

## President's Report 2011-12

It is with pleasure that I present my fifth President's Report covering the 12 month period October 2011 to September 2012.

### **Forward Plan**

As in the past the Committee's activities have been guided by the COG Forward Plan which was revisited and then published in the May 2012 Gang-gang.

Progress has occurred on various fronts. In particular I would like to mention the following:

1) Updating the COG website

As indicated in my last President's Report, we had some difficulties in sourcing a company that would take on the job of updating the website. I am glad to say that this problem was solved in December and after much activity by various members we are now at the stage of delivery of a 'Beta' version of the new site. This means that the structure and 'feel' of the site is in place but it is now up to a group of COG members to revise texts and set the words in place. At this stage I am not prepared to say when the site will go live but hopefully soon. One feature of the new site will be a Members Only area. I would particularly like to thank Julian Robinson for driving this project which has been complex, difficult and at times frustrating.

2) Developing the COG database

This project has been particularly frustrating but there has been progress. Presentations by Alastair Smith representing Eremaea, staff from the Atlas of Living Australia and Andrew Silcocks from Birdlife Australia have all been very useful in helping a group of members to determine options available to develop the COG system for collecting, recording and reporting bird observations. The complex situation with on-line and bulk reporting of observations from various survey types and the different requirements for data input and output has led to much discussion on whether to continue to develop and improve the present database or whether to put our faith in the hands of external groups. The project remains on-going but in the meantime the present database continues to serve us well

3) Recording local bird calls

To my knowledge there has been no activity in the area of bird sound recording. A couple of years ago COG was donated and then purchased additional equipment for the recording of bird calls but to date this activity has not been taken up by the COG membership. I would urge anyone with an interest in this area to contribute so that we can add further calls to the photo gallery located on the COG website.

4) Improving sets of display material

This is an on-going area of improvement. I am particularly pleased that we were able to finalise an update to the COG logo. The logo first appeared on

the May 2012 Gang-gang and appears to have been widely accepted by the membership. I would again like to thank Julian Robinson for all his work in driving this project

After much activity on the part of Michael Robbins a revised COG Observation Record Sheet was recently finalised and is now available in both hard copy and on the web. Geoffrey Alves and Steve Wallace provided much input into improving the look of the new datasheet which with a larger font size and improved layout is now much easier to read.

### **Committee**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the 12 members of the 2011-12 Committee. The Executive consisted of Alison Russell-French as Vice-president, Sandra Henderson, who completed her sixth year as Secretary and Noel Luff as Treasurer. Jenny Bounds continued as Conservation Officer with help from Alison and me. Sue Lashko continued as editor of Gang-gang and meeting-room organiser. During the year Michael Robbins took on the role of Outings Officer but due to family commitments had to retire for this position in December and Sue kindly stepped in to replace him. As mentioned previously Michael Robbins has been busy with the redesign of the 'COG Observation Record' data sheets. Lia Battison was able to stand in for the Treasurer whilst he was away for a number of months. Many thanks also to Bruce Lindenmayer, Peter Ormay, Mark Clayton and Stuart Rae for their contributions to the working of the 2011-12 Committee.

### **Conservation**

The many items of conservation concern have this year been dealt with by a sub-committee consisting of Jenny Bounds, Alison Russell-French and myself with input from Bruce Lindenmayer. COG has had an input to various Federal, NSW and ACT government departments and other bodies including the following:

- Review of policy on EPBC environmental offsets
- Down-grading of IUCN status of Superb Parrot
- ACT Pest Animal Management Strategy
- Little Eagle Action Plan
- Throsby Denominational School Referral
- Developments of the future suburbs of Kenny and Throsby (EPBC referral)
- Development of the future areas of Jacka, Taylor and Kinlyside (EPBC referral)
- Solar Farm proposal: Drake-Brockman Drive
- Draft Jerrabomberra Wetlands Master Plan

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Geoffrey Dabb for coordinating the COG response to the Wetlands Master Plan. Over 20 COG members contributed their thoughts on the subject and highlighted the importance of the area to members.

There have been further meetings with the Federal Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts concerning the proposed development of the suburb of Throsby and likely effects on the Mulligan's Flat/Goorooyarroo Nature Reserves with further discussions on the proposed Molonglo River Park and development within Molonglo in general.

As mentioned in my last President's Report, the Birds Australia Campout made a small profit and this went towards the purchase of Allocasuarina seedlings specifically for the threatened Glossy Black-Cockatoo. The seedlings were planted at the Bush Heritage property 'Scottsdale' where the Campout was held. We received a grant to pay for fencing and tree guards. The grant has been acquitted with a day of planting in October and again in May. I wish to thank Nicki Taws for her work in organising the grant and the plantings.

