

# Canberra Ornithologists Group: Name Change Survey

COG Committee

July 2022

## Summary

In July 2021, the Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG) opened a survey about the organisation's name. Participants were asked whether they thought the name Canberra Ornithologists Group should be retained, or if they thought that the group should consider adopting a new name or a trading name. The survey was prompted by member responses to a 2019 survey about planning for COG's future. There were 107 respondents to the survey, 95 of whom were current club members, 7 of whom were not current club members, and 5 of whom did not declare their membership status. All 107 responses were analysed in this analysis, noting that not all individuals answered every question. This number of respondents constitutes approximately one third of COG's membership at the time of survey.

Overall, there was no clear majority for either changing (supported by 47% of respondents), or retaining (supported by 38% of respondents) the current name of COG; the remaining respondents (15%) were 'possibly' in favour. However, within the survey responses, themes emerged that highlighted consistent opinions around a name change, and which might be used to guide the group in future 'branding' decisions. Taken together, most respondents (65%) perceived benefits from using a different name, such as increasing the membership base and making the group more approachable to non-scientists. Risks identified included the potential for losing professional recognition and history.

A threshold of 75% of members voting in-person or in absentia at a General Meeting is required for a voted legal name change\*, which based on this survey is unlikely to be attained. However, the large number of respondents who articulated potential benefits to the group from using a different name, and who listed issues with the current name, indicates that there may be value in progressing the issue, such as through expanding the use of a 'trading name', particularly for community engagement activities.

It is therefore my recommendation that the club retains the name "Canberra Ornithologist Group" for official use (Incorporation, financial dealings, survey and data contracts, lodging grant/research proposals, and for inter-club meetings, etc) while more casual, communication-focused activities (such as social media, community events, radio interviews, school visits, etc) adopt a trading name. The name "Canberra Birds" was the name most favoured by members.

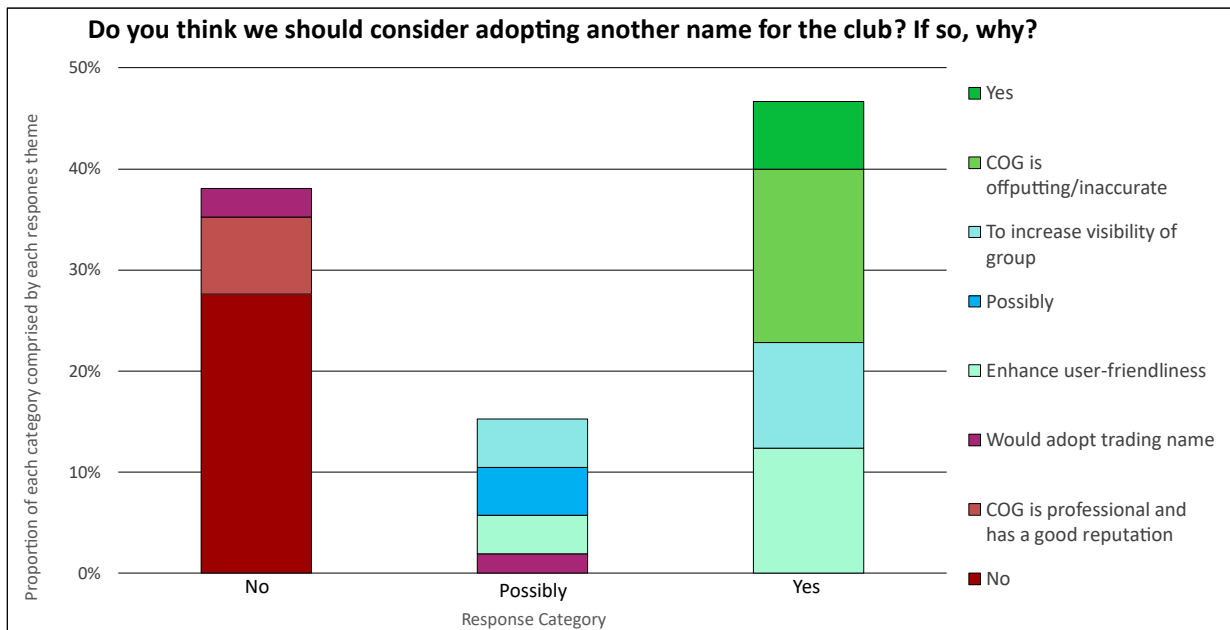
*Thanks to Brittany Brockett for organising, running and analysing this survey, Dr. David McDonald for his assistance with analysis and interpretation of survey results, and to Dr. Steve Read for his contributions to the editing this report; and to all these three for working to create an online version of this survey. Thanks also to the entire COG Committee for their assistance with preparation of the survey, and to the participants for their time. The Canberra Ornithologists Group works on Ngunnawal, Ngambri, and Ngarigo land, studying birds that use this land and have continued meaning to the Traditional Custodians. We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.*

