



Gang-gang

October 2005

News letter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

Monthly Meeting

8 pm Wednesday

12 October 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.

COG AGM

followed by a short talk by COG member Suzi Bond. Suzi's talk is entitled '**Bringing breeding birds back**'. It will be based on her honours research that she completed at the ANU under the supervision of Dr. Chris Tidemann and Julian Reid. This project was conducted to ascertain whether woodland birds were attempting to breed in revegetation patches and small remnants in the ACT region during the spring/summer breeding season of 2003. Sites were selected from Greening Australia Birdwatch sites, and together with the Birdwatch study results, over 35 species were found to have attempted to breed in the revegetation, including vulnerable and declining species.

Everyone welcome

What to watch out for this month

Early October is the time for the last batch of "summer" migrants to arrive. Look out for **Dollarbird**, **Sacred Kingfisher**, **Rainbow Bee-eater**, **Leadon** and **Satin Flycatchers** and **Rufous Fantail**. The last two are usually passage migrants as they are on their way to the mountains to breed. While they prefer wetter places they can often be seen in quite unsuitable habitat as they move through. All these species may be expected from early October, and most seem to spend only a relatively short time in the ACT, mainly to breed, departing from mid January to early March. This also applies to the **White-winged Triller** and the **Rufous Songlark**. It will be interesting to see whether these will again be present in relatively large numbers as they have been for the past couple of breeding seasons.

Over the next month breeding should also start to get into full swing. Watch out in particular for those mentioned above, which often arrive at a particular spot and commence breeding activity almost straight away. Again make sure that valuable records are not lost but are entered into the COG database.

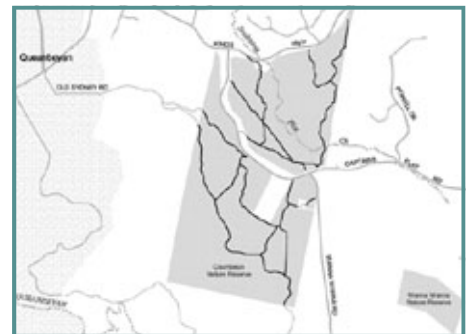
Jack Holland

Field Trip Reports

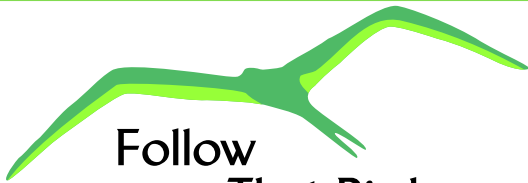
Cuumbeun Nature Reserve 18 September 2005

On a surprisingly sunny, cloudless, windless, mild Sunday (given the cloudy, rainy, windy and cold days of late), 18 lucky coggies met at 8:30 am for a leisurely amble through this newly created reserve straddling the Captain's Flat Rd, just up the hill from Queanbeyan. This was COG's first visit to the reserve, and probably (hopefully?) not the last, so expectations were high for a good species list. The reserve was created in 2001, and consists of 928 hectares, split up into three sections (see map – the southernmost section is to the south, along Wanna Wanna Rd). Our walk was in the section north of Captain's Flat Rd.

Over the ensuing 3 hours, we covered about 5 kilometres (did I mention it was leisurely?), negotiating fairly undulating terrain, including several small creek crossings (no casualties, luckily). This part of the reserve is wooded, with at least 7 species of Eucalypt identified, over a mostly Acacia understorey, with lots of fallen timber and many hollows (Kathy and I saw juvenile **Southern Boobooks** here last February). We loosely followed Scabbing Flat Creek



Cuumbeun NR (nth sections)
NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service



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Our small well serviced birdwatching tours with the following trips having pick up and drop offs available from Canberra's city centre.

All three star accommodation and meals are included. For an itinerary for any of the trips please contact us.

October 2005

Eastern Australia

Part 1 Tropical Cairns 1st-6th \$ 2250
Leader Klaus Uhlenhut
Start & End Cairns

Part 2 Lamington to Sydney \$ 3950
Leader Alan Morris
Start Lamington End Sydney

December 2005

Christmas Island \$ 2850
Leader Dion Hobcroft
Start & End Perth

January 2006

Alpine Birds, Plants & Everything \$ 1485
Leader Dion Hobcroft

February 2006

Divine **Lord Howe Island** \$ 1750
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(excludes airfare) Start Lord Howe
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(Common Eastern Froglets galore), and completed the circuit via a fire trail that climbs to the highest point in the north, before returning along the eastern boundary to our starting point.

