in the carpark.

David McDonald has been surveying the private property near Castle Hill for 17 years. He took us on a round trip of his nine Woodland Survey sub-sites, mainly in **Blakely's Red Gum**, **Red Box** and **Yellow Box** woodland and open woodland. Thanks to the generosity of the landowners in allowing us to visit, we spent a very enjoyable couple of hours on the property, noting 51 species. We were delighted by excellent views of three species of **Woodswallow**: **Masked**, **White-browed** and **Dusky**. Another highlight was **Brown Treecreepers**, which David is rarely seeing on the property nowadays, **Jacky Winter**, **Southern Whiteface** and a **Crested Shrike-tit**.

**Rick Kuhn**

### Oolambeyan National Park, 16-20 October 2006

Oolambeyan NP was purchased in October 2001, primarily to conserve habitat in NSW for the endangered **Plainswanderer**. Over its 21,851 hectares are native grasslands and boree (*Acacia pendula*), cypress pine (*Callitris*), rosewood and belar (*Casuarina*) and black box woodlands. The NSW National Parks Service is developing a management plan for the park, and visitor use issues have not yet been determined. Although conditions out west have been drought affected, and there were some restrictions on where we could take vehicles in this huge park, this mid week trip was greatly enjoyed by all, with a variety of activities (walks, drives, spotlighting) and 77 species of birds in



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#### 2007 Birding Tours

**Tasmanian Endemic Bird and  
Mammal Tour**  
**Bruny Island, Melaleuca, pelagic**  
18—24 February 2007

**South-west Western Australia  
including pelagic**  
27 February — 7 March 2007

**Northern & Central Thailand**  
7—24 April 2007  
co-led with Uthai Treesucon

**Top End**  
**Darwin, Kakadu NP, Kununurra  
& Mitchell Plateau**  
14 — 29 May 2007

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

**New Caledonia**  
22 — 28 July 2007

**2nd Outback (Strzelecki) Tour**  
7 — 25 September 2007

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

**All above tours are accommodated**

**Plains-wanderer Weekends 2006 & 2007**  
late November and December  
Itineraries can be viewed on the AOS website

[www.philipmaher.com](http://www.philipmaher.com)

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different habitats recorded. We are very grateful to the NSW National Parks Service and especially to the ranger, Michelle, for allowing a COG group to visit. As part of the agreement, we did Atlas searches in different habitats and will be providing all the sightings/data for their database.

Birds of prey were plentiful, with nine different species, including **Black Falcon** and nesting **Spotted Harriers** and nesting **Brown Goshawks** near the homestead, as well as a **Barn Owl** roosting in a pepper tree in the carpark. **Owlet Nightjars** were common on our spotlighting walks near the **Black Box** woodland. There was an influx of **White-fronted Chats** which had probably bred earlier in the spring, as well as lots **woodswallows** of three kinds - **White-browed, Masked and Black-faced**, and a pair of **White-backed Swallows** possibly nesting near the homestead. On the sandunes in the Callitris and Rosewood, our walks recorded **Grey-crowned Babblers, Apostlebirds**, lots of **Southern Whiteface, Chestnut-rumped Thornbills, Blue Bonnets and Red-rumped Parrots** amongst others. A surprise sighting was a young **Red-capped Robin** near one of the water tanks in very open country in the southern part of the park, a long way from any wooded area. **Honeyeaters** recorded on an earlier exploratory trip such as **White-plumed and Painted**, were noticeably absent, no doubt due to the conditions. The **Boobook Owl** roosting in the shearing shed on the earlier visit was not around, although we used tapes to try to call one in.



Photo by Geoffrey Dabb

**Oriental Plover**  
(*Charadrius veredus*)

We were fortunate to be able to go out with researchers to spotlight for **Plainswanderer** and saw several immature male birds in one paddock over several nights, as well as good views of **Stubble Quail** and **Brown Songlark** in the spotlight. With **Brown Songlark, Pipit and Singing Bushlark** in good numbers, it was also a very good opportunity for comparing these open country little brown birds. Other highlights included large flocks of **Banded Lapwings**, a few **Pratincole** and a pair of **Oriental Plovers**, all seen outside the park in paddocks along roadsides. A visit to Fivebough Swamp at Leeton on the way was also very enjoyable with 65 species recorded over a couple of hours, including **White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Australian Spotted and Baillon's Crakes, Freckled Duck, Glossy Ibis, Wood Sandpiper and Greenshank.**

