



PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2022-23

The Committee decided during the year to change the generally used name of COG to Canberra Birds. The Committee felt (and was supported in a survey of members) that changing the name to Canberra Birds could make our group more accessible to many. The name Canberra Ornithologists Group will remain the official name for government and administrative purposes but we will increasingly use Canberra Birds as our public-facing name. (It's a bit like scientific and common names for birds!)

During our 60th year next year we will do more public rebranding as the opportunities arise. I would like to thank all the Committee for their involvement in this decision and in particular for the guidance of Brittany Brockett.

I would like to highlight the extensive work COG has done with groups such as the Conservation Council ACT and the Friends of Bluetts to support actions to ensure the long-term protection of the area known as Bluetts Block, near Mt Stromlo. Putting the spotlight on the conservation values of Bluetts and raising community awareness and action was initiated by Jean Casburn, who received an ACT Environment Award in 2022 for her work. Sadly, Jean passed away in September 2023. COG will continue to advocate for reserve status for Bluetts.

COG was surprised, honoured and delighted to receive a significant financial bequest during 2023 from the estate of a past COG member, Betty Storrs. The Committee is considering ways in which this bequest may be appropriately used to support the conservation and education roles of COG.

The Committee

Whilst, under various constraints, it has been another tough year to manage COG's affairs in 2022-23, 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 continued to meet using Zoom for our committee meetings as this has proved more convenient for committee members.

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

General members of the Committee were Jenny Bounds, Brittany Brockett, Kathy Eyles, Bill Graham, Clare Henderson and Alison Mackerras, a committee of ten. Clare Henderson resigned in March but the committee was delighted to welcome Kim Farley in April. She has

contributed greatly already and we hope she continues to do so for a long time. In the second half of 2023, with a view to renewal on the Committee, three additional Committee members were co-opted: Zachary Flegg, Julie Hotchin and Ben Milbourne.

Acknowledgement and thanks are made to several Committee members who are not re-nominating for a further term. These are: Alison Mackerras, who has made an outstanding contribution over several years as Committee Minutes Secretary and also to the program of updating and organising official documentation on the COG website, both the public information and the Committee records/archive; Kathy Eyles has contributed significantly on community engagement and policy matters, in particular the Committee's guidelines for partnerships with other entities; Steve Read who has stepped back as Vice-President, has made a very significant contribution, with Executive support, managing Committee business and developing strategy and policy on various matters. Steve is expected to continue as a general Committee member.

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 Canberra Bird Notes with the help of Kevin Windle; Chris Davey is working with Duncan McCaskill managing the Garden Bird Survey- Barbara Allan remains Coordinator of the COG Rarities Panel; Nicki Taws is COG Records Officer and organises COG's annual Bird Blitz; Kathy Walter and John Goldie manage the sales desk but have decided to hand this task to someone else – any volunteers? Julian Robinson continues as Website manager; David McDonald manages the COG chatline; Dianne Davey distributes COG publications; Sue Lashko organises the outings program and is the editor of Gang-gang, assisted by Gail Neumann and Sandra Henderson. All of these people have generously given their time over a long period.

The final COG's Cogs article appeared in the November 2022 issue of Gang-gang. The committee hosted a thank-you and encouragement event in April 2023 for as many volunteers as could come to hear Graham Gall talk about photography and have a beer and burger at Capital Brewing.

The passing of long-term COG member Bruce Lindenmayer was acknowledged in last year's report. The Committee agreed this year to make a contribution to a memorial seat at Mulligans Flat Sanctuary Visitors Centre, the Reserve being a place of special significance in Bruce's roles on behalf of COG.

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. Following is a review of some work in this area.

COG has been represented in/input to several bird related projects, coordinated by the Office of Nature Conservation (formerly Conservation Research) in ACT Government and has provided relevant data for projects such as the Gang-gang bushfire recovery, and the ACT Urban Habitat and Connectivity project which has potential for improved outcomes for biodiversity/birds in the ACT's planning systems.

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.

As previously noted, 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 ongoing work planned to redevelop the database platforms for COG's various bird survey programs, including the long-term surveys and historical records. Progress on this has been slow for a variety of Covid and technical base reasons. However, the Committee has now made a decision to proceed with the compilation and publication of the next Annual Bird Report (ABR), using eBird data. The Committee hopes to have significant progress on this in 2024.

COG Membership

At the end of the last financial year we had a membership total of 344. This was a significant drop of almost 25% on the previous year. During the Covid years many people spent more time outdoors and some joined Canberra Birds as they developed an interest in birds. Some have not renewed their membership.

From the early 2000s until 2014/15, membership numbers hovered between 240 and 367. They climbed and remained in the 400s until this year. The committee is working to put into place strategies to maintain membership numbers.

Conservation

Jenny Bounds continues as COG Conservation Officer, with an expanded Conservation Team providing input, namely Clare Henderson and Steve Read. Jenny continues to represent 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.

