

Gang-gang

September 2007

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

Monthly Meeting

**8 pm 12 September
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.*

In preparation for wader sightings
in the coming spring, **Geoffrey
Dabb** will firstly introduce and
show a video on 'Birds of the Wer-
ribee Sewage Treatment
Works'."

The main presentation will be 'Fact
and Fiction About Southern Boo-
books'. **Jerry Olsen** and **Sue
Trost** will discuss their 14 year
study of Southern Boobooks in the
Black Mountain, Aranda Bushland,
and Bruce Ridge woodlands, how
some findings overturned previous
ideas about Southern Boobooks,
and how the Gungahlin Drive Ex-
tension affected breeding pairs
along Caswell Drive. After the talk,
Jerry and Sue will be happy to also
discuss issues that have arisen with
the **Powerful Owl** at the Botanic
Gardens.

Everyone welcome

What to watch out for this month

While the kind of a spring we'll have has started to define itself, it was by no means settled yet at the end of August. However, one thing that does look very likely is that, unless things change drastically and rain comes soon, the drought is set to continue, despite the promise of its demise in June. As predicted the first spring/summer migrants started to appear with again **Welcome Swallows, Tree and Fairy Martins** among the earliest arrivals. Also reported early in August were good numbers of **Grey Fantails** and **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes**. Though it is always hard to tell whether these had overwintered, the observers noted they had been absent for several months, so perhaps they had moved in from a slightly warmer spot not too far away.

Despite the warming weather during August close to the end of the month there didn't seem to have been a major influx of migrants yet, with there only having been a sprinkling of reports (some quite early) of the first **Pallid Cuckoos, Noisy Friarbirds**, and, towards the end, **Olive-backed Orioles**, calling in the observer's area. To date there have only limited reports of **White-naped** and **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, Dusky Woodswallows, Clamorous Reed Warblers** and **Rufous Whistlers**. Perhaps the most reported species has been the **Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo**; certainly this has been the most conspicuous spring migrant so far in my patch of NW Cooleman Ridge/Narrabundah Hill, with at least 5 present during the weekend of 25-26 August, including a pair about a metre apart in a dead tree giving very pipit-like "chirrup" calls, rather than the characteristic clear, sharp, descending whistle.

Continue to keep an eye and ear out for these earlier arriving spring migrants, particularly those which haven't come in any numbers so far, as well as the **Shining Bronze-Cuckoo**, a bird of more bushy areas with an upwards repeated whistle that can reverse mid call and sound like the Horsfield's. Other migrants to arrive during September are likely to be the **White-throated** and **Western Gerygone** and the **Leaden Flycatcher**, and perhaps some early **Rufous Songlarks** or **White-winged Trillers** (the first of the latter was reported at the end of August).

While spring is only just here, a number of species have already begun breeding, with reports already of the very early nester, the **Yellow-rumped Thornbill**, having dependent young. The **Masked Lapwing** also already has

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Field Trip reports

Far South Coast Outing 9-11 June

On a wet and windy day seven hardy souls arrived at the Scrymgeour's property 'Timbarra' to camp for a weekend of bird watching. Leaving Canberra most of the group possibly wondered where and why they were going down the coast to camp. It turned to be a most enjoyable weekend both bird and weather wise. Six of the group camped while one took the hosts' offer of a room with a double bed in the 'shed'. Another couple stayed at Merimbula and joined us for some of the walks.

The campers were entertained by the **Spangled Drongo** which was in residence at the hosts' farm and also the tame Little Wattlebird which flew down and landed on your shoulder when least expected. The male **Satin Bowerbird**, plus the **Crimson Rosellas**, **King Parrots** and other avian visitors, were a delight to watch.

