



# Gang-gang

October 2006

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

## Monthly Meeting

**8 pm Wednesday**

**11 October 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.*

## Annual General Meeting

### Agenda

1. Opening
2. Apologies
3. Confirmation of minutes of 2005 AGM
4. President's report
5. Adoption of president's report
6. Presentation of annual statement of accounts
7. Adoption of annual statement of accounts
8. Appointment of auditor for 2006-07
9. Election of office-bearers (President, Vice-president, Secretary and Treasurer) and ordinary committee members (nomination forms available at meetings or from the secretary)
10. Other matters for which notice has been given.
11. Close of meeting.

followed by a main talk by **Rachel Sims**, returning by popular request to give the results of her PhD study on the Dusky Woodswallows of Namadgi National Park.

### PLUS

the brief, but by now obligatory light relief in the form of a **Geoffrey Dabb** video, to round off the evening.

**Everyone welcome**

## What to watch for this month

By now all the early spring migrants seem to have arrived, though at least by indications to the SW of Canberra numbers of quite a few seem to be well down, as around Chapman only the **Noisy Friarbird** and the **Grey Fantail** have been conspicuous. The latter seems to have been particularly common in the ACT during September, with quite a few people reporting groups of them moving through. Another interesting report was by Michael Lenz of about 150 **Dusky Woodswallows** coming down to roost at Mount Majura in mid September, but having moved on early the following morning.

Late September/early October is the time for the last batch of "summer" migrants to arrive. Look out for **Dollarbird, Sacred Kingfisher, Rainbow Bee-eater, White-winged Triller, Rufous Songlark, Leaden and Satin Flycatchers, Cicadabird** and the **Rufous Fantail**. The last three are usually passage migrants 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. Over the last week of September there have been reports of some of these, as well as an influx of the **White-browed** and **Masked Woodswallows**, which haven't been present in any numbers for the past couple of springs/summers despite the continuing drought. There have also been reports of the **Superb Parrot**, which until last year generally didn't arrive until post-breeding in December.

Perhaps these early records are a sign of local breeding. Over the next month breeding should also start to get into full swing. Watch our in particular for those migrants mentioned above, which often arrive at a particular spot and commence breeding activity almost straight away. Make sure that valuable breeding records are not lost but are entered into the COG database.

**Jack Holland**



**Dollarbird**

(*Eurystomus orientalis*)

Photo by Geoffrey Dabb

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## Field Trip reports

### Raptor Twitchathon, Sunday 3 September

Almost on cue, it started raining just as I got into the bus to pick up the participants for this outing. Luckily it had stopped by the appointed time and with two full buses we set off to the Jerrabomberra wetlands hoping to see the range of raptors that had been reported from there for the previous month. Almost as soon as we arrived there we saw the pair of **Little Eagles** that have been consistently reported there recently. All participants had good views of them cruising or perched in a bare tree, often interacting, suggestive of breeding activity. The smaller, probably male bird, was clearly a light morph, with a classic light “M pattern” on both the under and upper wing, whereas the larger female bird was a dark morph, where this pattern could only be seen on the upper wing. Later we got further good views of the “M pattern” of a light phase morph high above us at Uriarra Crossing.

However, after this our luck ran out, with no more raptors seen there despite a search of several hours. The weather closed in again and after a drenching in a thunderstorm while at Campbell Park, the wind really came up very strongly and we only managed fairly distant views of a hovering **Brown Falcon** before Stromlo, brief views of a female (by size) **Brown Goshawk** further down on the Cotter Road, and finally a **Whistling Kite** high over at Uriarra (seen better by the first bus as the second was a little delayed getting there). Several participants also had very distant views of a **Wedge-tailed Eagle** at Uriarra.

Though 24 pairs of eyes looked very carefully at every pole, telephone wires and into the open fields on the Cotter/Uriarra loop, these were the only raptor species we could find. Clearly they must have been deterred by the prevailing weather, though one could have expected that the wind would have been ideal for the smaller birds to point into while hovering. Nevertheless there were some other good birds seen, **Pink-eared** and **Blue-billed Ducks**, **Shovellers** and **Hardhead** on the Fyshwick Sewerage ponds, and **Brown Treecreepers** and **Fuscous Honeyeaters** at Newline Quarry. A quiet but very co-operative **Pallid Cuckoo** sitting on a fence provided good views for all participants close to Kelly’s Swamp, some had seen this earlier picking up hairy caterpillars from the grass. Lots of newly arrived spring migrants, in particular **Grey Fantails**, were also in this area. Unfortunately we could not find the **White-fronted Chats** on the Uriarra Road, the reason becoming obvious from a chat line posting the following day.



