

Gang-gang

Canberra Birds Newsletter

JUNE 2025

Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

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Striped Honeyeater Photo by: Shorty

MAY MEETING

Wednesday 11 June 2025

7:30 pm

**Canberra Girls Grammar School,
Chapel, corner Gawler Cres and Melbourne Ave, Deakin**

The June 2025 meeting will be a normal face-to-face one held as usual at the Canberra Girls Grammar School but will be held in the Chapel where we will be meeting for the rest of 2025 while the Multi-media Theatre (MMT) is being renovated (see details below).

Graham Gall - the BirdLife Photography Australia Biennial Conference March 2026 - Canberra Birds Collaboration.

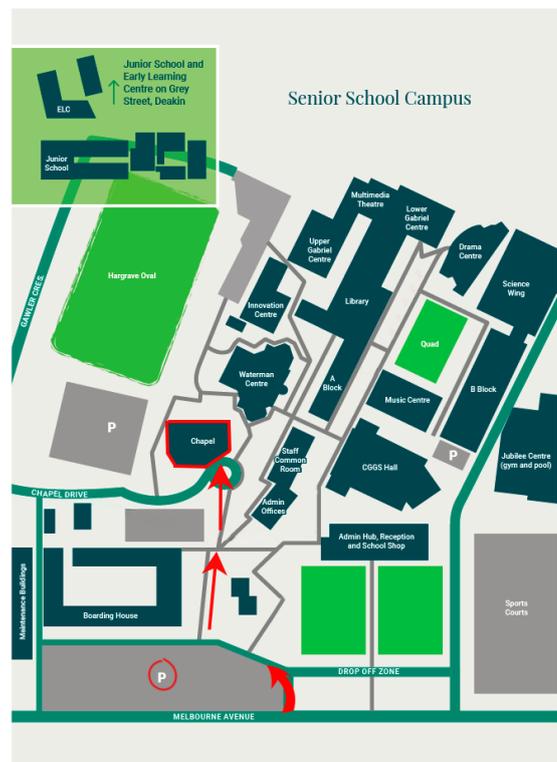
Bethany Dunne and Stuart Harris - Birds of the Snow Gum woodlands: a post-fire study.

The Chapel is much easier to find than the Multi-media Theatre. As for previous 2025 meetings entry and exit for the Chapel are from the main gates on Melbourne Ave, which automatically open and close. The Entry gate will be open, so please drive through and park in the main parking area to your left. Once parked proceed to the Chapel using main path as previously before turning left at the Admin Hub, or use the more direct (but darker) route keeping the Boarding House to your left – see the [amended map](#) .

Limited parking will also be available using the Chapel Drive entrance on Gawler Cres and car park, this gate should also be open.

Though it is well lit, as it will be dark before and after the meeting, a torch for finding your way to the Chapel and back to your car is recommended. The Exit gate is on a sensor pad, so please drive up to the gate and it will open for you.

As COVID is still widespread in the community 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.



The short presentation will be by **Graham Gall**, who will introduce the **“BirdLife Photography Australia Biennial Conference March 2026 - Canberra Birds Collaboration”**.

Graham, who is Chair of the organising committee for the BirdLife Photography Australia Biennial Conference to be held in Canberra on 7-8 March 2026, will present an outline of this exciting event that will bring 250+ bird lovers to the ACT from all over Australia.

He will introduce Ben Harvey and Kristina Sands from his Committee who are working with Canberra Birds’ Sue Lashko on the pre and post Conference Field Trip program. COG/Canberra Birds is hosting these field trips and will be manning an industry display table at the Conference.

Sue will be asking for volunteers to act as guides/facilitators for the field trips which will be held at the Jerrabomberra Wetlands, the ANBG, Mulligans Flat NR and Tidbinbilla Sanctuary. An outline of the proposed field trip program will be presented.

From past experience Graham advises that we can expect around 100+ delegates to attend these field trips, so Sue will need a good number of COG/Canberra Birds members to volunteer to host our visitors who will be excited and keen to capture great bird images at our iconic hot spots.

So please come with questions and a willingness to help if you can.