On Saturday morning the group combined with the Far South Coast Birdwatchers and spent the morning on a property (Watery Fowls) at Wallagoot Lake that had a variety of habitat including lake frontage. The drive to the site included views of **Superb Lyrebirds** running across the road. Here the group saw 55 species with the highlight being some of the closest and best views of a male **Mistletoebird** many had had. There was much discussion when one of the group announced that over the lake there were about 20 **Chestnut Teal** and various Cormorants. There was also a group of what appeared to be **Bar-tailed Godwits**. Some of the group thought that the birds were indeed only foam and much lamenting was done on no one having a telescope. After lunch, a further walk that ended at the beach produced an **Olive-backed Oriole**, **Australian Gannets**, **White-bellied Sea-eagles** and some smaller sea birds that were not identified.

On Sunday morning we drove to Wyndrock on New Buildings Road, Wyndham where the walk along the road netted 28 species, with good views of **Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters** and **Golden Whistlers**. The birds were a bit slow to move because of the cold and indeed it was after 1000hrs that they came to life. We then moved on to a travelling stock reserve at Rocky Hall where there were many birds with good views of more Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters, as well as **Scarlet Robins**. with the highlight being a **Azure Kingfisher** that sat in the sun for all to view its stunning colours.

After lunch we all met at the Panboola Wetlands with its mixture of lagoon, trees, grasslands and salt pan. This project is a huge one that will take much effort and community involvement for it to grow and succeed but will provide an accessible area to view a variety of avian fauna. In the afternoon the group visited the Merimbula boardwalk. This was a dry and windless area where there were many sightings among which was a Striated Heron.

The final morning was spent walking through part of the South East Forests National Park where there were views of **Wonga Pigeons** and some of the group saw **Brown Gerygones**. Two of the group then walked home and were rewarded by good views of a **Rose Robin**.

This was a weekend enjoyed by everyone who attended. The accommodation was superb, the weather was better than that in Canberra and further up the coast and the birding and company was excellent. The nights at the campsite were a delight with the hosts providing a sheltered meeting place with a heater where the group ate and socialised together.

We would all like to thank Lyn and Alan for their hospitality and for showing us some excellent birding spots over the weekend.

John Cummings

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.

Sat-Sun 15-16 September – Mittagong – overnight accommodated/camping

Local COG member, Pamela Morse-Evans will be showing us all her favourite birding spots in this area, which COG has not visited for some time. We'll be travelling down round lunchtime on Saturday and concentrating on waterbirds that afternoon, first visiting the Cecil Hoskins Reserve where a variety of ducks and other waterbirds as well as possibly the **Swamp Harrier** should be seen. If time permits we'll also visit the Wingecarribee Reservoir for waterbirds that prefer deeper water and perhaps the **White-bellied Sea-eagle**.

After staying in Mittagong overnight we'll spend the morning exploring the Box Vale and other tracks to the north of the town where a range of birds including **Origma** (Rock Warbler), **Pilot Bird** and **Bassian Thrush** are likely to be seen, returning to Canberra mid to late afternoon. Another attraction at the time of year will be the spring wildflowers, with especially the Waratah likely to be flowering.

Please register your interest with Jack Holland on 6288 7840 or jack.holland@environment.gov.au, who will be able to provide further information including on the range of accommodation available from which participants will need to make their own bookings. This information has already been sent to all those who have expressed their interest. It is recommended accommodation is arranged as early as possible as it will be tulip time in the Southern Highlands, with advance bookings already significant. It is proposed that there will be the opportunity for a meal together on Saturday evening at one of Pamela's favourite restaurants. Participation in either the Saturday or Sunday program will also be possible.

Midweek walk—Wednesday 19 September

The Wednesday walk for September will be to the Callum Brae component of Canberra Nature Park. Many spring migrants should have returned and the area seems to be a hot spot for parrots. Meet at 9am at the entrance to the area on Narrabundah Lane, approximately 500m from Mugga Lane or, if approaching from the other direction, 1600m from Jerrabomberra Ave. The road is well trafficked so be careful with parking.

