



PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2014-15

The period from December 2014 to November 2015 has been a busy one for COG. Together with all our usual activities, COG has been formally recognized for its significant contribution to conservation efforts in the ACT region that have benefitted our birds. This has built on the success of COG's 50th Anniversary held in 2014.

COG Committee

COG has been very well-served by a dedicated and enthusiastic Committee and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the 11 members of the 2014-15 Committee for all their efforts. The Executive consisted of Neil Hermes as Vice-president, Alan Thomas as Secretary and Lia Battisson as Treasurer. Jenny Bounds continued as Conservation Officer, Chris Davey was responsible for surveys, Sue Lashko continued as editor of Gang-gang, meeting-room organizer and Outings Officer, Julian Robinson managed the Website, Julie McGuinness took on the task of managing COG storage issues, and Bruce Lindenmayer and Stuart Rae supported the Committee across a range of issues.

Particular thanks are due to two Committee members who are standing down - Alan Thomas, who is retiring as Committee Secretary, and Stuart Rae as member of the Committee. Both have been stalwart supporters of and contributors to the Committee.

As well as Committee members, we have been well served by a number of other members who have provided invaluable service to COG: Jack Holland who is responsible for the members' meetings speakers program, Michael Lenz for Canberra Bird Notes, Duncan McCaskill for the Garden Bird Survey, Barbara Allan for the Bird Blitz and the Rarities Panel, Nicki Taws who is the COG Records Officer, and Kathy Walter and John Goldie for managing the sales desk. A particular vote of thanks goes to Paul Fennell for managing the COG database. Paul has now stood down from this role and we thank Paul for all his efforts and valuable contribution over many years to this important area of COG business.

COG Membership

There are currently 273 members of COG with 73 new members joining during the year. To all our members, you are a vital part of our organisation and your support for COG is very much appreciated.

Special Recognition of COG

COG has received special recognition through 2015 in the following awards:

- **Keep Australia Beautiful – Sustainable Cities Award 2015**

COG was an entrant in the ACT Keep Australia Beautiful – Sustainable Cities Award in the Nature Conservation Category and was awarded winner in both the category and as outright winner for the ACT Award. This is a significant recognition of the valuable role that COG plays in the conservation of ACT region birds and our winning this ACT award was quite unexpected.

Special thanks are due to Alan Thomas and Neil Hermes who worked on the Submission with me and to all those COG members and representatives of other organisations with which we work, for their participation in the judging day held with the National Judge on 21 October 2015 when we were able to showcase COG and its activities.

We are now in the judging for the National Award and this will be announced on the night of 13 November in Brisbane.

- **ACT Conservation Council Environment Awards 2015**

COG was invited to make a submission to the Act Conservation Council for consideration of an environmental award in a Group Category for making a significant contribution to protecting the environment. COG was the winner of this category as announced at the Act Conservation Council Spring Mingle on 30 October 2015.

COG works closely with the Act Conservation Council on a range of issues affecting our birds and such recognition for the effort COG contributes on a wide range of matters to assist the ACT Conservation Council in protecting our birds and their habitats is very welcome.

Working with other Organisations

Over the period December 2014 to November 2015 COG has worked with a number of other organisations on bird-related issues including:

The ACT Conservation Council

COG continued its long standing collaboration with the Conservation Council in relation to a range of planning and development matters which impact on bird habitats and movement corridors, Molonglo Valley and West Belconnen being the main ones. COG continues to support the Council in its efforts to progress cat containment across the ACT; while the ACT has declared new development areas on a site by site basis, progress has been slow at the political level in relation to retro-fitting suburbs next to high priority conservation reserves (eg Casey near Kinleyside, Harrison near Mulligans/Goorooyarro), and a broader phased-in program.

The Woodlands and Wetlands Trust

COG continues to support the reintroduction project of the Bush Stone-curlew at Mulligans Flat Woodlands Sanctuary run by the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust. Both financial and volunteer support has been provided by COG. It is wonderful that some members have been able to record the birds within the Sanctuary.

