



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2015-16

The period from November 2015 to October 2016 has been a relatively quiet one for COG in comparison to our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2014 and awards last year recognizing COG's significant contribution to education about and conservation of our birds.

This is also the year that I will hand over to a new President, having had the privilege of being the President of COG for four years. I count myself fortunate to have been in the position for our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and for COG's recognition through the 2015 Keep Australia Beautiful Sustainable Cities Award for Education in November 2015 and the ACT Conservation Council Award in October 2015. These are strong testimony to the effective and well-respected role that COG has in the ACT community and beyond.

The year has seen GOG maintain and enhance its very effective collaboration with the ACT Conservation Council, strengthen its partnership with the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust, and work actively with the BIGnet group of NSW birding clubs on matters of mutual interest and concern.

### COG Committee

In 2015-16, COG has been very well-served by a dedicated and enthusiastic Committee and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the 10 members of the 2015-16 Committee for their contribution to COG. The Executive consisted of Neil Hermes (Vice-president), Bill Graham (Secretary), Lia Battisson (Treasurer), Jenny Bounds (Conservation Officer), Chris Davey (Records Management and Survey), Sue Lashko (Editor of Gang-gang, meeting-room organizer and Outings Officer), Julie McGuinness (management of COG storage), Paul Fennell (management and oversight of the COG Database), David McDonald (advice on COG Constitution and policy issues) and Bruce Lindenmayer (connecting COG with CIMAG). Matthew Frawley was co-opted to the Committee in 2016 and Julian Robinson continued as Website manager in an ex-officio role.

On behalf of the Committee I would like to extend our thanks to those Committee members who are standing down: Bruce Lindenmayer, a long-standing Committee member and Julie McGuinness. They have been stalwart supporters of and contributors to the Committee and to COG.

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 is responsible for the members' meetings speakers program which has been both fascinating and broadly focused over the year; Sandra Henderson manages COG membership and the monthly raffles; Michael Lenz produces the Canberra Bird Notes; Duncan McCaskill manages 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. Bruce Lindenmayer generously volunteered to assist with the tea and coffee we have after meetings. All of these people have generously given their time to help COG members and the organisation.

## COG Membership

There are currently 447 individual members and 7 organisational members of COG with 56 new members joining during the year. We have a loss of members each year 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.

## Steve Wilson Award

The Steve Wilson Award was inaugurated in 2014 on the occasion of COG's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. In its second year, in recognition of their meritorious service and significant contribution to COG over a long period the Steve Wilson award was presented to Chris Davey and Barbara Allen.

## Conservation

This year conservation has been a significant part of COG's focus across a wide range of ACT and related issues. Jenny Bounds continued as COG's Conservation Officer, with input on some matters by other Committee members. Matthew Frawley joined the Committee in the second half of the year with an interest in working on some conservation issues. COG has continued its long standing collaboration with the Conservation Council ACT Region in relation to planning and development matters which impact on bird habitats and movement corridors, including sensitive river corridors, with the main areas of interest this year on:

- Gungahlin new suburbs, including Throsby next to Mulligans Flat,
- Ginninderra Station (CSIRO land on the Barton Hwy)
- The proposed new suburb (Thompson/Western Greenway) next to the Murrumbidgee River west of the Tuggeranong Town Centre (if this goes ahead, the development will take housing into the current corridor reserve, with minimal buffer and significant environmental impacts
- West Belconnen/Riverview, and
- Most recently, the Western Edge Planning Study (a future development front west of Molonglo suburbs and west of the Murrumbidgee River at Point Hut Crossing; this will have significant environmental implications for the river corridor.

The main conservation achievements/issues this year were:

- A submission with comments on the ACT Government's Draft Action Plan for the Scarlet Robin (declared a threatened species last year). The final Action Plan has been released and some of COG comments were taken up, important issues such as more detail on critical habitat needs and strengthening the objective on research and monitoring. There is still significant reliance in the Plan on the community's monitoring and COG data; resourcing the actions in the Plan will be important.
- A letter from COG to the Planning Minister, Mick Gentleman, regarding his approval using ministerial call-in powers, of the Williamsdale Solar Farm, on land which will mean the destruction of many mature eucalypts on the site. The Minister's response was very disappointing; more appropriate sites on already cleared and degraded land with minimal environmental impact should have been considered.
- Input from COG to a draft nomination to have clearance of hollow bearing trees (mature eucalypts, including paddock trees) declared a threatening process in the ACT. COG will be a signatory to the nomination with several other groups including ANPS and FOG. The decision to nominate this has arisen because of concerns about the various urban and infrastructure developments, (including the Williamsdale

Solar Farm decision) which continue to clear mature habitat eucalypts across the landscape.