It has to be said that birds were a bit scarce, but we did happen upon several mixed feeding flocks which improved our species count to 33, plus 1 more

across the road in farmland (**Flame Robin**) and 3 more in the other section of the Reserve (**Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike, Fan-tailed Cuckoo** and **Grey Shrike-Thrush**). Highlights included **Brown Treecreeper, Speckled Warbler** (heard), **Shining Bronze-cuckoo** (h), an unusually silent **White-throated Gerygone, Scarlet Robin, Eastern Yellow Robin** (h), several LBJs (Little Brown Jobs: **Brown, Striated, Buff-rumped** and **Yellow-rumped Thornbills, White-browed Scrubwren** and **Weebill**), several honeyeater spp (**Yellow-faced, Brown-headed, White-eared Honeyeaters**, and **Red Wattlebird**), a **Brown Goshawk** (our only raptor), several packs of **Varied Sittellas, Golden Whistlers, Grey Fantail** and some more of the usual suspects. Strong **Pardalote** presence, with good numbers of both **Spotted** and **Striated**, and some excellent views of **Striated**s displaying and investigating a tree hollow, and some **Crimson Rosellas** doing likewise.

Afterwards, Kathy and I had lunch and a walk in the section to the south of Captain's Flat Rd, the highlight being a really nice dam with grassy / reedy edges and four species of frog calling: **Common Eastern Froglet, Spotted Marsh Frog, Plains Froglet** and several **Pobblebonks** (Eastern Banjo).

All in all, an enjoyable morning's 'work'. Kathy and I would like to thank all those who attended.

David Cook

Southern Gorooyarroo NR Woodland Survey, 22 September

Dave and Kathy Cook and I carried out the September survey at the southern end of Gorooyarroo on a very pleasant spring morning. Birds were plentiful although we didn't see anything out of the ordinary. Small groups of **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters**, with a few **White-napped**

Honeyeaters, were constantly passing through on their southward migration. A few migrants had arrived in good numbers, notably **Noisy Friarbirds** and **Western Gerygones**. A single **White-throated Gerygone** was heard, but **Western Gerygones** were numerous and vociferous. A couple



Western Gerygone (*Gerygone fusca*).
Photo courtesy David Cook



Buff-rumped Thornbill (*Acanthiza reguloides*)
Photo courtesy David Cook

of **Rufous Whistlers** were noted, but rather surprisingly there was no sign of Olive-backed Orioles. The only cuckoo recorded was a distant calling Pallid. Other species included **Speckled Warbler**, **Varied Sittella** and **Mistletoebirds**. There was no sign of the lone Brown Treecreeper that haunts (or used to?) the far southern end of the reserve. There was a fair bit of breeding activity noted including active nests of **Striated** and **Buff-rumped Thornbills** and **White-winged Chough**. Wildlife other than birds included four species of frogs and a Shingleback skink. In all 47 species of bird were recorded, compared to 53 for the equivalent survey last year.

Steve Holliday

Mulligan's Flat to Gorooyarroo walk Sunday 4 September

The threat of being caught well away from the cars due to the uncertain weather lead to a consensus vote from the 10 members and guests who joined Jenny Bounds and me to do a walk of the best birding spots in Gorooyarroo rather than the advertised car shuffle/walk from the Mulligans Flat car park through this newer reserve.

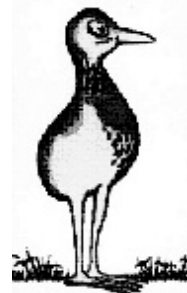
This started off well as from the car park we could observe an **Australian Hobby** bending over, appearing to be feeding chicks in a large nest in a tree just inside the reserve, and then fly to another tree to join its mate when the harassment from the **Noisy Miners** became too vigorous. Later on half of the group had very good views of this species making a stoop through a flock of **Welcome Swallows** and **Tree Martins**, only to come up empty handed.

Our next highlight was a lone **Southern Whiteface** high in a dead tree, though we could hear at least one other calling nearby, but the best birds of the day were encountered in a feeding flock well into the reserve. The undoubted highlight was a male **Hooded Robin** who was seen on both the way up and back, and particularly on return afforded great views in his best Fathers Day attire as he typically fed by perching and pouncing in front of us. His partner was much more reticent, but did appear towards the end, allowing the group to contrast her rather dull plumage. During this time a lone **Varied Sittella** was also in view, at one time so close that two threatened species were easily within binocular view. A pair of **Speckled Warblers** on the ground nearby was also special.

