



Gang-gang

October 2007

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

Monthly Meeting

**8 pm Wednesday
10 October 2007**

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

**The annual general meeting
will precede the normal
monthly meeting**

Scandals, Scams and Facts

Penny Olsen will detail some findings from her research for her latest book *Glimpses of Paradise: The Quest for the Beautiful Parrakeet*.

The main speaker will be **Stuart Cooney** from the ANU on *Ecological Associations of the Hooded Parrot*. This talk will report on the progress Stuart has made to date in analysing and writing up the field work for his PhD. More details are on page 2

Everyone welcome

What to watch out for this month

Despite the apparent increase in sightings posted on the COG chat line just after I wrote my column for the September *Gang-gang*, my impression, from both my local patch round NW Chapman and from helping with the Mulligans Flat survey on 23 September, is that it's been a pretty slow season for arrival of the spring migrants. In particular the **Noisy Friarbird** seems to have been very tardy. Surprisingly, there have already been a number of reports of **White-winged Trillers**, which usually don't arrive until October, as does the **Rufous Songlark**, the first of which was giving its rusty axle call at the NW end of Coleman Ridge on 22 September. Early **Sacred Kingfishers** also have been reported from the woodland area of the Jerrabomberra Grasslands Reserve.

The last of the spring/summer migrants are expected to arrive during October. These include the **Mistletoebird**, **Dollarbird**, the **Leaden and Satin Flycatchers**, **Rufous Fantails**, the **Cicadabird** and the **Rainbow Bee-eater**. The last four tend to be passage migrants in Canberra itself, and are usually seen "in transit" on their way to the cooler, wetter areas of the mountains, or to softer creek banks south of the ACT to breed. It will also be interesting with the continuing drought whether there will be an influx of **White-browed** and **Masked Woodswallows** this spring/summer, and of the honey-eaters usually found much more inland. Also keep an eye, or more likely, an ear out for the **Common Koel**, an increasingly spring/early summer visitor to raid your fruit trees as well as to attempt to breed. Likewise the **Channel-billed Cuckoo**, for which reports also seem to be increasing, though in much lower numbers, will alert you to its presence by its very loud call, and you have to be very alert to see it as it heads off urgently to unknown parts.

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. Details of how to do this are to be included on our web site under the "Recording Birds" button.— **Jack Holland**

Photo by Geoffrey Dabb



Dollar Bird
(*Eurystomus orientalis*)

Annual General Meeting October Monthly Meeting

8 pm Wednesday—10 October 2007

The Annual General Meeting of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc will be held at 8 pm on Wednesday 10 October 2007 in the Multi-media Theatre, Canberra Girls Grammar School, corner of Gawler Cres and Melbourne Ave, Deakin — **Sandra Henderson**, for Chris Davey, Public Officer

Agenda

1. Opening
2. Apologies
3. Confirmation of minutes of 2006 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 2007-08
9. Election of office-bearers (President, Vicepresident, Secretary and Treasurer) and ordinary committee members (nomination forms available from the secretary)
10. Other matters for which notice has been given.
11. Close of meeting

After the AGM, **Penny Olsen** will give an insight into some of the scandals, scams and facts she unearthed in her research for her new book on the **Paradise Parrot** *Glimpses of Paradise: The Quest for the Beautiful Parrakeet*. This book will be available at the COG sales desk on the night and Penny will be happy to sign your

copy. Members are reminded that Penny's exhibition at the National Library runs until 14 October, so there is only limited time left to see it.

The main speaker will be **Stuart Cooney** from the ANU on "**Ecological Associations of the Hooded Parrot.**"

For his PhD Stuart has been lucky to study a charismatic species with an interesting story to tell in a wild and remote part of Australia. The **Hooded Parrot** is one of three "antbed" parrots that are (or were) found in the Australian tropics. The **Paradise Parrot** is now famously extinct and the **Golden-shouldered Parrot** is endangered with less than 1000 individuals and perhaps as few as 150 breeding pairs left in the wild. The Hooded Parrot, however, is relatively secure and this allowed Stuart to study the remarkable associations of the "antbed" parrots.

Both the Hooded and Golden-shouldered Parrots nest in the terrestrial termite mounds that dot their tropical savannah home ranges. The parrots burrow into the termite mounds, which in turn seal off the nest cavity, leaving the parrots unmolested as they brood. Even more remarkable, however, are the strange bed-fellows that the parrots keep. They each have their own nest attending moth that lays its eggs in synchrony with the parrot. When the moth larvae emerge, they build a dense web in the base of the nest, from which they emerge to clean up the waste from the nest-bound chicks, keeping both the nest and the chicks, scrupulously clean!

