



PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2013-14

This Report covers the period November 2013 to October 2014 encompassing COGs 50th anniversary year. We have marked this very significant event in a number of ways that reflect the breadth and diversity of COG, its members and the activities done under the COG banner. Many COG members have been very active in supporting COG during this time and I would like to extend a very sincere thank-you to all those who have contributed over the year to make our celebrations such a success.

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 2013-14 Committee for all their efforts. The Executive consisted of

- Alison Russell-French, President,
- Neil Hermes, Vice-president and coordinator of the COG 50th celebration,
- Sandra Henderson, Secretary and responsible for COG membership and running the Raffle each month,
- Noel Luff, Treasurer,
- Chris Davey, manager of COG Surveys and leader of the COG 50th project on Gang-gangs,
- Jenny Bounds, COG Conservation Officer and organizer of the COG 50th Conservation Forum,
- Sue Lashko, editor of Gang-gang, meeting-room organizer, and Outings Officer,
- Julian Robinson, responsible for development of the new Website,
- Lia Battisson and Sandra who both assisted with the Treasurer's responsibilities whilst he was absent and took on tea arrangements after members meetings, and
- Bruce Lindenmayer and Stuart Rae have been stalwarts in their support across regular COG business and as well as the COG 50th arrangements with Bruce arranging the Spring ANU/COG Mulligans Flat/Goorooyaroo surveys and Stuart for organising production of a range of 50th Anniversary brochures.

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, Paul Fennell for managing the COG database, 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.

COG Membership

There are currently 270 members of COG (noting that reminders have been sent to 90 members who have not yet renewed for this year). We had 63 new members joining during the year. As with any organisation we always have a loss of members including those who can no longer participate in COG activities, those who move away from Canberra, those who pursue other priorities, and some

new members who find COG isn't what they were looking for. However to all our continuing members you are a vital part of our organisation and your support for COG is very much appreciated.

COG 50th Anniversary

The major focus for COG in 2014 has been the commemoration of its 50th Anniversary. This was celebrated with an Anniversary Program that included events designed to both acknowledge this significant anniversary and showcase COG to the community as an effective and professional organisation. Particular thanks are due to Neil Hermes for all the work he has done in coordinating the 50th Anniversary year.

The Program of special events included:

Bird of the Year Project- The Gang-gang Cockatoo

A 12 month long project to find out more about the COG emblem was initiated in March 2014. To date (October 20th) there have been over 3200 sightings reported from the COG area of interest with contributions from members of the public and COG. The interest in this project has exceeded expectations and has been greatly assisted by the on-line data entry portal developed by Atlas of Living Australia for the project. This on-line facility is currently receiving over 90% of all sightings. Many thanks to Chris Davey the Project Manager and Kathy Eyles the Communications Officer for this very successful project.

COG Photographic Competition

The COG Photographic Competition was held from 30 June to 5 July at the Legislative Assembly Exhibition Room. 15 members exhibited 48 photos of 29 local species. The Competition was opened by Nicole Lawder, MLA and over 300 visitors viewed the display. Visitors were encouraged to vote for their favourite photo and the one that attracted most votes was by Julian Robinson of a pair of **Satin Bowerbirds** at a bower. Charlie Davis's photo of **Rosellas in the Fog** was the runner-up and Kathy Walter was the winner of the lucky draw prize. Congratulations to all who entered the competition and to the winners. We have received suggestions that this might become an annual COG event and the Committee will consider this option.

COG Landscapes for Birds Forum

The **Landscapes for Birds Forum** was held on 5 July with the aim of improving public awareness of the need for landscape scale conservation and restoration and enhancement. The Forum, which was held at the Legislative Assembly Reception Room, attracted a mixed audience of around 75 people most of whom were not COG members. This was seen to be a success as the aim in holding the Forum was to engage with the broader public on the issues addressed at the Forum. Various studies, research, community/landholder engagement and on-the-ground work in the ACT and nearby NSW were the topics addressed by the guest speakers. Mick Gentleman, newly elected ACT Planning Minister, opened the Forum. I would like to thank all those who presented at the Forum but particular thanks go to Jenny Bounds for the organisation of the Forum.

