



PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2020-21

The last two years have been full of challenge. Last year I reflected on drought, fires, hail and pandemic.

This year, looking to future, I feel there is a wonderful feeling of renewal and we can be more upbeat and, to misquote Dr Seuss;

"We are again off to great places! Today is our day! Our mountains, forests, plains, lakes and wetlands are waiting, so let us get on our way!"

Last year I reported on the results of the COG members' survey. The committee's ability to respond to the comments received had been affected by COVID-19 but this year we held a planning day to review the results. Unfortunately some potential initiatives have been delayed but a number of new activities have been able to be started.

The main roles of the committee have been to keep the regular work continuing and to adapt to the new challenges. Despite these limitations, work on the role and function of the COG database has continued, the website has been updated, the opportunities for the COG databases have been researched and we have made inputs into a wide range of conservation issues. Our correspondence has increased with every year – more and more enquiries concerning plantings for birds, survey requests and invitations to participate in a range of community activities.

As noted further in this report work on replacing COG's bird database is continuing. This has been a challenge for the committee for a number of years as the bird database landscape has evolved and changed so dramatically; e.g. with the large migration of recording to eBird. We hope that we can develop an easy way to record data about local birds that complements other systems and simplifies production of the Annual Bird Report in future. Due to problems with getting data into and out of the old database, the ABR for 2019-2020 was delayed.

The committee has introduced a new section to Gang-gang to keep the membership up to date with the committee's activities.

The Committee

Whilst, under various constraints, it has been another tough year to manage COG's affairs in 2020-21, COG has again had a strong and enthusiastic committee. I would sincerely like to

thank each of them on behalf of the whole Group for their contributions. We have mastered Zoom for our committee meetings and this has allowed us to continue meeting each month to deal with committee business.

This year the four executive members were Neil Hermes (President), Steve Read (Vice-President), Prue Watters (Treasurer) and Bill Graham (Secretary).

General members of the committee were Jenny Bounds, Nick Nicholls, Chris Davey, Alison Mackerras, Kathy Eyles and Brittany Brockett, a committee of ten.

The Support Team (COG's COGs)

As well as committee members, COG has been well served by many 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 has handed over responsibility for the Bird Blitz to Nicki Taws but remains on 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; David McDonald manages the COG chatline; Dianne Davey distributed COG publications; and Bruce Lindenmayer generously volunteered to assist with the tea and coffee we have after meetings. All of these people have generously given their time.

We have introduced a new feature to Gang-gang to acknowledge COG's support team. We have been highlighting in short articles the contribution of those who contribute to the works of COG outside the formal committee. They are truly COG'S COGS. Thanks to Nathan Finger, COG's COG in charge of COG'S COGS and to Julian Robinson for the title of the series.

Use of photographs and sound recordings

COG's policy on use of photographs and sound recordings on the COG website was reviewed since we sometimes receive requests to use one of the photographs or sound recordings that are on our website. The committee agreed that each photographer or sound-recordist would be asked to grant COG an unlimited non-exclusive licence to use their provided material on the COG website, in COG publications, or in COG social media, and to allow COG to permit third parties to use the material non-commercially where COG determines that the third-party use aligns with COG's objectives. Requests for commercial use will be relayed by COG to the creator as ongoing copyright holder. The full wording of COG's policy for photographs and sound recordings has been made available on the COG website.

Code of Conduct

The committee adopted a COG Code of Conduct. It was felt that it was necessary to have an agreed Code that could provide a guide to the behaviour expected of all COG members regardless of their position or level of involvement within the group. A formal Code does serve the purpose of setting a standard that is now easy to understand by all.

Code of Conduct

Purpose: to articulate the basic standard of behaviour expected by COG committee members, and by volunteers and members when they are representing COG or participating in COG activities.

All COG members shall:

- act respectfully to all birders, whether or not they are members of COG
- not persistently and wilfully act in a manner prejudicial to the interests of COG.

In addition, COG volunteers shall:

- practice common courtesy when dealing with COG members and members of the public
- act in the best interests of COG.

In addition, COG committee members shall:

- act impartially in decision-making and their interaction with COG members
- adhere to the Objects and Rules of the Association.

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 been represented in/input to several bird related projects, coordinated by Conservation Research in ACT Government, and has provided relevant data for some projects such as the Gang-gang bushfire recovery.

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 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.

As was highlighted in last year's report, there are challenges of keeping up with modern information technology (web-based systems, apps etc.), to support database systems. COG data underpin lots of our conservation lobbying and governmental credibility.