The main presentation will be by **Bethany Dunne** and **Stuart Harris**, Fire Ecologist and Project Officer, respectively, in the ACT Government Office of Nature Conservation, on “**Birds of the Snow Gum woodlands: a post-fire study.**”

During the devastating Black Summer bushfires of 2020, large areas of Snow Gum woodlands across the ACT were burnt, much of it experiencing high severity fire for the second time in just 17 years. As this vegetation type represents a large proportion of the ACT uplands, the ACT Government Office of Nature Conservation fire ecology team started a monitoring project in 2020, investigating the interactions between fire history, vegetation structure and fauna in the Snow Gum woodlands of the ACT. This talk will discuss one of the sub-projects looking at the avian passive acoustic monitoring and analysis completed to date and will include a talk by Stuart Harris and his significant contribution to the bird surveys.

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

Membership payments become due from 1 July 2025 for the 2025/26 financial year. **Please don't pay your membership until AFTER 1 July.**

From 1 July we will be making a few changes to our membership system to streamline the process. Many members do not complete a membership form each year and consequently our membership secretary may not be advised of changes to email, phone number or address. From 1 July we are therefore asking members to complete the online membership form each year. This should enable Sandra Henderson, membership officer for over 20 years, to retire and do what she loves – birdwatching.

Renewing and new members can find the membership form on our website and transfer payment to the Canberra Birds bank account – after 1 July.

The information from the membership form will be transferred to a database which will provide an ongoing up-to-date record of our members.

If you have any queries about these changes, please contact prue.watters@gmail.com. Please also bear in mind that we are implementing the new system and may experience difficulties from time to time. And remember we are volunteers, so please be patient.

Prue Watters
Acting Treasurer
26 May 2025

Coffee and Chat at the Gardens Tuesday, 13 May

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 11:00 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.

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

The fine and warm (for the time of year) autumn weather continued for the just over 4 weeks from 29 April to 27 May covered by this column, with hardly any rain until some soaking falls in the final week. Before that, conditions seemed to be as dry as they had been any time since the last drought broke in early 2020. The rain came too late to affect bird activity in the COG Area of Interest (Aoi) which both my notes and analysis below indicates was very low in May. Again except for a few late staying birds the spring/summer migrants seem to have departed at their usual times, though the return of some of the autumn/winter altitudinal migrants still seems delayed. Numbers of “unusual” species reported were low, well below the already very low numbers in March/April.

Highlights

During the period there have been no real highlights, such as a special “unusual” bird or event. However, the **Striped Honeyeater** was still around in Higgins; after no reports since 25 April around 1 pm on 11 May Tracy Rail posted it was in her front yard in Brazel Street (about 350 m from the original Cantor Cres spot) a few minutes ago. It was travelling with a big mixed flock, **White-eared Honeyeater**, **Yellow-faced Honeyeater**, lots and lots of **Pardalotes**, **Yellow-rumped Thornbills**, etc. “The **Red Wattlebirds** were going off.”.

Interestingly, the only report on eBird during the period was from Matthew Mullaney within 15 minutes of Tracy’s sighting. He saw one land in crab-apple and then fly into a *Eucalyptus cinerea* on Dethridge St (on other side - southern - of Brazel St, so < 100 m away) before heading south (towards where it was originally reported).



Striped Honeyeater

Shorty

On 23 May Tracy posted that the **Striped Honeyeater** was still around. She had heard it two days before in a gorgeous remnant yellow box in someone’s backyard, close to the Brazel Street box gum grassy woodland. So, it has been in this area for well over 6 weeks, and it will be very interesting to see how long it stays before it quietly disappears as a few other special “unusual” birds have done in past years.

Spring/summer migrants

Of the inland spring/summer migrants still present in April, during the period there have been no further reports of the **Horsfield’s Bronze-Cuckoo** (last reported on 10 April) or the **White-winged Triller** (last reported on 16 April).