### **Outings**

Once again COG has been able to run a very comprehensive outings program. I would like to thank Michael Robbins and Sue Lashko who between them have been responsible for this very important task.

In addition to the scheduled outings, the *ad hoc* group of 'Wednesday and Thursday Walkers' have once again operated most successfully and have managed to attract a most enthusiastic group of followers with outings most months of the year. There were 16 mid-week outings and many thanks to Martin Butterfield, Michael Robbins and others for organising these events.

Up to mid-September and including the mid-week walks, there have been 56 outings this last 12 month period; a very large increase from the previous 12 month period. In addition to visiting local hotspots in the ACT and surrounds, members paid visits to:

- Capertee Valley
- Pelagic trips out of Eden (2)
- Deniliquin area for Plains Wanderers
- Goulburn area with the Goulburn Field Naturalists
- Host the Illawarra Birders at Wee Jasper
- Various locations hosted by the Illawarra Birders
- Ben Boyd National Park
- Weddin Mountains and Yathong Nature Reserve
- Bendick Murrell National Park

I would like to thank the organisers and leaders and to those who wrote up the trip reports for Gang-gang.

### **Communications and Publications**

#### Education

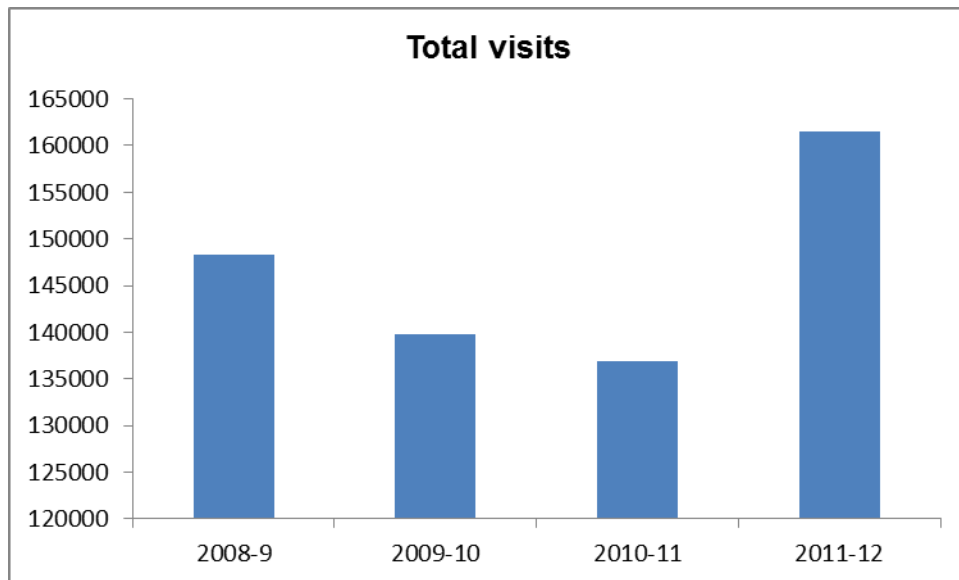
- Innovating Australia- Urban Bird Survey
- Birds of the Ginninderra Falls area- Presentation to Ginninderra Falls Association
- Open day for Conservation Agreements- COG presentation on survey techniques
- Restorative Justice matter- Tharwa Sand Wash and Kambah Pools
- Presentation at Finnish Embassy on ACT birds

Gang-gang. Many thanks to Greg Ramsey and Sue Lashko, who have continued with the editing and publishing of our newsletter. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Greg who after six years, (67 newsletters), as Layout Editor decided to retire. In February Janette Lenz replaced Greg as Layout Editor. Also, I would like to thank Brian Fair and helpers for the mailing of newsletters and Canberra Bird Notes. I would particularly like to again thank Jack Holland- 'Where to Watch Birds', Ian Fraser who has now contributed 95 AvIAN Whimsy's, Martin Butterfield 'Garden Bird Survey Notes' and Julian Robinson 'Photo Ops' for their regular contributions.

