

CANBERRA ORNITHOLOGISTS GROUP
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PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2018-19

The year saw COG being very active on many fronts.

We faced challenges and opportunities of various kinds from preparing for BIGnet meeting in Canberra in September 2019, reviewing some of the rules of the association and the myriad of requests for guest speakers, participation in various community days and general enquiries for bird identification (and they were not all Koels) to nest boxes and local bird issues. We had requests for what to plant in gardens to attract birds to regenerators interested in wider conservation works. We had media requests for what to do for birds during drought and discussions about peacocks. We signed a contract to do a study on bird impacts for Project Wing and company which had trialled using drones for home deliveries. We addressed the issues of funding of annual membership at the same time as financially backing bird supporting activities and organisations.

And we also did all the other things which are reported on below.

But before that I will mention the fact that this year we conducted a comprehensive member survey which was amazingly well supported. The full results of the membership survey will be available in 2019-20 and the results will form the basis of planning for COG activities into the future. The information from the survey is rich but I shall not comment on the actual results in this report. However, I will note some general observations by members who are very supportive of the hard work being done by such a wide and talented group of COG committee members and our large and very active support team.

Quotes from the COG survey

1. You are doing a great job. Keep going!
2. Yes, thank you so much for all your hard work and expertise
3. Thanks for the hard and difficult work the group is doing!
4. Thanks I am proud to have joined an organisation genuinely and professionally making a difference
5. Thank you for all your hard work.
6. Many thanks to COG for a fantastic service to the birding community and for the conservation of our birds.
7. Many thanks for all!!! I think the COG committee of management does a great job, always has. Thank you. Thank you for decades of excellence and voluntary contributions for birds and the region
8. Keep up the good work. COG is a good example to other special interest groups on how to cater for a cross section of interests.
9. I've only been a birdwatcher and a member of COG for a short time but I appreciate what you do.

10. I would like to say that all of those people who have an active role in COG are wonderful.
11. I think you do a great job and I am proud to be a member. COG is one of the most active, professional volunteer-based organisations that I have been involved with, which plays a strong role in nature conservation in the ACT. May it long continue. I think the Committee and all those members in active positions in COG do a marvellous job.
12. COG is (and has long been) an excellent community organisation. The committee and other role players are to be congratulated for the efforts, and you have my sincere thanks.
13. Am very happy about COG's contribution to the welfare of bird life in the ACT, as very few other places have a large active group like this. I very much appreciate the work of the Committee. I am already secretary on another Canberra Committee, otherwise I would join

So, this year's committee and support team have big shoes to fill. We also have a big responsibility to address the many positive issues raised in the members survey.

Committee

In 2018-19, COG has again been very well-served by a dedicated and enthusiastic Committee and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them all for their contributions.

We started the year with the four executive members Neil Hermes (President), Steve Read (Vice President), Lia Battisson (Acting Treasurer) and Bill Graham (Secretary).

On the committee we started the year with Jenny Bounds, David McDonald, Paul Fennell, Nick Nicholls and Chris Davey, a committee of nine.

Committee changes

On behalf of the Committee I would like to extend our thanks to David McDonald who stood down during the year. He has been stalwart supporter of and contributors to the Committee and continues to serve in a variety of capacities outside the committee. Lia Battisson finally retired from the committee and her role was taken over by Prue Watters. Welcome and thank you Prue.

The Support Team

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, COG's Public Officer, 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* with the help of Kevin Windle; Duncan McCaskill manages the Garden Bird Survey; Barbara Allan is responsible for the Bird Blitz and the Rarities Panel; Nicki Taws is the COG Records Officer; Kathy Walter and John Goldie manage the sales desk; Julian Robinson continued as Website



manager; Dianne Davey distributes COG publications. Bruce Lindenmayer generously volunteered to assist with the tea and coffee we have after meetings. All of these people have generously given their time.