\*According to Section 70 of the Associations Incorporation Act of 1991, a change of association name requires a special resolution to be passed at a general meeting of the association, of which at least 21 days' notice has been given to the members, accompanied by notice of the intention to pass the resolution as a special resolution. The special resolution must be passed by a majority of at least 75% of the votes of those members who are entitled to vote and who vote in person at the general meeting (or by proxy at the general meeting where proxy voting is allowed under the rules of the association).

## Should the Canberra Ornithologists Group consider adopting another name for the club?

Participants were asked “Do you think we should consider adopting another name for the club?”, and responses were categorised as ‘No’, ‘Possibly’ and ‘Yes’. Of the 105 respondents, 38% responded ‘No’, 15% responded ‘Possibly’, and 47% responded ‘Yes’ (Figure 1).

Of the respondents, 61% provided their perceptions of the potential benefits and detriments of a name change. These narrative responses were grouped into the six broad categories shown on Figure 1. The remaining 39% of respondents did not give a reason for their response; of these, the majority were not in favour of a name change.



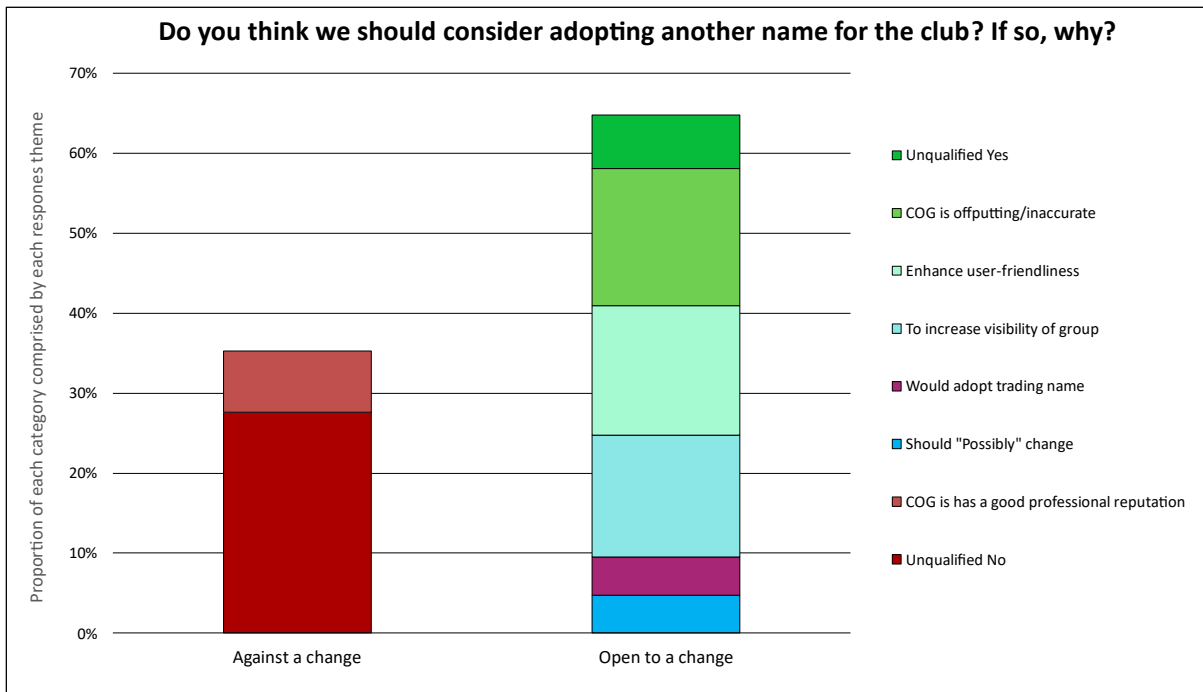
**Figure 1.** Responses to the question “Do you think we should consider adopting another name for the club? If so, why?” were allotted to one of three categories (No, Possibly and Yes; horizontal axis), then coded into ‘themes’ according to the more detailed reasons given by respondents. The vertical axis shows the proportion of 105 responses in each theme for each category.