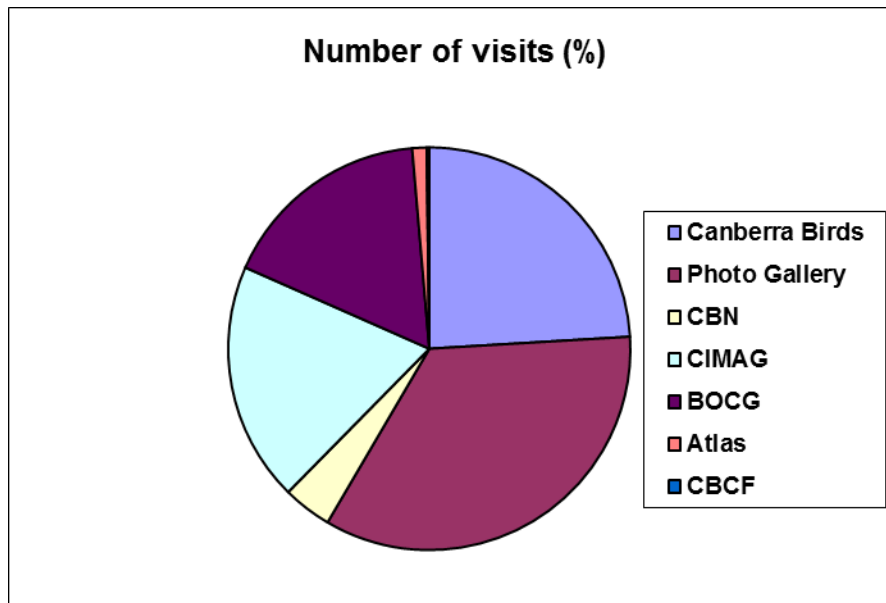
Canberra Bird Notes. This year there has been three editions of CBN produced by Michael Lenz as Editor. I would again like to thank *Tyto javanica* and *Stentoreus* for their regular contributions over the past year.

Annual Bird Report. Paul Fennell was responsible for the 2010-11 ABR published in Volume 37, March 2012 Canberra Bird Notes. Thanks to the ABR compilers Barbara Allan, Con Boekel, David McDonald, Ian McMahon, Harvey Perkins, John Goldie and Kathy Walter, John Bissett and Paul Fennell with each contributor, as usual, responsible for a group or groups of species. Overviews were written by Martin Butterfield, Michael Lenz and Jenny Bounds; as you can, see a major collaborative effort.

Website. David Cook continues to provide an excellent website. Over the year there have been 161,467 visits to the site, an increase of 18% over the previous year.



Overall, there has been an increase in the number of visits to CanberraBirds and Birds of Canberra Gardens and a reduction in the number of visits to the Photo Gallery with other areas remaining similar to last year.



Discussion list and email announcements. COG's Email Discussion Forum 'Canberrabirds' continues to be managed by David McDonald. The membership to the list stands at 263, an increase of four from the previous year. The Discussion Forum or 'Chat-line' is an excellent forum for the latest sightings, points of interest and provides an invaluable starting point for those wishing to discuss their unusual sightings.

### **Surveys and record management**

Surveys undertaken by COG members over the past year include the continuation of the woodland surveys at 15 sites across the ACT that documents species in the threatened Yellow-Box/Red Gum Grassy Woodlands. With funding from an ACT Government grant Dr Ross Cunningham completed his analysis of bird observations and habitat changes. A report titled 'An analysis of bird occupancy and habitat changes at six woodland locations 2003-2010' and written by Nicki Taws, Jenny Bounds, Alison Rowell and Ross Cunningham has been completed and placed on the COG website with a précis of the findings written up in CBN Vol 37 p 100-129. The project continues to be run by a management group comprising, Jenny Bounds, Nicki Taws Alison Rowell and myself with data entry by Helen Mason.

A third survey of possible breeding habitat for the threatened Superb Parrot in the ACT was completed with help from COG members. A report titled 'Distribution, abundance and breeding status of the Superb Parrot (*Polytelis swainsonii*) during the 2011-12 breeding season, central and lower Molonglo Valley, ACT' was compiled by Chris Davey and provided to the ACT Government. The Superb Lyrebird survey at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve was run for the ninth year, as usual on the third weekend in June.

The Garden Bird Survey is now in its 32nd year. Martin Butterfield continued to manage the project providing feedback through regular items of interest in Gang-gang. After six years in the job Martin decided to retire at the end of the 2011-12 GBS year and I am delighted that Duncan McCaskill has taken over the reins. Kay Hahne and Anne Hall continue to enter the GBS data. Many thanks to all. Over the past 12 months there were six requests for data.

The Blitz was run again for the seventh year in late October. Many thanks to Barbara Allan for all the hard work she puts into this project and to the many surveyors.

COG members were again involved in the Kosciuszko to Coast (K2C) bird surveys in April and again in October covering 23 properties in the area between Williamsdale and Bredbo.

The COG database continues to expand with **583,958** observations from **38,171** datasheets in the General Observations database. There were **1,223** sheets added during the year slightly down from **1,320** the previous year with **63%** entered on-line. The databases continue to be managed by Paul Fennell and Duncan McCaskill.