COG 50th Anniversary Short Talks

As part of the COG 50th Anniversary, Neil Hermes arranged for a number of COG members to present short talks about COG over its 50 years. Speakers reminisced about COG's early days (Neil Hermes and Dick Schodde) , the strong conservation agenda that COG has pursued (Jenny Bounds) , COG's contribution to ANU Research programs (Bruce Lindenmeyer) the history of COG bird banding (Mark Clayton), the history of COG bird song tapes and CD (Chris Davey), the history of COG's waterbird surveys – Lake George and Lake Bathurst (Michael Lenz), and the history of COG's bird blitz (Barbara Allan). It was a wonderful opportunity to reflect on COG and its achievements, its history, and appreciate the important role it has as a well-respected organisation within the community.

Steve Wilson Medal

The COG Committee resolved to inaugurate an annual award in commemoration of the 50th Anniversary, the Steve Wilson Medal, to honour the contribution made by Steve Wilson, one of the founding fathers of COG. The award will recognise meritorious contribution by an individual to COG and is open to any COG member or ex-member. The recognised service will have been voluntary service to COG, not service to birds. A Committee has been established to consider any nominations made for the award. The inaugural award will be made to recipients and will be announced at the Gala Dinner on 22 November 2014.

Special Edition of the Canberra Bird Notes

A special edition of the Canberra Bird Notes that captures the COG Anniversary Year will be published in December. The edition will feature all of the significant aspects of this important celebratory year

Mini Guide

A mini guide on the birds of Canberra has been produced to inform the general public about birds in Canberra. The guide provides photographs of familiar birds and a map to show where they can be found. The guide will be available at the ACT Information Centre for people visiting Canberra as well as being part of COG's information publications.

Beginners Walks

A series of Beginners Walks was run by Tony Lawson at the Australian National Botanic Gardens as part of the COG celebrations. These were aimed to encourage members of the public to experience the pleasure of watching and identifying birds in their natural habitats. From May onwards, a total of 5 Saturday walks were conducted with about 10-12 people attending each walk. Particular thanks to Tony for conducting the tours on behalf of COG.

COG Gala Dinner

The final event to celebrate COG's 50th Anniversary will be a Gala Dinner to be held on 22 November 2014 at Gold Creek Station, Hall. The Guest Speaker for the event will be former Senator and Leader of the Greens, Dr Bob Brown. The event will wind up a year of special activities and all COG members can be proud of the profile that the 50th Anniversary celebrations has generated for COG within the community and in government circles where COG was officially recognised for its work in the ACT Legislative Assembly.

Conservation

Conservation of our birds remains an important focus; however, in recent years we have prioritised our involvement in issues, and work more in collaboration with the Conservation Council ACT Region and other groups on major matters. Jenny Bounds continues in her role as COG Conservation Officer, with assistance from other Committee members. As a Vice-President of the Conservation Council ACT Region, Jenny also represents COG in that forum. In recognition for the contribution that the Council's work on cat containment in the ACT will have for COG interests, COG contributed \$5,000 to the Council's project on ACT cat containment and community engagement.

Conservation issues we have engaged in include:

- input to the ACT's Nature Conservation Bill 2014, a revision of the legislation protecting threatened species and communities and other conservation related matters – coordinated by the Conservation Council,
- comments on the ACT Environmental Offsets policy,
- comments on the ACT Trails Strategy 2014-24 (about recreation use in parks and reserves),
- comments on Superb Parrot habitat improvement plans (part of the planning for impacts from further urban development in Throsby, Gungahlin),

- with other groups and the Conservation Council, raised concerns and sought more information about a proposal to re-locate the RSPCA to a site bordering Callum Brae NR in Symonston, and
- provided input to a range of other matters/projects coordinated by the Conservation Council, including proposal for ACT wide, phased-in cat containment, urban development in West Belconnen and various publications to improve the community's awareness of environmental matters.