BIGnet

COG participated in the 12 April meeting of BIGnet Bird interest groups in NSW) held in Megalong in the Blue Mountains and hosted by the Blue Mountains Bird Observers. Jenny Bounds attended the meeting on behalf of COG. Chris Davey and Neil Hermes attended on behalf of COG the September BIGnet meeting held on 5-6 September at the Central Coast

Wetlands at Tuggerah, NSW. COG and BIGnet work on a number of issues relating to the conservation of birds and their habitat.

The COG website

The revitalised COG website continues to attract increasing usage. I would like to thank Julian Robinson for his ongoing efforts in maintaining the Website.

Average usage rose from 200 visits a day at the beginning of the (financial) year to 260 a day at the end of the year. This reflects increasing use of the website as a primary source of information about COG and its activities, including for administrative and archival information.

The COG Database – the past, present and future

On 19 September 2015, about twenty COG members with a particular interest in the collection, recording, management and distribution of COG's significant and important databases were invited to attend a workshop. The workshop was convened by Vice President Neil Hermes.

The group included many COG Committee members without database backgrounds. They used the workshop as opportunity to understand the challenges facing COG and its management of databases. The core message was that the world has completely changed from a paper-based/analogue one to device/digital one and this has major implications for COG's role as a data manager and publisher.

The group noted that there was a time from the 1960s when COG was virtually the only source of bird information in the COG area of interest (AOI - ACT plus region including Goulburn, Bredbo Captains Flat and Wee Jasper.) COG had the ability to set rules to assure the quality of the all data. COG also largely determined how and when the data was published or released.

The world has now moved on and COG's role has changed.

A number of challenges will need to be addressed by future COG Committees including the costs of maintaining databases, changing databases formats, archiving, the wide range of other recording platforms available to COG and non-COG members to record bird information in the COG AOI. The future management of historical data will also be a priority as will be the management of surveys using non-standard survey methods. Dealing with the fact that future bird data for Canberra, depending on source, will be of variable quality, will be a new challenge.

Bird watchers now have many data recording platforms to choose from for private and public data purposes. These platforms are changing rapidly with eBird one of the fastest growing at present. Birdlife Australia has indicated it will be releasing a new data portal in 2016.

None of these issues have simple or singular resolutions. The new 2016 Committee will need to continue the process of addressing the issues raised in the workshop. I would like to thank Neil Hermes, Steve Wallace, Michael Robbins, Chris Davey, Paul Fennell and Julian Robinson for all their work on the database.

Conservation

Jenny Bounds has continued as Conservation Officer this year, with input on some matters by Chris Davey and myself. The main achievements/issues this year are as follows.

Nomination of the Scarlet Robin

COG's nomination of the Scarlet Robin as a 'vulnerable' species in the ACT was accepted by the ACT Government. The nomination was supported by analyses of the COG Woodland Project data.

ACT Woodland Restoration Program

COG provided input to the ACT Woodland Restoration Program, on particular areas to enhance bird habitat (eg Jerrabomberra West and Callum Brae reserves). COG has also provided input, including bird lists, to the draft management plans for offsets sites in Gungahlin (Kinleyside and Throsby). COG is represented (by Jenny) in a working group to develop the expanded Mulligans Flat Sanctuary in the Throsby neck.

Travelling Stock Route (TSR) 48 near Gunning

COG recently wrote to the Local Land Services in Yass regarding the values of TSR 48 near Gunning, a site of long standing interest to COG with records of 13 NSW listed bird species, including Painted Honeyeater and Superb Parrot (both listed by the Commonwealth). Of particular concern is that TSRs across NSW are facing new management arrangements with possible long-term grazing leases, and bird groups are worried that the change from low-level, intermittent grazing will impact on the habitat values for birds. COG also sent a submission in response to the draft State Planning Framework for NSW TSRs, which significantly under-emphasizes conservation/environmental values. Other NSW bird groups within the BIGnet network are also putting in submissions on this important matter for bird habitats in NSW.

Register of Environmental Organisations

COG put in a submission to the Inquiry into the administration and transparency of the Register of Environmental Organisations. COG highlighted the importance of its conservation fund (tax-deductible donations) to assist on- ground field and research work on birds, and the need for such funds to be able to continue.