Lia Battisson and Malcolm Fyfe are putting considerable effort into adding old observation records to the database. The earliest records in the database are from the early 1970s yet observations from notebooks, Canberra Bird Notes and Gang-gang go as far back at the early 1960s. To date over 5000 records have been identified which potentially could be submitted. The project is on-going and will greatly value-add to the database.

A small group of COG members has been looking at ways to extract summary data to improve information provided in the Annual Bird Report. I would like to acknowledge the work of Steve Wallace, who has been working closely with Paul Fennell and Michael Robbins, and who is now able to provide summary information for all bird species records. The reports are in no way intended as an analysis of species status within the COG area of interest but are a report of what is in the database for information and use by members. Many on the Chat-line may have had the opportunity to view some aspects of the species reports that can now be produced.

Essential support for the COG database is provided through the Records Management Team and the Rarities Panel. I would again like to acknowledge the contributions provided by Nicki Taws as Records Officer, Tony Harding, Helen Mason and many others for data entry and to the members of the Rarities Panel consisting of Richard Allen, Jenny Bounds, Grahame Clark, Dick Schodde, Nicki Taws and Barbara Allan (Secretary), all who have offered to continue in their various roles.

### **Monthly meetings**

Jack Holland has again been responsible for a most successful and varied program of speakers.

The COG policy covering costs for those speakers from interstate has again been worthwhile with very popular presentations on 'Why some birds love cities and most don't', (Assoc Prof. Darryl Jones), 'Floods, droughts and river regulation' (Prof Richard Kingsford), and 'Powerful Owls' (Dr David Bain). Other subjects have included habitat management and restoration, the future of Australian threatened birdlife, a project proposal on functional connectivity, woodland bird diversity, conserving city birds, the 2011 Blitz, bird use of plantings and birding in Ethiopia. Species presentations have included talks on the Noisy Miner, Nankeen Kestrel, Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo, Painted Snipe, Superb Lyrebird, Brown Thornbill and Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo. My thanks to all of the speakers for giving of their time.

A continuing feature of the monthly meeting is the Sales Desk. The Desk this year has been managed by Roy Harvey, greatly assisted by Annie Holmes. Many thanks to them both for providing such a valuable service to COG members.

I would once again like to thank Julienne Kampad with occasional assistance from Lia Battisson who have worked quietly behind the scenes to provide the refreshments after the monthly meetings and to Sandra Henderson for taking on the responsibility of providing the raffle prizes and selling the tickets.

### **Canberra Birds Conservation Fund (CBCF)**

There have been 323 visits to the CBCF web page this past 12 months. This is an 18% increase from the previous year. A grant was made to William Feeney of the Research School of Biology at The Australian National University to support his research to investigate the nature of coevolved reciprocal adaptations prior to egg insertion by the parasite in the host nest (the 'front-line'). The research focuses on these interactions between the Superb Fairy-wren and the Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo. The research site is Gungahlin Hill Nature Reserve in Canberra. This is the 10<sup>th</sup> grant provided by the CBCF. The Fund continues to be managed by David McDonald with a Committee of Management consisting of David, Geoffrey Dabb and Penny Olsen.

### **Summary**

In summary, as in previous years, 2011-12 has been a busy year for COG. Outings and meetings continue to be the most popular activities although there appears to be a slight decrease in activities involving weekend campouts. The mid-week walks continue to be very popular.

The cost of membership to COG has remained the same for the past 11 years. Unfortunately our subscription income has decreased slightly but our costs for membership services has increased such that dues are no longer covering costs.



Although we are in a lucky position to be financially sound the Group cannot remain so if this state of affairs continues. We have been lucky in that we have been able to

obtain some income through survey contracts but there is no guarantee that this will continue. The situation will need to be considered by the 2012-13 committee.

The design of the new COG website is progressing well. Two features to be implemented will be the on-line payment of subscriptions and an area for COG members only, the structure and contents of which are still to be decided.

With the merger of Birds Australia (BA) and the Bird Observer's Club (BOCA) to form BirdLife Australia (BLA) our affiliation with BOCA ceased and by default we became affiliated with the new organisation. The terms and responsibilities of affiliation are unclear and discussions will continue into 2012-13 on this issue. One issue that remains unclear is that of insurance. COG now has its own insurance for public liability and for professional indemnity and again an issue for the 2012-13 committee will be to determine whether to continue with present arrangements or to be covered under the umbrella of BLA.

After five years as President I will be standing down. I have thoroughly enjoyed working as your President over that time but it is now time for me to move on and start bird watching again!

Finally, I wish to again thank those many individuals who have worked so hard in various ways to provide services to members and who have helped me in my role as President over the past five years.

Chris Davey,  
10<sup>th</sup> October 2012