

COG's 2019 member survey responses: Field trips

Four pre-coded questions sought to ascertain respondents' views and suggestions about field trips, with the following responses.

q10: Which COG services do you use, and which COG activities do you participate in?

	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	OCCASIONALLY	NEVER	TOTAL
Do you read or use the CanberraBirds email discussion list/chat list?	57.81% 74	12.50% 16	15.63% 20	14.06% 18	128
Do you visit the COG website canberrabirds.org.au	37.21% 48	39.53% 51	18.60% 24	4.65% 6	129
Do you attend COG's monthly meetings?	29.69% 38	17.19% 22	26.56% 34	26.56% 34	128
Do you attend COG's birding field trips?	14.96% 19	33.86% 43	31.50% 40	19.69% 25	127
Do you participate in bird surveys organised by or through COG?	21.60% 27	24.80% 31	17.60% 22	36.00% 45	125
Do you use the sales desk at these meetings?	3.23% 4	20.97% 26	41.13% 51	34.68% 43	124

q13: In your opinion, what are the best parts of being a member?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Knowing that COG provides a voice for regional bird conservation	71.54%	93
The opportunity to learn from other birders on COG's birding field trips	63.85%	83
The opportunity to go to new birding locations on COG's birding field trips	60.77%	79
The chance to meet and get to know other local birders	53.08%	69
Reading COG's publications	48.46%	63
Hearing from speakers at meetings	46.15%	60
Other(s) (please specify)	28.46%	37
Total Respondents: 130		

Respondents were invited to explain their responses. One mentioned field trips: 'Contributing by leading Field Trips'.

Q14: Please give suggestions for improving how COG runs each of the following member services and activities

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Meetings	50.00%	35
Local birding field trips	44.29%	31
COG's email-based discussion list, 'CanberraBirds' (known some as the 'chatline')	40.00%	28
The monthly Gang-gang newsletter	38.57%	27
Overnight birding field trips	31.43%	22
COG's website	28.57%	20
Annual Bird Report	24.29%	17
Sales desk	21.43%	15
Canberra Bird Notes	18.57%	13

Local birding field trips

- Make them accessible for the disabled
- I think all of above are run well – no complaints
- Pre-walk explanation of what can be seen today
- As a newcomer (and no longer young) I found it difficult to assess how difficult walks will be. And since I've not been able to find any Wednesday Walk information on the website, I've only just discovered the need to be on the email list for this.
- More attention to leading the trip to ensure participants are supported to see and recognise birds. Ensuring that potential participants have sufficient info to determine whether it is suitable for them (eg length, terrain)
- Facebook events
- We used to go to lots but have not been recently due to commitments. At times I wished more could be done to help people like me understand what I am seeing. I don't always hear anyone tell me what a bird is so don't know.
- Encourage new places to visit and new leaders, especially those who might consider themselves not good birders (as usually there is a least one experienced birder in the group who could take that role on).
- excellent
- Try and encourage expert leaders
- Good overall. Personally I think there are too many on the program, almost every week in some months. If current field trips coordinator resigned I think there might be an issue maintaining such a large program. Another issue with large number is that some sites get visited too regularly/frequently/saturated.
- Have more Saturday trips instead of so many Sundays
- Cap on numbers
- More learning opportunities for new members
- More, please!
- Bring morning tea and new members get a chance to meet Canberran birders and chat.
- One off complaint of a lack of information regarding sites to be visited. The speed the car convoy proceeded at coupled with the lack of information as to what we were doing and where we were going made for a very out of character and unpleasant experience.
- Perhaps a dedicated system for members to offer a lift/seek carpooling - particularly useful for newer members who may not have contacts within COG and who may not have the means to access or travel to locations. ACT Rogaine has this on their website for some idea. This could also extend to overnight trips, and perhaps also allow participants or those who would like to participate to seek/offer equipment like a spare tent etc as this may be another limitation for people who may like to join these trips
- Make sure leaders actually "lead" and ensure that everyone gets to see the birds. This often doesn't happen on Wednesday walks.
- Many cater primarily for twitchers, The growing photograph group is not well catered for
- The car pooling arrangements can sometimes appear mandatory, when I'd rather just be independent - so the location of walks is not obvious unless you carpool
- Long-term members should make an effort to welcome new people to the group and introduce themselves. This rarely happens and new members feel very much like outsiders for the first few outings/meetings.
- as I mentioned above, it would be great to do activities for children and young adults; mentor uni students etc. We must recruit the next generations!
- Already good
- publicise them better and more often. I have missed a few I wasn't aware of

- Often the birding field trips are in the morning on a week day or on a weekend. I would be nice if there were a few in the afternoon so that those who work these times might get a chance to participate.
- more beginner/novice options
- Send an email advice (on chat line) a fortnight before a field trip.