Altogether 37 species were seen or heard during the morning, including many migrating **Striated Pardalote** (with the **Spotted** only heard at one spot), four **Common Bronzewing** on the wing after being flushed together, and a recently returned male **Rufous Whistler**. There were lots of **Weebills** and several **Brown-headed Honeyeaters** calling but staying well out of view, as did a **Western Gerygone**, also recently returned from its winter sojourn. A surprise was a pair of **Little Corellas** inspecting a nest hole, indicating this rapidly spreading species is also starting to use the rural, as supposed to the city, areas

My thanks to Jenny Bounds for adjusting her timetable by giving up her Fathers Day and agreeing to lead this walk. Her familiarity with the area and its bird life and also the plans for the future were greatly appreciated by all participants, many of whom, like me, were visiting this impressive and large reserve so close to Canberra for the first time.

Jack Holland



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2005 Birding Tours

**The Good Food
Plains-wanderer Weekend
19 & 20 November 2005**
Combining good food, good wine
and good birding

2005 Plains-wanderer Weekends
10 & 11 December 2005
17 & 18 December 2005
31 Dec ember 05 & 1 January 06

2006
5 —11 February 06
Tasmania
Bruny Island, Derwent Bridge,
Melaleuca & pelagic trip. Accom.

23—30 April 06
Central Australia birding tour
Alice Springs, Uluru, Glen Helen
Accommodated

15—30 May 06
Top End
Darwin, Kakadu NP, Kununurra,
Mitchell Plateau, Lake Argyle Accom.

1 — 8 August 06
New Caledonia birding tour

15 August – 2 September 06
Strzelecki Track Outback Tour
Accommodated
check website for availability

7– 24 April 2007 Thailand

www.philipmaher.com

Woodland Surveys - Jenny Bounds

Mulligan's Flat Survey - Sunday 25 September

The spring survey gave a good total of 52 species, although some migrants (Flycatchers, Sacred Kingfisher) were not back. Highlights were a **Jacky Winter** near the large dam, several sightings of **Speckled Warbler** and **Scarlet Robin**, and **Little Corellas** at 3 sites. Both **Pallid and Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoos** were recorded, and an **Australian Hobby** near the entrance gate. The Reserve is looking very green, the dams have filled, and with more rain, it could be a good spring for wildflowers and native grasses. The next survey will be on either Sunday 27 November or Sunday 4 December - I will advise those on my volunteer list as soon as the date is settled.

Newline Woodland Survey - Tuesday 27 September

The Newline woodlands were relatively quiet this spring survey, although it was a cool and overcast morning. 41 species were recorded, and like Mulligan's Flat not all the spring migrants were back. Highlights were a **Jacky Winter** calling from the tree tops, **Crested Shrike-tits** and **Dusky Woodswallows** in the front paddock and a pair of **Double-barred finches**; the usual Brown Treecreepers were nowhere to be found and not calling either on my in or out of the area. Most of the other sites were relatively quiet, but the last site near the quarry had a pair of **Nankeen Kestrels**, **Buff-rumped Thornbills** and a **White-throated Gerygone**, and there were a few Little Corellas around the woodlands.

Majura Field Range - Monday 26 September

Paul Fennel and I did the spring survey on a fairly poor weather day with patches of drizzling rain, but as it was still and mild, there was a surprising number of active birds. **Brown Treecreepers** were calling near site 1 - they have been around this area for the last three surveys. There were **Mistletoebirds** at a couple of sites and a good number of small birds calling, but the highlight was a **Painted Honeyeater** heard calling near site 4 in the middle of the range where there is a good quantity of mistletoe in the trees. Paul and I also featured in a video being produced for environmental awareness training in Defence.

Kama Woodland: With the assistance of the ACT Parks and Conservation Service, Alison Rowell (our Woodland Project consultant) and I are in the process of setting up nine monitoring points in a high quality Yellow Box/Red Gum woodland in the Molonglo Valley, south of Belconnen. This area is on an aged lease. While there is little shrub layer, this site with deep soil on a south facing slope not far from the Molonglo River, has a diverse range of native grasses, forbs, orchids and other ground plants, with old eucalypt trees, a mix of trees and saplings of various ages, and a good number of hollow nesting bird species, including a small population of Brown Treecreepers. On our initial visits we have recorded two threatened species, **Brown Treecreeper** and **Varied Sittella**, plus **Crested Shrike-tit** and **Restless Flycatcher** (the last species has become quite scarce in Canberra). Chris Davey will be the site coordinator doing the ongoing surveys at this new location in COGs woodland project. With the prospect of housing development in parts of the Molonglo Valley, it is timely to have a bird monitoring location on the western urban fringe of Canberra.

