

Gang-gang

DECEMBER 2024

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

JANUARY MEETING

Wednesday 15 January 2025

7:30 pm

(note later date – the third Wednesday in the month)

QUIZ NIGHT

Instead of our usual COG Members' Night the 15 January 2025 COG meeting will be another Quiz Night:

**QUIZ MASTER –
MARK CLAYTON**

**VENUE – Woden Valley Uniting
Church Hall, off Gillies St, Curtin**

There will be Range of Questions to encourage participation from all levels of bird knowledge.

At the door there will be a Draw for Seats at the Tables.

Prior registration is not required but it would be helpful if you could let Mark know on chollop7@bigpond.com if you intend to come.

If participants want to do some homework Mark suggests that they have a **GOOD** look through the abridged version of the Australian Bird Guide - the smaller orange covered book as some, *Continued Page 2*

Summary/analysis of the past month and what to watch out for in December and January

During the 4 weeks from 30 October to 26 November inclusive covered by this column, the 10-day dry spell from the previous period lasted until 17 November when we received our only reasonably widespread rain event. It has remained dry since. While my impression was of an increase in bird activity in the COG Area of Interest (Aoi) during November, my analysis below shows that, despite the dry conditions, many of the inland spring/summer migrants are present in relatively low numbers. While there have again been a few more “unusual” birds reported, their numbers are still well below those of last summer/early autumn.

There have been two special “unusual” birds observed during this period, the first being the **Black-tailed Nativehen** initially reported by Michael Nikulin near the Mulligans Flat NR Big Dam on 2 November. Many birders then reported and photographed this bird until 9 November, with a break until further reports on 19-24 November.

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Canberra Birds Christmas Barbeque

Wednesday 11 December



You are invited to the Canberra Birds Christmas Barbeque and 60th Birthday

**Black Mountain Peninsula (John Cardiff Close) 6.00 pm
Wednesday 11 December 2024**

**Our 60th will be celebrated with a big birthday cake.
Come along and share this special event.**

Sausages, bread, onions, and a range of vegetarian options will be provided, along with beer, wine and non-alcoholic drinks.

Please bring either a salad or a dessert, plus serving spoons, to share.
You will also need to bring plates, cutlery, glasses, table and chairs.

There will be the usual monthly raffle.

Please RSVP by email to COG Office at cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au by Friday 6 December.

Everyone welcome

JANUARY QUIZ NIGHT—*continued from Page 1*

but not all, of the answers will be found there. As usual he will have 50 questions covering a selection of weird and whacky topics.

Attendees should heed social distancing and good hygiene practice etc and use their common sense and stay home if they have COVID symptoms. Mask wearing is recommended.

There is parking for at least 30 cars in the car park off Gillies Street, and further parking in Gillies St itself, or across the road at the Curtin shops.

Please use the entrance on the E side next to the Good Shepherd Anglican Church.

Please bring your own supper and drinks, including alcohol.

A good-sized kitchen with a fridge is available for our use.

Summary/analysis of the past month and what to watch out for in December and January

COG's 2018-2019 Annual Bird Report (ABR) lists this as non-breeding vagrant, a very occasional visitor (but it can be an irruptive species), which had not been recorded since 2014. Since then, eBird records (surprisingly) show only a single bird present at the nearby Valley Ave Ponds (Gungahlin) from 12-22 September 2019. As it often does, the question arises, what is the bird doing here and how it managed to get here, with the nearest record in the past month being near Temora about 170 km away, and the nearest in the past couple of years being not much closer at Wagga Wagga and Cowra.

The second was a **Pacific Golden Plover** initially reported by Elliott Overs at the Fyshwick Sewage Treatment Ponds (FSTP) on 11 November, but with then Deb and Rod Ralph realising they had actually photographed it there 2 days before. It was then reported from there, and several times from the Jerrabomberra Wetlands NR (JWNR) by a number of birders to 12 November, with a break when it was seen at the FSTP again on 21-23 November.

Again COG's 2018-2019 ABR lists this species as a non-breeding vagrant with very few reports outside the Lake Bathurst East Basin. There were no records that year but 4 in 2017. eBird shows the nearest recent report is on 18 November from the Goulburn Maturation Ponds to the NE of that city. Again surprisingly there is only one other record in the COG Aol back to January 2018, being of 12 birds at Lake Bathurst East Basin on 21 December 2020.

Of the spring/summer migrants present but reported from only a few locations in October, two **Singing (Horsfield's) Bushlarks**



Black-tailed Nativehen

Shorty



Singing Bushlark

Frank Antram

[which had been reported only from Marchmont (S of Yass) on 20 October] were reported from the FSTP on 29 October, with 2 birds then reported from the West Belconnen Pond on 12 November and then a single bird from the nearby Dunlop Grasslands on 19 November. Up to 3 birds have since been reported at this favoured place for them, as well as single birds at Lake Bathurst and Greenwood Rd Murrumbateman on 17 and 20 November, respectively.

There were reports of up to 7 **Brown Songlarks**, which in October had only been reported from the first 3 locations above, from 9 locations either side of the NW ACT/NSW border, also a favoured spot for them, but surprisingly from no other locations during the period. Likewise, up to 6 **Rufous Songlarks** have been reported from 5 locations along this border, but surprisingly from only 6 other locations (so slightly down from 12 in October) during the period, 4 being well to the S of Canberra. In addition, the **White-winged Triller** which has been reported only from 21 locations (similar to October) during the period.

Confirming that despite the local dry conditions inland migrants are not present in large numbers is that there have been only reports from 3 locations of **White-browed Woodswallows** during the period, 80 at Zosterops Corner and 3 at the Reservoir Hill Reservoir (Lawson) on 3 November, and 90 over Black Mountain Peninsula on 4 November. There have also been reports only of 20 and 10 **Masked Woodswallows** at the first and third of these locations, as well as a single bird at the Tidbinbilla NR on 2 November and 2 birds at the Mt Majura NR Watson on 5 November.

Similarly, the **Pallid Cuckoo** was reported from only 7 locations (well down from the 12 in October), with easily the maximum being the 5 birds reported from the Scottsdale Reserve on 11 November. Likewise, the **Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo** was reported from 18 locations, slightly down from the 21 in October.