Overnight birding field trips

- I think all of above are run well – no complaints
- Pre-walk explanation of what can be seen today
- I'd welcome opportunity for trips with option not to camp for medical reasons
- Facebook events
- Perhaps encourage new leaders by having a short presentation from someone on each overnight trip do a 5 minute presentation at the next meeting with images.
- Years ago I liked these but can't afford it any more.
- Good, no suggestions to improve.
- Interstate trips such as organised by Ulladulla Birders
- Ensuring all people attending are included in all opportunities, especially after-birding gatherings
- More trips that aren't camping (for those of us who can no longer camp)
- Keep in mind those who are still working by maintaining weekend options
- Clearly warn if ticks are likely to be present.
- Change sites more often
- Good
- Maybe a few email reminders that the trip is coming up?
- Send an email advice (on chat line) a fortnight before a field trip.

q37: Some people who are not members of COG attend COG's birding field trips. Would you support allowing only paid COG members to attend these activities? Or otherwise limiting the number of excursions that non-members could attend?

	YES	NO	UNSURE	TOTAL
Support only paid-up members of COG being able to participate in COG field trips	24.04% 25	57.69% 60	18.27% 19	104
Support limiting the number of COG field trips in which non-members can participate	54.70% 64	31.62% 37	13.68% 16	117

Respondents were asked to explain why these were their preferences:

- I can hardly express an opinion when none of you Committee has ever made them accessible to the disabled.
- Members bring young family or friends – could help in attracting new members, but where numbers on a particular trip need to be restricted, C.O.G. members must have priority
- Where places are limited, members should have precedence. Does that not happen now?
- You could ask them for a small payment, (compulsory)
- It often takes a while to get "hooked" on birding. It shouldn't be restricted as it's often a gradually developing interest.
- We should be as open as possible to community involvement: no secrecy!
- "I belong – and have belonged, where-ever I've lived-to several different nature/volunteer groups. Making possible new members welcome – and giving them time to decide whether or not a group is ""for them"" – is an absolutely basic way of gaining new members.

Conversely, HAVING to join before enjoying field trips is pretty much a guaranteed deterrent.

- But, limiting the number that can be enjoyed that way is completely fair and reasonable."
- Non-members are potential members
- "Don't make COG administration too complicated. Need to think through why we would change and what we want to achieve. Is the problem that people feel it is unfair if they are paid up members while non-members have access to everything without paying at all
- That's why we have a club to support our members
- Cog members already have preference - if there's room on the trip let others come.
- I think a regular attendee should be a member
- "Members should occasionally be able to bring guests.
- Does our insurance cover these non-members?"
- Provide incentive to join if people enjoy several free outings
- We need to encourage people to join however some folk need to try things out first.
- We came along when non members and loved the outing. This is what made us join. I think being welcoming is really important. I am not sure limiting field trips would make people join.
- I don't attend field trips so can't comment
- People living in the Canberra area should join COG in order to participate in organised outings.
- That just seems fair to me. If you are just visiting or thinking about joining then come along for free a couple of times. But long term I think you should be a member. Does our insurance cover non-members?
- Charge non members a small fee if they are not members of a birding club somewhere in the world.
- Similar conditions to other organisations and encourages people to become members
- As now, if there is a attendance limit on a field trips, then members should have preference. A few non-members on trips, particularly local ones, doesn't seem too onerous to me - particularly as they may end up becoming members. If we have a situation where we are getting large numbers of non-members, then think again.
- Being able to go to a limited number of field trips (with spaces given to members first) could give them an incentive to sign up.
- Want to encourage them to join by experiencing a trip or two.
- I think a higher fee could be charged to non-members. As above, COG needs to engage more with people who are interested in birds and promote awareness and conservation.
- Don't know. Sometimes people have short time visitors who would like to come
- No, I don't discriminate between members and non-members in the COG field trips that I run, again as I think it's an entree for the latter to become members
- If only the small-scale trips are for non-members then they would almost certainly join to go on bigger trips.
- "We want to encourage people to join us"
- How do new people know if it will work for them if they don't feel welcome - most people do the right thing
- We should be encouraging these non-members to join! We could also look at having a small cost for all attendees if revenue raising is a priority.
- If happy with their experience, non-members will join up. I'm assuming there is no legal liability issue about non-members attending field trips.
- There is an administrative load in requiring this but maybe that is a sad reality. Some other clubs (of different types) actually require non members to attend specific number of events before a joining application can be considered and accepted. So that is not unusual. I think

there may be insurance aspects to non member attendance, though this is hard to predict. If everything is available indefinitely to non members, apart from printed CBN, which is on website, why should most people join?