Future Field Trips

Bibaringa Spring; Sunday 16 October - morning walk

'Bibaringa' is a private property located on the Cotter Road owned by the Guth family and is utilised primarily for horse agistment. Mindful of the fine balance required to sustain both horses and local endemic wildlife, the custodians have taken measures such as leaving fallen wood (much after 2003 fires), selective paddock fencing and sub-saturation agistment to encourage what natural flora and fauna remain to flourish. As a result, bird enthusiasts at this time of year would expect to find the following on, or over Bibaringa: **Wedge-tailed Eagle**, **Brown Falcon**, **Brown Treecreeper**, **Diamond Firetail** and **White-winged Triller**. The possibility of any combination of 'local' **Woodswallow**, **Southern Whiteface** and **Peaceful** or **Diamond Dove** also exist.

Bibaringa is peppered with stately Yellow Box (*E. Melliodora*) and has strong populations of aging Red Stringybark (*E. Macroryncha*), some of which sport nesting holes, more so now after limb shear from the 2003 fire. **White-browed Woodswallows** have been observed nesting in pockets left by fallen limbs the past two springs though on both occasions it was early November, so here's hoping.

If interested, meet walk leader, Stuart Harris at the entrance to Bibaringa (see above) at 8 am. Stuart has been walking on, and observing the birds of Bibaringa for over 5 years now, with the kind permission of the Guth family. 105 species have been recorded in this relatively small area over this time. Please bring a drink bottle and sturdy footwear as the walk will be undulating and over sometimes rocky, or even moist ground (much topsoil was lost post January 2003 and Bibaringa's meaning is 'place of springs'). Depending on group consensus, our party may take in some of the elevated views around Bibaringa, which afford sweeping vistas of the Murrumbidgee Corridor. Consensus will again determine

the walk duration though it is not envisaged to go beyond 12 noon.

For those unsure of its location, Bibaringa is only ten minutes from Cooleman Court shopping Centre in Weston and 1 km on the right past the Mt Stromlo turnoff, heading west, and well short of the Cotter itself. Stuart can be contacted at home on 6232 4998, mobile 0437 394 882 or on sharris@cpe.com.au

Jerrabomberra Grassland Reserve, Sunday 23 October - morning birds and grasslands walk

This is will be a joint outing with the Friends of Grasslands (FOG) to this recently declared reserve where the focus will be on grassland fauna and flora. It will be an opportunity to learn about native grasses and other flora, as well as improve your ability to identify **Skylarks** and **Richard's Pipits**, and with luck the **Singing Bushlark**, which seems to have become increasingly rare in the ACT and for which the habitat could be suitable. Hopefully an ACT ranger can attend to give the government's perspective about the importance of preserving native grassland, some history of the reserve, and information about the earless dragon and the striped legless lizard. At the SW corner of the reserve there is a patch of very good grassy woodland with **Brown Treecreepers**, **Southern Whiteface**, **Dusky Woodswallows** etc, which we plan to visit towards the end of the morning.

Meet at the Canberra Model Aircraft Club facility (also know as the Aero Club) at 7:30 am. This is the only (low) structure on the western side of the Monaro Highway about halfway between the Hindmarsh Drive flyover and Lanyon Drive. Since this is double carriageway it is best approached from the South, 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. Please note this can be a very busy road (hopefully not at the meeting time) and extreme care should be taken when parking. 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).

Saturday-Sunday 29-30 October; COG Bird Blitz

Thanks to all those who have signed up to survey one or more COG grid cells in our attempt to cover the whole of the ACT over the weekend of 29-30 October. And remember, everyone is encouraged to survey their own patch as well, regardless of who is "officially" the person responsible. All contributions welcomed from COG members. The unclaimed grid cells are gradually finding owners – check out the COG website after the long weekend to see an updated map, a list of who is surveying where, and instructions. If you don't have access to the website, or need help in working out where your cell starts and finishes, or still want to volunteer, contact Barbara on allanbm@bigpond.net.au.

Remnants and Reveg; Sunday 6 November - 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 – Morning Nest workshop

Note 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 are currently 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. If you interested in participating, please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 A/H or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au). Meet at 7.30 am at the picnic tables at the far end of the car park. We'd be grateful for any tips on where birds are nesting shortly before the day.

Garuwanga via Nimmitabel; 18-20 November - 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

COG SALES 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 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.

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; Shoalhaven Shorebirds – weekend campout/cabins

Details of this trip to the best spot to see shorebirds at Shoalhaven Heads are still being negotiated. It is expected to involve travelling down on Saturday, staying overnight either camping or in cabins, with return on Sunday afternoon. Details and will be in the November *Gang-gang*. In the meantime pencil this date into your diaries.