Of the coastal spring/summer migrants still present in April, there have been no reports of the **Rainbow Bee-eater** (last reported on 26 March), **Sahul Cicadabird** (last reported on 7 April), **Shining Bronze-Cuckoo** (last reported on 19 April), or **Sahul Brush Cuckoo** (last reported on 24 April). However, there were still reports of the **Sacred Kingfisher** from 2 locations, single birds near the big dam at Mulligans Flat NR and at the Jerrabomberra Wetlands NR (JWNR), both on 2 May.

On 29 April Michael Lenz found some feathers at the West Belconnen Pond identified as belonging to either an adult female or juvenile **Eastern Koel**. Michael noted they were in good condition, and thus a recent kill and a relatively late (although not exact) record. The last **Eastern Koel** record I have for the past season is from 24 March, 5 weeks earlier, so it’s very likely a later record, though the dry weather may have helped keep the feathers in good condition.

There have been no further reports of the **Leaden Flycatcher** (last reported on 14 April), **Australian Rufous Fantail** (also last reported on 14 April), **White-throated Gerygone** (last reported on 27 April) or **Fairy Martin** (last reported on 28 April). However, there was still a report of the **Western Gerygone** from one location, 2 birds at the JWNR on 20 May.

The **Australian Reed-Warbler** was still reported from 4 locations (compared with 11 in April), with it still present at the JWNR up to the time of writing. The **Tree Martin** was still recorded from 7 locations (compared with 20 in April), with the most recent reports being 2 birds at the West Belconnen Pond, and at the dams on Cavanagh Close Queanbeyan, both on 17 May.

The **Noisy Friarbird** was still reported from 7 locations (compared with 17 in April), the highest number being 12 birds in Bonner on 1 May. As I mentioned in my previous column, they have stayed unusually late in my local patch, with up to 3 birds regularly recorded within 200 m of a favoured spot in Rivett. They were last heard there on 20 May, with one still seen there the day before. Chris Davey also found 2 in Holt on 18 May, and Ian Fraser last heard them in Duffy on 9 May.

The **Rufous Whistler** was still reported from 9 locations (compared with well over 50 in April), with it still being reported from the Namadgi NP Visitors Centre on 25 May. The **Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike** was still reported from over 30 locations (compared with around 70 in April) up to the time of writing, as was the **Grey Fantail** from around 50 locations (about half of April). Some of these, in particular the latter 2 species, will stay over winter as will some of the **Mistletoebirds** and **Superb Parrots**, reported from around 20 (slightly up from April) and 50 (slightly down from April, with only 15 south of the lake) locations.

Most of the **Dusky Woodswallows** and **Olive-backed Orioles**, still reported from around 20 (compared with over 50 in April) and 12 (only slightly down from the 16 in April) locations, respectively, will also depart in May, though some of both species will also overwinter.

So, during June please keep an eye out for the above and other spring/summer migrants which are still being reported but usually leave during this month.

Autumn/winter altitudinal migrants

Of the species that come to Canberra and its surrounds from the mountains and higher country to spend autumn/winter here, the **Scarlet Robin** was well and truly established by May, with reports from around 50 urban/peri-urban locations, similar to April. More **Flame Robins** have moved in with reports from around 20 locations compared with 11 in April (they have returned to one of their favourite locations on the lower slopes SW of Mt Arawang). There have also been reports of the **Rose Robin** from 5 urban/peri-urban locations (up to 2 birds were regularly seen at the ANBG to 15 May), about half of April. Again, there have been no **Pink Robin** sightings reported during the period, but now the closest location is the Bondi State Forest W of Eden.

There has been one such location of **Crescent Honeyeater**, up to 2 birds in the ANBG from 26 April to 16 May compared with 4 locations on or W of the Murrumbidgee River. An unusual location for the **Yellow-tufted Honeyeater** was one reported from the West Belconnen Pond on 24 May, with up to 3 reported from the Gigerline NR from 4-6 May and a single bird at the Namadgi NP Visitors Centre on 10 May.

Up to 3 **Bassian Thrush** have been regularly reported from the ANBG during the period, with reports from 2 other locations in the mountains to the W of Canberra. A single **Olive Whistler** were reported only from the Kambah Pool NR on 9 and 24 May, but again there have been no reports of the **Brown Gerygone** anywhere in the COG Aol during the period.