With his field work complete, Stuart is now analysing his data and writing up the results. This talk will report on the progress made to date.

Field Trip reports

18 July - Midweek walk *(Due to the vagaries of the internet, this report just received)*

The select few who braved the forecast snow showers enjoyed a pleasant morning of birding along the western shores of Lake Burley Griffin near Scrivener Dam. Highlights were two **Grey Currawongs** fossicking under eucalypt bark for food and a **Darter** drying its wings. **Eurasian Coots** and **Superb Fairywrens** were present in abundance (37 and 32 respectively). A pair of **Australian Ravens** was nesting, as were **Double-barred Finches**. We located three finch nests in a dense grevillea. A quick walk through the arboretum yielded five **King Parrots** sitting quietly in a Cork Oak. We flushed two **Common Bronzewings** that flew into a nearby tree where the sunshine picked out the iridescence of their wings. The group finished the morning by retiring to the Botanic Gardens for coffee and failing to locate the **Powerful Owl**. A total of 25 species was seen. — **Margaret Robertson**

2 September — Yanununbeyan State Conservation Area

It was a beautiful spring day for Margaret McJannett and Charles Buer to introduce us to this interesting new area with its variety of eucalypts and understorey. Yanununbeyan SCA is about 25 kilometres southeast of Queanbeyan and was gazetted in 2003.

Most of us met at Spotlight carpark in Queanbeyan at 7.30 am, arranged some car-pooling and met up with others along the way, making a party of 16. We reached the SCA by travelling from Captains Flat Road to Woolcara Lane before turning left on to Woolcara property road. We stopped at several different places in the SCA, spotting 30 species in all.

Our first stop was by a massive old Applebox. where we could hear a **Superb Lyrebird** making a variety of calls. Some members spotted a **Yellow-tufted Honeyeater**, and a pair of **Brown Goshawks** were seen flying over the forest.

At our next stop, to explore a creek line, we were treated to delicious Anzac biscuits, made by Margaret's mother. A number of **Brown Thornbill** as well as **Weebill** and **Yellow-rumped Thornbill** were observed here. We made our way down the creek bed to the river where most of us were lucky enough to see a platypus come up to the surface.

Grey Shrike Thrush and **honeyeaters (White-eared, Yellow-faced and White-naped)** were particularly active near the crossing where we stopped for lunch. Other species included **Pallid Cuckoo**, **Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo**, **White-throated Treecreeper**, **Brown Treecreeper**, **Spotted Pardalote**, **Striated Pardalote**, **Kookaburra**, **Eastern Yellow Robin**, **Grey Fantail**, **Australian Wood Duck** and **White-faced Heron**.

Just before leaving the area, we saw two Red-necked Wallabies. Then there were a number of sightings on the way back, including **Wedge-tailed Eagle**, **Jacky Winter**, **Welcome Swallow** and **Common Bronzewing**. A very enjoyable outing. — **Tina Bromhead**

15-16 September – Mittagong

An encouragingly large group of members and guests joined local COG member Pamela Morse-Evans and me in perfect, still, sunny weather at the Cecil Hoskins Reserve, where we spent a very relaxing Saturday afternoon by keeping to the elevated track that runs along the western side, with the sun behind us warming our backs. Unfortunately due to the ready availability of surface water in the area waterbird numbers were low, though with a mix of bush birds we managed to see a total of 39 species. The highlights were a **Black-fronted Dotterel**, a **White-bellied Sea-Eagle** high over and a **White-necked Heron**, which after skulking around in the long grass finally came into the open and allowed everyone excellent views. This species seems to be relatively common north of the ACT at the moment, with several participants seeing numbers of them on the swamps north of Collector on their way. Sue, our wader expert, also spotted and identified through the scope a couple of **Sharp-tailed Sandpipers**, underlining again my golden rule for waders, that if in doubt it's a "sharpie".

When we arrived back at the cars for afternoon tea we were treated to a **Red Wattlebird** migration spectacular, with well over 200 birds (with at least 50 in one group) in a period of 15-20 minutes moving S/SW just above tree top height, in a very similar fashion to the **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** that had been seen throughout the afternoon. After a short stop at the Wingecarribee



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2007 Birding Tours

Plains-wanderer Weekends

24/25 November &
1/2, 15/16, 29/30 December 2007

2008 Birding Tours

25 February—2 March
**Tasmania Birding &
Mammal Tour**
incl pelagic & Melaleuca flight

12—30 March
Thailand
A repeat of our wonderful 2007 trip with over 400 species of birds recorded; fantastic mammals, reptiles, butterflies, flora, scenery and food. Co-led by Uthai Treesucon, Thailand's foremost birding guide
See website for checklist & trip report

July
New Caledonia
incl Lifou & Ouvéa islands

10—28 August 2008
Strzelecki Track
Outback Tour
See other 2008 tours on our website

www.philipmaher.com

Reservoir to view the **Great-crested Grebes** (reasonable views of at least one through the scope) we checked in at our hotels and later had a lovely relaxed meal at Pamela's favourite local restaurant.