**Jenny Bounds**

## Future Field Trips

### Sunday 5 November — Jerrabomberra Grassland Reserve — morning woodland and grasslands birds walk

This will be COG's second attempt to reach the SW corner of this reserve where there is a patch of very good grassy woodland with **Brown Treecreepers, Southern Whiteface, Dusky Woodswallows** etc. Last year at this time the attempt to trek there about 2 km from the Canberra Model Aircraft Club facility was scuttled when at the last minute we had to access it from the Callum Brae Reserve gate, which proved too far to do it in a morning. Now a new entrance from the SE corner of the reserve has been prepared, which involves about a 900 metre walk up a gentle hill to reach this woodland. On the way to the woodland, which few people, including COG members, have ever been to, there will be an opportunity to improve your ability to identify grassland species such as **Skylarks** and **Richard's Pipits**.

Meet at the entrance in the SE corner of the reserve on the western side of the Monaro Highway at 7:30 am. Since this is a double carriageway it is best approached from the South, and if you are coming from the north the best option is to go down to Lanyon Drive and do a U-turn through the lights. The meeting spot is next to the private driveway about 100 m past the creek with tall trees and only about 500 metres N of the lights. Please note this can be a very busy road (hopefully not at the meeting time) and care should be taken when parking (though there is adequate room once off the road), and, in particular, extreme care should be taken when leaving after the walk. Depending on the route taken, there should be no fences to negotiate. If you are interested in participating, please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on [jack.holland@deh.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@deh.gov.au)).

### Sunday 12 November 2006 — Monga National Park, all day outing

David McDonald will lead a day outing to this area of wet forest just before the escarpment around 20 km east of Braidwood off the Kings Highway. Target species include the **Red-browed Treecreeper, Black-faced Monarch, Pilotbird, Olive Whistler and Bassian Thrush**, not to mention flowering waratahs. Meet at 7:30 am at the Queanbeyan Swimming Pool car park, Campbell Street, Queanbeyan, for car-pooling or, alternatively, meet at 9:00 am at the

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intersection of the Kings Highway and River Road on the right hand side of the Highway. Allow about 90 minutes for the journey from Canberra. Bring lunch and drinks.

Comprehensive information about the National Park and its birds is found in the wonderful book, Stellar, R (ed.) 2005, *Monga intacta: a celebration of the Monga Forest and its protection*, Robyn Stellar, Braidwood, NSW.

Registration for this trip is essential; please phone David McDonald on 6231 8904. Upon registration a map and other details are available directly from the leader.

## **15 November — Wednesday walk, Yerrabi Pond, Gungahlin**

Come with us on a walk where the loudest calls are from cursing builders and barking dogs. Visit a lake where the Magpie-lark's nest has failed and all the Pelicans are plastic. Help celebrate the resilience and diversity of our urban wildlife with an easy walk around Yerrabi Pond. We are certain to see the uncommon **Musk Duck** and a good range of other waterbirds. **White-plumed Honeyeaters** and **European Goldfinches** should be in the nearby trees. We will meet at 9 am near the **Waterfront Restaurant** on **Strayleaf Circuit**. Bring a hat and some morning tea.

## **Saturday/Sunday 18-19 November 2006 — Bumbalong Valley, campout on private property**

This is a repeat visit to this spot following COG's successful (though very wet) camp-out there in February 2002. The Bumbalong Valley is a very sheltered valley straddling the Murrumbidgee River about 10 km N of Bredbo. The area is generally not accessible and COG is very fortunate to have the opportunity to revisit. This visit is timed in spring to maximise the number of species that can be recorded.

Despite the wet conditions last time over a 24 hour period a very impressive total of 81 species were either seen or heard, including 53 species within 1 kilometre of our base. This included **Speckled Warbler** and **Dollarbird** seen at our campsite at the foot of the hills, and **Restless Flycatcher** plus a pair of **White-fronted Chats** on the banks of the river nearby. At one magic spot about 2 km downstream **Diamond Firetail** were observed taking grass to a large nest in a young gum, with **Double-barred Finch**, **Southern Whiteface**, **Brown Treecreeper** and two female **Hooded Robins** nearby.

