

### *Destruction or modification of habitat in distant areas*

It is striking that many of the birds with diminishing survey records are summer migrants. A possible reason for the decrease in their records is a change in their circumstances in areas where they overwinter, or in areas along their migration flight-path. However, it is difficult to pinpoint any particular reason for any one species. Nevertheless, the large-scale destruction of woodland habitat in Queensland in recent years could well be having a telling effect on summer migrant numbers.

Even an apparently small decrease in the number of records of Yellow-faced and White-naped Honeyeaters is a matter for concern. The Yellow-faced Honeyeater in particular moves through Canberra in spring and autumn, moving to and from the forests in the ranges west of Canberra. While the 2003 bushfires did immense damage, the burnt areas are recovering and bird numbers are building up. These ranges, being mostly in national parks, provide a secure habitat for these birds. There are no other apparent local reasons for any decrease in their records.



David Cook

Rufous Whistlers are summer migrants that are decreasing in number. It is difficult to identify the reasons for this decline.

### *Predation*

There is no direct evidence from the survey records of the effects of predation on bird numbers, although it is clear from anecdotal evidence that, during the breeding season, Pied Currawongs take nestlings of many garden birds. It is interesting to note however that the Superb Fairy-wren and White-browed Scrubwren, species vulnerable to predation by Pied Currawongs and cats, appear to be increasing in numbers in Canberra gardens, rather than declining. This is perhaps due to increasingly dense understories developing in many gardens as they mature. This could be particularly true of the gardens of people who complete the Garden Bird Survey chart every year. An interest in birds is most likely closely associated with an interest in a bird-rich garden.

Another aspect of predation is the trapping of pest species to remove them from the area. The Canberra Indian Myna Action Group (CIMAG) is an active group devoted to removing the Common Myna. Since the introduction of trapping in Canberra suburbs, the number of Common Mynas has reduced significantly, as indicated by the abundance graph on page 70.

### *Competition for nesting sites*

Despite the spectacular increase in the records of Common Mynas, an aggressive species which vigorously competes for nesting hollows, there appears to be little effect on the numbers of other species using similar nesting sites. Certainly there are many observations, and studies by Pell and Tidemann, indicating that Mynas displace Crimson and Eastern Rosellas and other parrots from nest hollows. However, the survey indicates that the records of the Red-rumped Parrot, the Galah, and Crimson and Eastern Rosellas are not declining. Of the 228 species recorded in Canberra gardens, 101 have been recorded as breeding there.



Julian Robinson

Brown Treecreepers have been declared vulnerable in the ACT

### *Competition for food*

Canberra gardens and surrounding woodland and grassland provide a rich supply of food for birds in most seasons. The great increase in numbers of two ground-feeders, the Common Myna and the Crested Pigeon, may have some impact on Red-rumped Parrots or even Australian Magpie-larks. Starlings, another ground-feeder, generally leave the suburbs for surrounding grasslands to feed, so are less open to competition for food. Magpie-lark and Common Blackbird records have been decreasing since 2000, but this coincides with the decrease in Common Mynas. It also coincides with extended dry periods and water restrictions that could reduce the food supply for these species.

### *Disease*

There appears to be little evidence that disease is the cause of the decrease in the number of records of any of the birds surveyed. Beak and Feather Disease is occasionally observed in Sulphur-crested Cockatoos but there is no indication that overall numbers are affected.

### *In summary*

It is possible only to speculate on probable causes of species decrease in Canberra gardens. However, the fact that so many species are in decline should be a matter of concern for everyone interested in the environment. We must take a particular interest in this issue, and work together to reverse the trend. To this end, COG will continue to collect data through the Garden Bird Survey.