Photo by Jenny Bounds

Twitchers hard at it!

Despite the inclement weather and only seeing four of the 11 target raptors (hardly a pass mark) most participants seems to have an enjoyable day, and it’s worth repeating the exercise, when hopefully the weather will be more conducive to finding the target birds. My thanks again to Jenny Bounds for helping, including with the driving of the second bus, including having to spend rather an anxious Saturday night waiting for it as it wasn’t delivered until after midnight.

### Frogs’ Hole Creek, Frogmore — Saturday/Sunday 16-17 September

How appropriate it was that the 57th species recorded for the afternoon within 500 m of our campsite close to the Frogs’ Hole Creek near Frogmore would be a **Tawny Frogmouth** that flew into the trees above us at dusk. It had been one of those rare perfect afternoons for birdwatching since we had arrived and started setting up camp round 1 pm, warmish with little wind and increasing activity, especially round 4 pm when many of the birds started coming in to drink at the nearby dam. Species seen included **Superb Parrots** flying through the campsite, **Pied Butcherbirds**, **Jacky Winter**, **Peaceful Dove** and **Grey-crowned Babblers** calling loudly for most of the afternoon, as were the numerous **Little Friarbirds**, and a **Striped Honeyeater** building a nest.

The frogmouth also called regularly during the night, to be joined by a **Southern Boobook** towards morning. The lighter sleepers also clearly heard **Barking Owls**, which we had earlier failed to arouse through the use of a taped call close to some very suitable habitat, ie old mature gums close by the creek. However, no-one could possibly have slept through the dawn chorus which is certainly close to the loudest one I’ve ever witnessed. And the success rate was maintained when early the next morning I was puzzled by some strange calls emanating from the reed-filled creek, and could only conclude these were **Spotless Crake** when three seemingly all dark birds emerged briefly. Luckily, these were confirmed by several other participants that I alerted. This was the second new species for the property’s bird list, following the **Stubble Quail** seen the previous day.

After breakfast we did a large slow circuit of the 350 ha property and our patience was rewarded by many more species,

particularly on the mature callitris ridge to the NW. These included a **Horsefield's Bronze-cuckoo, Hooded Robin, Southern Whiteface, Brown Treecreeper, Restless Flycatcher, White-throated Gerygone, Speckled Warbler, Varied Sittella**, a pair of **Golden Whistlers, Dusky Woodswallow, Diamond Firetail** (including a pair building a very large nest) and **Mistletoebird** (also nest building). However, the undoubted highlight was two male **Crested Shrike-tits** continually chasing each other through some trees in front of the gathered crowd.

A number of raptors were also in evidence, including good views of an **Australian Hobby** near its suspected nest close to the campsite, and a **Little Eagle** overhead. However, while we were having morning tea a very bizarre incident occurred, as there was a sudden rush of wind nearby like a jet landing and some of the party saw a **Rock Dove** landing (the 3rd new species to the bird list!), followed soon after by a hastily retreating female **Brown Goshawk**.

Overall 80 species were seen for the 24 hours we were on the property. Surprisingly, considering the warmer conditions than Canberra, of the later arriving migrants only a single **White-winged Triller** was seen sitting quietly in a tree together with a couple of **Rainbow Bee-eaters** overhead. Unfortunately we dipped on the **Black-chinned** and **Blue-faced Honeyeaters**, said to have been calling loudly around the house on the days after our departure.

All in all a great spot, and we thank our hosts Richard and Angela for inviting COG to come to their lovely property. The campsite below the house alongside the creek in among all the very mature gum trees is certainly one of the most ideal and secluded I've been to and a great birding spot.

**Jack Holland**

## Future Field Trips

I have been the person chiefly responsible for organising COG outings (field trips) for the past 5 years, 3 of these while also serving as COG President. While I enjoy this role and see it as a very important part of COG activities, this is no longer sustainable, particularly as I expect to serve another term as President. Therefore I am looking for someone to help with/take over this responsibility. There are a number of ways this can be done. If you are interested in the field trips program and feel you can assist please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on [jack.holland@deh.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@deh.gov.au)) to discuss the possibilities.