After setting up camp mid Saturday afternoon we propose to do an inspection of the birds on the property and the adjacent river. On Sunday morning we will proceed on the road north along the river to survey along the road, and access a couple of properties where we've been invited to identify the birds. Depending on the number of participants (few so far) some may venture up the steep slope to the west to do atlas surveys of 2 grid cells for which access is otherwise very difficult.

We will be camping overnight on one of the local properties on a take everything in, take everything out basis. Participants should aim to arrive mid afternoon on the Saturday, and it is expected we'll stay until mid Sunday afternoon. Car pooling will be encouraged, so if you're interested please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on [jack.holland@deh.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@deh.gov.au)).

## **Sunday 26 November — Campbell Park, Morning Nest workshop**

This will be a repeat of the very successful practical nest workshops held over the past three years at Campbell Park, arguably the best bit of grassy woodland in Canberra. The outing has again been timed to coincide with the peak of the breeding season. The morning will start with 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 three years. We won't be walking very far as there is a "hot spot" close to the car park where most of the nesting usually 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](mailto:jack.holland@deh.gov.au)), who would also be grateful for any tips on where birds are nesting shortly before the day. Meet at 8:00 am at the picnic tables at the far end of the car park.

## **Sunday 3 December — Hospital Creek, Namadgi Nature Reserve, day outing**

The last formal COG outing for 2006 will be held in this popular nature reserve to the south of Canberra. The ACT Parks and Conservation Service have suggested Hospital Creek, with its 4 years of regrowth, as a site which should have birds plus be of use to them if surveyed. We will be car parking and using the toilets at Yankee Hat carpark, followed by

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a walk in. Julian Robinson who knows the area has kindly offered to help guide us on a circular walk following both the road and the creek, lunching on the creek (possibly at the Hospital Creek Hut). We can be flexible about the exact route, which will depend on where the birds are and the weather on the day. If you are interested in participating, please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 A/H or by E-mail on [jack.holland@deh.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@deh.gov.au)). We will meet at the Kambah Village shops at 7:30 am, so we can consolidate cars and get to the Yankee Hut car park well before 9 am.

## Proposed longer trip for 2007 — Lady Elliot Island

### Extended weekend trip in late November/early December 2007 – seeking expressions of interest

A number of members have indicated their interest in a formal COG trip to Lady Elliot Island. This island is located within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in the highest possible classification of Marine National Park Zone by GBRMPA. It is one of only six island resorts on the Great Barrier Reef, is teeming with wildlife and live corals, and is famous for a resident population of 40 Manta Rays (for more information see [www.ladyelliott.com.au](http://www.ladyelliott.com.au)). However, the main purpose for COG would be to view the seabird nesting (**Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, Lesser Frigatebird, Red-tailed Tropicbird, Roseate Tern, Black-naped Tern, Bridled Tern, Common Noddy, Black (White-capped) Noddy, Silvereye Great Barrier Reef form**), which is at its peak towards the end of November. While the list of birds is not large the sheer numbers and the ability to closely observe the roosting sites without disturbing the birds are what makes this special. To find out whether this would be a viable trip we are looking for expressions of interest from members and their friends. The preferred weekend is Friday 30 November - Monday 3 December (3 nights, 4 days), but an earlier time could be considered depending on interest and availability. Preliminary costs are for 20 people @ \$649 each, which includes 4 share (bunk beds) in the Eco Huts, marine park tax and flights from Hervey Bay. If desired a higher level of accommodation is possible. Travel from Canberra to Hervey Bay is not included and will be up to the individual, but could be looked at in a group format, i.e. bus to Sydney and flights to Hervey Bay. If you are interested in participating please contact John Cummings (0407 181 002 or 6254 6741 H) or by E-mail on [cummingsj@missionaustralia.com.au](mailto:cummingsj@missionaustralia.com.au) or [thecummings@spiderweb.com.au](mailto:thecummings@spiderweb.com.au), as soon as possible so that COG can gauge the level of interest and decide whether this trip can be included on the 2007 field trips program.

## Draft 2007 COG Field Trips Program

The draft field trips program for next year is on page 8. Members are invited to comment and/or offer to organise/lead some trips for which the entries are still vacant. This is particularly so for a couple of our major camp-outs, ie the Easter and October long weekends, for which both locations and leaders are still needed. There are also still some gaps for local or mid distance day or overnight trips, but generally the program this year fell into place quite easily without too much drama. My thanks again to all those who have offers suggestions of where to go and especially to lead walks. If you have any offers or comments to make please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on [jack.holland@deh.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@deh.gov.au)).