In contrast coastal spring/summer migrants seem to be present in more usual numbers, and in some cases greater than usual with the **Channel-billed Cuckoo** being reported from another 14 locations (up from 11 in October). This includes a rare record of one briefly calling *awk awk awk* over our house in Chapman, but otherwise causing a great commotion amongst the local birds. Again, I expect at least some of these may have been the same bird, with on 12 November one reported at Ainslie at 07:00 h, then the Russell Offices at 07:09 h and from Griffith at 08:26 h. The **Brush Cuckoo** has also been reported from around 18 locations, well up from the 8 in October.

Finally of some of the passage migrants have still been reported moving through Canberra on their way to the mountains to the W, with reports of the **Australian Rufous Fantail** at 3 such locations, 1 bird in Gungahlin on 3 November, 2 at Harper Hill (Wanniassa) on 4 November and 1 at the ANBG on 12 November. A female **Common Cicadabird** was reported from Mt Majura NR on 19 November and a bird was heard calling at the Googong Dam foreshore on 14 November, but no **Satin Flycatchers** appear to have been reported on passage migration this spring, reflecting the difficulty of separating even the males from each other.



Rufous Fantail

Rick Schurmann

So, during December and January please keep an eye out for those species mentioned above, especially the inland ones should it dry out further. Watch also for the **White-throated Needletail** (one was reported flying over the Nevertire Parkland Lawson on 25 November) and the related **Spine-tailed Swift** which usually first appear in the COG Aol in the New Year.

Of the species that come to Canberra and its surrounds from the mountains and higher country to spend autumn/winter here, the **White-eared Honeyeater** and the **Golden Whistler** were each still present at around 14 (compared with 20 in October) and 12 (about half of October) urban/peri-urban locations.

The **Scarlet Robin** was reported just 4 such locations, slightly down from the 6 in October, of which 3 were again from the Mulligans Flat NR area. The **Flame Robin** was again reported from just 1 such location, the juvenile/immature observed during the Nest Workshop at Campbell Park on 19 November (see separate report). The **Rose Robin** was only reported from 3 locations in the mountains well to the W of the Murrumbidgee River (as well as one in the Tallaganda NP), and there have been no further **Pink Robin** sightings.

There were reports of **Crescent Honeyeaters** only from only 2 locations well to the W of the Murrumbidgee River, as well as one from the Tallaganda NP. There was a single report of four **Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters** at the Strike-a-light TSR on 14 November during the period, but none of the **Swift Parrot** (all should be back in Tasmania now)) or the **Brown Gerygone**.

There were reports of the **Bassian Thrush** only from 2 locations in the mountains to the W. However, the **Olive Whistler** was still heard at the ANBG on 12 November; and from 1 location in the mountains to the W, as well as one from the Tallaganda NP.

While there have again been more reports of “unusual” birds during the period than in recent months, apart for the **Black-tailed Nativehen** and **Pacific Golden Plover** (see above) none really require a special mention.

No **Magpie Geese** or **Plumed Whistling Duck** were reported in the COG Aol during the period, but **Freckled Duck** have continued to be present at the JWNR with a maximum of 12 ducks there on 10 November. However, by far the largest number was the 89 ducks counted at Lake Bathurst during the surveys there on 17 November, with single birds also reported from Greenwood Road Murrumbateman and the Big Dam at the Mulligans Flat NR. An **Australian Shelduck** was reported from the Big Dam at the Mulligans Flat NR on 29 October, and a pair flying over the Dunlop Grassland on 21 November, apart from as is usual, 5 locations to the N through to the E of Canberra. By far the highest numbers were the 156 on Lake Bathurst on 17 November, though there were also 54 at the Wet Lagoon, Breadalbane on 20 November.

Blue-billed Ducks were reported from 5 locations, with 1-3 ducks at the Upper Stranger Pond (Kevin Windle has informed me that he saw 2 drakes, 1 duck, and 5 small ducklings on 12 October, the highest number of young reported from there this spring), up to 4 ducks at the JWNR (and a single one at the adjacent FSTP), and 1-3 ducks at Rowes Lagoon. However, by far the highest number was the 28 recorded at Lake Bathurst during the surveys on 17 November. Apart from the Tidbinbilla NR Sanctuary, **Musk Ducks** were reported from 6 locations, the highest number being the 5 reported from the Morass on 17 November. **Great-crested Grebes** were reported from 4 locations, the maximum being the 8 reported from the Lake Bathurst survey on 17 November, but also 7 from the Googong Dam on 20 November. A single bird was regularly reported from the West Belconnen Pond and less frequently from the adjacent Dunlop Grasslands.

Stubble Quail were reported from 11 locations during the period (well up from the 4 in October) with again the highest being the 15 recorded during the Lake Bathurst surveys on 17 November, said to be a conservative count as they were calling constantly. There were up to 5 reported otherwise, a sign that despite the dry conditions there is enough grass around for them to breed. Up to 5 **Brown Quail** were reported from 17 locations, well up from the 10 in October. However, again no **Painted Button-quail** or **Little Button-quail** were reported during the period.

A **Brush Bronzewing** was reported from the Warks/Blundells Creek Rds on 11 November, and a **Peaceful Dove** from the Jacka Development area on 1 November. No **White-headed Pigeon**, **Brown Cuckoo-Dove** or **Diamond Doves** were reported during the period, but a **White-throated Nightjar** was reported from the Zosterops Corner on 23 November.

Up to 2 **Baillon's Crake** were reported from 4 locations, but with birds regularly observed only from the JWNR, with just single reports otherwise. Up to 2 **Spotless Crakes** were reported from 5 locations, but again only regularly from the JWNR from where they were last reported on 11 November. Up to 4 **Australian Spotted Crake** were also very regularly reported from the JWNR, and from a further 6 locations. **Buff-banded Rail** were reported from 4 locations, again regularly from the JWNR, but also the Big Dam at Mulligans Flat NR where the maximum of 5 was recorded. Up to 3 **Lewin's Rails** were reported from 4 locations, but never regularly from any of them.