### 7-8 October — Saturday/Sunday overnight campout on at Bungonia

As part of our continuing links and joint outings with the Goulburn Field Naturalists Society (GFNS), COG has been invited to observe the birdlife on a private property belonging to GFNS members near the historic village of Bungonia. This is a large 300 ha property bordering Morton National Park, with a topography varying between flat, undulating and hilly. About 5 kilometres of Jacqua Creek flows through it. Half of this length was virtually totally logged and has been replanted and fenced off. The remainder of the creek is not fenced off, but does contain some former riparian vegetation and beautiful waterholes.

No formal bird surveys have previously been undertaken for the property, though the owners have kept a bird list over the more than 20 years they have lived there. At the time of year there should be a peak for a mix of spring migrants and more coastal birds not commonly found in Canberra. On Sunday



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### 2006 Birding Tours

**Plains-wanderer Weekends**  
**Good Food PW Weekend**  
18 & 19 November 2006

**Regular Plains-wanderer**  
**weekends**

December 2 & 3, 9 & 10,  
16 & 17 and 30 & 31

### 2007 Birding Tours

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

**South West Western Australia**  
27 February — 7 March

**Thailand**  
7—24 April  
co-led with Uthai Treesucon

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

**Strzelecki Track**  
August 2007

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

**All above tours are accommodated**

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



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we will be doing a circular walk for about 5-6 hours through the property, taking in some of the varied habitat including the best parts of the creek. If time permits we may look at some other areas. On a visit in late August **Spotted Quail Thrush, Southern Whiteface** and several **Jacky Winter** were seen.

COG will have access to the Old Bungonia School where there is plenty of room to pitch tents, an external shower and toilet block, a large BBQ, a room in which to eat or, if wet, cooking facilities inside. There is also a wood fire inside if it is cold.

Participants should arrive in Bungonia mid afternoon of the Saturday when after setting up we will do some local birding in the adjacent Bungonia Village Park, alongside Bungonia Creek, and the nearby TSR, and stay until mid Sunday afternoon. Car pooling will be encouraged. There are still some spots available, so if you're interested please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au). Participants are also welcome if they wish to join in only for the Sunday morning or Saturday afternoon/night events.

### **15 October — Sunday, Castle Hill, morning local outing**

The land holders of 'Booroomba' Station near Tharwa have kindly agreed to a limited number of COG members undertaking a morning field trip to their block below Castle Hill. This wonderful area of grassy box woodland was not burned in 2003 and has been part of COG's woodland survey since the survey's inception.

Meet at Tharwa in the car park adjacent to the bridge at 8.30 am for car pooling so that we can minimise the number of vehicles we take onto the property.

As this is a private leasehold, numbers will be strictly limited, and participation will only be available to those who have registered. For further information, or to register to participate, please contact the trip's leader, David McDonald, on phone 6231 8904.

### **18 October — Wednesday walk, Tharwa Sandwash**

The mid week walk for October will be to this popular spot which is well known for spring migrants and for observing a number of the ACT's threatened or declining species. Meet at the Kambah Village shops at 8:30 am for car pooling and the drive down past Tharwa, which will need to be done via Point Hut Crossing now that the bridge has been closed again. Bring morning tea and lunch as the visit allows for an inspection of the new display and woodlands exhibition at the nearby Namadgi National Park Visitor Centre.

### **22 October — Sunday, Googong Dam, extended morning outing**

The Googong Dam is another former regular spot for COG outings that has not been visited for some years. Googong has a bird species list of about 150 which includes both water and woodland birds. Recent sightings by COG members have included **Hooded Robins, Speckled Warbler and Pied Cormorant**.

Ian Anderson (Ph: 6281 0609) will lead this outing. It is planned to check the birds around the Googong Dam. Those who wish can then continue on to the Tin Hut Dam area at the southern end of the Googong Catchment. They could then drive through the Burra Valley to the Monaro Highway at Williamsdale.

Meet at the Googong Visitors' Centre carpark at 8 am. The Visitors' Centre is reached by taking a signposted left hand turn off the Old Queanbeyan to Cooma Road, about 6 km from Queanbeyan. The road continues on to reach the Monaro Highway at Guises Creek.

Googong Dam area has good picnic facilities Bring morning tea/lunch if you wish.