## News from the committee

At the Annual General Meeting in October the following were elected to the COG committee for 2006-07:

**President:** Jack Holland

**Vice President:** Chris Davey

**Treasurer:** Lia Pattison

**Secretary:** Sandra Henderson

**Committee:** Jenny Bounds, David Cook, Sue Lashko, Anthony Overs.

Anthony Overs will take over the role of field trips officer from February 2007

At the subsequent COG committee meeting:

- Chris Davey agreed to be Public Officer.
- The committee discussed a proposal for a COG poster which can be used for display purposes. There was strong support for the idea. The poster will include information on COG's aims, member services and achievements.
- Those who look at COG's website regularly will have noticed the Grid Cell map, made available initially for the purposes of the Blitz. This was developed by Peter Cowper and the Committee is most appreciative of this

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very useful work.

One of the committee's goals this year is to work out how best to spend some of COG's accumulated funds to benefit the Group's aims. If any members have suggestions they would like considered in a redevelopment of the business plan, please contact one of the committee members or email the Secretary at [cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au).

## Report on October COG Meeting



**Dusky Woodswallow**  
(*Artamus cyanopterus*)

Photo by John Gordon

Once again, we were treated to an enlightening and amusing talk by an ANU postgraduate with Rachel Sims presenting 'High society: social and breeding biology of Dusky Woodswallows'. In the first detailed study of any woodswallow species in Oceania, Rachel is attempting to find out how the three 'odd' aspects of these birds (they often migrate, are colonial and breed cooperatively) fit together. She outlined three findings from her studies of four breeding sites in the Gudgenby Valley. Firstly, the Gudgenby Dusky Woodswallows are complete, not partial, migrants. About 50 birds arrive en masse in September of each year, and all leave together in the following March or April. 53% of adults that Rachel banded one year returned the next and nested an average 62 metres from their final nest of the previous year. 20% of yearlings, 87% of which were male, also returned home and nested an average of 64 metres from the natal nest.

Secondly, Dusky Woodswallows nest in small colonies of 5 to 14 breeding pairs, with an average of 56 metres between neighbours. Rachel tested out her theory that this close nesting was a defence mechanism by using a 'Robowong' (a robotic Currawong). She found that the nesting pair swooped

the invader the most, but some close neighbours also helped. The birds in a colony also forage together and regularly sleep together in clusters at night.

Dusky Woodswallows breed cooperatively sometimes, with 48% of the Gudgenby nests being cared for by more than a single pair of birds. Most of these helpers are young, non-breeding, subordinate individuals, but they may also be failed breeders, breeders which also have their own nests, or juveniles from the first brood which then help with the next brood. In addition, the Dusky is unique among woodswallows in that fledglings from two different broods may be herded together and cared for in a crèche for about a month, with the four parents feeding any of the babies.

What does this mean for Dusky Woodswallow reproduction? The birds breed from October to February and can have up to 5 nests in that time, but a successful pair will raise only 2 broods. 31% of nests were abandoned but, of the remaining nests, 67% of clutches hatched, 68% of broods fledged and 81% of fledglings survived. We look forward to further updates on the Gudgenby birds.

The meeting concluded with another example of Geoffrey Dabb's powers of patient observation. A number of Canberra birds, including **Glossy Black-cockatoos, Diamond Firetails, Owllet Nightjars, Baillon's Crakes and Superb Parrots** were shown feeding, bathing, courting, drinking or sunning themselves. — Sue Lashko

## Other activities of interest to COG members

### COG Grid Map

Member Pete Cowper has prepared a map of the ACT that features the COG grid. The map is a handy way to check where particular grid cells are. You can find the grid on the Maps and Forms page ([http://canberrabirds.org.au/maps\\_forms.htm](http://canberrabirds.org.au/maps_forms.htm))

To print a map of particular grid cells, simply zoom in to the grid cells you need, then:

- choose PRINT from the FILE menu
- select PRINT CURRENT VIEW
- choose FIT TO PRINTER MARGINS from the Page Scaling pull down menu.
- click OK