29 September - 1 October long weekend – Buddigower Nature Reserve – Camp-out

COG will join Anthony Overs and other Canberra bird-banders for the October long weekend campout at this reserve, near West Wyalong. This will be a bring-everything camp as there are **NO** facilities in the reserve. All rubbish etc will need to be taken out. With care, a conventional vehicle will get in to Buddigower OK. The reserve features a wide range of habitats, from pure Mallee to small areas of heath, extensive areas of Broombush (*Melaleuca*) and ironbark ridges. There are numerous old mineshafts in Buddigower so care needs to be exercised while walking around. The reserve has been severely affected by the drought so birds could be a bit of a potluck assemblage. However most migrants should have returned to the area. Participants will be able to see the local birds in the hand, as the banding crew conducts its operation over the weekend. For those who do not wish to camp, there are motels and caravan parks in town approximately 15 km away. If it has recently been wet, and access to Buddigower is limited we will stay in nearby Charcoal Tank Nature Reserve. Anthony will have further details including directions at the August and September COG meetings. If you can't make the meetings, or wish to register your interest please contact Anthony on 6254 0168 AH or anthony.overs.reps@aph.gov.au.

Green Cape – Monday to Friday 8-12 October – Mid-week accommodated

This mid week trip is a reprise of the very successful COG trips in June 2004 and October 2005. COG has again booked the two duplex cottages associated with the lighthouse, and Peter Fullagar will again be leading. This time it will be the peak of the season for the shearwater migration and he also expects to



**Australian
Ornithological
Services P/L**
PO Box 385
South Yarra 3141
Victoria
Tel: 03 9820 4223
Mob: 04173 10200

enquiries@philipmaher.com

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

see a mix of other sea birds as well as whales close to shore (depending on the weather). In the nearby heath there are some specials such as the **Ground Parrot** and the **Tawny-crowned Honeyeater**, and there is likely to be a range of birds in the woodlands, also close by. Highlights from COG's previous visits include up to four species of shearwaters, five species of albatross, **Brown Skua**, **Black-faced Cormorant**, **Striated Fieldwren**, **Southern Emu-wrens**, not to mention the very tame **Ground Parrot** in June 2004.

The two cottages have been booked for 4 nights. The cottages each hold a maximum of 6 people, consisting of separate rooms, the master bedroom with a queen size bed, one bedroom with two single beds and a double sofa bed in the family/lounge room. There will also be the opportunity to camp at Bittangabee Bay, only 8 km away.

The accommodation costs will be \$125 per person for the 4 nights, including the COG admin fee. The trip is currently fully subscribed and has a short waiting list. To put your name on the waiting list in case of late cancellations, please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@environment.gov.au). The full payment of \$125 (less the \$30 deposit) is due by the COG meeting on 12 September, when further information for participants will also be available.

Frogs' Hole Creek, Frogmore; Saturday to Sunday 13-14 October – 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 over 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 visits over the weekend 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 **Tawny Frogmouth**. A surprise 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 will be encouraged, so if you're interested please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@environment.gov.au).

Coolleman Ridge; Saturday 20 October – 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 Coolleman 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. 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.

Other Surveys/Activities of Interest to COG Members

Birdfair 2007 15-18 November 2007

Our disappearing woodland birds – their future conservation—See advert on page 6 of this *Gang-gang* for details.

(Continued from page 1)

produced young, with those in the Chapman horse paddocks much easier to see this year due to the very short grass, their presence being alerted by the alarm calls and vigorous swooping of their parents. The **Australian Magpie** has also started breeding with quite a few reports of early swooping, and there have been a number of reports of **White-winged Choughs** nest building. **Red Wattlebirds**, another increasingly earlier nester, have also begun breeding.

As noted last month please make sure that all your significant sightings are provided to the Records Management Team so they can be considered for the 2007-2008 Annual Bird Report. To help with this process a condensed and slightly amended version of the overheads I produced on “What Birds are Worth Reporting” for the August COG meeting is contained elsewhere in this newsletter. Note that this has been incorporated into a larger document on COG’s Observations Records that will be loaded onto the COG web site.

Jack Holland

Mulligan's Flat Survey Sunday 23 September

Notice to regular volunteers, the woodland survey will be on Sunday 23 September, meeting at the reserve carpark at 7.15am. Due to a crush of other events and the need to avoid the following long weekend, this is the only possible Sunday within the woodland survey period. I will email those on my volunteers list as a reminder. Please let me know if you are available by phone or email. Jenny Bounds, ph 62887802.