Databases and data management

COG has a long history of strong collection and dissemination of reliable data on birds of our region. This has continued this year. Here is a review of some work in this area.

COG has had an MOU with the Conservation and Research area of ACT Government for around two decades, which enables bird data to be provided for the Government's core responsibilities, strategies and actions for threatened ecological communities and bird species. COG has also provided advice based on its bird surveys for other purposes such as NRM related projects, to target management actions for species.

COG recently analysed 20 years of bird data from its long-term woodland bird monitoring program, in a collaboration with the ACT Government's Parks and Conservation Service, Environmental Offsets Team (which provided funding). The results have use for land management purposes and projects for habitat enhancement within the ACTs reserve system, and more widely on private lands.

- The results from the woodland analysis have recently been presented to the Ecofocus Forum in September 2019, attended by a range of ACT reserve managers and rangers, NRM staff, ACT Parkcare volunteers and attendees from various environmental community groups.
- The woodland bird dataset has potential for future projects to analyse birds' responses to habitat changes at sites over time, using methods such as remote sensing data/tools, and to investigate bird/habitat related relationships more deeply, e.g. eucalypt dieback and bird relationships.

The COG woodland bird monitoring protocols/survey methods have been adopted by other projects for bird monitoring/surveys, e.g. Molonglo Valley environmental offsets, and other environmental offsets sites managed by the ACT Government.

COG bird survey records were important for the community campaign by local environmental groups in the early 1990's to save Mulligans Flat (a prime grassy woodland site) in Gungahlin from urban development. Mulligans Flat became a nature reserve and the Mulligans Flat Woodland Sanctuary is now the site of an experimental project on woodlands restoration (including reintroduction of animal/bird species locally extinct), as well as community education and engagement in conservation.

COG has supported landcare projects in the ACT region, through undertaking bird surveys at re-vegetation sites in nearby NSW, eg Taylor's Creek Landcare, Greening Australia's Birdwatch and K2C revegetation projects over several decades.

COG contributed over 1 million bird records to the Canberra Nature Map (CNP), a web-based information tool which is publicly accessible. COG also contributed records from its long-term Garden Bird Survey to the CSIRO's web portal 'Atlas of Living Australia'; this is a publicly accessible, information resource.

Recently, COG provided ten years of bird survey data from its K2C bird surveys on private properties on the Monaro, for a collaborative research project to establish evidence-based management protocols for recovery of multiple threatened birds. This is a project of the



Threatened Species Recovery Hub, funded through the Commonwealth's National Environmental Science Program, in a collaboration of four academic/university institutions, CSIRO, NSW Saving our Species Program, Bush Heritage Australia, and Birdlife Australia. This project aims to better understand what the most cost-effective conservation are actions and has potential to inform habitat/connectivity restoration and for land stewardship programs and landowner engagement.

COG publishes (using its bird survey data) an annual bird report, a summary of the status of all bird species recorded in COG area of interest (ACT region) which is available on the COG website. This is a major source of data which can be used to document the changes which are occurring in the bird population in the ACT and surrounding area and is also an important source of data for many other studies.

COG also publishes several its bird survey project reports, such as the analyses of data, species trends, from the woodland bird monitoring program. These reports and species trends are published on the COG website.

However, there are challenges of keeping up with modern information technology (web-based systems, apps etc.), in order to support database systems. There is a need to employ professional services in information technology to design, manage and update the critical database systems on which bird data is stored and retrieved for the various purposes, including requests for data from external parties and for COGs own analyses of data, as well as the programs for data-entry, particularly on-line data entry systems. COG is currently looking to re-develop its data base systems and this will require the engagement of professional services and investment of monies.

Another challenge is funding for professional statistical services to analyse data, particularly to obtain meaningful, accurate long-term trends for bird species over time. Specialist services for advice on habitat related analyses also need to be funded.

These are all issues that are front of mind for this year's new committee.

COG Membership

There are currently about 450 members and to all our continuing members, you are a vital part of our organisation and your support for COG is very much appreciated.