There is a need to employ professional services in information technology to design, manage and update the critical database systems on which bird data are stored and retrieved for the various purposes, including requests for data from external parties and for COG's own analyses of data, as well as the programs for data-entry, particularly on-line data entry systems.

The Committee is working with a commercial database design company to develop a new database for COG, then to migrate into it all our data across current disparate databases. Progress on this has been slow on this for a variety of COVID-related and technical reasons. The Committee hopes to make significant progress on this in 2022.

COG Membership

At the end of the end of the last financial year we had a membership total of 420.

This is very encouraging given the challenges again this year. As we all have had to adjust to changes to meetings, outings, surveys etc, the committee has been keen to try to ensure that members maintain connections with the group. This is best expressed by members voting with their feet and wallets and keeping up their membership.

This support by the general membership through the challenges of COVID is greatly appreciated.

Steve Wilson Medal 2020

The Steve Wilson medal recipient was Bruce Lindenmayer.

The Steve Wilson Medal Committee in 2020-21 was Neil Hermes, Sue Lashko and Jack Holland.

Conservation

Jenny Bounds continues as Conservation Officer, and represents COG in various forums and stakeholder groups, including the Biodiversity Working Group of the ACT Conservation Council, and the ACT Government Biodiversity Conservation Forum, a regular meeting with Government for environmental community groups. Many of these consultation activities have continued via on-line platforms this year.

Some matters of interest to COG have not been progressed by ACT Government quickly in the past year for various reasons (including COVID). An example is the Draft Action Plan for conserving mature, hollow-bearing eucalypts which is still awaited. Through the Conservation Council's Biodiversity Working Group, the protection of bird habitats and connectivity continues to be a priority to COG, particularly the land west of Mt Stromlo to the Murrumbidgee River (including Bluett's Block), and in the Central Molonglo adjacent to Belconnen (for Superb Parrots particularly).

Chris Davey represents COG on the Ginninderry Bush on the Boundary Working Group and so allows us to comment on any activity in the Murrumbidgee Conservation Corridor.

Some matters COG has provided views on or written responses to were:

The North Lawson Grasslands: COG has supported the Friends of Grasslands and ACT Conservation Council's campaign against high quality habitats being developed for Dept. of Defence housing. Although not significant birds related issues, these areas were identified for natural and heritage protection in previous environmental assessments.

A submission on the Development Control Plan for land on Dairy Road adjacent to Jerrabomberra Wetlands (units and commercial development). Two key matters were raised: the need for a high standard/best practice design and environmental provisions, and the minimisation of human impacts on, and avoidance of inappropriate recreational activities in the sensitive nature reserve.

A response to a Discussion Paper concerning a proposal for Seaplanes to operate commercially on Lake Burley Griffin. A key matter was that the paper did not address any issues for or potential impacts to the birdlife occurring on the lake, including Seagulls breeding on Spinnaker Island and large waterbirds, and an EIA was needed.

A submission concerning the Australian War Memorial re-development, including loss of large native eucalypts and habitat for birds, noting that Swift Parrots regularly

occurred on migration in the Mts Majura/Ainslie complex adjacent.

Comments on the Development Application for a new crematorium and chapel on the old Mugga Lane Zoo site, particularly loss of mature trees and indirect impacts on the high value Callum Brae NR.

COG reviewed Draft Conservation Advice on Gang-gang Cockatoo and Glossy Black-Cockatoo, and supported their nomination for listing as threatened species under Commonwealth legislation.

Comments on the Mulligans Flat Sanctuary Draft Strategy 2020-2045. The need for acknowledgement of the role of key groups like COG in the development of the Sanctuary, and for the Principles in the document to make clear the important ongoing role of community/citizen science groups.

Bird data collection programs

COG's long-term Woodland Bird Monitoring Project surveys 15 locations (142 monitoring points). 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.

A COG team (Jenny Bounds, Chris Davey and Nicki Taws), with Dr Laura Rayner (ACT Government) and analyst Dr MJ Evans (ANU), has been working for over 12 months on a report of the analysis of the COG woodland project survey data covering the period March 1998 to September 2019 (21 years 6 months). The report is soon to be published on the COG website. A soft cover designed and printed version is also planned. There are some important findings for a number of common woodland birds, and species of conservation concern have been identified based on the findings. The report will be provided to ACT Government land managers, NRM, and community Landcare groups.