Wednesday walk – 19 October – Stoney Creek Nature Reserve

Stoney Creek is a new NR 8 km from Queanbeyan on the Captains Flat road. Meet 9 am at the Spotlight carpark on the Bay side of Queanbeyan for car pooling. This will be our first look at this grassy woodland site. Walking should be easy, bring some morning tea.

Longer trips **Green Cape – Tuesday to Friday 25-28 October; Mid-week accommodated**

This mid week trip is a reprise of the very successful COG trip in June 2004. COG has again booked the two duplex cottages associated with the lighthouse at Green Cape, and Peter Fullagar will again be leading. At the end of October he expects to see a mix of sea birds (including shearwaters) as well as whales close to shore (depending on the weather). In the nearby heath there are some specials such as the Ground Parrot and the Tawny-crowned Honeyeater, and there is likely to be a range of birds in the woodlands, also close by. Highlights from COG's 2004 visit included three species of **albatross, Brown Skua, Black-faced Cormorant, Striated Fieldwren, Southern Emu-wrens**, not to mention the very tame **Ground Parrot**.

The two cottages have been booked for 3 nights. The cottages each hold a maximum of 6 people, consisting of separate rooms, the master bedroom with a queen size bed, one with two single beds and a double sofa bed in the family/lounge room. There will also be the opportunity to camp at Bittangabee Bay, only 8 km away. The accommodation costs will be \$100 per person for the 3 nights, including the COG admin fee. **There is still a spot available on one of the comfortable double sofa beds.** This could suit a couple or could be shared with one of the options being the use of a blow up mattress or camp bed on the floor as there is plenty of room. To book your place, or to put your name on the waiting list in case of cancellation, please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au). A deposit of \$30 will ensure your spot in one of the remaining spots in the cottages. Note that the full payment of \$100 is due by the COG meeting on 12 October, when further information for participants will also be available.

2006 COG Field Trips Program The 2006 COG Field Trips Program is being drafted, and is expected to be published for members' comments in the November 2005 edition of *Gang-gang*.

The COG Field Trips Program was discussed at the COG Field Trips Leaders Workshop on 21 August and comments published in the September *Gang-gang*.

For the past two years the basic program has been built around at least 2 outings per month, a shorter local one (early) and one further afield later in the month. It has also included campouts etc on all the long weekends (except Christmas, New Year and Australia Day), with more frequent outings in spring (close to weekly). Winter has been the quietest period, and there has been some flexibility, with ad hoc trips added as the opportunity arises. There have been no/few longer commercial trips.

The general philosophy has been to try to find interesting new places with leaders who know the spot. We have tried to avoid picking an outing/spot and then finding a leader, and not going to places just because we haven't been there for a while, particularly not going there out of season. We have tried to spread it around, with not too many repeats (spots and leaders).

There has been a mix of outings, trying to ensure there are several things on the program to attract every member. These range from beginners walks, outings to find specific birds, sea/shore birds trips, some bus trips, campouts and staying in full accommodation.

We requested some feedback from the general COG membership. What are the membership's views? We'd like to know if the balance is right? Do we want more frequent outings? Do we want different opportunities?

Unfortunately there has been little received from members to date – so this will be your last chance to influence the draft program.

Also if you have any places you think are worth visiting next year, favourite places that COG should visit, past outings that you think ought to be repeated, or any type of outing that you think would be suitable please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au).

Most of all offers to lead outings in 2006 will be gratefully accepted. The 2005 program has again run smoothly because members have been happy to help organise and lead one, or at most two, outings for the year. That's all it takes folks, so please let's continue this co-operative spirit and keep making a success of this very important part of COG's program! so please let's continue this co-operative spirit and keep making a success of this very important part of COG's program!

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

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.

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

These 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. **Again there has been a very limited response to date.** Please provide any comments to Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au).

Notices Back copies of CBN Joan and Trevor Lipscombe wish to dispose of a virtually complete set of CBNs and indices from Vol 7 (4) 1982 to Vol 30 (2). Excellent condition. Free to the first taker. Phone 02 6262 7975 or email joanlipscombe@bigpond.com.

Newsletter Co-ordinator Role. The Newsletter Distribution Co-ordinator role is expected to become vacant at the Annual General Meeting. The commitment required is as follows: Once a month coordinate the efforts of a very willing team to send out approx 250 *Gang Gangs*. Four times a year, instead of the above, send out approx 350 Canberra Bird Notes with *Gang Gangs* placed inside them. The current co-ordinator can assist for the first three months. Contact Jack Holland if you would like to assist your club in this way for a couple of years."