Pied Stilts were reported from 3 locations (half of October), with the 30 birds seen during the Lake Bathurst surveys on 17 November easily the highest number. Two **Sharp-tailed Sandpipers** were also reported from 3 locations with again the 5 recorded during the Lake Bathurst surveys on 17 November the highest number. Up to 5 **Red-necked Stint** were reported from there on 17 November, but no **Red-necked Avocet**, **Australian Painted-snipe**, **Banded Lapwing**, **Comb-crested Jacana** or **Pectoral Sandpiper** were reported during the period.

On 2 November Sandra Henderson reported that she still could only find the **Common Sandpiper** on the first island on Lake Tuggeranong, but on 6 November she reported it back at its usual spot at the gross pollutant trap at the inlet of Village Creek. However, Kevin Windle has informed me that he saw it there on 22 October. Other observers have found it there since.

Six **Whiskered Tern** was at Lake Tuggeranong on 3 November, the only report for this species during the period. However, a highlight of the period has been the regular reporting from 9 November of the **Caspian Tern** from the JWNR and the adjacent FSTP, with a maximum of 8 birds from the latter on 19 November. This is both the most and the longest staying birds of this species I can recall. No **White-winged Black Tern**, **Australasian Bittern** or **Australasian Little/Black-backed Bittern** was reported during the period.

No **Little Egret** were reported during the period, but a **Plumed Egret** was reported from the JWNR on 7 November. Single **Great Egrets** were reported from 11 locations, and **White-necked Herons** were reported from close to 30 locations, up from 18 in October. **Royal Spoonbill** were reported from 7 locations (also well up from October) with the 14 recorded at the Wet Lagoon Breadalbane on 24 November easily the highest number. **Yellow-billed Spoonbills** were reported from 5 locations, with again the 6 recorded at the Wet Lagoon Breadalbane on 20 November the highest number. On 27 October 8 **Glossy Ibis** were reported the Rowes Lagoon, the only record for this species during the period.

A **Barn Owl** was reported only from the Kings Hwy, Kowen on 9 November, and **Black-shouldered Kites** were reported from around 20 locations, down from the 37 in September, indicating this species may be moving away due to the dry conditions. There were no reports of the **Grey Goshawk**, **Pacific Baza**, **Spotted Harrier**, **Black Kite** or **Black Falcon** during the period.

No **Azure**, **Forest** or **Red-Backed Kingfisher**, **Cockatiel**, **Turquoise Parrot**, **Purple-crowned** or **Little Lorikeets** were reported over the period. Fourteen **Glossy Black-Cockatoos** were reported from the Scotts Reserve on 16 November. Two **Scaly-breasted Lorikeets** were reported flying low over Symonston on 19 November, and single **Musk Lorikeets** were reported from Kambah on 11 and 14 November, and from Garran on 16 November, respectively.

No **Spiny-cheeked**, **Singing** or **Scarlet Honeyeaters** or were reported during the period. A **Blue-faced Honeyeater** was only reported from the Yass Caravan Park on 23 November. A **Painted Honeyeater** was reported calling from the Mt Majura NR on 23 November and a **Little Friarbird** was seen by quite a few observers at the West Belconnen Pond from 10-15 November.

Up to 3 **White-fronted Chats** were reported from the Holborow Ave Ponds (Denman Prospect) between 15-18 November, with the 4 birds recorded at the Lake Bathurst surveys on 17 November the only other report. **Red-capped Robins** were reported from 2 locations only (down from 6 in October), a male (and possibly a second bird) from Campbell Park on 9 November, and a single bird regularly from the Zosterops Corner. However, no **White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike**, **White-browed Babbler**, **Spangled Drongo**, **Black-faced Monarchs**, **Tawny Grassbird** or **Zebra Finch** were reported during the period.

Again, while there have been a few more “unusual” birds reported, the low numbers from winter have continued, in particular of pigeons/doves, raptors, parrots, honeyeaters and other passerines.



Pacific Golden Plover

Lindsay Hansch



Australian Ornithological Services P/L

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Victoria

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Good birding, good food

2025 Plains-wanderer Weekends

25 & 26 October 2025
8 & 9 November 2025
22 & 23 November 2025
6 & 7 December 2025

The 2025 November weekends will be limited to 6 participants per weekend & the October and December weekends will have the usual 8 participants.

Personal tours to the Deniliquin district, Victorian mallee, NE Victoria, Gippsland and the Melbourne area.

Personal tours to anywhere you need to go to bolster your Australian bird list.

Please contact Patricia Maher for information, itineraries and costing.

www.philipmaher.com

Of the birds I have continued to ask readers to keep a special lookout for in 2024, the **Jacky Winter** was reported from only 2 (but new) locations, single birds from the Brooks Reserve on 2 November and from the Lambs TSR (NW of Yass) on 16 November.

Hooded Robins were reported from 3 locations, with 6 birds at the Scottsdale Reserve on 13 November and 4 birds from nearby the Strike-a-light TSR (a new location in recent times though this species was quite common on the Jerangle Rd during my atlasing days pre the 2000s) on 14 November, respectively, as well as at Kym Bradley's patch to the S of Canberra.

Restless Flycatchers were reported from 3 locations, with several reports of a single bird at the Glendale Depot, 2 birds at the Scottsdale Reserve on 14 November as well as at Kym Bradley's patch to the S of Canberra.

If the annual Nest Workshop on 10 November was an accurate indication (see separate report) the dry weather has led to a poor breeding season. Some observations follow *but again I first need to remind readers of the care that needs to be taken around breeding birds as outlined the new COG Ethical Birding Guidelines which can be found through the link on the Home Page of the Canberra Birds web site (in particular please read and follow the sections on Nesting Birds and Bird Photography):*

On 8 November Shorty posted that at the beginning of the season his resident **Australian Magpies** had built a nest and had some young hatch, but as the nest was high in the tree he could not see the young though he could hear them. After a while the nest failed, Shorty assumed they may have been predated. Not long after they built a new nest in a different tree and again two young hatched, and with the nest being lower down, he could see the two young when being fed by the adults, but again the nesting seemed to have failed. The adults had been seen taking food to the nest, but no young could be seen. That morning one of the adults removed one of the deceased young and placed it on the ground. Shorty had a look at it and could not see any obvious cause of death. He asked: Any ideas on what could be causing their young to be dying?