The only **Swift Parrot** report during the period were 2 birds flying very fast close to the observer in Narrabundah Lane Symonston on 2 May. eBird now shows the closest other sighting being the Mount Annan Botanic Gardens SW of Sydney where 1 bird was observed on 13 May.

So please during June look out for the above species as more of them move into Canberra and surrounds.

Unusual species

Apart from continuing presence of the **Striped Honeyeater** described above there were no special “unusuals” reported from the COG Aol during the period.

Again, there were no **Magpie Geese** or **Plumed Whistling Duck** reported during the period. **Freckled Duck** were reported from 3 locations, with up to 12 ducks continuing to be present at the JWNR throughout the period. Two ducks were also reported from the big dam in Mulligans Flat NR on 2 May, with 10 ducks counted on the Lake Bathurst

waterbird survey on 11 May, and 5 at the NW corner of Lake George on 7 May.

During the period **Australian Shelduck** were reported from 2 locations within the ACT, including up to 2 ducks regularly from the big dam at Mulligans Flat NR. Two ducks were reported from Tharwa Drive on 10 and 20 May, with 2 ducks also from Woolcara Lane near Primrose Valley Creek (S of Hoskintown) on 11 May. During the period they were only reported from 4 locations to the NE through to the E of Canberra. Again, by far the highest numbers were the 215 ducks on the Lake Bathurst survey on 11 April (12 were also at the adjacent Morass on this date, in total about half the numbers in April). Otherwise, the maximum number was 64 ducks reported from the Trucking Yard Lane Dam on 6 May.

Blue-billed Ducks were reported from 3 locations during the period, with up to 11 ducks reported from the Upper Stranger Pond between 4-24 May. A single duck was reported from the Fyshwick Sewage Treatment Ponds (FSTP) from 1-17 May, but easily the highest number was the 300 ducks recorded at Lake Bathurst during the surveys there on 11 May (6 X the number recorded there on 11 April). Nine ducks were also reported from Rowes Lagoon on 25 May. Apart from the Tidbinbilla NR Sanctuary, **Musk Ducks** were reported only from 4 locations, with the highest numbers being the 28 ducks recorded at Lake Bathurst on 11 May when there were also 5 reported from the adjacent Morass. Up to 2 ducks were reported from the Upper Stranger Pond between 5-24 May, and up to 2 ducks from the Tin Hut Dam (Googong) between 2-11 May.

The **Great-crested Grebe** was again reported from only 2 locations. The maximum was 18 birds reported from the Lake Bathurst survey on 11 May, with just a single bird from the Bracks Hole Fire Trail on 2 May.

Two **Stubble Quail** was reported only from the big dam in Mulligans Flat NR on 11 May. In contrast up to 8 **Brown Quail** were reported from 6 locations, down from the 9 in April. No **Painted Button-quail** and again no **Little Button-quail** were reported during the period.

Two **Peaceful Doves** were reported the JWNR on 16 May, but no **White-headed Pigeon**, **Brown Cuckoo-Dove**, **Brush Bronzewing**, **Diamond Doves** or **White-throated Nightjars** were reported during the period.

No **Baillon's Crakes** were again reported during the period. **Spotless Crakes** were reported from 3 locations, with up to 4 birds regularly from the JWNR, but with a single bird at the McKellar Wetland on 9 and 11 May, as well as one from Barbour Park (Gunning) on 3 May. A single **Australian Spotted Crake** was also regularly reported from the JWNR, the only location for the period.

Single **Buff-banded Rails** were reported only from the JWNR on 8 May, and from the big dam at Mulligans Flat NR on 2 and 13 May, and a single **Lewin's Rail** only from the JWNR on 9 May. No **Black-tailed Nativehen** was reported during the period.