### **5 November — Sunday, 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

#### **Letters to the Editor**

There were no letters to the Editor

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Monaro Highway at 7:30 am. Since this is double carriageway it is best approached from the South, being 2.6 km from the Mugga Lane lights. If you are coming from the north the best option is to go down to Lanyon Drive and do a right hand U-turn through the lights. The meeting spot is next to the only private driveway about 100 m past the Woden Creek with tall poplar 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)).

### **12 November — Sunday, 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 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.

### **18-19 November — Saturday/Sunday, 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 was either seen or heard, including 53 species within 1 kilometre of our base. These 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.

While details are still to be finalised, on Saturday afternoon we expect to be doing an inspection of the birds on the property and the adjacent river, and going further on Sunday morning with some participants venturing up the steep slope to the west to do atlas surveys of 2 grid cells for which access is otherwise very difficult. Others will proceed on the road north along the river to access further grid cells for which few atlas sheets have been lodged.

We will be camping overnight on one of the local farms 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)).

### **26 November — Sunday, 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. This very informal outing has again been timed to coincide 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 three years were.

This workshop is particularly suitable for beginners or those relatively new to birdwatching, though more experienced members are also welcome. We won't be walking very far as there is a "hot spot" close to the car park where most of the nesting occurs. If you are interested in participating, please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 A/H or by E-mail on [jack.holland@deh.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@deh.gov.au)). We'd also be grateful for any tips on where birds are nesting shortly before the day.

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Meet at 8:00 am at the picnic tables at the far end of the car park.

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

The last formal COG outing for 2006 will be held in this popular nature reserve to the S of Canberra. We are currently negotiating with the ACT Parks and Conservation Service as to the best location to hold this outing. In the meantime pencil this event and date into your diaries.

### **22-26 November — Fivebough Wetlands Forum and Birding and Nature Fair**

Sadly, while I have advertised in *Gang-gang* several times for interest to make this into a formal COG event, the response has been very low. There is likely to be a small, probably informal COG presence. Those who have expressed an interest to me should contact Tom Green on 6247 0630.

### **17-24 March 2007 — COG Tour to Lord Howe Island**

This special package tour for COG, with a focus on a waders project, is now fully booked. Names can be taken for a wait list. See previous [Gang-gangs](#) for full details about the tour or contact the [organizer](#), Jenny Bounds (ph 6288 7802 or email: [jbbounds@optusnet.com.au](mailto:jbbounds@optusnet.com.au))

## **Report of September COG meeting**

**Michael Lenz** demonstrated his wonderful powers of observation in his talk on ‘*A Family of Australian Ravens with a Difference*’ that nested at the ANU last spring. Although a common species, little is known about the breeding behaviour of **Australian Ravens**, perhaps because they tend to nest in the tops of tall trees. They are thought to have a simple breeding system with one pair per territory. That territory is held and defended throughout the year by the pair, which stays together until one partner dies. If the female dies, the male finds a new partner quickly; if the male dies, the female can’t hold the territory alone and so joins a flock of non-breeders until she is recruited into another territory.

The ANU ravens demonstrated an interesting variation. The pair was observed to be feeding juveniles in the nest in late August/early September. At the same time, another female was building a nest just 90metres away, within the territory of the first pair. Michael’s careful observation revealed that the one male had two partners. The first female disappeared shortly after its young had fledged. The second female was observed sitting on its nest, sometimes accompanied by the fledglings from nest 1, between Sept 7 and 20. After the male and the second female were seen defending nest 2 against Pied Currawongs on Sept 20, activity moved back to nest 1. The nest was repaired and by Sept 30, the second female was seen incubating on nest 1. By late October, the birds were no longer at the nest, having presumably given up, but the family was seen on the nearby oval with one juvenile noticeably smaller than the other. With only the male feeding, perhaps it was not getting enough food.

**Janet Gardner**, from the School of Botany and Zoology at the ANU, then delivered a fascinating talk on ‘*Plumage and Moulting in the Speckled Warbler*’, based on three years of research at Campbell Park. There she discovered 20 to 35 groups living on the 300 hectare study site. 143 individuals were captured and colour banded. Each bird was given a moult score out of 50 at each capture: comprising a score of zero (old) to 5 (new) for each of the 10 primaries. For those of us who had given little thought to bird moulting, the sequence was surprising. The primaries on both wings moult first, starting from the middle of the wing out to the wing tip. The primary coverts moult at the same time. It takes an average of 78 days for the 10 primaries to moult, although there is considerable range from 45 to 135 days depending on food availability etc. Halfway through this process, the secondaries moult from the centre of the wing in towards the body. Tail feathers moult in pairs sequentially from the centre. The body moult can start before or after the primary moult.