COG'S BIRD BLITZ 2007—27-28 October

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, Gooroyarroo, as well as many spots in the Brindabellas and Namadgi NP. Check out the map and find your own challenge!

2008 Field Trips Program

This will be put together over the next couple of months, 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).

AUSTRALIAN BIRDFAIR

15-18 NOVEMBER 2007



*Our disappearing woodland birds –
their future conservation.*

The annual Australian Birdwatching Fair will be held in Leeton, Southern NSW in November 2007. The Birdfair will comprise of a number of different activities and events, along with indigenous and local art, music and trade exhibitors. Key activities include:

- Flights of Fivebough – Meet and greet BBQ held at Fivebough Wetland. While being able to enjoy the spectacle of 1000's of Glossy Ibis and Whiskered Terns come to roost together with the many 1000's of other waterbirds.
- An evening with Sean Dooley, comedian, author and avid birdwatcher. Sean will host a bird quiz night with a difference.
- Professor David Lindenmayer will speak on habitat restoration and conservation of woodland birds.
- Organised bird watching tours to a number of iconic sites within the region.
- Seminars and lecturers on topics relating to birds, nature, photography, management of gardens to enhance bird life, children's workshops and activities and much more.



*Photographs courtesy
of David Kleinert and
Fivebough-Tuckerbil
Wetland Trust*

Fivebough and Tuckerbil Wetlands are located a short distance from Leeton, in the Lower Murrumbidgee region. The Lower Murrumbidgee region has recorded over 270 species of birds in varied habitats, from Riverine Forests to Grasslands, to Mallee and various Woodland communities.

An invitation is extended to potential exhibitors wishing to be involved in the Birdfair. For more information on submitting an expression of interest please contact events@leetontourism.com.au.

For more information, please contact:

Leeton Tourism on (02) 6953 6481, Fivebough and Tuckerbil Wetlands Trust, P.O. Box 357 Leeton, NSW 2705 Australia.

Email: Trust@fivebough.org.au or visit www.australianbirdfair.org.au





**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.

Most of all 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!

Bird calls!

Peter Fullagar and a small team of assistants are about to begin a project updating and extending COG's "Bird Calls of the ACT" CD. The new edition will be a two CD set, incorporating new calls and a few updated calls for some species. COG recently contributed to the purchase of some new recording equipment for the project (other equipment has been supplied by Peter Fullagar, Ed Slater and CSIRO). There are two sets of equipment; one will be kept by Anthony Overs on the northside, and one by Harvey Perkins on the southside of town. The team is looking for one or two more people who are passionate about bird calls and are interested in recording calls for the project. If you think you might like to be involved please contact Anthony Overs on 6254 0168 (H) or anthony.overs.reps@aph.gov.au.

News from the Committee

If members have any ideas for trips or outings they would like to see in the 2008 program, please contact Trips Coordinator Anthony Overs (Anthony Overs aovers@grapevine.net.au or 6254 0168) or President Jack Holland (jack.holland@environment.gov.au or 6288 7840 AH).

Work has commenced on the digitisation of Canberra Bird Notes, so all issues can be made available on the COG website. Many thanks are due to Alistair Smith who has started this work. Although a time-consuming task because of the variable paper and print quality of the very early issues, good progress is being made, and some interesting information is emerging. It will not be news to long-time members that the first issue, in 1968, recorded the existence of a small group of crested pigeons near the crematorium. Members were asked to "keep a good lookout and report any other local sightings so that we can accurately record what may well be an increase in numbers and extension of range" for a species rare in Canberra at the time.

The Conservation Council and the Ginninderra Catchment Group are holding a 'Bush on the Boundary' Expo in Gungahlin on November 18. Are there any members keen to become involved with this project - we are looking for a coordinator and some helpers for COG's involvement. If you are interested please contact cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au or call Sandra Henderson on 6231 0303 (AH).