Despite this we were all up early next morning to walk the Box Vale track. This was a combination of walking, bird watching and wildflower identification, with a range of the latter in flower, but unfortunately no Waratahs. A total of 41 bird species were seen with good views being obtained of a pair of **Musk Ducks** on a small reservoir, the **Fan-tailed Cuckoo** (on two occasions), the aerial and fantail-like **Rose Robin** (most of us saw JUST the female except for Sylvia whose decision to wait there for our return rewarded her with good views of the spectacular male), and a very loud and vocal **Olive-backed Oriole** giving not just its typical call but also several less familiar renditions. We also saw several **Red-browed Treecreepers** and added the **Brown-headed Honeyeater** to Pamela's list for the area. However, the undoubted highlight for everyone came at the opening to the tunnel in the track. There was some confusion as to whether the birds sighted were **Origmas (Rock Warblers)** or **Pilot Birds**. The very loud *Guinea a week* call on just one occasion seemed to have settled the debate in favour of the latter, until we entered the tunnel and found the reason why some of the birds were entering and leaving, as on the roof they were building the very diagnostic ragged hanging mass nest of the former. To our surprise both species were present at this spot, though not everyone could be convinced they had seen both.

In conclusion a very enjoyable weekend for all, with over 60 species seen, not including the **Superb Lyrebird** (a very tame one which provided easily the best views, and sounds, I've ever had) seen by the early risers who accompanied me on a close to town track. Our thanks go again to our local host Pamela for making us so welcome and showing us her best birding spots. This was a bit of a different COG outing, accommodated and also with a bit more of a focus on plants and walking. It has reinforced my view that there is room for such an outing in the COG calendar, and I propose to include a similar one on the 2008 Field Trips program.— **Jack Holland**

Photo by David Cook



**Olive-backed Oriole
(*Oriolus sagittatus*)**

Future Field Trips

The Guidelines for the conduct and advertising of COG field trips are published on the COG web site. Both trip leaders and members/participants should familiarise themselves with these guidelines. In particular, the Registration Form should be completed for each field trip.

8-12 October—Green Cape—accommodated

At the time of writing, this trip was fully subscribed, though with a number of cancellations there was no longer anyone on the waiting list. In case of further late cancellations, to put your name on the waiting list please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@environment.gov.au). The full cost will be \$125.

13-14 October—Frogs' Hole Creek, Frogmore—over night campout on private property

COG has been invited for a third visit to observe the birds on this property at Frogmore, 26 km to the NE of Boorowa, and about 2 hours drive from Canberra. This is an undulating bush block of close to 150 ha, with a large number of old eucalypts of several species including Yellow Box, White Box and Apple Box and patches of very old Black Cypress Pine. A large number of plantings have gone in over recent years and quite a lot of re-growth of Callitris and other native species is evident since grazing was limited. Over the past 6 years close to 130 different species have been recorded here, including a number which are close to their eastern limit such as **Cockatiel, Blue-faced Honeyeater, Gilbert's Whistler** and **Apostlebird**.

A total of 75 and 80 bird species were recorded during the COG weekend visits in late April 2005 and September 2006. Nine new bird species were added to the property list. Species not usually seen in Canberra included **Peaceful Dove, Little Friarbird, Striped Honeyeater, Black-chinned Honeyeater, Grey-crowned Babbler** and both **Pied** and **Grey Butcherbirds**. Other good sightings were **Jacky Winter, Diamond Firetail, Hooded Robin, Southern Whiteface, Brown Treecreeper, Restless Flycatcher, Crested Shrike-Tit, Superb Parrots, an Australian Owlet-nightjar**, and a

Tawny Frogmouth. A surprise on the last visit was seeing **Spotless Crakes** in the reed beds of the creek. There are few places close to Canberra where such an extensive and varied list can be seen within such a small area.

This follow up visit is timed a month later than last year as most of the spring migrants should have returned. We will again be camping overnight at the lovely spot near the creek on a take everything in, take everything out basis. Participants should aim to arrive early afternoon on the Saturday, and it is expected we'll stay until mid Sunday afternoon. Car pooling is encouraged, so if you're interested please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@environment.gov.au).