Chris Davey represents COG on the Ginninderry Bush on the Boundary group, which allows us to comment on any activity in the Ginninderry Conservation Corridor and adjacent Murrumbidgee River Corridor.

Early in 2023, COG developed conservation priorities, which were published on the website. COG submissions on most conservation matters are also posted on the COG website, and members are encouraged to go there for more detail. This year, COG contributed views on the review of the Murrumbidgee River Corridor Plan of Management, the review of the Namadgi National Park Plan of Management, the Ginninderry Conservation Corridor Plan, the ACTs Draft Natural Resource Management Plan, and various Territory planning system changes/reforms.

As mentioned earlier, a strong focus for COG has been the protection and conservation of Bluetts Block, and ensuring there is a reasonable buffer zone on the Denman-Prospect urban edge. In relation to the buffer zone, this was achieved to a large extent by concerted opposition from COG and more than 50 community groups and individuals with respect to a proposal to extend urban development into much of the buffer block (deferred Block 12 next to Bluetts); that proposed housing extension has now been limited and most mature eucalypt trees will be retained. COG and other groups also successfully achieved an improved outcome for a planned fuel reduction burn in Bluetts Block in 2023, which will now be undertaken as smaller patch (ecological) burns over a number of years.

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. It is noted that 2023 marked 25 years of surveys at the foundation woodland sites, and 28 years of surveys at Mulligans Flat.

The COG Garden Bird Survey also continues, now in its 43rd year.

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

Latham's Snipe surveys (coordinated by the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust) of this 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.

Surveys of waterbirds at Lakes George and Bathurst continued, a long-running monitoring project over more than four decades. This has been managed by Michael Lenz, who has made a very significant contribution. In recent years, Michael had also taken on a formal role as Guardian of Birdlife Australia's Lake Bathurst KBA (Key Biodiversity Area), continuing to undertake the survey monitoring and reporting annually to Birdlife Aust. Michael has now retired from these roles, and the KBA Guardian role has been taken on by Sue Lashko, supported by a survey team of Luke Downey, Zachary Flegg and Liam Manderson.

Regular surveys at a high-quality Travelling Stock Reserve (TSR) 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. In late 2023, Zachary Flegg took over Sue's Gang-gang responsibilities.

The COG website

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

The whole Group is indebted to Julian Robinson for his ongoing commitment to 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, Helen Mason (Woodland Survey data) and 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

After the disruption to field trips caused by Covid, we were able to run a full programme in 2022-23. This would not be possible without the generous support of the leaders, only about 20 people, who give up their time year after year to make the trips a success. A special mention to Sandra Henderson who, as well as leading more than her share of weekend trips, also organises and leads the Wednesday walks.

Locally, we ran trips to a variety of locations within the city, in Namadgi and in neighbouring areas across the border. As always, the beginners' walks led by Anthony Overs and the Campbell Park nest workshops led by Jack Holland were well attended. Further afield, a mixture of longer camping and accommodated trips were held to Tathra and Ulladulla on the coast, to Grenfell, Tumut and the Capertee Valley to the west.

Unfortunately, our planned trip to Yathong was cancelled due to rain closing the roads in the area. Peter Fullagar led a very popular outing to Green Cape, probably for the last time as the accommodation is about to be handed over to commercial interests. Pelagic trips out of Eden were held in October 2022 and June 2023 and produced an interesting variety of birds for the participants, many of whom had never been on a pelagic.

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 2022-2023 Jack Holland again arranged an interesting year of both local and interstate speakers. Due to the COVID-19 lockdowns COG was again forced to hold virtual meetings from September 2021 to February 2022, inclusive. However, from March 2022 we were able to re-commence face-to-face meetings throughout the year; this initially involved signing in through the Check-in CBR app, but as restrictions relaxed from early 2023 we able to enjoy coffee/tea/biscuits again after the meetings.

I would again like to thank Jack for his efforts in bringing to the members engaging and informative presentations again this year.

Sandra Henderson again 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. Thank you Sandra.

CanberraBirds email Chatline

At the end of the year, COG's CanberraBirds email announcement and discussion list had 356 subscribers, a similar number as at 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.

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. I warmly thank the members of COG who donated during the year. Two grants were made during this period: \$5,000 to McLean Cobden (ANU) to support research into the population genetic structure of the Superb Parrot in the greater Canberra area, and \$1,000 to the Murray Wildlife team to support research into the Australian Painted-Snipe, making the Fund a "Key Donor" for this initiative. The COG Committee also made a separate donation of \$1,000 from COG general funds, to support the Australian Painted Snipe crowd funding campaign.

The Committee of Management of the Fund (Dr Penny Olsen, Geoffrey Dabb and 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.

Conclusion

Again, it has been a privilege to be part of the talented team that supports COG through the Committee and those COG Cogs who support the whole organisation. I would like to thank the membership for its continued support.

On a final note I would like to alert all members to the fact that 2024 will be COG's 60th Anniversary.

Neil Hermes
President
Canberra Birds
1 November 2023