Date	Place	Type of Event
Sun 21 January	Brindabellas	All day
Sat 27 January	Lake Burley Griffin/Springbank Island	Evening electric boat cruise/picnic
Sun 4 February	Jerrabomberra Wetlands	Morning - part of World Wetlands Week
Fri – Mon 9-12 February	Mallacoota	Post School Holidays extended weekend camp-out/accommodated
Sun 25 February	Tallaganda SF	Olive Whistler search
<b>Sun 4 March</b>	Lake Burley Griffin	Birding by bike
Sat 17 - Sat 24 March	Lord Howe Island	Week accommodated
Sun 1 April	Molonglo Reach	Morning electric boat
<i>Fri – Mon 6-9 April (Easter)</i>		<i>Extended long weekend – camp-out*</i>
Sun 15 April	Honeyeater migration	Morning
Sat 28 April	Tallaganda SF	Powerful Owl search
Sun 14 May	Botanic gardens	Beginners morning
<i>Sun 27 May*</i>		
<i>9-11 June long weekend</i>	<i>Far South Coast</i>	<i>Caravan park/accommodated</i>
Sat 23 June	Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve	Lyrebird survey
Sun 8 July	Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve	Ducks Plus
<b>Sun 22 July*</b>		
Sun 5 August	Lake Ginninderra	Waterbirds for beginners morning
<b>Sat 18 August*</b>		
Sun 2 September	Yanununbeyan NR	Extended morning
Sat-Sun 15-16 September	Mittagong (Box Vale track etc)	Day/overnight camp-out?
<i>6-8 October</i>		<i>October long weekend camp-out*</i>
8-12 October	Green Cape	Mid week accommodated
Sat - Sun 13-14 October	Frogs' Hole Creek, Frogmore	Overnight camp-out
Sat 20 October	Dunlop Grasslands	Extended morning
<i>Sat - Sun 27-28 October</i>	<i>Bird Week blitz</i>	<i>All day atlassing bonanza</i>
Sun 4 November	Superb Parrot search	Minibus all day
Sun 11 November	Bellmount Forest/TSR 48	Extended morning
Sun 18 November	Campbell Park	Nest workshop
Sat-Sun 24-25 November	Caloola Farm	Cottage accommodation
<i>Fri 30 November – Mon 3 December</i>	<i>Lady Elliot Island</i>	<i>Commercial tour</i>

\* Location and leader are still needed

Entries bolded in italics still to be finalised



Please note that the map is indicative of grid cell locations only and should not be used for navigation.

Also available on the Maps and Forms page is a file that contains the coordinates for the south-west corner of each cell in the COG grid (110kb Excel spreadsheet). And for those that use GIS or mapping software, two versions of the COG grid are available as a single zipped file (100kb zip file).

A map showing the full COG Area Of Concern will be prepared in due course.

### Mulligan's Flat Survey - Sunday 10 December

Regular volunteers please note the survey date (not 3 Dec as foreshadowed earlier). Meet at the usual gate to the reserve at 7.15am, accessing from the north off the re-routed Gundaroo Road (follow the signs to the carpark). Sturdy shoes, sunhat, mug for morning tea, clipboard, pencil and eraser needed. Please let me know by phone (62887802) or email ([jbbounds@optusnet.com.au](mailto:jbbounds@optusnet.com.au)) if you are available. I will email reminder nearer the time. Jenny Bounds

### WWF launches shorebird conservation toolkit

To help protect and enhance shorebird habitat WWF-Australia, with funding from the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust, has launched a Shorebird Conservation Toolkit which can be accessed at <http://promomail.adrenalinmedia.com.au/ch/b6m1w5/131781/2670cmgtp.html>.

### A long way from home

For the second year in a row, a black-browed albatross has been seen building a nest in Scotland's Western Isles.

A spokesman for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds believed it unlikely he would attract a mate as the nearest colony is 10,000 miles away in the Falkland Islands.

The spokesman added that as it was possibly the only albatross in the North Atlantic he considered it to be Britain's most endangered bird.

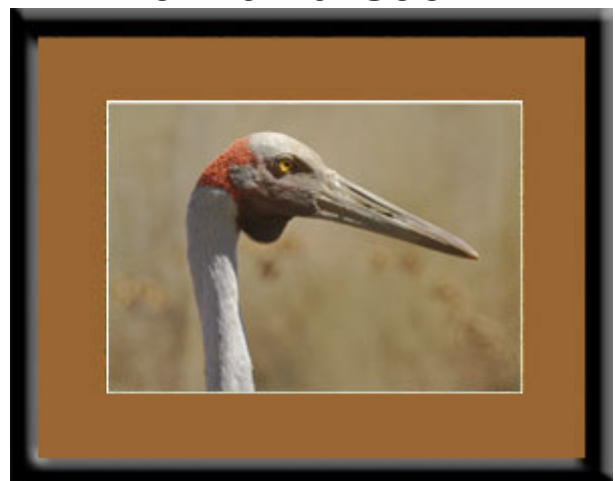


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## MUDBRICK COTTAGE

### 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. Contact Barbara de Bruine

(02) 62583531.