Gang-gang editor. The Newsletter editor role **is going to become vacant** at the Annual General Meeting. 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. Tanya 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.

OBSERVATIONS REQUIRED FOR COLOUR-BANDED OSPREY. As part of a study of population dispersal of Osprey in NSW, a number of Osprey chicks have been colour-banded along the Mid North and Far North Coasts. Assistance is required in carefully recording any future observations of colour-banded Osprey, providing details as follows - Date, Accurate description of location of sighting (distance and direction from nearest town etc. and GPS if possible), What colour band on right leg (there is only ever one band on the right leg), What colour band(s) on left leg and what colour band is on top of what other colour, What the bird was doing. *Please note* there are more birds than there are different coloured bands, so it is critical to accurately record the colour on the right leg, plus the top/bottom positions for each colour for the left leg. Please advise any sightings to Greg Clancy gclancy@tpg.com.au Phone 6649 3153, Tony Bischoff gcbabbler@optusnet.com.au Phone 6582 5055 or 0408 825055, or Andrew Marshall andrew.marshall@environment.nsw.gov.au Phone 6588 5505. Your assistance would be very much appreciated.

Notice of COG Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc will be held at 8 pm on Wednesday 12 October 2005 in the Multi-media Theatre, Canberra Girls' Grammar School, cnr Gawler Crescent and Melbourne Avenue.

“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**

NSW and ACT Twitchathon 2005. October 29-30. Prizes galore. For more information or to join the Twitchathon 2005, Contact Alan Morris for your 2005 Twitchathon Kit TODAY (For Birds Australia, Southern NSW & ACT) c/- 3 Murray St Bateau Bay NSW 2261. Telephone: 02 43 342776. Fax: 02 9436 0466. Email amorris@ceinternet.com.au.

From the Committee

As our members would be aware, conservation issues have been at the forefront of the committee's concerns in recent times. Our conservation officers, Julie McGuinness and Jenny Bounds, have been most active. We are delighted to report that COG's application for an ACT environment grant for the Woodland Project for 2005-06 was successful - \$13,150 will be coming our way. Ross Cunningham has provided graphs from the 1998-2004 data for 61 woodland species and Alison Rowell is compiling a report. Another woodland site has been added to the survey – “Kama”, a property south of Belconnen, in the Molonglo Valley.

Birds Australia will be producing a report on woodlands in its “State of Australia's Birds” series. COG was invited to submit a contribution, which has been drafted by Jenny Bounds in consultation with Alison Rowell, and with graphs provided by Ross Cunningham.

The Namadgi National Park Plan of Management has been released, and public comment invited by 7 November. COG will be putting in a submission – if you have matters you would like to raise, please let Jenny or Julie know, to conservation.officers@canberrabirds.org.au. COG is also helping EACT update its bird list for Googong Dam – if you have a particular knowledge of this area, and would like to be involved, please contact Barbara at cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au.

The proposed waterskiing trial on East Basin of Lake Burley Griffin is concerning us all. COG has been involved in discussions and in correspondence to the Minister, stressing the environmental issues relating to the proposal. Similarly, we have been expressing our views on the housing proposals for the Molonglo Valley and the potential threat they pose to the raptors breeding in the area. Concerns have also been expressed about the present state of a favoured COG excursion site, Jindalee State Forest and we are investigating. Nearer to home, we have supported a proposal to rehabilitate a Jerrabomberra Valley quarry site.

We note with pleasure the launch of another book by COG member and woodlands advocate, Dr David Lindenmayer: “Woodlands: a disappearing landscape”. Congratulations David, and COG hopes to have copies available for sale shortly. The Lindenmayer family is also donating a copy as a “lucky draw” prize for one blitz participant.

The AGM will be held at the beginning of the October monthly meeting. We urge you all to consider whether you can give a little time to help COG. We are particularly seeking people who are prepared to give talks to, or lead walks for, children; and to organise COG displays at community events. Talk to Jack Holland if you'd like to be involved.

Barbara Allan, COG secretary

Avian Whimsy #34 Tickling the Ivories

It should of course make no difference if a threatened species is small, brown and inconspicuous, or large, colourful and charismatic. But of course it does. The apparent rediscovery of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker in the remote backwaters of the swamp forests of Arkansas has sent waves around the birding world that a long-lost LBB simply couldn't have generated. Moreover the emergence of the story has been attended by drama that rivals that of the bird's own story. The New York Times has been covering the unfolding complexities with a series of stories by two journalists who are obviously genuinely



interested and highly informed. (Seems unnatural, doesn't it?)