Woodland Bird Monitoring Project

The COG Woodland Bird Monitoring Project has been running since 1998 and quarterly surveys continue (142 monitoring points/15 locations of grassy woodlands across the ACT). Ten years or more of data will be reached for all sites in 2015/16, when a major data analysis can proceed. Jenny Bounds coordinates the project, with Chris Davey, Nicki Taws and Alison Rowell providing support. Alison Rowell continues to have a key role as consultant to the project. Thanks to all involved, including the site coordinators and Helen Mason (data entry), in this important long-term project for COG. As usual results are incorporated into the Annual Bird Report published in CBN.

Woodland and Wetlands Trust

COG also has representation on the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust which was established to enhance management in and undertake fund-raising for Mulligans Flat and Jerrabomberra Wetlands Reserves. I chair the Trust Committee and Jenny Bounds sits on the Mulligans Flat Management Committee and is an alternate on the Trust Committee.

Bush Stone-curlew reintroduction at Mulligans Flat

This year, COG partnered with the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust to reintroduce Bush Stone-curlews to the Mulligans Flat Woodland Sanctuary. The birds were released in October 2014. A number of COG members have been involved in the project in various capacities: Chris Davey, Jenny Bounds, Kathy Eyles and Mark Clayton (banding the birds). COG has not only provided financial help but members have also been involved in the daily feeding of the birds held in captivity between their arrival in June and their release in October. In addition, and with help from COG members, tracking of the birds movements is now in progress. We anxiously await the outcome of this interesting project. COG has committed \$5,000 per annum funding in 2014 and 2015 to the project, and expects a further group of birds will be released in 2015.

Surveys and record management

The 12 month period to November 2014 has again been a busy one for the bird surveys conducted by members. Two new surveys were initiated in 2014, the COG 50th Bird of the Year project (Refer to the 50th Anniversary item above) and the reintroduction of the Bush Stone-curlew project (see above).

Superb Parrot Survey

A fifth 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 2013-14 breeding season, Throsby Ridge. ACT' was again compiled by Chris Davey and provided to the ACT Government with a copy placed in the COG library.

Superb Lyrebird Survey

The survey, to document the recovery after the 2003 bushfire at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, was held for the 11th year as usual on the third weekend in June with results published in the COG newsletter and provided to the ACT Government.

Garden Bird Survey

This survey is now in its 34th year with over 70 sites surveyed. As usual, results are incorporated into the Annual Bird Report published in CBN. Thanks to the many contributors and to Duncan McCaskill for managing the survey and for data analysis. Kay Hahne and Anne Hall once again continued with the difficult task of entering the GBS data.

Mulligans Flat/Goorooyaroo Survey

The Spring surveys run by the Fenner School, ANU, has again involved 6-8 COG members in data collection. These surveys have now been running for 9 years and help to contribute to the woodland restoration project conducted by the ANU. COG members have also been involved in surveys at Jervis Bay and in surveys at Cowra and around Canberra for the Stewardship Project. Many thanks to Bruce Lindenmayer for coordinating the COG contribution to these important surveys.

The COG Blitz

The Blitz was run for the 9th year, as usual over the last weekend in October, with Barbara Allan yet again managing the survey. Our thanks to Barbara for the considerable work involved in this most valuable and enjoyable survey. The results of the weekend's efforts were published in CBN Vol 39 #2.

Waterbird surveys at Lake George and Lake Bathurst

On behalf of COG, Michael Lenz is continuing surveys at two lakes within COG's area of interest (Lake George since 1979 and Lake Bathurst since 1980). In 2013-14 Julienne Kamprad and Peter Milburn assisted at various times. The lakes continue to be a refuge for waterbirds and the on-going surveys provide significant data.

Jerrabomberra Wetlands Bird Survey

The quarterly survey of the Reserve organised by Chris Davey was initiated in July 2012 with four surveys (January, April, July and October 2014) conducted over the reporting period and involving 12 COG members and Friends of the Wetlands. The surveys are run on behalf of the Jerrabomberra Wetlands Management Committee who report to the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust. Unfortunately the Fyshwick Sewage Ponds were closed to the public for renovations over the period although special permission was obtained for access for the October survey. Special thanks to Michael Maconachie (COG member and Reserve Ranger) for participating in all of the surveys.