COG's Annual General Meeting will be held at the start of the October COG meeting on 10 October. A notice about the meeting is published elsewhere in this issue.

Nicki Taws will be making a presentation at the Leeton Birdfair in November about COG's Woodland Project. Jenny Bounds will collaborate in preparation of the presentation.

COG is a member of the new Limestone Plains Group, which intends to advocate for responsible and ecologically informed management of grassy ecosystems.

COG provided input to the recently released Lake Burley Griffin Willows Management Plan (see http://www.molonglocatchment.com.au/Projects/LBGWMP_download.htm for access to the online version)

UNDERSTANDING BIRDS

Learn to think like a bird!

An ANU Centre for Continuing Education course with COG member and 'Avian Whimsy' author Ian Fraser



Six two-hour sessions covering evolution, structure, ecology, behaviour, habitats, bird-watching tools and techniques.

No knowledge assumed, lots of illustrative slides.

Discussion of the issues encouraged!

Tuesdays, 6.30pm, 25 September - 30 October.

Also two 3-hour field trips.

For further details and booking, contact the CCE on 6125 2892 or enquiries.cce@anu.edu.au

Notice of COG Annual General Meeting

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, 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

WHAT BIRDS ARE WORTH REPORTING?

• ALL records are valuable

• HOWEVER, some are potentially more important

than others – if they fill in gaps in our knowledge of local birds, or if they come from infrequently surveyed areas.

• AND judgment is required, so as not to overload COG's databases.

The preferred survey method is the 20-min 2-ha survey; area surveys are also very valuable; 'incidental records' are only desirable for one-off observations of **significance** when a 'proper' survey is not possible.

HINTS ON WHAT IS A 'SIGNIFICANT' INCIDENTAL RECORD

- birds seen out of season (e.g. Rufous Songlark in winter; Flame Robin in the lowlands in summer)
- arrival and departure dates of migrants in your area
- birds whose status is 'migrant/resident' (e.g. Grey Fantail, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike)
- birds seen in unusual numbers (e.g. more than 2 Grey Currawongs, more than 2 raptors)
- birds seen in unusual locations (e.g. Powerful Owl in the Botanic Gardens)
- most breeding records, especially unseasonal ones
- threatened species or those known to be declining
- vagrants.

HINTS ON WHAT NOT TO REPORT

- daily presence records – first and last observations are sufficient, and maximum or any unusual numbers in between
- daily breeding records – a record for each stage of the breeding process (nest building, on nest, feeding young etc) suffices
- daily surveys of the same spot – once a fortnight for general records is sufficient, supplemented with incidental records of anything of **significance** that happens in between.

WHERE TO FIND OUT MORE

COG's website www.canberrabirds.org.au – see the *Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Australian Capital Territory*; and the Rarities Panel list of unusual birds in the broader COG area of concern.