- Some potential members try out COG via a trip or two. Insisting on being a member before going on even a short outing might discourage some people. But you don't want people using the trips significantly instead of joining. In reality it's probably not an issue, people are unlikely to continually go on trips without joining.
- perhaps 3 "free" field trips which gives people a chance to see if they like what COG does. Then they would have to join if they wished to attend any more trips.
- possibly limit the number of trips that non-members can attend but, in practice, this happens anyway because members get preference for trips that have limited numbers. Allowing non-members to come on trips gives them a taste of what COG is about so I would be reluctant to prevent this entirely.
- Useful to be able to take visitors along
- I think current policy for members preference on booked trips seems to work OK, and probably does not need to be changed.
- Non-members should be able to attend one field trip to see if it is the sort of thing that they want, then be required to join.
- Some specialised trips with small numbers should have members-only access.
- Participation encourages involvement and so what if they can't pay or won't
- Good to have birdos visiting from interstate able to participate or potential new COG members.
- Other organisations prefer membership after a few visits
- Welcome visiting bird watchers, or allow members to invite friends for specific walks. Exclude non-members from longer trips.
- I think it would be better to charge people a small fee (say \$5 per field trip) if they are not members or else to allow non-members to attend a limited number of field trips per year.
- No freebees, all should pay.
- come one, come all
- limiting number could encourage membership if participants like what they experience and are made welcome-
- If people are not paying an annual subscription they should not have access to the complete suite of COG activities.
- I think the Bushwalking Clubs model has worked very well for them. Admittedly they do it so they can vet people who apply for membership, and COG would probably not wish to do that. However, I think the same 'try before you buy' idea as I mentioned for website, applies to field trips.
- I attended a few field trips before becoming a member. I think field trips should be available to non-members to encourage people to join and find their passion for birds.
- We will never attract new members if we ask them to sign up upfront. Charge \$5 for nonmembers each walk, maybe.
- Again, if we are not an open organisation, we will shrink
- Excludes visitors to Canberra.
- I feel that having some spaces open to the public is a good way to encourage their participation to become a member.
- User should pay
- Members given preference for restricted numbers field trips after that should be open to anybody who wishes to participate.
- Not sure of consequences of only paid members attending as have not attended enough to know or assess. but seems logical.

- would encourage membership
- I think it would be fair to allow a sort of trial period (perhaps total of 3 trips and/or meetings), and then expect that if they choose to keep attending that they become members. Also appeal a bit further with a membership table at meetings with a sign that advises attendees that you are unable to cover costs and appeal anyone who isn't a member to sign up
- COG members should have priority but allowing non members the opportunity would I think encourage a greater interest in organized birding.
- I think this would provide an incentive to join, as long as there's an arrangement whereby potential members can come on 1-2 trips before they join. Would this be feasible - ie keeping a count of the number of trips non-members do?
- My reasons are similar to my response to the previous question. However, member should have priority over non-members
- See 36. comment
- But I would support non-members paying a fee to attend field trips - i think they expect to and are surprised that they can come along for free!
- Just charge for it. People will pay
- It's good and fairer for new people to try a field trip before needing to become a member.
- We are yet to attend a field trip.
- If people don't have to be members, where's the incentive to join
- It is important to involve as many keen people as possible, and participating in a field trip is a fabulous way of enticing them into the wonderful world of birding and bird/habitat conservation! Rather, I suggest it could be free for members and non-members could have one or 2 trips free and then would have to pay for each (\$5 or 10?)
- Field trips are a way of getting new members. If people keep turning up without being a member then some suitable person could have a chat to them.
- Some trips are more specialised than others. Others are special, like pelagic trips or boat trips on the lakes. Others, again, might be to private land areas where members' visits are a privileg.
- it will encourage people to join once they realise the benefits
- Experiencing COG field trips can encourage people to join. There should be an expectation that if people continue to come then they will join COG
- Excellent way to encourage membership, I should think
- as before - if people are not members, and are likely to stay in Canberra, it's better to chat and explain that membership numbers give us more influence with govt etc, and members get preference on some activities, eg pelagics and the Green Cape outings
- They must sign a waiver for insurance purposes
- The trips are the benefits of members. non-members either pay more for the trip or join COG.
- Just in case a member has forgotten the payment, can't deny them an excursion. Prefer that you have to be a member, but also maybe some people use excursions to 'test out' whether they'd like COG. Also overseas visitors (birdos) need to access occasionally
- these activities encourage membership
- Field trips should be part of what the membership fee is for.
- Perhaps allow a member to bring one other person, or allow people who are thinking of becoming a member to come once
- Non-members should be asked to pay to participate in field trips. A nominal amount of \$10 per local excursion, and more for further afield camping trips should be charged. When people go to exercise classes they pay around \$10 an hour for the leadership and equipment.