Steve Wilson Medal 2018

The Steve Wilson Medal Sub-Committee (Neil Hermes, Alison Russell-French and Bruce Lindenmayer) has selected two awardees for the 2018 Steve Wilson Medal Sandra Henderson and Dick Schodde.

Sandra Henderson

Sandra joined COG in 2006, after being captivated by a Golden Whistler at Lowden Forest Park while on a COG tour run by Ian Fraser. Within a few weeks Sandra was in the role of secretary, which she undertook for 9 years. At the same time she took on the role of memberships officer, a role she continues in to today.



Sandra loves the COG outings program and feels strongly that to get something out of it, you must be more involved, which is why she now organises/leads several outings each year. She says it allows her “to show off some of my favorite new places of the last few years”.

Running monthly raffles for the last few years lets Sandra indulge her love of books and bookshops, but she also like the brief chats with members as they arrive at meetings.

Sandra got involved in woodland surveys quite early on in my involvement with COG and have done Callum Brae surveys for over 10 years, and more recently the Isaacs Ridge surveys. She enjoys helping Lia with many of COGs promotional activities at various open days.

Richard “Dick” Schodde

Dick was former Curator/Director of the Australian National Wildlife Collection at CSIRO, is one of Australia’s most widely known professional ornithologists, internationally as well as nationally. He founded the Australian National Wildlife Collection, has published almost 200 scientific papers and a number of books on the taxonomy and biogeography of Australia’s birds. He was the first Honorary President of the recently formed International Ornithologists’ Union where he still serves as the Chair of the Union’s Working Group on Avian Nomenclature.

Dick joined COG in the first year of its existence in the early 1960s, but only became active in the early 1970s after shifting to ornithology in CSIRO’s Division of Wildlife Research. He served on the COG committee for several years before becoming President from 1976 to 1978 and was remarkably unsuccessful in getting meetings to start on time. In his last year as President, when COG was charged with organizing the then RAOU’s annual field outing, he led the initiative to hold that event on Norfolk Island and carry out the first methodical survey of the island’s bird fauna. The resulting report, written with other COG members Peter Fullagar and Neil Hermes, was the first published record of an RAOU field program in over a decade, and the last ever.

Dick has given diverse talks to COG meetings over the years, regularly contributed “bird of the month” through the 1980s, and led excursions then, mostly to Jindalee near Cootamundra. Dick produced the COG pocket list of Australian birds in the 1980s and 1990s which provided COG with valuable funds, and still serves on COG’s Rarities Panel.

Conservation

Jenny Bounds continues as Conservation Officer, and represents COG in various forums and stakeholder groups, such as ACT Grassy Woodland Stakeholder Group, and the Kosciuszko 2 Coast (K2C) forum. COG has again collaborated with the Conservation Council ACT and other groups to progress conservation matters impacting on birds, particularly those relating to ongoing greenfield development in Gungahlin and the Molonglo Valley, and the implementation of offset arrangements.



Surveys

In addition to those larger bird data collection programs previously mentioned members participate in:

- An annual Bird Blitz in late October, covering as much of the ACT as possible.
- The COG Garden Bird Survey, now in its 40th year; COG published two editions of the 'Birds of Canberra Gardens' from this data, a highly successful coffee-table style book for Canberra residents to identify and encourage birds in their gardens.
- Latham's Snipe surveys (coordinated by the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust); this survey of a migratory wader is part of a national and international monitoring program.
- An annual Lyrebird survey at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve.
- Lord Howe Island annual bird survey in September for the NSW Parks and Conservation Service; this project is in conjunction with an eradication program of rats and mice on the Island; this survey will provide baseline data before the eradication program and after the eradication program, to determine impacts on birds on the island.
- Surveys of waterbirds at Lakes George and Bathurst, a long running monitoring project over more than four decades.
- Regular surveys at a high-quality Travelling Stock Reserve north of Canberra near Gundaroo (Nelanglo) which inform NSW Local Land Services' management of the TSR.