Seventeen (half of those in April) **Red-capped Plovers** were reported from the Lake Bathurst survey on 11 May. Two **Sharp-tailed Sandpipers** were also recorded there that day, but no **Pied Stilts**, **Red-**



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Geoffrey Dabb



Baillon's Crake

necked Avocets, Australian Painted-snipe, Pacific Golden Plover, Banded Lapwing, Comb-crested Jacana, Pectoral Sandpiper or Red-necked Stint were reported during the period. The **Common Sandpiper** seems to have finally moved on from its usual spot around the gross pollutant trap at the inlet of Village Creek from where it was last reported on 23 April (Andrea and I couldn't find it there on 14 May).

No **Caspian, Whiskered or White-winged Black Terns, Australasian or Australian Little/Black-backed Bitterns** were reported during the period.

No confirmed sightings of **Little or Plumed Egrets** were reported during the period. **Great Egrets** were reported from 17 locations (up from 12 in April) during the past month. Single **White-necked Herons** were reported from 4 locations only, well down from the 14 locations in April, a surprise since Andrea and I recorded one at the same small dam on the S side of Narrabundah Hill on both 8 and 21 May. **Royal Spoonbill** were reported from 11 locations (similar to April), and **Yellow-billed Spoonbills** from 6 locations (well up from the 2 in April). Again, no **Glossy Ibis** were reported during the period.

Single **Barn Owls** were reported from 5 locations, including 3 to the S of Yass. **Black-shouldered Kites** were reported from around 50 locations in the period, a bit up from April. Single **Spotted Harriers** were reported from 3 close together ACT locations, the JWNR, East Basin LBG and the Majura Rd, so possibly all the same bird. However, no **Grey Goshawks, Pacific Baza, Black Kites or Black Falcons** were reported from anywhere in the COG AoI during the period.

Two **Azure Kingfishers** were reported from the well-known Cotter Bend location on 16 May, and one from the Namarag - Molonglo River Reserve on 14 May (a new location but linking known spots). No **Red-backed or Forest Kingfishers** were reported during the period.

No **Glossy Black-Cockatoos, Cockatiel, Turquoise Parrot, Scaly-breasted, Little or Purple-crowned Lorikeets** were reported over the period. Up to 3 **Musk Lorikeets** were regularly reported from the University of Canberra to 15 May, with 2 in Turner on 14 May the only other report.

Apart from the **Striped Honeyeater** described above, **Blue-faced Honeyeaters** were reported from 4 locations with 1 bird at the University of Canberra on 1 May, as well as 2-3 birds at Eddison Park (Woden) on 13 May, with 5 there on 16 May. Single birds were reported from Kingston on 5 May as well as 1 bird from the Urambi Village in Kambah on 20 May (both new suburbs), with a delayed report of a breeding record from the former (see below).

While **White-fronted Chats** were reported from 3 locations only, with the only ACT sighting being 3 birds on the unnamed ponds at the end of Roy Corrigan Close Coombs on 14 May. Nineteen birds were recorded at Lake Bathurst during the waterbird survey there on 11 May, as well as 5 birds on the Wollogorang Rd on 11 May. However, no **Spiny-cheeked, Singing, Scarlet or Painted Honeyeaters or Little Friarbirds** were reported during the period.

Two **Chestnut-rumped Heathwren** were only reported from Whiskers Rd Carwoola on 25 May, and a **Red-capped Robin** only from the corner of Gum and Long Rail Rds (NW of Murrumbateman) on 10 May. However, no **White-bellied Cuckoo-shrikes, White-browed Babbler, Apostlebird, Spangled Drongo, Black-faced Monarch, Tawny Grassbird or Zebra Finches** were reported during the period.



Jacky Winter

Victor Braguine

In contrast to the 7 in April, **Jacky Winters** were reported from only 2 known locations, with up to 5 birds seen on the Naas Rd at Spring Station Creek from 3-18 May, and 4 birds on Top Naas Rd on 8 May.

Hooded Robins were reported from 3 known locations, with a male photographed on the Bracks Hole Fire Trail on 2 May, and 2 birds recorded at the Scottsdale Reserve on 3 May. However, there were up to 5 birds seen on the Naas Rd at Spring Station Creek from 3-25 May. These have been noted as a family group, with on 17 May "young birds apparently greeting their mother".

Restless Flycatchers were reported from just 1 known location, a single bird at Illilanga, such a contrast from the remarkable 10 locations in April.