17 October—Wednesday Walk

The Wednesday walk will go to Tharwa Sandwash, with an extension to the vicinity of the Namadgi Visitors Centre (if time permits). For carpooling meet at Kambah Village shopping Centre at 8:45 am. Drivers should note that access to Tharwa is via Point Hutt Crossing as the bridge is still closed.

20 October—Coolman Ridge—joint walking/birdwatching event for the public

As part of Parks Week, together with the National Parks Association, COG will hold an introductory event for beginners or those new to bird watching or bush walking. This will take place from 9:00 to 13:00 at the NW end of Coolman Ridge off Kathner Street Chapman, where there are both good walking tracks and a good variety of birds. In particular the range of views of the Murrumbidgee Valley and the mountains beyond, or back into the city, is unrivalled in Canberra. It is expected two sessions will be held, at 9 am and 11 am. While this is mainly aimed at the public, new members or beginners in COG are also welcome. Please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@environment.gov.au) to book your place.

27-28 October—COG's Bird Blitz 2007

Planning is underway for our 2007 "bird blitz" on the weekend of **27-28 October 2007**. As in the previous two years, our aim is to record all bird species present in the ACT over that weekend, their abundance, and any indications of breeding. The blitz is limited to the ACT and does not include COG's broader area of interest, but we hope to cover all broad habitat types in the territory, if not all 165 possible grid cells, or parts thereof. Any COG member with a reasonable ability to identify birds is encouraged to participate, and may nominate to **Barbara Allan** (allanbm@bigpond.net.au or 6254 6520) in which grid cell or in which location they would like to survey. Once your grid cell(s) are allocated, you have committed to a minimum of one 20-min, 2-hectare survey in that cell in the course of that weekend. Though of course, more frequent, longer or more extensive surveys are welcomed! Many former blitzers or regular surveyors of 2-ha sites have already nominated to undertake surveys, or are likely to do so – check out our website www.canberrabirds.org.au to see which grid cells have "owners" and who is surveying where. This is a moveable feast so regular checks might be useful. You can also find complete instructions for how to participate, on the website. Ask Barbara, if you do not have internet access. A major challenge for us is to find enough 4WD vehicles to go behind the locked gates in Namadgi National Park. If you have a sturdy 4WD and would like to help out, Barbara would dearly love to hear from you. Many kind intending blitzers have indicated they are willing to survey anywhere (within reason!) so they do not feature yet on the owners list. More than one person or group may survey the one grid cell, particularly if there are multiple habitats therein, but do consider the challenge of surveying in a spot you don't know, as well as your favourite location(s). The survey is probably not suitable for complete beginners, but if you would like to be involved, and particularly if you have transport, let Barbara know and she will match you up with a more experienced birder. Last year at least 62 COG members participated, 60% of possible grid cells were surveyed, 242 datasheets were completed and 161 species of bird were recorded, with 76 species breeding. Do join in the blitz this year and let's see how it compares! Currently un-owned areas, or areas whose previous owners have not confirmed their intentions this year, or who lack transport, include all the grassland reserves, the ANBG, the shores of Lake Burley Griffin, Isaacs Ridge, Tuggeranong Hill, Farrer Ridge, Jerrabomberra Wetlands, Newline Quarry, Tidbinbilla NR, Castle Hill, Gungahlin Hill, Percival Hill, Mulligans Flat, Goorooyarroo, as well as many spots in the Brindabellas and Namadgi NP. Check out the map and find your own challenge!

11 November—Bellmount Forest—morning/early afternoon visit to private property

This will be a repeat visit to the property of long time member Pauline Wicksteed, north of Gundaroo. Pauline also has a keen interest in plants so the focus will be on both birds and plants. We'll spend part of the morning looking at these on her property, which consists of natural woodland and planted areas. We'll also have another look at the nearby TSR 48,

which usually supports a good range of declining species, before having a latish lunch. As it will be late spring all the summer migrants should have returned. In 2004, the highlights were **Painted Honeyeater**, **Red-backed Kingfisher** and **White-browed Woodswallow**, all inland species brought in by the drought, and with the continuing drought who knows what to expect this time.

To get there take the Federal highway to the Gunning turn-off, then through Sutton and Gundaroo towards Gunning. 13 km past Gundaroo Village you reach Bellmount Forest, continue on the main road a further 100 metres to where a 100 km speed sign is and the gate is directly opposite to the right, number 5202. Drive in and meet Pauline (Ph 4845 1174) at 8:30 am. The driving time from Civic is approximately 40 minutes. Members wishing to arrange car pooling should be at the Shell Service Station, Federal Highway, Watson by 7:45 am.