The 47% of respondents that were in favour of adopting a new name were comprised of 17% whose response could be classified as “COG is off-putting/inaccurate”. Within this theme were discussions of the current name being intimidating due to its scientific implications, and some respondents felt that it was an inaccurate representation of many of the club members’ interests. A further 12% felt that the current name was unwieldy/not user friendly, 10% felt that by changing the name we could make the group visible to more people such as through internet searches, and 7% did not give a reason for their opinion in favour of a change of name.

The 15% of respondents who responded ‘Possibly’ to the idea of a name change comprised 2% who were willing to adopt a trading name, 5% who thought a name change could enhance the visibility of the club, 4% who thought it might enhance the “user-friendliness” of the name, and 5% who did not give a reason.

Of the 38% of respondents who were not in favour of a name change, 28% did not give a reason for their opinion, 8% felt COG has a professional reputation that would be lost if the name were to be changed, and 3% would be willing to contemplate use of a trading name for public outreach. The potential reputational loss identified by 8% of respondents was attributed to the name “ornithologist” being inherently professional and in line with COG’s history of reputable science, and to organisations we collaborate with (NGOs, Governmental departments, other birding clubs) recognising us by the current name.

The 3% of respondents with a primary response of ‘No’ but who were willing to use a trading name were then reclassified into the “Possibly” category (Figure 2). This shows more clearly the difference of opinions between the 65% of respondents who were open to a name change, and the 35% of respondents who were not.



**Figure 2.** Responses to the question “Do you think we should consider adopting another name for the club? If so, why?” were allotted to one of two categories (Against a change, Open to a change; horizontal axis), then coded into ‘themes’ according to the reasons given by respondents. The vertical axis shows the proportion of 105 responses in each theme for each category.

### Identification of potential benefits and detriments to the club through a name change

There were 95 respondents who provided comment about potential benefits to the club from a name change (Table 1). Of these respondents, 21% used this section to state that they could perceive no benefit from a name change, while 40% thought that a change of name might expand our membership base. This was attributed to the current name being unappealing, difficult to find online, limited in scope of interests for birders, or poorly understood by the lay-person. Others (18%) thought that the length of the current name and its difficulty in being understood would make a new name easier to use in conversation, or (14%) that a new name could more accurately reflect the range of interests held by birders in the group.

There were 97 respondents who provided comment about potential detriments to the club from a name change (Table 2). Of these respondents, 20% used this section to state that they could perceive no detriment from a name change. The most common concern raised was the loss of recognition that could come from changing the name of COG. This was the dominant concern of 28% of respondents, though it was also raised by other respondents. A further 19% of respondents thought there may be side-effects were the name to change, but they were not sure what that could entail, and 20% of people stated that they could not foresee any long-term detriments to the club through a name change – if it was undertaken “properly” and within a larger effort for the club to encourage new members (i.e. it would need to be more than a “PR stunt”). The potential for a loss of the club’s history was seen as a potential detriment by 12% of respondents. The idea that a name change would be “dumbing down” the club was also raised by 6% of respondents to this question. The potential for upsetting current members/past members was also raised as something that should be considered, as can also be concluded from the responses more generally.

**Table 1** Respondents’ opinions on potential benefits to the club through a name change. Only the dominant benefit cited by the 95 respondents to this section is scored.

Perceived benefit from a name change	Count of respondents citing this as the dominant benefit	Proportion
Potential membership increase	38	40%
Easier to use in conversation	17	18%
Broader scope	13	14%
Must be part of larger strategy	3	3%
There would be some	1	1%
There may be some	1	1%
Name made unique from other “COG” s	1	1%
Already using a trading name	1	1%
None	20	21%

**Table 2** Respondents’ opinions on potential detriments to the club through a name change. Only the dominant detriment cited by the 97 respondents to this section is scored.