**Speckled Warblers** breed as pairs or trios, the latter with two males, one of which doesn’t feed the young. At Campbell Park, about 30% were trios. They fledge up to 3 broods per year in a breeding season that lasts from July to November, and 98% of clutches contain 3 eggs. Only the female incubates and broods the young. After leaving the nests, the fledglings are fed for 5 weeks and by 7 weeks they have dispersed. The onset of primary moult occurs between November and April. Half to one-third of the birds begin to moult during their last breeding attempt of the season. The post-juvenile moult of body feathers only occurs when the birds are 5 to 60 days old. The flight feather moult is delayed until the second year. The distinctive lateral crown stripe starts to moult in five weeks after fledging. Once again, we were greatly impressed by the audience-friendly presentation style and the excellent science of an ANU postgraduate.

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## News from the committee

- **Launch of the Lower Sullivans Creek Ecological Project findings and urban habitat guidelines.** Many COG members participated in Henry Nix's bird counts for this project, some of the results of which will be released on 25 October. There will be a static display, including a COG table, for the two-week period 23 Oct-3 Nov in the CSIRO Discovery Centre. Helpers are still wanted to attend the table and restock pamphlets from time to time during that period. Please contact the COG secretary Barbara Allan on 6254 6520 if you can help. COG with the Friends of the ANBG will be running bird walks for the general public on Thursday 26 and Sunday 29 October.
- **Electronic data input.** The new data input program is currently being tested by members of the Records Management Team and hopefully will be operational soon. But fear not, if pen and paper is more your thing – for the submission of your bird records, electronic data entry will be optional and you may continue with the paper datasheets.
- **Archiving of our website.** The National Library of Australia has deemed COG's website to be of sufficient significance that it wishes to archive it – and we have agreed. This means that old material, which we may remove from our site, will still be searchable through the National Library's archived site in future.
- **Members' complaints about the state of Jerrabomberra Wetlands and Shepherds Lookout.** We are drawing these matters to the attention of the relevant authorities.
- The nomination of the **Little Eagle** as a vulnerable species in the ACT has been submitted to the ACT Flora and Fauna Committee
- The ACT Chief Minister has replied to COG's concerns about the wide-scale budget cuts, especially impacting on ground staff (rangers etc) and the possible loss of an identity for the environment within a re-structured municipal services portfolio indicating that the new unit and the Minister will include environment in its name/title, and the Gang-gang logo will be retained in some form
- On the COG Woodland Project front, new monitoring sites in woodland in Jerrabomberra Grasslands Reserve (Jerrabomberra Valley) are being set up; new habitat assessments will be done at all sites/locations over the spring
- The 'conserving birds' page on the COG website has been significantly added to, with new Fact Sheets for Newline and Red Hill woodlands; Callum Brae and Gooroo woodlands Fact Sheets to be added soon; key COG conservation submissions and woodland project reports are also available
- By invitation the President attended a briefing session by the Bird Observers Club of Australia (BOCA) on a variety of planning and process issues it currently has under consideration. .

## Other Surveys/Activities of Interest to COG Members

### 2007 COG Field trips program

The field trips program for next year will be drafted over the next month for inclusion in the November 2006 Gang-gang. Despite some members forwarding proposals in response to the August and September ads, the cupboard is still quite bare. So I'll need to rely on you all more than ever; and if you have any new places you think are worth visiting next year, favourite places that COG should visit again, 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](mailto:jack.holland@deh.gov.au)).

Most of all offers to lead outings in 2007 will be gratefully accepted. The 2006 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!

### COG's bird blitz 28-29 October 2006

Preparations are well underway for our second across-the-ACT bird blitz on the last weekend in October. If you haven't registered your interest in participating, it is not too late as several attractive sites are still waiting for "owners", including the National Museum site, Mt Majura, Mt Taylor, Mugga Mugga, Tuggeranong Hill, Mt Rob Roy, Pierces Creek, Blue Range Hut area and Mt Franklin Rd. Contact Barbara on 6254 6520 to stake your claim. An updated map of