18 November—Campbell Park—Sunday morning Nest Workshop

This will be a repeat of the very successful practical nest workshops held over the past four years at Campbell Park, arguably the best bit of grassy woodland in Canberra in spring. This very informal outing has again been timed to coincide with the peak of the breeding season. The morning will start with the usual very 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 four years have been.

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 usually 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@environment.gov.au), who would also be grateful for any tips on where birds are nesting shortly before the day. Meet at 8:00 am at the picnic tables at the far end of the car park.

23 to 25 November—Naas Valley weekend at Caloola Farm—accommodated

This will be a weekend outing commencing with dinner on Friday night, at a lovely rural retreat, only 30 km south of Tuggeranong Town Centre. At the head of the Naas Valley, the property borders Namadgi National Park, with areas of grassy woodland and dry forest. There is a good diversity of birds in this area, including species becoming scarce closer to Canberra, like **Brown Treecreeper**, **Hooded Robin** and **Diamond Firetail**. When COG was there four years ago, we even got a **Painted Honeyeater**!!

There will be opportunities for walks on the property and into the National Park, and for relaxing on the verandah over a glass of wine. We have booked a comfortable farmhouse with several bedrooms; group size will be 10-12, shared rooms with a mix of single and bunk beds; the cottage has good facilities including bathroom. Accommodation cost is \$30 a head for the two nights. You bring your own food, linen and towels. We expect to organise communal dinner meals, with everyone bringing a contribution; you bring your own breakfast and lunch supplies. This is a good opportunity to learn about our local woodland and forest birds. Contact the leader Jenny Bounds for more details, Phone 6288 7802.

2 December—Kelly Road—Sunday morning walk

For those who missed out going to Lady Elliot Island, there will be an opportunity for members and guests to accompany the retiring President to one of his favourite bits of woodland at Kelly Road, which runs parallel to the Monaro Highway just outside the ACT border about 10 km north of Michelago. On past trips, participants have had excellent views of the **Hooded Robin**, **Brown Treecreepers**, **Restless Flycatchers**, **Diamond Firetail**, **Rufous Songlark**, **Dusky Woodswallows** and **Southern Whiteface**. It is also one of the best spots close to Canberra where very close views of **Fuscous Honeyeaters** can be obtained.

Hopefully the bird life at Kelly Road will again be excellent this early summer, in particular the 200 metre stretch at the southern end of TSR 36. Meet Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@environment.gov.au) at the Williamsdale Service Station at 7.30 am, for car pooling etc prior to the 5-10 minute drive down the start of this outing. The main part will involve a 1-1.5 km easy walk along this quiet road and is suitable for all members. Bring morning tea.



The Paradise Parrot
E E Gostelow

MR GILBERT'S BEAUTIFUL PARRAKEET

Until Sunday, October 14, 2007 Visitor Centre, National Library

This display, curated by Dr Penny Olsen of the School of Botany and Zoology at the Australian National University, focuses on the, almost certainly extinct, paradise parrot as a symbol of all those birds and animals which have ceased to exist as they have been hunted for food, their feathers and fur, or had their habitat destroyed through human expansion. Visitors will have the opportunity to view some special items from the Library's collections such as the work of John Gould, Gregory Macalister Mathews and Gracius Broinowski and the watercolours of William Cooper, E.E. Gostelow and Neville Cayley.

2008 Field Trips Program

This will be put together over the next month, with the draft program expected to be published with the November 2007 Gang-gang. So 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 Anthony Overs (6254 0168 AH or by E-mail on Anthony.Overs.Reps@aph.gov.au).

Offers to lead outings in 2008 will be gratefully accepted. The 2007 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, so please let's continue this co-operative spirit and keep making a success of this very important part of COG's activities!

News from the Committee

- Bruce Ramsay, who runs the Sales Table at COG meetings, attended the last committee meeting. He was congratulated for the great job he's been doing. Bruce has plans to expand the stock available to include, for example, publications from the CSIRO.
- COG will be represented at the 'Bush on the Boundary' event in early December. As mentioned in the last report, the Committee would like to hear from COG members who would like to be involved in this sort of community education activity.
- Jack Holland represented COG at the recent BIGNet meeting in Sydney, and Bill Handke also attended to give a presentation about mynas. COG will be hosting the next meeting of this group in April 2008. It is intended that conservation will be the focus of that meeting.
- Jenny Bounds will be working on a response to the ACT Government's proposals about Molonglo Valley development, with assistance from some other members.
- Several COG members attended the recent launch of the Googong Foreshores draft management plan.

Other Surveys/Activities of Interest to COG Members

Free lecture — Tracking Down Australia's Rarer and More Mysterious Parrots: What have we learned and where to next?