Compared with April the number of “unusual” birds reported is again very low, including the above species for which I formerly asked readers to keep a special lookout, with in particular very few reports of pigeons/doves, raptors, parrots or passerines including honeyeaters.

Breeding

Limited late-autumn breeding has come to my attention, but with the following worth reporting:

After first seeing one adult **Blue-faced Honeyeater** around her place in Kingston on 14 April, Desley O’Mara next sighted 4 together on 25 April. These consisted of 2 adults and 2 immature birds, one of which was being fed by an adult and the other was feeding independently across the road on protea flowers. This record expands both the range and breeding range of this species in the ACT.

Flocks, including of migrating birds

While the mixed feeding flock (MFF) in our garden seems to have moved on, in our walks Andrea and I have continued to see quite a few MFFs, often being the only presence of small birds in long stretches. However, compared with the one with the **Striped Honeyeater** described above, the best bird has mainly been the presence of **Scarlet Robins**. So, keep an eye out for these, MFFs are expected to gradually diminish during June and early July as birds start preparing for the breeding season

During May flocks of cockatoos etc have started to become more noticeable in my local area. These include **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos** both on the verges/ovals or flying over/past our place from mid-May (close to 100 birds on 21 May) towards their roost site in the Chapman horse paddocks.

Early in the morning of 11 May at least 75 **Little Corellas** were counted flying towards Cooleman Ridge, where Ben Milbourne had counted 110 the day before. Flocks of this size occasionally come through but do not stay in the area, with few seen or reported after on eBird, until in the early afternoon of 23 May I again heard them come flying high over from Rivett and estimated at least 110 birds this time. I also note that Patrick Cox counted 325 at McQuoid’s Hill, not that far away, on 25 April.

Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos have also started to become more noticeable around Narrabundah Hill and the Molonglo River where David Clark counted 80 at the Namarag - Molonglo River Reserve on 14 May. Large flocks of **Galahs** have also been feeding on Rivett Oval, where I counted at least 310 on 20 May. A feature in my local area has been the snipping off the end branchlets in quite a number of gums or sometimes exotic trees, with a carpet of leaves under favoured trees, always a sign that parrots are active.

The only honeyeater migration that has come to my attention was the 70 **Red Wattlebirds** Andrea and I saw passing through the NW corner of the Narrabundah Hill reserve heading N on 1 May.

During the first month of winter please watch out for the last of the departing spring/summer migrants mentioned above, and for more of the returning autumn/winter altitudinal migrants, MFFs and single species flocks, as well as roosts and roost flights. 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 14 May meeting presentations.

The short presentation was the very interesting and informative, “**The life and times of a Sulphur-crested Cockatoo: Age-related variation in cognition and behaviour**” by Shefali Dorepalli, a Ph D student in the at the Research School of Biology at the ANU.

Shefali delivered a well-prepared presentation very confidently and with humour. The slides were clear and very well set out and contained many short videos vividly illustrating the **Sulphur-crested Cockatoo’s** reaction to a number of different test situations.

She noted that this species is a very good candidate for age-related variation in cognition and behaviour as after fledgling it takes 6-8 months before they become independent and remain as immature birds until they are 7 years old. Age can be determined by visually inspecting the eye colour. Birds with a red ring in their iris are females, those with a brown ring are juveniles, and those with completely black eyes are males. It is beneficial to age the birds in a sunny spot, as the eye colour can then be seen most clearly.

They also roost together in large numbers (around 150-180 birds in her two Sydney study sites of the Royal Botanic Gardens and Clifton Gardens) and are easily habituated into being captured and marked. In Shefali’s case this is by temporary colour marking on their backs or having Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) tags glued on, which allows tracking using iPhones.

Shefali described the results of the first year of her Ph D studies, aimed at looking at the effect of age on social behaviour, movement patterns, motor skills and fundamental cognitive abilities.

She has been able to show that adults rank higher than juveniles in their dominance ranking, and that the latter direct their aggressions more widely. Juveniles also roam more widely than adults. However, the test that fascinated the audience most was the string-pulling task from a perch, with Shefali’s videos showing individual birds using a variety of techniques; either an upright or collected pull using their left foot, or through “slurping” the string through their beaks.