Perceived detrimental effect of a name change	Count of respondents citing this as the dominant detriment	Proportion
Loss of recognition	27	28%
There may be some detriments	18	19%
Confusion	12	12%
Loss of history	12	12%
Paperwork	8	8%
Many	1	1%
None	19	20%

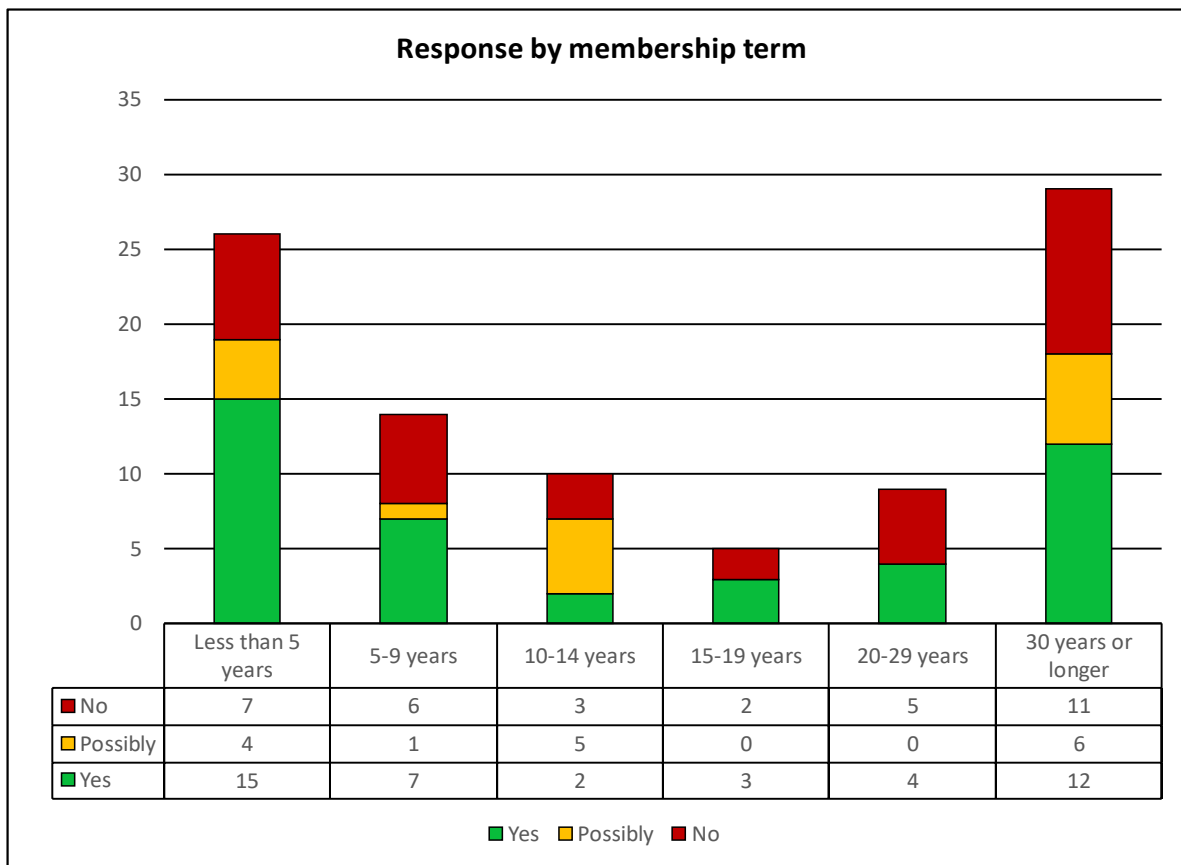
### Variation of opinion with length of membership

Members that had been in the group for the shortest amount of time marginally favoured a name change (15/26 individuals). Long-term members showed no clear preference, with 12 voting “no”, 11 voting “yes”, and six being unsure. All membership categories contained both “yes” and “no” votes (Figure 3). Overall, there was no clear trend of opinion with membership length.

### Preferences for and opinions around alternative names

A total of 100 respondents suggested an alternative name to COG for the group.

The survey provided 13 suggestions for alternative names for participants to respond to (Table 3). The most popular of these suggestions (approved by 44% of respondents) was “Canberra Birds”, which is the name currently used on the COG website and its URL. Note that there is no possibility for “Canberra Birders” to be used, as this is the name for a popular, unaffiliated Facebook Group. Other popular options included Canberra Birding Group (20% of respondents), Capital Region Birders (17%) and ACT and Region Birders (16%). All other suggestions received less than 15% approval. Other responses indicated that people liked none of the names suggested or did not support a name change (28%).



**Figure 3** Variation of opinion about a potential name change with length of COG membership. Vertical axis shows the number of respondents in each age class and response category.