Australia has long been known as a 'Land of Parrots'. While we in Canberra are graced with some of the most spectacular species around us daily, Australia also is home to some parrots that are among the world's most mysterious birds. **Dr Leo Joseph** of the Australian National Wildlife Collection will discuss what we know of some of these rarer species, the problems the birds themselves face if they are to survive and the exciting and challenging research we have to do to help them. The lecture is on **Wednesday, October 10, 2007, 12:30 pm - 1:30 pm, Ferguson Room, National Library of Australia**. The Ferguson Room is on the mezzanine level overlooking the foyer. Take the marble stairs near the reception desk, or take the lift to first floor and exit through the glass doors onto the mezzanine level.

Woodland Surveys Report

Mulligan's Flat—Sunday 23 September

The spring survey was in fine, clear weather, an almost still morning. Surprisingly, the reserve was green from recent showers, some early spring wildflowers were starting to poke through, and some of the dams had good amounts of water in them, but grass growth was still very short. Survey teams reported quite a lot of activity, with 55 species in total (in contrast to only 41 species at last year's spring survey). Most of the spring migrants were back with three species of cuckoos and lots of small birds - **thornbills**, **Weebills**, **gerygones**, **orioles**, and a few **honeyeaters**. Highlights were several groups of **Speckled Warblers**, a species we don't record much at Mulligan's, four sightings of **Varied Sittellas**, two **Red-capped Robins**, a **Fuscous Honeyeater** and a **Grey Butcherbird** on a nest. The next survey will be **Sunday, 2 December**.

Jerrabomberra Valley—Callum Brae and Jerrabomberra Grasslands Reserves—16 and 20 September

Most of the spring migrants were back (with **Dollarbirds** and **Leaden Flycatchers** still to arrive), and there were many small flocks of **Yellow-faced** with a few **White-naped Honeyeaters** passing through. Highlights in Callum Brae were a flock of around 12 **King Parrots**, the **Dusky Woodswallows** in the usual spot on the hillslopes, and numerous **Striated Pardalotes**. At the woodland sites in the Jerrabomberra Grasslands Reserve there was a lot of small bird activity at a couple of the sites, with **Varied Sittellas**, **Speckled Warblers** and **Southern Whitefaces** the most interesting sightings. One very quiet **Rufous Songlark** was seen as we left the reserve. Alas the **Brown Treecreepers** were nowhere to be seen or heard, and may have disappeared from this area. I would be interested to hear of any sightings of BTC by members walking in these reserves. It is now possible to walk from Callum Brae right through to the Grasslands Reserve off the Monaro Highway - be mindful to observe the signs as these reserves have private leaseholds on their borders. — **Jenny Bounds** — phone 02 6288 7802

Leucistic Rosella

This leucistic **Crimson Rosella** flew into a garden at Royalla recently. All the normally red areas are white. Other images are on the COG website.

Birdfair 2007 — 15 to 18 November

The programme for Australian Birdfair 2007, organised by the Fivebough and Tuckerbil Wetlands Trust is on the Birdfair website, www.Australianbirdfair.org.au.

The Grey Fantail

Kat Munro's study of the **Grey Fantail** in Campbell Park and Mt Ainslie during 2002-2005 (see *Gang-Gang* May 2007) has now been published. See Munro, Kat (2007), *Breeding behaviour and ecology of the grey fantail (Rhipidura albiscapa)*, *Australian Journal of Zoology*, Vol. 55 No. 4, pp 257–265. — **Robin Hide**

Photo by Bronwyn Willing



Crimson Rosella
Platycercus elegans

Report of September COG meeting

Geoffrey Dabb once again delighted members with a wonderful video on the waders, and other birdlife, of Werribee.

The main speaker was Jerry Olsen, updating us on **Southern Boobooks** in Canberra. He began his talk with an explanation of the two types of owls, the 'Barn Owl types' and the 'non-Barn Owl types', the latter including the **Boobook** and **Rufous**, **Powerful** and **Barking Owls**. This species, *Ninox novaeseelandiae*, includes birds from mainland Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand. Other countries have many more non-Barn Owl species, so why doesn't Australia?

The Boobook weighs 300grams and is insectivorous as well as carnivorous. Birds are its most common food source, with 16 species recorded as prey ranging in size from **Crimson Rosellas** and **Crested Pigeons** to **Superb Fairywrens**. Spiders, grasshoppers, beetles, praying mantis, weevils, cockroaches, moths, butterflies, ants, mice, rats, bats, skinks and geckos make up the balance of the diet for Canberra Boobooks.

