

Canberra Ornithologists Group  
PO Box 301  
CIVIC SQUARE ACT 2608  
ABN 72 534 628 789



Chief Executive  
National Capital Authority  
Email: [draft.amendment@nca.gov.au](mailto:draft.amendment@nca.gov.au)

### **Draft Amendment 95 - Variation to Territory Plan - North Curtin Diplomatic Estate and Urban Area**

The Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG) is responding to this Draft Amendment. COG does not support the Draft Amendment in the present form, which would re-zone all land from broadacre to urban/residential.

COG is a volunteer-based community group with around 500 members whose mission includes the conservation of native birds and their habitats. COG plays an active role in advocating for protection of native vegetation/bird habitats and for the mitigation of threats to and impacts on native birds. COG undertakes surveys of birds, including long-term monitoring projects, which can usefully inform land use and land management actions.

The area of DA 95 includes a site on the edge of north Curtin which has been monitored for birds on a weekly basis for the last 27 years, by a member of COG who lives immediately adjacent to the site. The site and associated data are part of COG's long-term Garden Bird Survey. The total bird list for the site of 169 species is very impressive for a peri-urban site of modified vegetation and mixed plantings, considering that the total number of bird species recorded in the ACT is around 250. Part of the area of DA 95 is an important local corridor and seasonal habitat along Yarralumla Creek, for a significant number of birds on passage through Canberra. Both geographic and ecological factors contribute to the special value that area of DA 95 has for birds.

This Yarralumla/Molonglo corridor connects to the Molonglo River and more broadly to habitats for a range of species to the west and into the Brindabella Ranges. Specifically, the treed/vegetated area of the creek/gully line of Yarralumla Creek running through the lower part of the site adjacent to Curtin, with an area of lower open pasture, is essential for the viability of many bird species moving through the Molonglo and Woden Valleys. Insectivorous birds on returning migration to the ACT in spring thrive on the abundant larvae (e.g. Day Pasture Moth) that emerge in spring. Regularly trillers, songlarks, whistlers, and woodswallows occur in the lowland pasture.

Fourteen of the bird species recorded at this site over time are on threatened species lists (Commonwealth, ACT, NSW), and others are regarded as decliners or of conservation concern. An example is the Flame Robin, an altitudinal migrant which moves to lowland habitats in autumn/winter. There are also records of two important species listed under the Commonwealth's EPBC Act (and ACT legislation), Superb Parrot and Swift Parrot.

On a broad landscape scale, the land subject to the DA is part of a large complex with mixed/varied habitats on Canberra's western urban edge. This includes the parklands of the Governor-General's residence, Weston Park and Westbourne Woods, lowland woodlands in Stirling Park abutting Lake Burley Griffin, the Molonglo River corridor, and the National Arboretum, with connections to Black Mountain, the Australian National Botanic Gardens, and the Woden Valley. These areas/habitats, although modified to varying extents, all have habitat values and are used by a large range of birds.

Seasonal migration is a marked feature of bird movement in the ACT and high country, particularly over certain periods in spring and autumn. There is a significant occurrence of spring passage migrants moving through urban Canberra and an autumn influx, including altitudinal migrants moving from higher altitudes to overwinter in lower altitude habitats. This includes urban-edge sites, nature reserves and parklands. The existing reserves and green corridors in Canberra are very important to facilitate these seasonal bird movements, by providing shelter and food resources.

COG's view is that there needs to be a conservation corridor conserved through the site, with appropriate zoning. It is noted in the DA document (page 13) that the application of an 'open space' land use policy is mentioned for Yarralumla Creek and the land immediately either side. To function and remain viable for migrating birds, COG's view is that this should be around 500 metres minimum width from the edge of Curtin suburb across Yarralumla Creek, and include some lower slope open pasture/paddock area. It would be a positive inclusion in any final development plan for the whole area, if there was a preference for native vegetation in any new plantings.

This action would be also consistent with matters of national significance and objectives of the National Capital Plan as expressed on page 2 of the DA, such as "conservation and enhancement of the landscape features .... which contribute to the integration of natural and urban environments", and "protect the undeveloped hill tops and the open spaces which divide and give form to Canberra's urban area".

COG is seeking to engage in consultations, to work with the NCA about the use of the site, including giving input to any master plan which may be developed. COG has significant experience in both local and strategic planning within the ACT for bird conservation outcomes. COG wishes to ensure that the significant values for birds in the Yarralumla/Molonglo corridor are taken into account and reflected in such plans, and that a reasonably sized corridor is conserved in a way which will enable this to continue to function as an important local movement corridor and seasonal habitat resource for birds.

COG can be contacted on: [cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au](mailto:cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au)

Yours sincerely



Neil Hermes  
President  
Canberra Ornithologists Group  
2 June 2020