Kosciuszko to Coast (K2C) Bird Surveys

Nicki Taws has again been responsible for running the COG contributions to the K2C bird survey in April and again in October covering 23 properties in the area between Williamsdale and Bredbo. On both occasions 15 COG members contributed their time and expertise. Always a most enjoyable outing, it was finished off with a BBQ at the Bush Heritage property 'Scottsdale'.

Lord Howe Island Bird Survey

The second survey was run over the week 7-14th September with a report to the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage currently being prepared. In addition to the coordinators (Peter Fullagar and Chris Davey), who participated last year, David and Kathy Cook, Christine Ledger, Michael Robbins and Gail Neumann all put in a sterling effort to complete the survey. We await confirmation for the 2015 survey.

Silver Gull Breeding Survey

On behalf of COG, Peter Fullagar and Chris Davey again surveyed the breeding colony on Spinnaker Island, Lake Burley Griffin. The colony has continued to expand with a maximum of 465 active nests found and 867 eggs. A report has been provided to the National Capital Authority.

Records Management

Essential support for the COG database is provided through the Records Management Team and the Rarities Panel. I would like to acknowledge the role of Paul Fennell (Database Manager) with much support from Steve Wallace. I would also like to acknowledge the contributions provided by the Records Officer, Nicki Taws, and to Tony Harding, Helen Mason and others responsible for data entry. The Rarities Panel consisting of Richard Allen, Jenny Bounds, Grahame Clark, Dick Schodde, Nicki Taws and Barbara Allan (Secretary) have continued the important role of verifying unusual observations. During the year David McDonald, assisted by Mark Clayton, Nicki Taws and Richard Schodde, revised the COG Annotated Check List.

The COG website

Julian Robinson has done a fantastic job in getting the new COG website up and running. The website went on line on 1st March 2014, three years after serious efforts began to replace our original site. Using new technology, the new site is designed to be easy on the eye, 'cleaner' and easier to use, while providing new facilities and better access to fast changing information. Part of the justification for the new site was that much of the content can now be entered and updated by non-expert members who are directly responsible for each area, rather than one or two overworked website specialists.

Another objective was to make the website a first port of call for members seeking information about COG's activities such as the Gang-gang surveys and other 50th anniversary happenings, for which it has been very successful. General reaction from members and non-members has been very positive, while the first few months' operation has shown the design to be robust and reliable. A number of improvements are planned to be implemented gradually over the next year or two.

The new website would appear from web statistics to be hugely appreciated and used by an audience far beyond COG's membership. Member usage of the site has more than doubled and the photo gallery continues to be the area that receives the highest proportion of visitors. However the site's different construction hides the photos from search engines so the site no longer appears when people google on bird names. We may want to look at this in the future as there may be a larger actual increase in use of the new site than we are currently able to detect.

2014 COG Field Trips Outings

2014 has been another busy year with 35 weekend outings. There has been the usual mix of morning and day outings, as well as camping or accommodated trips over 2 to 4 days. Our annual boat trip in February and bus trip in late winter continue to be popular. The 2 pelagic tours from Eden in September were again over-subscribed so next year there will be 3 pelagic tours.

I would like to thank Sue Lashko for her great efforts in managing the field trip outings and all leaders for suggesting a venue and volunteering to lead. Most of our leaders put their hands up every year to lead one or more outings. The COG field trips programme would not exist without your generosity of time and enthusiasm for birds. Particular thanks to Anthony Overs who has again led two beginners' outings as these are an excellent way to attract members of the public to COG, as well as improving the ID skills of existing members. Jack Holland's nest workshop at Campbell Park continues to attract large numbers of COG members and nesting birds! Well done to new leaders, with John Harris and Julie Clark introducing us to some little known birding sites in Gungahlin, Duncan McCaskill leading birding by bike at Mulligans Flat, and Jean Casburn introducing us to Guthega in summer as well as Narrabundah Hill.