The Boobooks which nested in the Black Mountain/Aranda area had territories of about one square kilometre. Males duel call from August to March with a peak in October/November around laying and hatching. The young fledge at six weeks and the family roosts in a dense shrub or tree such as *Exocarpus* for about two weeks, before the female departs, leaving the male to look after the young. Females have been tracked and have been found as far away as Telopea, a distance of about 7km. She may make an occasional visit to her home territory but ignores her offspring. Birds do not use the same nest every year.

Since the clearing of bush for the Gungahlin Drive Extension three of the five pairs in the area have disappeared, not because their nest trees were destroyed, but because their food trees had been removed. Some of these birds had been studied for 13 years. One bird (possibly from the GDE area) observed nesting in the city was hassled by **Noisy Miners** by day and possums seeking its eggs by night. — **Sue Lashko**

27-28 October 2007—Birds Australia NSW and ACT Twitchathon 2007

Proceeds this year will go to the Birds Australia Discovery Centre, Sydney Olympic Park. To participate contact Frances Czwalierna, Twitchathon Co-ordinator, Tel: 02 9436 0388 or E-mail: rosella63@bigpond.com

Garden Bird Survey Notes

Sightings relevant to the Garden Bird Survey mentioned on the Chatline have included: breeding observations for **Magpie-lark, Australian Wood Duck and Pallid Cuckoo**; and the return of **Noisy Friarbirds** in several suburbs. There has also been some discussion of the incidence of **Spotted Turtle-Doves**.

Over the last two months there have been a number of comments relating to the various cuckoos seen in the COG Area of Interest. Seven species have been recorded in the GBS as summarised below.

Name	No. of records	Name	No. of records
Pallid Cuckoo	424	Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo	171
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	216	Shining Bronze-Cuckoo	161
Brush Cuckoo	24	Common Koel	130
		Channel-billed Cuckoo	9

The number of records for **Common Koel** is a tad surprising, since it was until recently regarded as a rare bird in the ACT. It is still a noteworthy one!

Most sites (477 out of 745 Cuckoo site-years) reported only one of the seven species in a year. Two species were reported by 174 site years, three species (68), four species (24) and five species in a year by two lucky observers. Of the combinations of two species in a year the most common mixes were Pallid Cuckoo and Horsfields Bronze-Cuckoo (51/174), Pallid Cuckoo and Fan-tailed Cuckoo (33/174) and Pallid Cuckoo or Fan-tailed Cuckoo and Shining Bronze-Cuckoo (47/174). It is possibly of interest that there are only five site-years in which Horsfield's and Shining Bronze-Cuckoos were reported together.

The process of entering the data from the 68 charts we have received so far for this year is approaching finalisation. For annual report purposes the database will be closed off after the October COG Meeting and compilation of the statistics will commence soon thereafter. (If any further charts appear after that date they will be added to the database for historical purposes, but not included in the annual statistics.)

Martin Butterfield

COG SALES

MUDBRICK COTTAGE

Mallacoota

Our mudbrick cottage is available for rental for all those nature lovers out there!! It is set amongst the trees in Mallacoota, Victoria (approximately 4 hours drive from Canberra). It is only 10 minutes walk to the beach, 5 minutes walk to the golf course and about 15 minutes walk to town. It sleeps 4-6 upstairs and there is a sofa bed downstairs. It is fully self-contained with a kitchen and laundry. Contact Barbara de Bruine

(02) 6258 3531.

PASSIVE SOLAR HOUSE

South Rosedale

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

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

(02) 6286 1564

or e-mail
gramsay@actewagl.net.au

The Long Paddock: A Directory of Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves in NSW - Rural Lands Protection Board - \$31.00

Wet and Wild: A Field Guide to the Freshwater Animals of the Southern Tablelands and High Country - M Lintermans and W Osborne - \$28.00 (RRP \$34.95).

Where to Find Birds in NE Queensland - Jo Wieneke - \$16.00.

Reptiles and Frogs of the ACT - Ross Bennett - \$13.00.

Grassland Flora: A Field Guide for the Southern Tablelands (NSW and ACT) - by David Eddy et al. - \$13.00

Our Patch: A Field Guide to the Flora of the ACT Region - \$13.00

The Nestbox Book - Gould League - \$12.50

Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT - Taylor and Day - \$14.00

Woodlands: A Disappearing Landscape – Lindenmeyer et al - \$34.00

Feather and Brush: Three Centuries of Australian Bird Art – Penny Olsen [reduced price](#) - \$50.00

Simpson and Days' Birds of Australia CDROM Version 5.0 [special price](#) - \$45.00

COG Car Stickers - \$2.00

COG Badges – red or grey - \$5.00

COG Birds of the ACT: Two Centuries of Change - Steve Wilson - \$25.00

COG Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the ACT - \$1.00

COG Bird Songs of Canberra – Cassette - \$10.00

COG Bird Calls of the ACT – CD - \$12.00

All these items plus COG T-shirts and Polo shirts and various pamphlets etc are available at the monthly meeting sales desk or by contacting Bruce Ramsay via [email](mailto:barkeramsay@velocitynet.com.au) to barkeramsay@velocitynet.com.au or telephone 02 6294 5881 (after 6.30 pm please)

Avian Whimsy #57 — Glory, Glory, Alula!!