Once again on behalf of COG/Canberra Birds members, many thanks to Shefali for giving this very interesting and informative presentation on a bird that we are all very familiar with, but that she confirmed are very intelligent. We wish her the very best with the completion of her Ph D studies and to hearing about the full study in the future.

The main talk was a fascinating presentation “**Where music meets conservation: the incredible Palm Cockatoos of Cape York Peninsula**” by Professor **Rob Heinsohn** of the Fenner School of Environment and Society at the ANU.

It was a wonderful presentation which he delivered clearly and calmly, making good use of his slides, videos and sound, and that held the audience’s very tight attention throughout. His great enthusiasm for the **Palm Cockatoo** and the Cape York area, including its indigenous people, clearly came through.

Rob started by pointing out that **Palm Cockatoos** prefer the ecotone between rainforest and woodland, needing large gums to breed in but also the forest to feed in. They are endangered because they are very slow breeding and are threatened due to inappropriate fire regimes; too frequent or infrequent fires can both have an impact, but in particular too big fires destroy their nest trees.

He showed a video (with sound) of different males drumming (using their left foot). He emphasised how remarkable this is; with the species being the only parrot to regularly use tools in the wild, that there is more than one tool type (different size sticks or small nuts), that is used for display and not foraging, and importantly that there is high individual specialization.

Rob then noted that the **Palm Cockatoo’s** drumming has key elements of human music, being the only non-human species that makes a percussive sound tool. Other qualities of music include performance in consistent contexts, discrete pitches, repeatability and rhythmicity.

He then addressed the question of when, where and how this drumming arose, noting it was only discovered in the early 1980s by Graham Wood, and that drumming is much more common in the Iron/Mcillwraith Ranges population than elsewhere. To answer the question of whether it began there he needed to know the history and connectivity between populations.

Rob raised several hypotheses, the first being that drumming began organically potentially a very long time ago, up to 17,000 or perhaps about 8000 years ago when sea levels had risen and the wetter climate allowed more patches of rain forest. Iron Range was then already occupied by **Palm Cockatoos** with evidence that they were not well connected. This includes that the population has several calls that the others don't, that the broad band call is distinct, and most importantly that they are genetically distinct. So, his conclusion was that this hypothesis is plausible.

Rob's second hypothesis is that drumming is more recent and has been copied from humans, noting that animal cultures can change very quickly. Very interesting is that **Palm Cockatoos** can make their own rhythms, with the ability to entrain a regular beat being uncommon, for example, great apes or dogs cannot do it. He showed a video that captive cockies easily learn to pick up a beat (with human help) and wondered whether **Palm Cockatoos** learned it from the indigenous people, with their presence for around 60,000 years giving them plenty of time to learn.

Support for a possible even later start comes from the fact that the species loves beach almonds and comes into close contact with humans in the Lockhart River every dry season. As this was only established in the 1960s, perhaps it was copied from rock music and big speakers with sub-woofers, with particularly that the mean tempo of the **Palm Cockatoo's** drumming is 120 beats/minutes, mid-way the rockers 100-140 beats/minute, lending some support for this.



Birdwatchers & nature lover's accommodation

Feathers'n'Friends cottage is fully self-contained with extensive facilities to ensure guests can enjoy short or extended stays.

The secluded lodging is surrounded by tropical rainforest and beautiful gardens with varying habitats and a large variety of birds and wildlife.

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Tel: 07 4094 1665

Email: freddy@feathersnfriends.com.au

Rob concluded that there is some evidence for three different origins; the drumming may have arisen a very long time ago, possibly being copied from indigenous people, or is a very new trait copied from western rock music. However, there is currently insufficient evidence to rule out any of these.

Once again, on behalf of COG/Canberra Birds members, many thanks to Rob for giving this very fascinating presentation on the incredible **Palm Cockatoo**. We were all enthralled by this fascinating story, and we wish him the very best in his further work trying to establish the most likely origins of their drumming. We also wish Rob the very best with the writing of his book on the **White-winged Chough** and **Apostlebird**.