## PUBLICATION ISSUES FOR COG

Since the advent of the COG website, and given the advances in communications technology generally, the committee has begun a process of questioning what it publishes, and how. It is evident that some members prefer to receive all COG publications in hard copy, even if they have access to the website. It is equally evident that COG has some members who are technologically savvy and prefer to access COG publications via the web. The committee notes that it costs more to publish and distribute in hard copy but the costs of maintaining a website are not inconsiderable (for example, each issue of *Gang-gang* costs about 55c to print and a maximum of 50c to mail; CBN costs between \$2-\$3 to print, and a maximum of \$1.62 for postage and packing; the website currently costs about \$3 per subscription p.a.). Also, by making publications available on its website, COG is effectively shifting costs to the membership – or to various governments, as a considerable number of members receive our publications at work addresses. And the question must be asked as to whether the around 10% of interstate or overseas members would continue their membership if all our publications were freely available on our website. A further consideration is the capacity of volunteers to keep up with technological challenges and the administrative complexity of multiple production and distribution methods.

The committee would like to invite members with views on these issues to provide feedback. In particular you may wish to address some of the following issues:

- Do you read the current COG publications (*Gang-gang* monthly newsletter; Canberra Bird Notes quarterly journal)? What items do you find most useful? Are there any changes in content you would like to see?
- If CBN were not included in your membership, would you subscribe separately to it?
- Do you access the COG website [www.canberrabirds.org.au](http://www.canberrabirds.org.au)? If so, how frequently? What items do you find most useful? Are there any changes in content you would like to see?
- Putting aside your personal likes and dislikes for a moment, what publications should COG, as part of the wider birding fraternity, be producing?
- Which COG publications should be available on the website?
- Should those publications be available on the COG website in perpetuity? Or would you be prepared to search for them in an electronic archive?
- Should general website access to the world at large be limited to broad general information only, and access to particular publications be restricted to members with a password?
- Should members who receive hard-copy publications be expected to pay more, given the higher production and distribution costs?
- Do you have any other comments on these issues?

Please email your comments to [cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au); write to COG, PO Box 301, Civic Square, ACT 2608; or telephone the president or secretary.

claimed grid cells will be published on our website by 10 October, and shown at the COG meeting on 11 October, after a meeting with Namagdi National Park staff to clarify access issues for those heading south. Serendipitous surveys are also welcomed, if you can spare the time to do a 20-minute, 2-hectare count in your local park or wherever you happen to be. All that is required is that you record, on a COG datasheet, the number (abundance) of all species seen in your chosen area, and any breeding observed. COG datasheets are available from meetings, they can be downloaded from the COG website, or mailed out to you. If all else fails, a written list will do. Record your location with a GPS if you have one, but otherwise just give a clear written description of where you were. Don't worry if you can't work out which grid cell you surveyed in – we can determine that for you. Or consult the map on the website. Depending on the nature of your site, you may wish to spend 20 minutes covering a two-hectare area (roughly 100x200 m); alternatively, you may wish to spend more time surveying a site more closely, so the 'within 500 m of a central point' option might be best for you (for a minimum of 20 minutes, but as long as you wish). Or you may want to canvass the entirety of a grid cell (roughly 3.5 X 4.5 km) (this will need to be recorded as a survey 'within 5 km of a central point'). Only record those species you are sure of – don't take a guess. And if you are a beginning birder and not too confident of your surveying abilities, let Barbara Allen know and she'll try to find a more confident birder to go out with. Please return your



datasheets to COG blitz records, PO Box 301, Civic Square ACT 2608 as soon as possible, or place in the red box at the November meeting. Anyone completing at least one datasheet on the blitz weekend and returning it on or before the November meeting will be rewarded with a native plant of their choice (available for collection at the meeting only, no rainchecks). And there will be a few lucky draw prizes as well. With your help, let's see how much of the ACT we can cover in the one weekend! The information gathered will be invaluable in providing a snapshot of the ACT avifauna to complement our other surveys.

### Woodland Spring Surveys Update

Woodland site coordinators: please note the next woodland survey period is 2 to 10 December. We welcome Owen Holton to the team, who will be doing surveys at the Tuggeranong Hill site.

**Mulligan's Flat** — Although weather conditions were not optimal on 24 September, (a change moving in, some gusty wind and a few raindrops), some sheltered sites produced good counts of birds. Many of the early spring migrants were back: both **Gerygones**, **Rufous Whistler**, and **Pallid** and **Fan-tailed Cuckoos**. A number of sites recorded **Golden Whistlers**, more than usual for early spring, when they tend to move to the mountains. Very few **honeyeaters** were moving (due to weather conditions) although there were **White-naped** and **Yellow-faced** recorded at a few sites. The total count was down for a spring survey at 41 species. Thank you to the volunteers who turned up despite the disappointing weather. The December survey is likely to be Sunday 3 December, to be confirmed. Please note your diaries.