Recently there was some discussion on the COG email line about alulas (alulae?), with predictably helpful and informative explanations about what and where an alula is. However, we didn't really get to why it exists, and that's the question that always attracts me, luring me down unsuspected alleys. I would suggest that this inconspicuous tuft of tiny feathers at the 'elbow' of the wing, normally folded invisibly away, is as crucial to successful flight as are the mighty driving primaries (remiges) or the steering, braking tail feathers (retrices).

Cuenca is an ancient walled city some 150km from Madrid, with World Heritage classification. However to a birdo – not to mention a bird! – it has an even greater significance. From nearby, in the mid-1990s, a remarkable fossil was reported, of a superficially unremarkable bird about the size of a scrubwren. This bird, **Eoalulavis**, lived some 115 million years ago. The detail of the fossilisation makes me shake my head with wonderment at the sheer, beautiful unlikelihood of it. We know what it ate, because its stomach was still full of shrimps. And we know that it truly flew, as truly as any modern bird does, because its superb fossil feather impressions included an alula!

But what, and why, *is* an alula? As is well-established, I have no credentials at all in physics, and in any case even the professional aerodynamics bods (pabs) can't seem to agree on the details of why a wing (be it of bird or aeroplane) actually works. So, this explanation will of necessity be simple. As the leading edge of a wing tilts further up (in pab parlance, the 'angle of attack' increases), two key things happen. Firstly, the lift increases (partly due to decreasing pressure on the top of the wing, as it forms a 'pressure shadow' behind the raised leading edge, so that the wing is forced up); this is essential if the bird is to accelerate and climb. But, the drag also increases as the area facing the wind does; this pulls the bird back, so it must thrust (ie flap) harder to compensate. A wing held horizontal to the ground attracts least drag, but it will also not allow climbing.

It is important to reduce turbulence over the leading edge of the wing, in part because turbulence breaks up the relative vacuum above the wing and increases drag. However, as the angle of attack increases, so does turbulence. This is manageable under most normal flying conditions, but there is one aspect of every flight where the angle of attack must be raised to almost 90°, with potentially disastrous results. This is at the moment of landing, where wings, tail and feet are spread fully out to deliberately increase drag, in order to decrease speed to stalling. In such circumstances turbulence over the wing would be expected to be catastrophic, simply dropping the bird out of the air with all the grace of their wingless reptilian forebears. But now the marvellous alula is spread, like a mini-wing stuck up from the real one; air flows through the slot formed and over the wing surface. For reasons not even the pabs can explain (or maybe just not in terms that I can understand) this air flow is nice and smooth and the bird, rather than stalling or crashing, touches lightly down.

The alula is controlled by the first of the three remaining much reduced 'finger' bones in a bird's wing. (Technically this is number two; one and five have disappeared entirely.) An aeroplane achieves the same thing by means of wing flaps and slots; the superb and lamented *Pteranodons* did so by lowering a flap of skin across the front of the wing using a single small tiltable bone.

Archaeopteryx apparently had not evolved an alula, so presumably hit the ground running (or crashing!). It almost certainly couldn't have landed on a branch, or pounced onto prey. Somewhere in the brief few million years between *Archaeopteryx* and *Eoalulavis* evolution (or rather, time) produced the first alula. No living birds descended from *Eoalulavis*, so either the alula evolved more than once or it arose very early in the story of birds, in a forgotten species which is the common ancestor of every bird we see today. Either is possible, and either way it emphasises the critical importance of the rudely misnamed, and sadly unsung, 'bastard wing' in the mighty epic of birds and flight.

Ian Fraser ianf@pcug.org.au



Great-winged Petrel showing alulae



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Next newsletter

November deadline

Wednesday 31 October 2007

Please send, articles, advertisements, updates etcetera to the Editors at gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au or 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.

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

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Canberra Birds Conservation Fund

Donations to this fund are tax deductible. Funds are used to support projects that protect and enhance native birds and the environments that sustain them.

COG website

www.canberrabirds.org.au

Office

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

COG membership

2007-2008 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

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Gang-gang

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