- Submission to the EPBC Act referral for the West Belconnen/Riverview development, commenting on the loss of Little Eagle foraging habitat and the need for surveys for Superb Parrots over the life of the development (given the increase of the parrots' distribution in the ACT in the last decade).
- Submission to the NSW Government about new biodiversity legislation which would significantly lessen the protections for native vegetation in NSW. This issue has been a major conservation focus this year for the groups of BIGnet, the NSW network of bird clubs and bird interest groups which COG is a part of.

COG provided input to the ongoing management of some environmental offsets sites including:

- Throsby Offsets management plan (expanded reserve area adjacent to Mulligans Flat), and
- Jaramlee in West Macgregor, regarding possible impacts on small birds by management for woody weeds and advice on a bird monitoring program

COG accepted an invitation to join the K2C project group as a supporting partner on their Committee. Jenny Bounds represents COG and has attended several meetings and a strategic planning day. The group has recently received funding to undertake engagement with the farming community in the surrounding region and habitat enhancements, under the project banner "Save our Scarlet Robin". COG has facilitated volunteers for the K2C twice yearly bird surveys on the Monaro for a number of years.

COG (Jenny Bounds and I) attended a meeting with the ACT Commissioner for the Environment and Sustainability to discuss their 2015 State of the Environment report and related birds issues. COG data is used to inform this report. A particular problem discussed was the need to rely significantly on, for the SoE report, environmental related information gleaned from Government reports commissioned for planning purposes (and limited primary research data availability).

#### *Woodland Bird Monitoring Project*

COG's long running survey at 15 locations (142 monitoring points) continues. 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 to all involved.

## **Surveys**

Under the guidance of Chris Davey, COG has again been very active over the past 12 months in the recording of bird observations. Observations are now increasingly being recorded with the help of eBird and then downloaded to the COG database. In addition to the general observations, on-going surveys continue to inform us of the status of birds within the ACT and local region.

The surveys include collecting observations for a long-term study at Mulligans Flat/Goorooyarro Nature Reserves by the ANU. This study is now in its 9<sup>th</sup> year. Also, quarterly surveys at Jerrabomberra Wetlands/Fyshwick Sewage Ponds, the annual 'Blitz' - now in its 11<sup>th</sup> year and the Superb Lyrebird survey at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve- conducted since June 2004, have been completed.

COG continues to provide volunteers twice a year to the Greening Australia 'K2C' project, now in its 7<sup>th</sup> year. Observations on the expanding Silver Gull colony on Spinnaker Island,

LBG, continues with information supplied to the National Capital Authority and, after a postponement of 12 months, the annual bird survey on Lord Howe Island, associated with the rodent eradication program, was recommenced in September 2016.

COG members continue to supply observations to the Latham's Snipe survey, run by the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust. The survey will run from August 2016 to March 2017, whilst the on-going long-term data set collected from Lake Bathurst and Lake George continues.

Over 1 million bird records covering the past 10 years were submitted to the Canberra Nature Map. These General Observation records and Garden Bird Survey records now provide a new avenue for the general public to find out about the birds of our local region.

### **The COG website**

During the year the COG website was visited by an average of 200 different people each day, similar to last year. Newly available statistics reveal some possibly surprising patterns of usage.

16% of pages were accessed from the USA, 17% from other countries and the remainder (obviously) from Australia. The most-viewed pages are Our Birds/Bird Info (660 views a month), the Photo Gallery (350), Trip Information (275), Birds of Canberra Gardens (270), Membership page (230), a page describing the Email Discussion List (170), Popular Birding Spots (145) and Meeting information (145).

The website is also a much-used resource by people who download specific files, including, in order of most used:

- By far the most popular download is bird calls, around 160 each day. Given that only a minority of our birds have calls on the website this possibly indicates an area we should explore further. The most popular are King Parrot, Gang-gang, Eastern Spinebill, Australian Raven, Brown Goshawk, Brown Thornbill, Red-rumped Parrot and Flame Robin – all played more than 3 times every day.
- Bird data sheets showing distribution of each of our species are downloaded 16 times a day. Crimson Rosella and White-browed Scrubwren top the list.
- An average 12 issues of Canberra Bird Notes are downloaded each day, evenly split between the latest issue and older archived issues. Each recent issue is read (downloaded) by 90 to 600 people.
- An average 11 issues of Gang-gang magazine are downloaded each day, mostly the most recent issue but also a significant number of older issues. Each recent issue is read (downloaded) by about 250 people.
- Other downloadable items that are regularly accessed include President's Reports (29/month), Bird Routes brochures (22/month), and a fact sheet about birds of Callum Brae (20/month).

I would like to thank Julian Robinson for his ongoing efforts in managing and maintaining the COG Website.

### **The COG Database**

For decades COG has built up a very valuable set of historic bird databases for the birds in our Area of Interest (AOI). This database has been added to every year by members on organised COG activities, COG members on independent activities, non-COG members and by visiting bird watchers from outside our AOI and outside Australia.