Various possibilities were raised, and a possible feeding issue was ruled out as the keel bone felt plump. Denise Kay posted that she had had 27 'orphans' in since September, with 3 it had been a constant battle getting them to fledgling size. After a number of poor **Australian Magpie** breeding seasons despite up to 4 nests in my Chapman GBS site, this year one pair has raised a single very loudly demanding young. However, these are the only 3 birds in my GBS site whereas previously there could be up to 8 based on overlapping territories.

On 16 November Mariko Buszynski posted that her resident **Australian Magpies** had two new fledglings, and she thought the fledgling from last year would have been kicked out as it had been harassed by adults. However, recently she observed that last year's fledgling was feeding this year's, and that day it did it again while the adult female was looking on. She asked what is happening? She had heard about co-operative breeding in some magpies but not in Canberra. She mentioned she fed magpies and that's probably why last year's fledgling was reluctant to leave. HANZAB confirms that the **Australian Magpie** sometimes breed co-operatively, though the degree of help varies greatly between Territorial Groups and individuals, and possibly also geographically.

On 9 November Shorty posted that some may recall back in 2016 he noted that there were **Australasian Shoveler** diving at the JWNR and Steve Wallace did a note in Canberra Bird Notes about it. That day he noticed that the large ducklings there were also diving and made a very short video. This partly answers my question posed in my previous column that I couldn't recall any of this duck species breeding since 2017. However, a search through recent eBird records shows this appears to be the only other spot they have bred this season, apart from the Gungahlin Pond. I have still to find a way to easily check breeding in eBird apart from doing it ad hoc.

The first **Eastern Koel** fledglings are usually reported from early December. However, I am not expecting many this year as based on my observations locally there seem to be fewer adult Koels around this year and noisy interactions (males chasing females) only began in the past two weeks. I'm also not recording many adult **Eastern Koels** calling in the usual areas away from home. So, it might be another poor breeding season for them, as 2023-2024 was.

Finally in the absence of any information on flocks or roost flights I include details of the following sighting. On 12 November Christine D alerted the COG chat line of a possible **Green Sandpiper** at the Googong Dam. I quote with some minor editing from the checklist of 4 November.

“Medium sized wader spotted foraging on rocks in Shannon's Inlet (in Googong Dam on Shoreline Walk). Photos taken from a distance. Initially exhibited 'sandpiper' like head bobbing. We approached closer & more photos taken. We attempted to get closer behind vegetation, but the bird spooked and flew towards the main dam area. A bright, white rectangular rump was visible. We could not identify the bird and so circulated the photos to members of the Hastings Birdwatchers. From there the photos were passed to the Australian Twitchers Facebook page. On this page Rohan Clarke has stated that he believes it be a Green Sandpiper. I will submit details to BARC (Birdlife Aust. Records Committee)”.

From eBird it appears that since that report a number of birders have since unsuccessfully looked to it. The Australian Bird Guide includes it as a rare vagrant in freshwater wetlands, but a check of the BARC database on the Birdlife Australia web site reveals only 1 accepted record of a bird observed in Darwin in March 1998. So, if accepted, it would be a very rare sighting indeed in the COG Aol.

During December and January please watch out for the inland spring/summer migrants mentioned above, as well as for the first for the **White-throated Needletails** and **Spine-tailed Swifts** to appear, and for any early summer breeding activity. Please also continue to keep a special look out for the **Restless Flycatcher**, **Jacky Winter** and **Hooded Robin**. As usual please ensure that all significant sightings are properly reported and end up on the COG database.

Once again, my sincere thanks to everyone who has contributed to my two main data sources, posting on the COG/ Canberra Birds e-mail Discussion List (“COG chat line”) and the eBird Australia database, as well as direct correspondence with me. As always, I am very grateful to all involved for publishing this information without which it would not be possible to put this column together.

Jack Holland

Summary of the Presentation from the 13 November Meeting

The single main speaker after the AGM was McComas Taylor who gave a very entertaining and evocative presentation “Through the binoculars backwards: how the ACT Bird Atlas and Field Guide came about, and other ancient history”.

Attendees thoroughly enjoyed this presentation, which for many brought back nostalgic memories of the great times we had participating in this innovative project which McComas planned, designed, conducted and delivered so enthusiastically.

He began by relating how when he first came to Canberra in 1979, he offered to help with COG’s Garden Bird Survey analysis by cutting up the charts into each of the over 50 individual species and then manually adding up the numbers. This soon greatly advanced into writing COG’s Annual Bird Reports.

However, it was the publication of the RAOU’s The Atlas of Australian Birds and most importantly a visit to the RSBP in the UK whose Atlas of Breeding Birds both inspired and increased McComas’ desire to develop an Atlas of the ACT birds. He then discussed this with both Henry Nix and Bryan FitzGerald, who was COG’s President at the time.

First of all, he managed to convince COG to purchase its very early model first computer (we marvelled at his overhead of the Sanyo “PC compatible” with twin 5.5 inch floppy disk drives) to be able to handle all of the expected data, and then after having conducted a few less ambitious surveys for them, convince the National Capital Development Corporation (NCDC) to fund the surveys over a 3-year period.

For these surveys McComas divided up the ACT into 168 X 2.5-minute (roughly 3.5 X 4.5 km) grid cells which he drew up on a 1:100,000 map of the ACT. Surveyors were then asked to adopt these grid cells and, with the help of Atlas kits in plastic sleeves, include the bird species found to be present in them on a data sheet, which somewhat controversially had the species in alphabetical order.

Apart from individual or small group atlasers, he also organised group tours labelled the A-team to visit the more inaccessible locations within the ACT to ensure the fullest coverage possible. Atlas sheets were collected at COG meetings in the famous Red Box with the funding allowing for the data to be entered.

McComas noted that by the time of its launch at the COG meeting in July 1986, about 75% of the grid cells had already been adopted. Also, at his suggestion based on a recent visit there, Jenny Bounds and Brendan Lepschi adopted the Mulligans Flat grid cell, and as he noted, “the rest is history” with it now being a major ACT Nature Reserve.

The atlassing was then conducted over a 3-year period from 1 September 1986 to 31 August 1989, over which time there were close to 300 contributors, with 250,000 records from close to 7,500 data sheets resulting in a total of 226 species (including 11 aviary escapees).