In the second half of 2021, the team commenced a sub-project of the woodland 21 years data analysis, on the colonisation of Noisy Miners at woodland sites. Noisy Miners had a six-fold increase in 21 years of woodland surveys, and further research on impacts on small birds is needed to inform NRM management programs.

The COG Garden Bird Survey also continues, now in its 42st year; COG published two editions of the Birds of Canberra Gardens from GBS data, a highly successful coffee-table style book for Canberra residents to identify and encourage birds in their gardens.

The annual Bird Blitz was in late October, covering as much of the ACT as possible. We all thank Nicki Taws will taking the reins of the Blitz.

Latham's Snipe surveys (coordinated by the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust) of a migratory wader are part of a national and international monitoring program.

The annual Lyrebird survey at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve continues and monitoring of birds near the new suburb of Whitlam was also coordinated by Chris Davey.

The Lord Howe Island annual bird survey has been conducted for the NSW Parks and Conservation Service; this survey had to be cancelled this year due to COVID restrictions.

Surveys of waterbirds at Lakes George and Bathurst continued 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) inform NSW Local Land Services' management of the TSR. All bird data collected by COG are stored in databases, which can be retrieved for various purposes.

Gang-Gang Newsletter

One of our best resources continues to be our newsletter *Gang-gang*. As has been the practice since July 2018, *Gang-gang* has been available on the COG website as a colour pdf that can be downloaded and printed if you wish.

We thank Sue Lashko for her great job in coordinating *Gang-gang* and thanks to Gail Neumann, who does the layout.

The COG website

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

The whole Group is indebted to Julian Robinson for his ongoing amazing diligence and 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

The Panel continues to review reports of unusual species, and publish endorsements in Canberra Bird Notes.

Thanks for the efforts of Grahame Clark, Richard Allen, Dick Schodde, Jenny Bounds and Nicki Taws who are the moderators of our COG rarities records, and Barbara Allan who coordinates the Rarities Panel's work.

Outings

We were very fortunate to be able to run a full field trip programme until lockdown on 12 August. As well as a variety of day trips within the ACT, and to Wee Jasper and Scott Nature Reserve, Mulloon, longer trips also proved to be popular. Shoalhaven Heads in February, Wanganella at Easter (with Plains-wanderer on site) and Mallacoota for the ANZAC long weekend took us to quite different landscapes.

Anthony Overs continued to lead beginners' outings to the Australian National Botanic Gardens. These proved so popular that additional dates had to be added to the programme.

After a two month cessation of outings during the lockdown, and the unfortunate cancellation of 11 trips including the ever popular Green Cape stay and the Eden pelagic, the programme recommenced on October 16 and will continue until mid-December. Hopefully, the cancelled outings can be rescheduled in 2022.

The field trip programme would not be possible without the loyal band of 15 leaders who volunteer year after year and one new teenage leader this year. A particular thank you also to Sandra Henderson who coordinates the Wednesday walks.

Genuine thanks go to Sue Lashko on behalf of all members for all her efforts in making our outings program a great success under difficult circumstances. 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.

Canberra Bird Notes

Michael Lenz and Kevin Windle continue their great work as Editors of the Canberra Bird Notes and I thank them 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.

Monthly meetings

During 2020-2021 Jack Holland again arranged an interesting year of both local and interstate speakers. Due to COVID-19 COG continued to hold virtual meetings for the first half of the year. However, in 2021 we were able to re-commence face-to-face meetings, starting with COG's annual January Members' Night. I would again like to thank Jack for his efforts in bringing to the members engaging and informative presentations this year.

Before COVID-19 hit we held meetings early in the year and Sandra Henderson took 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. Thanks to Sandra.

The committee is planning to get back to face to face general meetings and committee meetings as soon in the new year as possible.

CanberraBirds email announcement and discussion list

At the end of the year, COG's CanberraBirds email announcement and discussion list had 364 subscribers, four percent more than the same time last year. 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. The list manager has commended subscribers for the way they use the list: positively, productively, and politely.

Technical problems with the list, experienced last year as a result of moving it to a new hosting company, have been overcome and it is now functioning smoothly.

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. For the first time since its inception, the Fund did not make any grants during the year. Although it received some generous donations from COG members, it did not receive any applications for funding. We believe that this was the result of the COVID-19 pandemic curtailing most ornithological fieldwork. With the re-opening of travel, etc., we expect that the Fund will resume receiving high-quality grant applications in the course of the current year.

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 environments.

In conclusion

in 2021, 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 due to 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.

Neil Hermes
President
1 November 2021