All bird data collected by COG is stored in databases, which can be retrieved for various purposes.

Woodland Bird Monitoring Project

COG's long-term woodland survey at 15 locations (142 monitoring points) continues. Jenny Bounds coordinates the project's operations. Many thanks are due to the team of COG members and their helpers who survey the sites quarterly. The commitment of the site coordinators over time is a significant factor in the success of this survey and deserves recognition. With more than ten years' data at all sites (some sites since 1995), COG is in a position to plan and undertake a significant analysis of this data in the future.

Gang-Gang Newsletter

Hard-copy of the *Gang-gang* newsletter ceased from 1 July 2018. *Gang-gang* will continue to be available on the COG website, as a colour pdf that can be downloaded and printed if you wish. Most of the membership already access *Gang-gang* on the website, and some have been doing so for many years.

The COG website



COG's website was visited 155,000 times last year and used by an average of 270 different people each day, 25% more than the previous year. The COG Membership Survey results suggests that the website largely succeeds in fulfilling members' needs and overall satisfaction is high.

A major update was made to the Bird Info pages during the year that included updated and more informative statistics, distribution and breeding information for almost every bird found in our region. Thanks to Jaron Bailey and Paul Fennell for their considerable effort in preparing and presenting such a large amount of data.

The time may have come to re-assess the website's Bird Photo Gallery and either remove or upgrade it. Until recently it seemed that our gallery had reached the end of its useful life, given the number of alternative bird photo sites and the rapid increase in the number and quality of bird photographs and photographers. On the other hand, the membership survey suggested surprising support for the gallery and this will now be taken into account in deciding the Photo Gallery's future.

Website information is regularly updated by members and thanks go to Sue Lashko, Jack Holland, David McDonald, Martin Butterfield and Julian Robinson for this work.

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

Records Management

COG database is kept up to date by 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.

Rarities Panel

Thanks for the efforts of Grahame Clark, Richard Allen, Dick Schodde, Jenny Bounds and Nicki Taws who are the moderators of our COG rare records. The Panel endorsed 8 records in 2018-19, several of the Yellow-plumed Honeyeater (a first for the ACT), also Pied and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters, a Black-faced Monarch and a Square-tailed Kite. It continues to receive requests for identification from the general public, often of surprisingly common species such as the Crested Pigeon.

Outings

Our special thanks go to Sue Lashko for all her efforts in making our outings program a great success for COG members. This is a vital part of COG's activities and the fact that the planned outings for the year are mostly fully attended is testimony to their popularity.



Our Wednesday walks have once again operated most successfully and managed to attract a keen group of followers, with outings taking place each month. On behalf of COG members, our thanks to Martin Butterfield and others for organising these events.

Canberra Bird Notes

I would like to thank Michael Lenz and Kevin Windle for their great work as Editors 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.

Appreciation is also due to Paul Fennell, Jaron Bailey and the writing team for their work on the Annual Bird Report.

Monthly meetings

In addition to being COG's public officer, Jack Holland has arranged yet another most interesting year of both local and interstate speakers at the COG monthly meetings in 2018-19. I would like to thank Jack for his great efforts in bringing to the members engaging and informative presentations again this year.

Thanks 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 an opportunity for members to socialise.

CanberraBirds email announcement and discussion list

At the end of the year COG's CanberraBirds email announcement and discussion list was 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. The list manager continues to commend subscribers for the way they use the list: positively, productively and politely.

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. 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 most of 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 environment.



In conclusion

I thank all the COG members who have actively contributed over the year to COG and our many and varied activities.

The work of the committee is only possible by the efforts of a large skilled support team.

COG continues its work in conserving our birds as well as providing a great organisation for those who love birds. We have the fulsome results of the membership survey which gives us renewed enthusiasm, direction and purpose.

Neil Hermes

President

1 October 2019