McComas' analysis and writing up of all this information for the Atlas took another 3 years. One of his biggest advances was to use the SPLINE smoothing technique which allowed him to print more realistic distribution maps as it allowed shading between areas of contours. Also, he sought sponsors to buy the rights to print drawings of the birds. He very gratefully acknowledged Muriel Brookfield's excellent editing skills including picking up his ubiquitous use of the phrase that species were "ubiquitously" present. He also very gratefully acknowledged Henry Nix's role in mentoring him throughout the project.

McComas related his difficulties in convincing the COG committee of the time to include his name as one of the authors of *Birds of the Australian Capital Territory: An Atlas*, due to the extreme time and effort he had put in to developing it, which happily for him, he was able to resolve in his favour.

He also briefly covered how *The Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT* came about through his very strong friendship with Alastair and Hedda Morrison who organised the ACT National Parks Association (NPA) to provide the money to write the text and access the drawings.

He noted how the Field Guide was now in its sixth edition, being the "gift that keeps on giving" to the NPA. He also noted how pleased he was when he recently saw a bird watcher with a copy in their back pocket, exactly where it was intended to fit.

Once again, on behalf of COG/Canberra Birds members, many thanks to McComas for his very informative and entertaining presentation on a unique piece of our history. The interest was very clear from the large turnout with from the show of hands around half having participated in the ACT Atlas. Apart from the nostalgic memories it brought back to many of the audience, we trust that he was also able to renew some old acquaintances.

Our very best wishes to McComas for his further birding activities, including with COG/Canberra Birds, where he would of course be more than welcome to join in.

Jack Holland

Committee News

The COG AGM on 13 November saw Neil Hermes and Steve Read step down from the Committee. Neil was President for eight years and Steve Vice-President for six. They were a great team and brought both the big picture and precision to our discussions and decision making. Both Neil and Steve will continue to be involved with Committee projects of particular interest to them. Thank you, Neil and Steve, for your contributions to the Committee and Canberra Birds/COG.

The new committee is:

President: Kim Farley

Vice-President: Julie Hotchin

Treasurer: vacant, with Prue Watters acting in the position for the present

Secretary: Margaret Robertson

General Members: Jenny Bounds and Bill Graham

Our new Committee is smaller than is ideal and we are keen to recruit a Treasurer and several more General Committee Members. If this might interest you, contact me or any committee member for a chat. I also recommend the short article in the October Gang-gang about what's involved in being a committee member.

Kim Farley *President*

kimlouisefarley@gmail.com

Coffee and Chat at the Gardens Tuesday, 11 December

You are invited to Canberra Birds monthly Coffee and Chat at the Australian National Botanic Gardens cafe.

Come along any time between 9:30 and 11:30 on the second Tuesday of the month.

All welcome – experienced birders, new and would-be birders, locals and visitors.

Look for the table with the binoculars on it.



Field Trip Reports

Wednesday 16 October - South Aranda Woodland (Ian Loiterton) Walk

On a glorious morning, despite the early predictions of rain, 13 people joined me to explore this new trail in the south-eastern section of the Aranda Bushland Nature Reserve. We had a blend of new and experienced members together with a visitor from Finland.

There was lots of bird activity throughout the walk, often heard rather than seen. Numerous **Grey Fantails**, **Superb Fairy-wrens**, **Weebills** and **Yellow-Faced Honeyeaters** were calling at the start of the walk as we followed the bush next to the open grassland. A very loud and vocal female **Rufous Whistler** was eventually located. Several species were more easily seen in a lightly wooded area with large old gums, including good views from a distance of a **Striated Pardalote** at a nest hollow, two very active female **Golden Whistlers** gleaning bugs and an **Eastern Yellow Robin** calling. A pair of **Gang-gang Cockatoos** graciously flew closer towards the group and settled in a tree, allowing for good views. A short side trip brought us to an apple-box grove, a fine example of how young trees can form a circular grove as they grow around the mother-tree. Some in the group shared their knowledge of the growth pattern of the apple-box and the characteristics of several old yellow-box trees.

As we walked through the woodland section and the trail along the lower slope of the ridge, we had good views of **Brown Thornbills** and **Silvereyes** feeding in the canopy and of **Australian Ravens**, one of which was carrying food. At the top of the chert ridge was a family group of ten **White-Winged Choughs**, as well as more thornbill species and **Superb Fairy-wrens**. The calls of several summer migrants accompanied us during the morning, including **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike**, **Olive-backed Oriole** and **White-throated Gerygone**. A fine view of a solitary **Australian Pelican** flying over the arboretum greeted us as we returned to the grassland at the end of the trail.

Our collective bird list for the walk was 39 species, highlighting the avian richness of this section of Aranda Bushland. Many thanks to Margaret Robertson for keeping track of the bird list.

Julie Hotchin



Gang-gang Cockatoo, Rufous Whistler, Striated Pardalote

Tee Tong Teo

Sunday 3 November – Callum Brae NR

More than twenty birdwatchers met at 8am at the entrance to Callum Brae Nature Reserve on a sunny Sunday morning. The walk was led by Sandra Henderson, who has been monitoring the reserve countless times over the years and expertly guided us through its varied habitats. We made our way through open woodland and denser patches of forest, each providing its own birdwatching opportunities.

At first, the air was filled with the piercing calls of **Noisy Miners** but, as we moved along, the notes of more and more birds were heard, adding layers to the morning's soundtrack. We passed small dams that held a few waterbirds, including **Hardhead**, **Grey Teal**, **Pacific Black Duck** and **Eurasian Coot**. While standing by one of the dams, intent on checking out the waterbirds, a **Brown Quail** suddenly flushed, catching some of us by surprise.



Callum Brae: **Dollarbird, Little Coreella, Australian Raven, Red-browed Finch, Mistletoebird** - *Marcus Hellyer*

Yellow-rumped Thornbill - *Tee Tong Teo*

Along the walk, we admired ancient trees' twisted and gnarled shapes, pausing at times to focus on birds singing high in the canopy, with **Mistletoebirds** adding colours to the morning. **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike** flashed through the trees, while **Grey Fantails** and **Superb Fairy-wrens** kept busy in the undergrowth. **Yellow-rumped Thornbills, Weebills** and **Silvereyes** also put in an appearance. As we were wrapping up for the morning, a **Laughing Kookaburra** was seen flying from tree to tree, adding a final touch to our tally of 45 species observed. A rewarding walk in a beautiful reserve.