**Newline** — I did the COG survey on 26 September, a fine morning with an early start at 6.30am. The **Jacky Winters** are back in full song and other good sightings included **Crested-shrike Tit**, **Speckled Warbler**, **Southern Whiteface** (in the paddock near the dump), both **Golden** and **Rufous Whistlers**, **Tree Martins** and both **Brown Goshawk** and **Collared Sparrowhawk**. A pair of **Brown Treecreepers** were in the front paddock as usual, and a **White-necked Heron** circled above the site at the end of the survey. Lots of small groups of **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** moved south through the site early in the morning, including one group of 25 birds. I did think there were a lot of ferals around on this survey, notably **Starlings** and **Common Mynas**. I'd be interested to hear from others visiting the site re this. Total species list of 45. **Jenny Bounds**

**Walk Against Warming** — Saturday 4 November 2006, 12 Noon. Meet Legislative Assembly/Civic Square, walk to Glebe Park for music and stalls.



Limited Edition

## Framed and unframed Wild Bird Photographs



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Note: **Special COG Prices**, with \$10 from every purchase being donated to the Canberra Birds Conservation Fund

Join the rest of the world, calling on our leaders to act now to cut greenhouse gas emissions, by walking against warming. This event is part of a synchronised international mass mobilisation incorporating rallies across Africa, Asia, Europe, the Pacific and the Americas. It has been called to coincide with the UN talks on climate change in Nairobi, Kenya. A Conservation Council sponsored event. More information [www.ecoaction.net.au](http://www.ecoaction.net.au).

### 28/29 October — NSW and ACT Twitchathon 2006

Birds Australia, Southern NSW & ACT, is holding a twitchathon on the above weekend to raise funds for the Australian Bird Study Association's Research Fund. This fund provides grants to students at Australian universities who are carrying out research on Australian birds. Prizes will be awarded for the most species seen by three winning teams as well as prizes for the most money raised, the rarest bird seen, and prizes for children. Contact Alan Morris at [amorris@ceinternet.com.au](mailto:amorris@ceinternet.com.au)

### 28/29 November — 'From the Ground Up: a workshop on the conservation and rehabilitation of grassy ecosystems of the ACT and region'

The Australian Network for Plant Conservation Inc is holding this workshop at CSIRO Discovery Centre, targeted at those interested in the conservation of native grasslands and woodlands, in managing and rehabilitating grassy ecosystems, or those involved in local rehabilitation projects. It will be a mix of presentations and field visits. There is a modest cost.. Details are on the ANPC website, [www.anpc.asn.au](http://www.anpc.asn.au) or phone 6250 9509.

**Fundraising for the Conservation Council** — The ACT's peak environmental advocacy group has a solar hot water system and insulation batts for sale by tender. (*cont. p 12*)

## 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.

## Avian Whimsy #46 — Dividing the Bills

I used to put feathers into my hat band, sad and beautiful souvenirs salvaged from small tragedies I stumbled upon – outback road accident victims or clandestine under-bridge barbeque sites. I stopped because of my grand-daughter (technically I suppose she was my then-step-de facto grand-daughter, but that's a linguistic mire best stepped around). Specifically it ended in Civic one day, when she amused herself while travelling on my shoulders by plucking and scattering the feathers to the winds they were designed to ride. I wonder if they were found by a birdo and what that person made of **Bustard** and **Spotted Nightjar** primaries wafting along Garema Place?

However I am quite sure that my small affectation didn't have any impact on the species, unlike the English George V. He, when a mere Duke of York on a visit to New Zealand, was presented with **Huia** tail feathers, plonked them into his hat band and thus precipitated a craze for them that ended with the death of that truly wonderful species. The Huia (*Heteralocha acutirostris*) was one of three species of the stunning endemic Wattlebirds – no relation to honeyeaters – and had evolved a truly remarkable method of getting the most out of its habitat. Male and female Huias, which were very impressive 50cm long glossy green-black birds with large orange wattles and white tail tips, had utterly different bills from each other. The male used his sharp chisel-like bill to break open rotting logs and seize grubs close to the surface. The female followed immediately afterwards, probing deeply into crevices inaccessible to him with a slim decurved bill about three times the length of his. They were using the same resource, but not competing with each other at all. I find that truly wonderful, but I shouldn't be too amazed I suppose – at least not once I've accepted that life is routinely amazing!