Phase 1 development of the new suburb of Throsby

As this report is prepared, the ACT Government has cleared mature eucalypts to make way for phase 1 of the new suburb of Throsby (abutting Mulligans Flat and Gorooyaroo Nature Reserves), notwithstanding that a nest with Superb Parrot young has recently been found in a tree within the proposed development area. COG has made representations to the ACT Conservator of Flora and Fauna, and has asked for a stay until the breeding season is over. COG has opposed urban development immediately adjacent to the Throsby Ridge Superb Parrot nesting colony, due to factors such as loss of mature trees across the landscape and the need for a reasonable buffer from urban edge related impacts. We remain concerned about the future of the Throsby breeding site and the pressures from a closer urban edge.

Surveys and record management

The period October 2014 to November 2015 has been a very busy one for COG survey efforts. These are a very important part of COG's work and enhance our credibility as a valued source of reliable data and information about birds in the ACT and surrounding region.

Many thanks to all those COG members who have contributed to the 50th Anniversary Bird of the Year Project- Gang-gang Cockatoo which ended in March 2015. Results are still being analysed

with presentations so far given to the Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens and at a Citizen Science Forum held in Canberra in July.

Woodland Bird Monitoring Project

Our long running survey at 15 locations (142 monitoring points) is now in its 21st year at Mulligans Flat, and a milestone has just been reached with 10 years data at Kama NR, the last location to be added to the project. There is now 10 years or more survey data at all sites. Next year, discussions should start about doing a major data analysis. Jenny Bounds coordinates the project with input from Alison Rowell, Nicki Taws and Chris Davey. The project would not be possible without the commitment of the team of site coordinators and their helpers who do the surveys four times a year, so thanks are due to all involved.

Garden Bird Survey

The Canberra Garden Bird Survey completed its 34th year of continuous operation, with charts completed for about 65 sites. Thanks to all the observers and thanks to Anne Hall and Barbara Allan for assistance with data entry.

Mulligans Flat/Goorooyaroo Surveys

The ANU survey that is conducted at Mulligans Flat/Goorooyaroo twice yearly in Spring and Autumn involves COG members assisting in data collection. This year a Black-eared Cuckoo was recorded in the survey at Mulligans Flat.

The COG Blitz

The Blitz was run for the 10th year this year, in the weekend of 24-25 October, with Barbara Allan yet again managing this most valuable of surveys. From Barbara's interim report, she is expecting it to be a most successful blitz. Some 167 bird species were recorded, with 66 breeding. Particular highlights include so far: the Powerful Owl (Turner), Cicadabird (Old Boboyan Rd), Bush Stone-curlew (Mulligans), Black-eared Cuckoo (Mulligans), White-fronted Chat (Nth Weston ponds), Crescent Honeyeater (Bendora Ck) and Hooded Robin (Glendale). Our thanks are due to Barbara for her sterling efforts in making the Blitz both a valuable survey and source of enjoyment for all who enjoy bird watching.

Kosciuszko to Coast (K2C) bird surveys

Nicki Taws has again been responsible for running the COG contribution to the Kosciuszko to Coast (K2C) bird surveys in April and again in October covering 23 properties in the area between Williamsdale and Bredbo.

Other projects that COG has been involved with includes the annual Superb Lyrebird survey at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, quarterly bird surveys at the Jerrabomberra Wetlands run on behalf of the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust and providing input to the Common Myna control project at Mulligans Flat Nature Reserve run by the Canberra Indian Myna Action Group (CIMAG).

Records Management

Essential support for the COG database is provided by the Records Officer, Nicki Taws, while data entry continues to be performed by Tony Harding and many others. The Rarities Panel, consisting of Richard Allen, Jenny Bounds, Grahame Clark, Dick Schodde and Nicki Taws, with Barbara Allan as secretary, continues to vet unusual records.

Canberra Nature Map'

COG has become a partner in the web-based project 'Canberra Nature Map'. The Map originally intended to document and map local plants but this has now been extended to encompass fauna, including birds. At this stage the project is still under development but we view the site as a means of providing information to the general public on the birds of the local region using records from the COG database.

Outings

Once again COG has been able to run a very comprehensive outings program in 2014-15 and I would like to thank Sue Lashko for her efforts in making this a great success for the year.

Thirty-eight field trips were held with an increased number of mid-week trips being a popular addition to the programme. We birded on foot and by bus, boat and bike. Special thanks must go to members who volunteered to lead outings, including those who have done so for many years.