Nicole Damaggio

Sunday 10 November – Campbell Park, Morning Nest Workshop

Thirty members and guests, including five younger people, joined me for the twenty-second running of this annual event. Again, the emailing of the notes beforehand allowed me to largely dispense with the short spiel at the start, and we soon headed off towards the horse gate, where the main activity had been noted during the reccie a couple of days before. Sue Lashko had again kindly offered to help lead so we could split up into two groups, exchanging notes whenever we passed each other, and then again at morning tea.

As for 2023, it was a somewhat different morning as, perhaps due to the very dry conditions with no rain for over 3 weeks, there was clearly reduced bird activity (though it seemed to increase around/after morning teatime), and as a result the least breeding activity ever observed. Even the **Noisy Miner** numbers and activity seemed more subdued than usual, with only one group seeing them both carrying food and feeding a dependent young.

The best confirmed breeding observation of the morning was a pair of **Weebills** busily taking food to their young through the side entrance of a dome-shaped nest at head height in a sapling. A pair of **Striated Pardalotes** was also photographed going in and out of a small hole in a dead gum. Otherwise breeding activity was confined mainly to the parrot family inspecting nest holes, in particular **Crimson Rosellas** which seemed to be the most abundant, or at least conspicuous, species of the morning. A pair of **Nankeen Kestrels** was flying out over the grassland and returning to the tree near the big (completely dry) dam where they bred a few years ago. Though some possible territorial defence was noted, they did not seem to be taking in food. A pair of **Little Coreellas** was also observed allopreening in this tree.

There were a couple of observations of recent breeding, the first being a still streaked bird with buff wing bars, concluded likely to be a juvenile/immature **Flame Robin** probably from the recent breeding event here. It was seen by both groups (and photographed by Teo, surprisingly in amongst the dead branchlets/foliage, though the earlier group had seen it about a metre off the ground, then flying down to the ground and back) about an hour apart in much the same location, but no adult was seen. The alternative of a **Scarlet Robin** was ruled out as none of this species had been



reported from there since early October, or has ever been observed during this workshop, the **Flame Robin** having been recorded breeding there in 2014 and 2018.

The second bird, seen by one group, was a very plain bird with a light green back, the main feature being the barring under the tail. It had limited, if any, barring on the breast/throat and no clear dark eye-stripe. The diagnostic rufous sides to the tail were not able to be seen as the bird moved around but were clear on Teo's photograph, which confirmed it as a juvenile/immature **Horsfield Bronze-Cuckoo** (the other group had heard one, likely an adult, earlier). A **Buff-rumped Thornbill** was close but not seen to feed it.



No confirmed breeding activity was observed for other birds that usually nest there. A pair of **Leaden Flycatchers** were moving around and calling occasionally when we first arrived at the horse gate. Both groups had very good views of **White-throated Gerygones** calling around there, but the **Western Gerygone** was heard only by one group. Quite a few **Grey Fantails** were flitting about, but with no clear breeding activity noted, nor was there for several **Noisy Friarbird**, **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes** and **Rufous Whistlers**. A **Mistletoebird** flew over calling while we were having morning tea at the horse gate and allowed good views for some as it moved around in a mistletoe for a short while. A **Grey Shrike-thrush**, unusual for this Workshop, was also heard calling several times, and most of the combined group had good views of a **Sacred Kingfisher** towards the end of the morning.



White-winged Trillers, for which breeding activity has been observed most years, were not recorded, nor were **Dusky Woodswallows**, also regular breeders in the past, **Olive-backed Orioles**, often heard and occasionally found breeding, or **Varied Sittellas**. Unexpected species were a couple of **Striated Thornbills** (only observed once before) and a **Yellow Thornbill** (quite yellow under and with an orange spot under the chin), a first for this workshop.



A total of 42 species were seen on the morning, only slightly down from previous years, but some of the birds did not allow good views. Only 7 species were confirmed to be breeding at some level; hollow nesters accounted for more than half of them. Checking my notes, this is the lowest ever and nearly 50% down on the previous low in 2023.

Participants continue to enjoy this very popular outing, and my sincere thanks again to Sue Lashko for helping lead the very large group. However, with the consistent decline in breeding activity at this spot over the past few years (for the first time there wasn't the usual hum of activity), the viability of this as a Nest Workshop can be questioned, though it remains a very good spot for an outing in mid spring.

Jack Holland

King Parrot, Buff-rumped Thornbill, White-throated Gerygone, Nankeen Kestrel *Tee Tong Teo*

Wednesday 20 November - South Jerrabomberra Ponds

A smaller than usual group met in the new South Jerrabomberra suburb to look around the three new ponds. Despite the pond system being very new, eBird already has over 80 birds listed. Both **Hoary-headed** and **Australasian Grebes**



Australasian Grebe

Sandra Henderson

were identified, with one of the **Australasian Grebes** on a nest. Tim and Jenni found an **Australian Spotted Crake** foraging along the edge of the water, and we all got good looks at this bird. In the unkempt area between Hume and the ponds, **Golden-headed Cisticolas**, **Superb Fairy-wrens**, **Red-rumped Parrots** and **European Goldfinches** were seen, and **White-plumed Honeyeaters** complained loudly when a **Pied Currawong** flew in. A total of 39 species went on the list - so well worth visiting as the suburb develops.

Sandra Henderson

Sunday 24 November – Rye Park, Phil’s Creek TSR and Boorowa

Bill Graham led a group of 8 members across six sites in the Boorowa and Rye Park district. We had a combined tally of 66 species across all sites. After meeting at Hall at 7:30am, our first stops were at Grassy Creek Road (Rye Park) and Mewburn Grove Cemetery (Rugby). Highlights were a **Dollarbird** and 2 **Sacred Kingfisher** at Grassy Creek Road, amongst 13 other species.