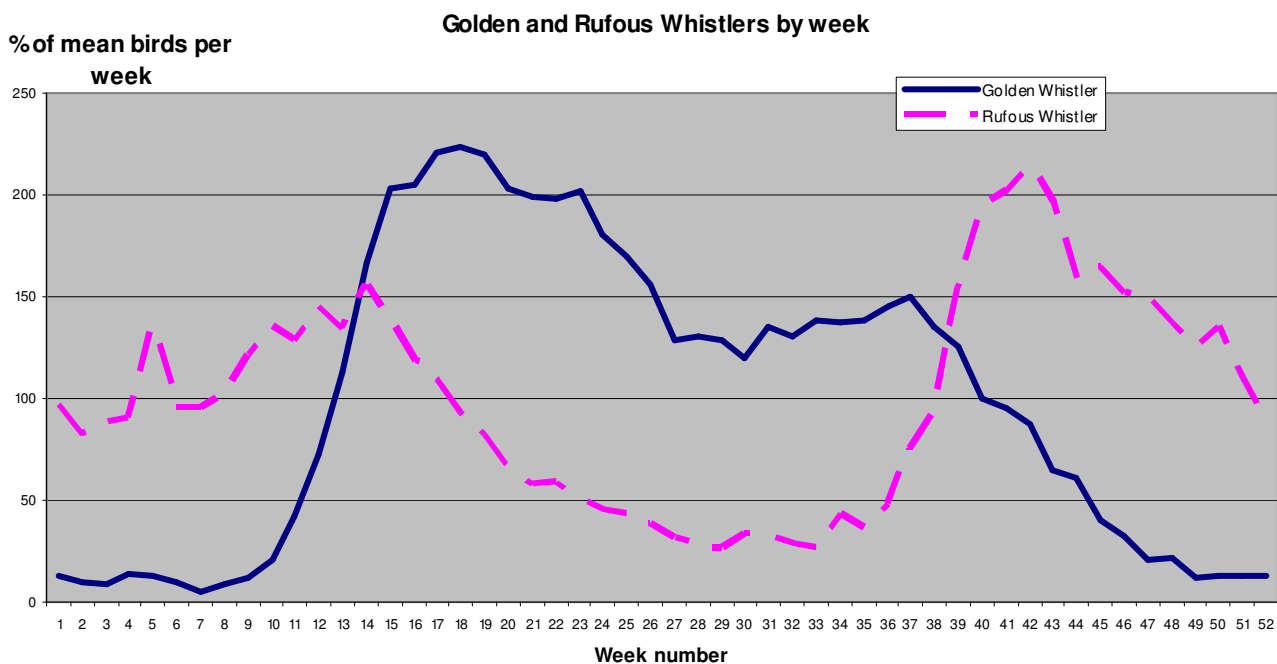
COG's annual bird report (most recent in *Canberra Bird Notes 32 (1) March 2007*).

Garden Bird Survey Notes

Sightings relevant to the Garden Bird Survey mentioned on the Chatline have included: a male Rose Robin in Florey (followed a week later by a female of that species); 15 Red Wattlebirds overflying Jerrabomberra as had some small flocks of other, unidentified, honeyeaters; a male crescent honeyeater in Kambah; a **Peregrine Falcon** in Hoskintown.

Generally it seems that migration is well underway and the first reports of breeding activity are being noised about.

One of the features of migration is the return of Rufous Whistlers to the COG area of interest and the departure of Golden Whistlers to the higher elevations. An index compiled from the 25 year GBS data is illustrated in the graph below, showing a crossing point in the last week of September.



During the month I provided GBS information about **Glossy Black-cockatoos** to assist the nomination of this species as threatened.

Kay Hahne, Anne Hall and myself are now well into the process of entering the data from the 68 Charts we have received so far for this year. At the risk of boring everyone, if you still have a Chart for Year 26 please let me know as soon as possible.

Martin Butterfield

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

COG SALES

- **The Long Paddock:** A Directory of Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves in NSW - Rural Lands Protection Board - \$31.00
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Avian Whimsy #56 —

Birds in Words

“One moment they will be flying down the light, a cloud of grey ghosts barely visible against the eastern sky. Then in a flash they will wheel around towards the sun; and it seems for all the world as if a new flock had suddenly come into being, as though solid bird bodies had been created out of nothing but the thin air and the sunset colours.” Francis Ratcliffe was an ecologist, Canberra-based for many years, and a very fine one too. *Flying Fox and Drifting Sand*, published in 1938, is a true classic of Australian natural history writing. To give you an idea of when I first bought it (new) and read it, the price sticker on the front says ‘\$2.50’. (Well, at least it’s decimal!) It’s been well-thumbed through the decades since. Ratcliffe was not an ornithologist, but his glorious evocation of Galahs is one of the finest examples of the Australian natural history writer’s art. He weaves a living flock with words, and we can see and hear it.

Too often natural history writing has not been regarded as true literature, which has been a source of exasperation to me down the years. For some time the Canberra Times relegated such natural history reviews as they published to the science pages, not the literary ones.