Members were surveyed mid-year to gather feedback on the current programme and changes for the future. There was a high level of satisfaction with the current programme, as well as considerable interest in mid-week trips so three will be offered in 2015.

Thank you to Martin Butterfield for again coordinating the very successful Wednesday walks. The draft 2015 programme is in the November Gang-gang and leaders are sought for several outings. I encourage you to get involved and take us to your favourite birding spot.

Communications and Publications

Gang-gang

Many thanks are also due to Sue Lashko and Gail Neumann for their excellent efforts in the editing and publishing of our newsletter and to Dianne Davey for its distribution. Gang-gang is a great source of information to members with its wide range of articles and news about the birds of Canberra and the surrounding region. We are always looking for members to write occasional columns on bird related topics - a favourite species or family, 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.

Canberra Bird Notes.

Three issues of CBN were produced over the year. Two general issues were edited by Michael Lenz. The remaining issue consists of the Annual Bird Report, produced and edited by Paul Fennell and Steve Wallace and a team of dedicated COG members who write up the species accounts. I would like to thank all those COG members involved in the production of the Canberra Bird Notes.

Monthly meetings

I would like to thank Jack Holland for arranging another very interesting program of speakers for 2014 for our COG monthly meetings. The monthly meetings took a slightly different format this year with the COG 50th Anniversary series of short talks (Refer to the report on the 50th Anniversary above).

Highlights in the longer talks we have heard over the year include Dean Ingwersen and his presentation on the Regent Honeyeater at the AGM last year, Laura Johnson's presentation on how the Eastern Koel has duped naïve Red Wattlebirds, Geoffrey Dabb's on the bird of the year (Gang-gang), Andrew Cockburn's presentation on Fairy Wrens, Michael Lenz on Roost Flights, David Lindenmayer's talk on 17 years of ANU-COG co-operation on bird research and Matt Herring on the Australasian Bittern in rice fields.

This last talk inspired both COG members and the COG Committee to contribute to the crowd source funding that Matt had initiated and it is great to see that it was successful in reaching the funding goal. \$2,500 was agreed to be contributed on behalf of COG by the Committee. This project is a great example of how working with landowners can bring benefits to birds.

John Young's presentation on the Rediscovery of the Night Parrot in conjunction with ACT Eremaea Ebird was another particular highlight in the year.

Canberra Birds Conservation Fund (CBCF)

The Canberra Birds Conservation Fund was established to receive tax-deductible donations and to expend the funds received on activities that contribute towards achieving COG's environmental objectives, namely:

1. To encourage interest in, and develop knowledge of, the birds of the Canberra region
2. To promote and co-ordinate the study of birds
3. To promote the conservation of native birds and their habitats.

I thank members of COG, and others, who have provided donations to the Fund during the year, and encourage others to do likewise. David McDonald has done a great job managing the CBCF.

One grant was made during the year: to Dr Virginia Abernathy of the Australian National University to support her research titled "Investigating the rate of coevolution between the Pacific Koel and its hosts". As a consequence, the Fund is in the unusual position of having money is available to allocate to worthwhile projects, but no applications currently before it. Members of COG, and others, are invited to contact the Fund if you have proposals that, if supported, would help to attain COG's environmental objectives.

Conclusion

2013-14 has been a particularly significant year for COG with the celebration of our 50th Anniversary. I wish again to thank all those who have worked so hard in so many ways to provide what has been a stand-out year and I also express my sincere appreciation to those who have assisted me in my role as President over the year.

I would like to pay particular tribute to 2 of our Committee members who are leaving the Committee this year – our Secretary Sandra Henderson who has been Committee Secretary for 9 years and Noel Luff, our Treasurer for a number of years. Both have given fantastic service to COG in these positions and we all thank them very much for their dedication. Not surprisingly the reasons they have given for standing down now is to go and do more birdwatching. Good luck to both of them in this and everything else.

Alison Russell-French
25 October 2014