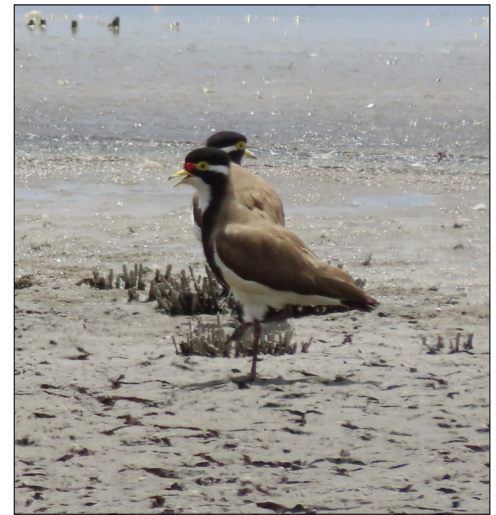
We arrived at Phil’s Creek TSR at 9.45am as the temperature exceeded 29°, but were still able to seek out 42 species, most of which were woodland birds: highlights included 3 **Brown Treecreeper**, 2 **Rainbow Bee-eater**, 1 **Leaden Flycatcher**, 3 **Brown-headed Honeyeater**, a nesting **Striped Honeyeater** and a **Mistletoebird**. Raptors were active, 2 of which were identified as a **Collared Sparrowhawk** and a **Nankeen Kestrel**.

After morning tea, we proceeded to Boorowa Rotary Park for a pleasant but busy stroll along the shaded river in the low 30s temperature. Even in the heat, 24 species were still active, including plentiful **White-plumed Honeyeater**, **Sacred Kingfisher** and **Rufous Songlark**.

After lunch, our final stop in the 34° heat was at two farm dams on Ballyryan Rd, one of which had an abundant array of waders and ducks, despite it rapidly drying out, with the water only halfway up stilts’ legs over much of the dam. There were over 350 **Grey Teal**, 23 **Pied Stilt**, 25 **Masked Lapwing**, 12 **Red-kneed Dotterel** and 4 **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper**. The final highlight of the day was the arrival of 4 **Banded Lapwing**, settling along the edge of the dam just as we were about to depart.

Many thanks to Bill for such an interesting and well researched road trip.

Mark Tindale



Banded Lapwing

Sandra Henderson

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Field trips - January to June 2025

Month	Date	Venue	Leader
January	15	Wednesday walk TBD	
	19	Warks Road	Sue Lashko
	26	Venue required	Leader required
February	2	Jerrabomberra Wetlands – World Wetlands Day	Sue Lashko
	9	Brooks Hill Reserve, Bungendore	Michael Robbins
	16	Private property near Hoskinstown	Peter Smith
	19	Wednesday walk TBD	
	23	Forde Creek & Gungahlin ponds	Bill Graham
	23-28	Crowdy Bay NP - camping	Kathy Walter, John Goldie
March	2	Venue required	Leader required
	9	Venue required	Leader required
	16	Ian Loiterton Walk, S Aranda Bushland NR	Julie Hotchin
	19	Wednesday walk TBD	
	22-23	Eden pelagics	Sue Lashko & Julian Teh
	30	Rob Roy NR, Tuggeranong	Michael Robbins
April	6	Narrabundah Hill	Jack Holland
	13	K2C	Nicki Taws
	16	Wednesday walk TBD	
	18-21	TBC	
	27	Majura West Nature Park	Sally Stephens, Prue Watters
May	4	Mulligans Flat NR from Wildbark, Throsby	McComas Taylor
	11	Tin Hut Dam, Burra	Mark Tindale
	17	ANBG beginners	Anthony Overs
	21	Wednesday walk TBD	
	25	Bargo Reserve	Bill Graham
June	8	Glendale to Brandy Flat Hut, Namadgi NP	Prue Watters
	14	Superb Lyrebird survey, Tidbinbilla	Chris Davey
	18	Wednesday walk TBD	
	22	Venue required	Leader required

Future Field Trips

COG Trips

Each participant must register prior to their chosen trip with their name and contact number and, before proceeding on the trip, must comply with the participant's responsibilities (wording follows). An emergency contact name and phone number are required.

"I declare that I am capable of undertaking the trip having discussed with the Trip Leader any limitations I have (e.g. medications, physical), assessed the risks to myself and my property, and ensured that I am adequately equipped. I will follow the instructions of the Field Trip Leader, and advise them before moving away from the group."

New birders and visitors are welcome. If you do not have your own binoculars, COG can lend you a pair, so please advise the trip leader when you register.

Changes to trips are notified on:

the COG chatline <http://canberrabirds.org.au/publications/discussion-email-list/> and trips page of COG website <http://canberrabirds.org.au/category/trips/>.

A reminder that COG has a long-standing policy to give **preference to members** for field trips that can accommodate only a limited number of people.

Do NOT attend if you have tested positive for Covid, have been a close contact within the past 5 days, or have any Covid, cold or flu symptoms.

Sunday 8 December – Tuggeranong Hill NR

Tuggeranong Hill is a 365 hectare nature reserve in South Tuggeranong. We will explore the section in Theodore behind the electricity substation. Speckled Warbler and Crested Shrike-Tit have been seen here in the past.

Bring hat, sunscreen, lots of water and sturdy shoes.

Meet at 8 am at the substation which is halfway round Callister Cres, Theodore. Car pool where possible, as parking is limited. **Please register** with Lia Battisson at liabattisson@outlook.com.

Sunday 15 December – Cuumbean NR

Meet at 8am at the entrance on Captains Flat Rd, on the right just over 1km from the Kings Hwy, where there is a gravel pull-off area for parking.

The walk will be 2-3 hours, with some gentle slopes and one short, sharp uphill section. Wear sturdy shoes and bring hat, water, sunscreen.

There have been over 80 species seen in the reserve.

Register with Sandra at shirmax2931@gmail.com, with name and phone number, and name and number for an emergency contact

Wednesday 18 December - West Belconnen Pond

Meet at 8am at Percy Begg Cct, Dunlop, near the pond. We'll proceed around the near end of the pond and beyond to the grasslands. After a walk along the tracks in that area we will complete a circuit of the pond. Apart from water birds, we may encounter Brown Songlark or Singing Bushlark beyond the pond. Make sure to bring hat, sturdy shoes, water and sunscreen. **Register** with Sandra at shirmax2931@gmail.com

Wednesday 15 January 2025 - Mulligans Flat NR – evening walk

Meet at 7pm on Eric Wright St in Forde. Our targets will be the night birds - in January 2024 we heard the **Bush Stone Curlews** and **Southern Boobook**, and saw a **Tawny Frogmouth**, as well as various mammals. Bring a torch and wear sturdy shoes. **Register** with Sandra at shirmax2931@gmail.com

Sunday 19 January - Warks Rd/Blundells Creek Rd

The plan for this outing is to walk down Blundells Creek Road and then along Warks Road, in particular to search for wet forest birds. This will involve a car shuffle so that we do not have to walk back up Blundells Creek Road. However, road closures, as have happened in recent years, may change these arrangements closer to the time.