## PASSIVE SOLAR HOUSE

### South Rosedale

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

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

(02) 6286 1564

or e-mail

greg.ramsay@actewagl.net.au

# COG SALES

- **'The Long Paddock** - a Directory of Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves in NSW' by Rural Lands Protection Board - \$31.00
- **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 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.**

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## AvIan Whimsy #47 — Sex Behind the Toilet

It was totally consensual, but after a huge build-up on his part wherein he offered her his dearest treasures for access to her body and his eyes literally bulged with the force of his lust, the actual act was startlingly perfunctory. The fact that I was overtly ogling them from alongside the toilet block, and even photographing their passion, did not seem to faze them in the least. She retired to a nearby resting place and smoothed her disarray, while he set about rearranging his treasures in hope of a new conquest. At the risk of laying myself open to misinterpretation about my proclivities, I confess that I felt more excited than either of them appeared to be.

Like most of us I suppose, I have admired many bowers (of six of the seven Australian bowerbird species, now I think of



Photo by Ian Fraser

it) and have watched his display on various occasions, but never had I previously seen the consummation of all these efforts. By coincidence I had just recently been reading detailed accounts of it for something else I was writing and now it was all happening right in front of me, in the less than salubrious lee of the toilets in the Bomaderry Creek picnic area in Nowra. When we start watching birds, for the most part we are happy just to see them, getting a thrill out of recognising them and especially those we've not seen before. But after a while our interest matures and more and more we notice and are entranced by what they're doing. The simple enjoyment should never go away, but understanding of what we're seeing brings a deeper appreciation and pleasure. I always feel very privileged when I finally see acted out what I had previously only read about.

**Satin Bowerbird** ( *Ptilonorhynchus violaceus* )

Already this spring I had had the great pleasure of seeing two courtship performances which had

previously for me only lived on paper. At Mulligans Flat I was delighted to witness an echidna train, comprising three ardent males hopefully trundling along behind the female who was currently the most interesting object in their universe. Little chance of seeing the denouement of this drama, which could continue for a month! Shortly after that, by the very edge of rushing Barry Drive, two big Eastern Brown Snake males were intimately entwined, pushing and manoeuvring but never trying to bite, to establish local dominance with regard to mating rites. I was enthralled.

And here in Nowra the male Satin Bowerbird had finished painting the inside of his bower with a brush of chewed leaves, and rearranging the curved sticks that comprise the arch set into a platform of heavier sticks. When the mottled green female suddenly appeared all this preparation was put aside and his frenzied performance began, clicking and whirring as his violet eyes bulged and he stretched and stiffly bowed, presenting a blue peg selected from his distinctly plastic age collection. Then as I held my breath – as presumably he was also doing – she entered the bower and his ecstasy increased yet further, showing her the peg and his head from close range from behind the bower. Her acceptance signal was invisible to me, though clearly not to him, as he suddenly hopped to the back of the bower and onto her back. A brief flurry and the genetic exchange was complete; she flew out of his memory and up to a branch to preen and prepare to lay her egg the next morning in the pre-made nest.

She did not fly from my memory though and will not do so. Such glimpses into the private lives of our fellow inhabitants are precious privileges and not to be relinquished from the mind's treasure gallery. And their value only deepens if we can glean some understanding of what we witness.

Ian Fraser [ianf@pcug.org.au](mailto:ianf@pcug.org.au)



## WONGA

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

## Next newsletter

December deadline

Wednesday 29 November 2006

Please send updates, articles, advertisements etcetera to the

Editors of *Gang-gang*

gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au

or send 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.

Print photographs with or without articles are

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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 membership

2005-2006 memberships:

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

### COG E-mail Discussion List

COG has an email discussion list for

members and friends: 'Canberra Birds'.

Join the list by following the links on the

COG website or by sending an empty

email message to [canberrabirds-](mailto:canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au)

[subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au)

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## Gang-gang

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