The nature of how bird data is now collected and reported has changed dramatically in the past 3-5 years. Many observers now submit data to third party databases. This data is variously included in the COG databases.

At the end of last year a group of COG members with a particular interest in COG's database, convened a workshop which examined a range of options for COG's future database options.

These options include;

- (a) have no database,
- (b) have a closed database which only contains data up to a certain date e.g. 31 Dec 2016,
- (c) have a continuing and updated COG managed database that attempts to be comprehensive for all AOI data,
- (d) have a continuing and updated database of all records for AOI provided mainly by COG members and through COG managed systems,
- (e) have a continuing but new database recognising it will never again be comprehensive and will mainly have inputs through known and unknown future non COG sources but still (hopefully) be the best data set for AOI or
- (f) have some other model.

It was agreed that COG should continue to have a Database which would enable COG to maintain its role as a provider of reliable moderated (but not all) info about birds in AOI.

It is now agreed that COG's database will;

- cover the COG Area of Interest (AOI)
- maintain all existing historic Garden Bird Survey and General Observations data,
- allow for the input of data from COG's own surveys into the future,
- allow input of approved other data sets
- allow data entry by third party systems both existing (e.g. Ebird) and future (e.g. Birdlife)

COG will moderate all data held in its database and COG can continue provide its data to others on terms to be determined

I would like to thank Neil Hermes, Steve Wallace, Michael Robbins, Chris Davey, Paul Fennell, and all those who have assisted in progressing this challenging task

### ***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 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.

### **Outings**

Once again COG has been able to run a very comprehensive outings program in 2015-16 and our special thanks to Sue Lashko for all her efforts in making this a great success for COG members. This is a vital part of COG's activities for members and that the planned outings for the year are mostly fully attended is testimony to their popularity.

In addition to the scheduled outings, the ad hoc group that has 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 this year. On behalf of COG members our thanks to Martin Butterfield 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. The wonderful photos provided by COG photographers are a most welcome part of Gang-gang and out thanks to those who have generously provided their photos to enhance the 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 also like to thank Dianne and Chris Davey and helpers for all their efforts with the distribution of the newsletter and Canberra Bird Notes.

## **Communications and Publications**

### ***Canberra Bird Notes.***

I would like to thank Michael Lenz for his great work as Editor of the Canberra Bird Notes and all those who have contributed to CBN over the past year. CBN is a well-respected and valued source of information about the birds of the Canberra region. 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, an increase of 14% on last year's figure. Most years the number remains fairly stable, with only a small proportion of subscribers dropping off and new ones joining. 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 2,200 emails distributed over the list, an average of about six per day.

## **Monthly meetings**

Jack Holland has arranged yet another most interesting year of both local and interstate speakers at the COG monthly meetings in 2015-16. I would like to thank Jack for his sterling efforts in bringing to the members engaging and informative presentations each month. I also give sincere thanks to the twenty two people, three of them twice, who generously gave up their time and spent considerable effort to prepare and deliver presentations on a varied range of topics, including on ACT Raptors and the national Malleefowl monitoring effort. A special thanks also to the six speakers who contributed to a very interesting and successful Members' Night, sadly likely to be the last for some time due to the unavailability of the meeting venue over December and January.

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 Canberra Birds Conservation Fund has been established for the purpose of supporting COG's environmental objects by receiving donations that are tax deductible by the donor, and allocating those funds as grants. COG's environmental objects are 'to promote the conservation of native birds and their habitats', with particular reference to the native birds and their habitats in the Canberra region. During the year to 30 June 2016, the Fund received a number of donations for which COG and the Fund's Committee of Management

are most appreciative. The first 2015-16 grant was to Ms Constanza Leon from the ANU's Fenner School of Environment and Society to support her research on 'Complex cooperation and the effect of climate change on white-winged choughs'. Close to the end of the year the Fund's Committee Of Management resolved to provide a grant to Dr Kate Grarock of the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust to support research on 'Bringing back Bush Stone-curlews'. I express my thanks to the members of the Fund's Committee of Management, Dr Penny Olsen, Geoffrey Dabb and David McDonald (convenor), for their stewardship of the Fund.

## Summary

I would like to thank all the COG members who have actively contributed over the year to COG and our many and varied activities. COG is well recognised for its effectiveness as an organisation dedicated to the conservation and enjoyment of birds. As outgoing President I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all those who have helped make my time as President rewarding and enjoyable. I look forward to continuing my association with COG through other avenues particularly through the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust where both organisations have strong mutual interests in conservation of our birds.

I extend my congratulations to the new President of COG and look forward to seeing COG continue its work in conserving our birds as well as providing a great organisation for those who love birds.

Alison Russell-French  
President  
11 October 2016