- Monitor this issue. If they are paying up then participation could lead to membership.
- Not sure how widespread the problem is. Certainly at excursions with limited number of participants COG members should have priority.
- I feel very strongly about this! Puts great burden on leaders of trips. I suspect the trips are a good source of new members. What about interstate or OS visitors? If a trip is oversubscribed (eg where accommodation is restricted) then certainly give priority to members. I am not aware of any case in which a normal field has had a problem with too many people - we did once (about 1994) have to split a group as 60 starters arrived, but I can't remember a recent occasion where we have had more than 30. Restricting involvement would aid recruitment.
- I think that giving outsiders a taste of what the trips are like is a positive idea, because if they like it they might join, and that would also build incentive for friends and family to join, since only COG members could go.
- Would prefer charges for non-members to more than cover costs.
- Unless there are insurance difficulties it is better to allow them to participate and learn. It does not cost COG to allow them to attend.
- Visitors have always been welcome. No need to be restrictive.

General comments about COG services or activities – field trips

- As a relatively new birdwatcher I really appreciate the opportunity to go on field trips and learn from more experienced birdwatchers. That is the best part of COG from my perspective.
- I'm very glad to be a member of COG and appreciate the field trips.
- I am a fairly new member but do not feel very connected to the organisation - no introductions or guides to what I could participate in. Your field trips for beginners seem to be only every 6 months when it should be more often.

What do you particularly like about the website? (re field trips)

- Field trip info, bird photos for IDs and rarity info
- List of field trips

Is there anything that would make you use the website more? (field trips)

- "There is a problem in that COG now seems to use the website as practically the only way of interacting with members. I wonder whether the monthly meetings will be the next thing to go, on the grounds that they are ""too expensive"". Please remember that some people have a marked preference for a printed monthly newsletter by post. For some it is their only way of receiving information. Please reinstate it, at least for those without email.
At the moment, if I can't get to the meetings (not COG's fault) I have no idea of what is going on and no info about field trips. The value of being a member is becoming questionable."

Suggestions to increase COG's long-term revenue – field trips

- Increased charges (say 5% on some of the field trips. Extra \$ to go to COG's treasury.
- Perhaps charging a small fee for non-members to attend field trips and/or charging for external bird groups (e.g. from interstate/overseas) to attend local birding excursions

Suggestions for increasing memberships – field trips

- Publicise a field trip aimed at non-members. Follow up any non-members who participate in any COG activities

- somehow getting a higher public profile for the work done in addition to field trips - lots of people love birds, and I'm sure would support the work COG does but are not interested in field trips, or group activities
- Discuss with eBird users joint field trips for "expert" groups to seek out "interesting" species.

A member-only section of COG's website, requiring members to log on to access restricted areas, or a time-limited section of the website – field trips

- currently there is no incentive to join COG as everyone has free access to our website including publications. Only some field trips are restricted to members only.
- Part access will give some idea of the range of activities eg an extract from Gang Gang or basic information about field trips but not full detail.

Other feedback to COG's Committee of Management – field trips

- Re non-members joining cog trips - its important that visiting birders not be excluded
- Just a thought about COGs field trip program. I notice that other naturalist clubs we belong to put out field trip programs in smaller chunks eg 3-4 months in advance. COG develops a program for the entire year in the later months of the year and I know that it can be hard to get leaders. From a leaders point of view, sometimes it is hard to commit to leading something that far out. I wonder if developing the program for the next 4-6 months would be easier to get leaders? You would also be able to be more flexible and add trips to locations that are good this season, rather than taking a guess at where might be interesting 12 months in advance.

(Author: David McDonald, 12Oct19)