It stands to reason that any two species must specialise if they are to live in the same area. There are obvious ways; seed-eating finches and insect-eating flycatchers are irrelevant to each other, as are **Boobooks** and **sparrowhawks**, eating very similar prey but working mutually exclusive shifts. Closely related species are likely to have very similar feeding habits, so must be more sophisticated in their strategies if they are to cohabit. **Straw-necked Ibis** tend to work on drier ground than **White Ibis**, so take more spiders and insects and less frogs, snails and fish than their very similar relatives. **Willie Wagtails** and **Grey Fantails** are very closely related but divide the insect resource neatly by height above the ground. In general Grey Fans work the aerial pantry around and above the canopy while Willies stay on or near the ground. This division is emphasised when they co-exist, and is less strictly observed when they are on their own. Their bills also have diverged to further decrease competition – Grey Fans have smaller weaker bills suitable for small soft-bodied prey, while Willie has a larger stronger one for bigger crunchier goodies.

**Brown, Striated** and **Buff-rumped Thornbills** live together in open forest; Browns and Striateds both glean foliage, but the Striateds concentrate higher in the eucalypts and Browns lower in shrubs. Buff-rumped focus on the ground and bark crevices. There is some overlap but when times get tough they retreat deeper into their own niches. And again, each has a subtly different bill shape which assists in this.

Both Australian **spoonbill** species can feed side-by-side, with seemingly identical tools, but yet again their bills are actually distinctive enough that they are taking subtly different foods. Royals have shorter wider bills with more papillae than Yellow-bills, and zig-zag them more per sweep; as a result they encounter and take more fish, while the Yellow-bills mostly eat slower aquatic insects.

Where **Sittellas**, **White-throated** and **Red-browed Treecreepers** co-exist the Sittellas specialise on dead Stringybark branches. White-throated Treecreepers like Stringybarks too, but prefer trunks and living branches, while Red-brows go for smooth bark on different tree species or outer living branches of Stringybarks. And exquisitely, when they have the tree to themselves, male and female Sittellas further sub-divide the spoils. The males have larger bills and use the trunks and large branches more than do females.

Which of course brings us back to the Huia. I'll never see one, which is of no relevance at all. What is relevant is that the finely tuned product of millions of generations of evolution can be snuffed out by our greed, arrogance or ignorance in just a very few generations. Each such product is unique. And can *never* be reproduced.

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

(from page 10) **The Solahart 302J** is a two collector system with 300 litre capacity tank suitable for a family of 4. 5 year warranty and designed to provide freeze protection. Includes standard installation.

**Ceiling Insulation:** R4 Insulco Fat Batts. Premium glasswool batts (rating R4). 8 batts per bag to cover 4.5 sqm laid between ceiling joists. Includes standard installation.

For details phone 6247 7808 or email [ccserac@ecoaction.net.au](mailto:ccserac@ecoaction.net.au). Closes Friday 20 October 2006.

## NEW MEMBERS

COG welcomes the following new members:

**Peter Cowper**, of Flynn

**Irene Davies** and **Keith Thomas**, of Campbell

**Sally Stephens**, of O'Connor.

and welcomes back after a long absence,

**McComas Taylor**, of Ainslie.

## Next newsletter

**November deadline**

**Wednesday 25 October 2006**

**Please send updates, articles, advertisements etcetera to the**

**Editors of *Gang-gang***

**[gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto: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

## COG info

### *President*

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Email: [jack.holland@deh.gov.au](mailto:jack.holland@deh.gov.au)

### *Vice President*

**Nicki Taws**, ph 6251 0303

### *Treasurer*

**Lia Battisson** ph 6231 0147

### *Secretary*

**Barbara Allan** ph 6254 6520

### *Address for correspondence*

**The Secretary**  
COG, PO Box 301  
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### *Newsletter distribution*

**Judy Collett** and helpers

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### *Gang-gang editors*

**Sue Lashko** and **Greg Ramsay**  
ph 6286 1564  
Email: [gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au)

### *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.

### *Office*

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

### *COG website*

[www.canberrabirds.org.au](http://www.canberrabirds.org.au)

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

### *Editor Canberra Bird Notes*

[CBN@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:CBN@canberrabirds.org.au)



## Gang-gang

If undeliverable, please return to  
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