The Ivory-bill is big and dramatic; half a black metre high with white racing stripes, a wild red bouffant hair-do and equally wild-looking eyes, plus a very serious bone-white bill which it uses to hammer bark off dead trees and holes in the wood to extract large beetle larvae. This need for dead trees was one of its downfalls, since it is the deep-seated wont of foresters to 'tidy' forests by removing just such trees. Its size also acted against it – a pair needs at least 16 square kilometres of good habitat to survive. Once found across the south-eastern United States from eastern Texas to Florida and up to North Carolina, populations were snuffed out as habitat was fragmented and the fragments shrank. The last known population hung on in the 'Singer Tract' of forest in northern Louisiana and there was broad pressure for the tract's preservation. It was logged in the 1930's..

By the 1950s the US Ivory-bill had apparently gone and by the 1980s the last bird of the Cuban subspecies also seemed to have disappeared. But this is a bird which seems to inspire True Believers – the analogy with the Paradise Parrot is obvious – and some refused to believe it had truly vanished. Tantalisingly nebulous reports continued, but all could just as easily have referred to the smaller but similar Pileated Woodpecker. Then in February 2004 a canoeist in the Cache River National Wildlife Refuge reported a sighting and the Cornell University's Lab of Ornithology followed it up, with two professional ornithologists reporting another sighting. A major survey ensued, with a series of unconfirmed sightings, culminating in the in/famous video of 25 April 2004 which came to public attention when published in *Science* exactly a year later. Meantime the survey continued in the flooded channels of huge old Swamp Cypresses over dense understorey – and in total secret!

When the *Science* article broke on an unsuspecting world, there was euphoria. But... The video comprised just 4 seconds of a tiny blurry pixilated image, which could only be interpreted through intense digital manipulation. Was this *really* proof? There were mutterings; no-one doubted the credentials or sincerity of the scientists, but it seems I wasn't the only one to recall Bill Oddie's *How to brighten up a dull day* chapter in the *Little Black Bird Book* (ie by turning something common into something much more exciting). I have an article from the Brazilian *Atualidades Ornitologicas* No. 125 which urges scientific caution; "to avoid the contradictory in science may lead to a dangerous path". Then came news that other eminent US ornithologists were preparing a formal published rebuttal. A good scientist can't afford to shy away from the bambi-killing image, if that's what it takes. Things were getting tense – but Cornell wasn't anywhere near finished, and astonishingly only then produced their clinching evidence in the form of 18,000 hours of recordings from 24 fixed microphones rotated through 153 different sites. Sifting them first with software, then manually, they produced over 50 'BANG-bang' contact drummings and several of the so-called 'kent' nasal trumpet vocalisations. The latter were compared with recordings made at the nest in 1935.

The critics were won over (the public wasn't to hear the evidence until just last week, at an American Ornithologists' meeting on 25-26 August). The critical paper was withdrawn – they maintained their skepticism of the video, but agreed that events had moved beyond that. But...

One of the critical authors is not convinced. And no-one – including Cornell – can say for sure that the 'kent' calls aren't those of Blue Jays or Nuthatches. There are no authenticated recordings of the double-knock call for comparison. The

recordings could still be of (legal!) gun shots in the forest, other woodpeckers or even branches breaking. Cornell notes that some of the drumming is not at the time of day expected from records. A major effort is planned for November to try for more positive proof. Meantime Ivory-bill mania rules; \$10m has been allocated for habitat protection, and there is an industry in IBW souvenirs (much of the proceeds going to the research effort).

There's a lot more I'd like to say but as ever, my word allocation has expired much too soon (ie for me!). In summary then: Does the Ivory-bill live? Quite likely, but the evidence is 'on balance', based on an accumulation of indicators, rather than conclusive. Does it matter? A heretical question, but one to which I'm tempted to offer an even more heretical answer – perhaps not. If the bird does live, it may well be that numbers are already too low for long-term survival. What really matters is that the habitat is protected as being of value in its own right, and that we continue to give as much emphasis to less charismatic species (Kirtland's Warbler is already suggested as one missing out) as we have to this magnificent woodpecker.