We hope to see **Satin Flycatcher**, **Eastern Crested Shrike-tit**, **Rose Robin**, **Rufous Fantail**, **Red-browed Treecreeper**, and at least hear **Pilotbird**, **Wonga Pigeon** and **Superb Lyrebird**, as well as see a variety of honeyeaters, whistlers and parrots.

Bring morning tea, lunch, plenty of water, hat and wear suitable footwear for a downhill gravel road.

Register at smlashko@gmail.com with your name, mobile number and name and number of an emergency contact. Please also include your suburb so that I can connect you to others in your area for carpooling. Suggested contribution to drivers is \$10 per person; please bring the correct money.
Sue Lashko

Sunday 26 January – venue required, leader required

If you can help, contact Sue Lashko on smlashko@gmail.com

Sunday 2 February - Jerrabomberra Wetlands NR – World Wetlands Day

To celebrate World Wetlands Day, during this morning outing we will visit Kelly Swamp and Jerrabomberra Creek. Depending on numbers, the group may be divided into two, so a volunteer to lead a possible second group would be appreciated. Bring hat, sunscreen, water and, if you have one, a telescope.

Meet at 7.30am in the carpark at the end of Dairy Road, Fyshwick.

NB: this walk is flat and is wheelchair-friendly.

Register at smlashko@gmail.com with your name, mobile number and name and number of an emergency contact.
Sue Lashko

Sunday 9 February – Brooks Hill Reserve, Bungendore

Brooks Hill Reserve is on the Kings Highway. Often passed, but less frequently visited, the reserve car-park is located on the right hand side at the bottom of the last hill before the flat stretch leading to Bungendore.

We'll plan to walk back up the old highway and then through the bush, which is fairly open, and not especially uneven ground, back to the car park. We'll be out for about 2 to 3 hours, depending on how many birds are around, so those that need a mid-morning snack should bring one, as well as water, sunscreen and appropriate clothing.

Meet at 8 am at Spotlight, Queanbeyan for carpooling, or 8:30 am at the reserve parking area.

Register with Michael Robbins (mrobbins@home.netspeed.com.au) with your name, mobile number and name and number of an emergency contact.

Sunday 16 February – private property near Hoskinstown

Description: Mixed-eucalypt forest, including post-burn regeneration; garden around house. A range of forest species expected including **Eastern Yellow**



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Email: freddy@feathersnfriends.com.au

Robin, White-throated Treecreeper, Superb Lyrebird, thornbills, Australian King Parrot, rosellas, Wonga Pigeon and Laughing Kookaburra, as well as spring/summer migrants.

Meeting time and place: 8.00 am, Spotlight car park, Queanbeyan for carpooling.

Walking distance: 4 km

Degree of difficulty: medium

End time (approx.): 12.00pm

What to bring: water, morning tea, hat, sunscreen, sturdy shoes

Registration: participants must register with the leader at least 36 hours in advance, providing their name and mobile number, and the name and mobile number of an emergency contact.

Numbers limited: maximum of 16

Name of leader and contact details: Peter Smith 0427 879 774 smith.peter899@gmail.com

Sunday 23 February – Yerrabi Pond and Ginninderra Creek, Amaroo

Description: Yerrabi Pond is a hotspot for **Superb Parrot** and many species of waterbirds including **Musk Duck** and **Black Swan**. Ginninderra Creek runs beside Moncrieff Ridge and has **Tree Martin, Dusky Woodswallow** and **European Goldfinch**.

Meeting time and place: 7.30 am in the carpark off Wonderlich St, Gungahlin. The second meeting place will be Jorgensen St, Moncrieff.

Walking distance: Yerrabi Pond 2 km, Ginninderra Creek 2 km. Degree of difficulty: easy

End time: 12.30 pm

What to bring: water, morning tea, sunscreen, sturdy shoes, hat.

Numbers limited to 16.

Participants must register with the leader, by email to bsgraham1948@gmail.com at least 24 hours before, providing their name and mobile number, and the name and mobile number of an emergency contact.

Bill Graham

Sunday 23 to Friday 28 February – Crowdy Bay NP – camping

Protecting a pristine sweep of coastline between Port Macquarie and Taree, Crowdy Bay National Park is a beautiful coastal park. Habitat includes coastal heath, swamp and woodland which harbours some fantastic species such as **Grass Owl, Tawny-crowned Honeyeater, King Quail, White-cheeked Honeyeater, Southern Emu-wren, Eastern Ground Parrot** and potentially Koala. We will be camping at Kylies Beach National Park Campground.

Contact Kathy and John on walter.goldie@gmail.com for further information and to book your place. Please provide your name and mobile number, and the name and mobile number of an emergency contact.

John Goldie and Kathy Walter



The eight card designs:

- **Australian magpie** at the National Arboretum Canberra
- **Australian white ibis** at the National Carillon, Canberra
- **Bush-stone curlews** at Mulligans Flat Woolshed
- **Crimson rosellas** at the National Gallery of Australia Skyspace
- **Galahs** at the Balloon Spectacular
- **Gang-gang cockatoos** at City Hill
- **Rainbow-crested cockatoo** at Black Mountain Tower
- **Tawny frogmouths** at Shine Dome

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COG membership

2024-2025 memberships:

- Individual: \$50
- Family: \$55
- Institution: \$50
- School student (under 18) \$20

New members

COG welcomes the following new members:

E Kay
D and A Munn
Yi Shu

NEXT NEWSLETTER

Deadline for February 2025 edition:

Wednesday 29 January 2025

Please send articles, advertisements, updates etc. to the Editors at:

gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au

or

c/- The Secretary, COG,

PO Box 331, Jamison Centre, ACT 2614.

Articles should be less than 500 words (300 for reports of 1-day field trips) except by prior arrangement with the editor.

Photographs (prints or electronic) with or without articles are encouraged.

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