Thirty-six respondents provided comment on the alternative names suggested, or provided their own suggestions (Table 3; *note that some of these names were likely not serious suggestions*). Suggestions to merge with Birdlife Australia were made on 6 occasions – names associated with this suggestion are provided at the end of Table 3 and are not considered further, as it is not in the scope of the current survey to consider this merger. Four respondent-suggested names were mentioned by more than one respondent – Canberra Bird Observers Club, Birds/Birders ACT, Canberra Region Birds/Birders, and Birds Canberra. Were COG to decide to undertake a further survey of name change of any type, these should be included in the options presented to the club.

Many suggestions for alternative names centred around switching the word order to make an acronym easier to say – Birders ACT (BACT) instead of Canberra Birders, for example. This was also thought to make search engines find the group more easily.

Interestingly, there was split opinion surrounding preference for “birds” over “birders”, some feeling that the club focuses on birds and so that should be within the name (“*Birds rather than Birders as the focus is birds, not the members, per se*”, “*birding rather than birds, as we are people/mammals*”), while others strongly preferred “birders” over “birds” (“*NO to anything ending in birds - it makes no sense, that's like naming a Canberra photography group 'Canberra Cameras'. We are not birds*”).

Some people supported the use of a trading name, with COG to be kept for official purposes. Further, it was suggested that, if a new name were adopted, it would be appropriate to note “formerly the Canberra Ornithologist Group” for a period.

**Table 3** Response of respondents to suggested alternative names, and alternative names suggested by respondents. A total of 100 respondents indicated approval for a name alternative to COG. Respondents could approve one or more of the names suggested in the survey, and/or proposed their own suggestion.

Name	Count of respondents approving this name	Proportion	Comments
<b>Candidate names suggested in the survey</b>			
Canberra Birds	44	44%	Note Canberra Birders is an unaffiliated Facebook group.
Canberra Birding Group	20	20%	
Capital Region Birders	17	17%	
ACT and Region Birders	16	16%	
COG Canberra Birds	13	13%	
ACT Birds	12	12%	
Capital Birders	9	9%	
Capital Region Birds	9	9%	“Capital region” a bit obscure. “Capital” is less clunky than “ACT and Region”.
ACT Birders	7	7%	
ACT and Region Birds	5	5%	
Capital Birds	5	5%	
Capital Region Birds/ing Club	4	4%	Club more “exclusive” than group.
None of the above	28	28%	
<b>Names suggested by respondents</b>			
Canberra Bird Observers Club	2		
Birds/Birders ACT	3		(BACT)
Canberra Region Birders/Birding	3		
Birds Canberra	4		
ACT Bird Watch	1		
ACT Birdwatchers	1		
ACT Friends of Feathered Friends	1		
Birding Canberra (and region)	1		
Birds of the Capital/Canberra Region	1		
Canberra Birding Association	1		(CBA)
Canberra Birds and Nature Group	1		
Canberra Birdwatching Association	1		
Canberra Region Birding Group	1		
Canberra-bird Observers Group (COG)	1		
Friends of Birds Club Canberra	1		(FOBCC)
Capital District Birders	1		
Canberra Birding Enthusiasts	1		
Canberra Birding Society	1		
Capital Avifauna Appreciation Society	1		
Canberra Ornithologists Club	1		
Canberrabirds.Org.au.Group	1		
Birds Australia – Canberra Region, Birdlife Canberra, Birdlife Southern Tablelands, Birdlife Capital Region	6		A merger with Birdlife Australia is not in scope for this survey

## **Final comments from survey respondents**

The final section of the survey allowed for general opinions to be aired, and this prompted 47 responses. Most ideas brought forth in these comments had been mentioned in previous sections by their commenters.

Some responses were reiterations of “Don’t change the name” (8 respondents), or that there needed to be better justification presented before this could be considered (4 respondents). There were 5 responses acknowledging that other names could better serve the club than COG, and there were 3 suggesting that Canberra Birds could be the name to do so, with a further 3 requesting that a name change be a trading/marketing name only. Four people thanked us for asking this question, and another respondent commented that they remembered this discussion from the 1980s. Three people mentioned the need for a good acronym, and one of these mentioned that this was one of the reasons they liked “COG”. Four people took the opportunity to say that they enjoy being part of the group, regardless of the name. There was one statement around “ornithologist” not necessarily being exclusionary, and one suggestion that changing from COG would need to be part of a larger re-brand. One respondent mentioned that we must be cautious not to select a name that would make us sound like aviculturists.