Ian Fraser ianf@pcug.org.au



JJ Audubon

Avian Whimsy #35 John Gilbert; a man of 'great zeal and assiduity'



When Paterson wrote in *How Gilbert Died* "There's never a stone at the sleeper's head, there's never a fence beside", he had in mind a very different John Gilbert from the remarkable naturalist and collector who gave his life – literally, in the end – to John Gould and Australian ornithology. But Johnny Gilbert, the Canadian-born bushranger whose Binalong death Paterson commemorated, did have some things in common with John Gilbert the English discoverer of the Noisy Scrub-bird. Both were superb bushmen and both died young and violently in the bush – the thief just 23, the naturalist barely ten years older – and both lie in unmarked graves*. From now on, to avoid confusion, all references are to the latter!

I find Gilbert's extreme bush skills to be remarkable, given that he didn't see the Australian bush until he arrived here as a principal employee of John Gould in 1838, aged 26. We know little of his early English life, other than that he trained as a gardener, then as a taxidermist at the Zoological Society of London. At least one account suggests that Gould found him that job – in any case Gould subsequently found qualities in Gilbert that he valued and employed him, at £100 a year plus expenses, to accompany him to Australia. Gilbert spent the remaining six years of his life (except for one short stint back home) travelling remote parts of Australia collecting for Gould.

The story of John Gould is too long and complex to tell here – though if permitted I'd like to explore it with you one whimsical day – but he was a giant of the naturalists' world of the time. I do not share a common disdain for him as 'just an entrepreneur', though he was certainly that. (As a small-scale professional naturalist myself – albeit not a bird stuffer – perhaps I should declare an interest!) Suffice to say for now that, in addition to making a living from selling specimens and natural history books based on them, he is the author of (by my count) 176 Australian bird names and 39 mammal names in current use! That is a remarkable output of scientific work. And a high proportion of these were collected for him by Gilbert, who would also in many cases have been the first European to have seen them. (He readily acknowledged the role of Aboriginal guides, and recorded local names for animals wherever possible.) One figure suggests that Gilbert was responsible for providing a startling 8% of all the type specimens of Australian birds and mammals!

The Noisy Scrub-bird is notoriously hard to find but Gilbert collected it, from well outside its tiny modern range, at Waroona in the jarrah country between Perth and Bunbury. He discovered the Paradise Parrot, which he thought 'far surpassed in beauty every other species of the genus'. In addition to the south-west he worked in Tasmania, Queensland and around Port Essington in the wild Top End, all very different from each other, not to mention from his native land! He was far from just a shooter, keeping detailed accounts of behaviour, food and song wherever possible. We should bear in mind that the ornithologists of Gilbert's time lacked the advantages of modern binoculars that we take for granted – Peter Slater looked through the ones that Gilbert used and reports that there was little difference from the view without them.

In the end he famously, and fatally, sought to join the ill-fated Leichhardt expedition leaving the Darling Downs in 1844 to travel to Port Essington. His bushcraft experience and skill – by most accounts considerably greater than that of Leichhardt – soon made him *de facto* second in command. On 28 June 1845, near the Gulf of Carpentaria, he died of a spear thrust during a night attack on the camp. Leichhardt kept his papers and diary and specimens – the diary was only rediscovered by Alec Chisholm in 1938.

For all this we might expect that his proflutely publishing employer, who used the term 'great zeal and assiduity' in reference to him, might have honoured him by naming a few of his specimens. We know that Gilbert even asked to have the Paradise Parrot named for him, but it was not to be. Gould tried to 'give' him Gilbert's Whistler in 1844, but had apparently forgotten that he'd already somewhat dismissively named it *inornata* 3 years previously! He did name Gilbert's Potoroo from the far south-west, but it promptly disappeared for the next 150 years. Ironically there are at least five times as many plants named for him, all from Western Australia where he collected as a sideline. I have little doubt that in footy vernacular 'he was robbed' – if he'd lived long enough to grow beyond his employer's shadow we would know and honour John Gilbert to a far greater extent.

Ian Fraser ianf@pcug.org.au

* To pre-empt the objection that the bushranger's grave is indeed marked on the outskirts of Binalong, I point out that this is just a memorial erected long after the event, in the police horse paddock somewhere near where he was anonymously buried after his death in a gun battle.



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COG welcomes new members

Lynne & Noel Bentley, Braddon
Philip & Jennie Buchanan, Charnwood
Helen Carse, Downer
Cechet family, Campbell
Anna Dacre, Kambah
Fleur Horan, Curtin
Fay Maxfield, Bruce
Julie Nikolaidis, Dickson
Jen Shallcross, Lyneham

Next newsletter

NOVEMBER deadline
Wednesday 27 October 2005

Please send updates, articles, advertisements etcetera to
Editors *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. 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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Lia Battisson and helpers

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

CBN@canberrabirds.org.au



Gang-gang

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