Yet the best of it doesn’t need to be categorised, as if we’re saying “it’s good – given that it’s only natural history writing” (or indeed “...crime writing”, “...biography” etc). Good evocative writing is good writing, irrespective of the genre. Much good writing ostensibly about natural history is no such thing; I don’t mean that it’s not good writing, but it’s really about us and is ‘using’ the birds as metaphor, without knowing them. The excellent and now venerable collection *Australia Wildlife Stories* edited by Bill Wannan back in 1970 is very much a case in point. Not one of the apparent bird stories is really about birds – but then they don’t actually claim to be.

I’m talking of writing about birds for their own sake, by a skilled wordsmith who really knows the birds. For me, the late and missed Graham Pizzey is probably the doyen. His beautiful collection *Journey of a Lifetime* is one of my favourite reads. We can taste the salt and feel the wind’s bite in his summoning of a Wandering Albatross. “... a great hump-backed white bird like a flying cross was sailing low across the face of a moving mountain of water. ...as the huge grey-green wall of water began to break at the top, it swept effortlessly up on the wave’s updraught, high up over the toppling white crest, rolled over onto the other wingtip and went rushing down into the next long, foam-streaked wave-valley, still without moving its wings.” He *knows* the bird and the wave and the wind and has the words at his fingertips. How I envy and admire him!

As I do the craft of Tim Flannery, another great Australian observer and writer (not to mention of course his science!). In the brilliantly conceived and developed *Astonishing Animals* (also featuring Peter Schouten’s beautiful paintings) Flannery with exquisite terseness brings to pulsating life animals which most of us can never and will never see. Consider some birds of paradise (I am limiting myself to writings of Australian birds, but remember that it’s only an accident of timing which sees New Guinea temporarily separated from the rest of Australia by sea). Blue Bird of Paradise; “... he flexes, sending waves of blue and violet shimmering through his feathers. At the centre of his chest is a dark oval patch lined on its lower margin with red. This is rhythmically expanded and contracted so that it resembles a huge, slowly expanding eye whose effect, even on humans, is hypnotic.” And the call of the King of Saxony; “... a buzzing, fizzling sound resembling that made by a malfunctioning electric motor”. I’ll probably never see those birds – but I think I now know what it would be like.

Humour is another aspect of this topic too, and one which really merits its own Whimsy. Brevity is essential in field guides, which leads to some unexpected smiles. I was delighted to see, in Stevenson and Fanshawe’s *Field Guide to the Birds of East Africa*, the Black-casqued Wattled Hornbill described as a ‘stonking great hornbill’. And I check anxiously in each edition of Pizzey and Knight to confirm that the Blue-winged Kookaburra’s call is still described as ‘appalling’.

Another Whimsy too must host an introduction to the rich field of Australian bird poetry.

Communicating our passion for birds, our reactions to them, searching for the right words to express colour and sound and movement – it’s often a struggle that can leave us exhausted and frustrated. But when someone does it successfully, oh what a joy it is.

Ian Fraser ianf@pcug.org.au



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At The Crossing

White cockatoo on a lower bough;
Australian raven is closing now.
Cockatoo softly drops to the ground,
Spreads one wing,
Lies itself down,
And gently dies in
The afternoon sun.

Next newsletter

September deadline

Wednesday 26 September 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.

COG info

President

Jack Holland, ph 6288 7840 (h)

Email: jack.holland@environment.gov.au

Vice President

Chris Davey, ph 6254 6324

Treasurer

Lia Battisson ph 6231 0147

Secretary

Sandra Henderson ph 6231 0303

cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au

Address for correspondence

The Secretary
COG, PO Box 301
Civic Square, ACT 2608

Newsletter distribution

Judy Collett and helpers

Membership inquiries

Sandra Henderson ph 6262 1481 (w)

membership@canberrabirds.org.au

for changed address or other details

Gang-gang editors

Sue Lashko and Greg Ramsay

ph 6286 1564

Email: 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.

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.

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Editor Canberra Bird Notes

CBN@canberrabirds.org.au



Gang-gang

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Canberra Ornithologists Group, Inc.
PO Box 301, Civic Square ACT 2608

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