In addition to the scheduled outings, the ad hoc group who have organised the Wednesday walks have once again operated most successfully and have managed to attract a most enthusiastic and intrepid group of followers with outings taking place each month of the year, notwithstanding some very testing weather conditions. On behalf of COG members our thanks to Martin Butterfield, Michael Robbins and others for organising these events.

Gang-gang

Our particular thanks go to Sue Lashko and Gail Neumann for their excellent efforts in the editing, layout and publishing of our newsletter. Gang-gang is a great source of information and news and members may not be aware of the work that goes into producing the newsletter every month. I would like to thank Dianne Davey for her efforts with the distribution of the newsletter and Canberra Bird Notes.

We are looking for someone to write a regular column and/or members to write occasional columns on bird related topics - a favourite species or family, a favourite birding spot, a recent trip or some other item of interest to members. Please let Sue Lashko know if you would like to exercise your writing skills and add to the interesting contributions in Gang-gang.

Communications and Publications

Canberra Bird Notes.

Michael Lenz, Editor of the Canberra Bird Notes, did a wonderful job with the Special Edition of the Canberra Notes celebrating our 50th Year. It is a great reflection over COG's 50 years and a source of valuable information for newer members of COG about our history. I would like to thank Michael for his work as Editor of this edition and Volume 40 (June 2015) and all those who have contributed to CBN over the past year. Particular appreciation is also due to Paul Fennell and Steve Wallace for their work on the Annual Bird Report.

CanberraBirds email announcement and discussion list

At the end of the year the CanberraBirds email announcement and discussion list had 310 subscribers, a 14 percent increase on the same time last year. The list, managed by David McDonald, continues to provide a useful forum for people to discuss the birds of the Canberra

region, their environments, and COG's activities. New subscribers, including people new to birding who seek support from more experienced birders, are welcome to subscribe. During the year there were approximately 4,600 emails distributed over the list, an average of about 12 per day, twice the number distributed last year.

Monthly meetings

I would like to thank Jack Holland for arranging another most interesting year of both local and interstate speakers at the COG monthly meetings in 2014-15. The calibre of speakers that we are privileged to hear makes the members' meetings a pleasure to attend. It is highly informative to hear from a range of students and the research work that they are doing on birds.

Our appreciation to all those who have assisted with the provision of the refreshments that follow the monthly meetings, and to Sandra Henderson for taking on the responsibility of providing the raffle prizes and selling the tickets. All of these add to the enjoyment of the occasions and provide opportunity for members to socialise.

Canberra Birds Conservation Fund (CBCF)

The Fund, established in the year 2000, is a tax deductible gift recipient, and members and friends of COG are encouraged to donate to it. During the year, the Fund provided support to one project that contributed to the achievement of its conservation objectives.

The grant, the fourteenth since the inception of the Fund, was made to Ms Virginia Abernathy. It supported the second year of her doctoral research at ANU into the rate of coevolution between the Pacific Koel and its hosts.

The Committee of Management of the Fund (Dr Penny Olsen, Geoffrey Dabb & David McDonald) invites enquiries from people seeking financial support for projects that are consistent with its environmental objectives. Although almost all the projects funded to date have been academic research, the Fund can support any projects that encourage interest in, and develop knowledge of, the birds of the Canberra region; promote and co-ordinate the study of birds; and/or promote the conservation of native birds and their habitats in the Canberra region. COG members are encouraged to promote the Canberra Birds Conservation Fund, encouraging friends and businesses alike to make tax-deductible donations to it in the interests of the birds of the Canberra region, and their environments.

Summary

I would like to extend a very sincere thank-you to all those who have actively contributed over the year to COG. 2014-15 has been a busy and productive year and one that has seen COG recognised for its effectiveness as an organisation dedicated to the conservation and enjoyment of birds. Particular thanks to all who have assisted me in my role as President over the year.

Looking forward to reporting on COG matters in the coming year, we will be advised about the Sustainable Cities National Awards and how COG fares. We will also be able to report on the ongoing work needed on the COG database, our involvement with the Canberra Nature Map, and the award of the Steve Wilson Medal for 2015 and the forthcoming AGM.

Alison Russell-French
President
9 November 2015