Jack Holland

Vale Bill Compston

Elizabeth and Bill Compston joined COG in 1992, and were both keen birders. They attended COG meetings regularly, and when I joined COG some years later Elizabeth often chatted to me about sightings at Callum Brae, which was one of her favourite spots and became one of mine. Some years later Elizabeth shared with a COG meeting her observations of Peregrine Falcons nesting at the Big Hole in Deua National Park. When I first visited that spot some years later I searched in vain for a Peregrine, but have never forgotten how her story made the spot so much more exciting. Elizabeth passed away in 2021, and Bill on 16 May this year. RIP.

Sandra Henderson

News from the Committee

The committee's monthly meeting was held on the 29th and caught up with a number of items held over from last month. Items of interest were:

- Our noting that Canberra Birds responses to the ACT Government's Reviews of the **Plans of Management for Jerrabomberra Wetlands Nature Reserve** and **Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve** were submitted to the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate on 13 May 2025. The documents will go onto our website.
- Thanks to **Prue Watters, Julian Robinson** and **Lucy Randall** for their ongoing work on a more automated system to record memberships and payments. Information about this, along with a reminder about **July membership renewal time** was emailed to members last week.

Canberra Birds held a **morning stall at Wildbark at Mulligans Flat** on the 24th of May. It was a successful first try-out of what we would like to be an ongoing quarterly event. The aim is to engage with families and other visitors to Wildbark and its cafe - in an undercover (and warm) setting. We fielded questions about membership, bird photography, bird books, binoculars, walks and birding apps! The younger ones were intrigued with nests, feathers, wings and posters. The next stall is on August 22. If you would like to sit on the stall let **Bill Graham** know via an email to COGoffice@canberrabirds.gov.au.

To date, no-one has volunteered to manage the **October COG Blitz**. This is disappointing and places very serious pressure on the viability of the event. A new volunteer will be welcomed, assisted and strongly supported.

Kim Farley, President

Apply for Canberra Birds funding to attend the Australasian Ornithological Congress

BirdLife Australia and Birds New Zealand are co-hosting the 13th Australasian Ornithological Conference (AOC) in Perth in November 2025. The AOC is the primary conference for BirdLife Australia and is the largest biennial gathering of enthusiastic amateur and professional ornithologists from our region.

As in 2023, Canberra Birds will again support one or two suitably qualified people to attend this important conference. Applications for funding are open to anyone whose participation in the AOC aligns with Canberra Birds' objectives. This will include tertiary students as well as other people undertaking demonstrated research or projects that support our objectives.



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While giving a presentation at the conference is not a requirement of COG funding, it would be looked upon favourably as we assess applications.

For more information, including Canberra Birds' objectives and the application form, see the [AOC funding application page](#) on the Canberra Birds website.

Field Trip Reports

Wednesday 16 April – Lindsay Pryor Arboretum at Barrenjoey Point

Eight members joined me for a gentle stroll in beautiful autumn weather around the arboretum. The weather was in sharp contrast to that on a memorable walk I led a few years ago, when the temperature was around four degrees, with snow flurries. Today we enjoyed the leaf colours and discussed the new plantings, trying to identify unfamiliar species. We visited the feijoa plantation, hoping for ripe fruit, but found chewed fruit instead.

Our mystery bird of the morning, found by call, was moving around in dead blackberry plants in the conservation zone. At first sight it looked like a fairywren but the tail wasn't long enough. It was identified as a **Golden-headed Cisticola** from photos taken by Richard.

Eastern and **Crimson Rosellas**, **Australian King-Parrots** and **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos** were abundant and we were entertained by several **Grey Fantails**. There were few smaller birds, but they included **Brown Thornbill** and **Silvereye**. A small number of **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** was the vanguard of a large flock of around 40 that flew over.

Our bird total for the morning was 32 species, with the highlights being flocks of **Little Black Cormorants** and a skein of **Great Cormorants**, lit by the sun as they circled on a thermal.

Margaret Robertson

Sunday 4 May - Mulligans Flat NR

Thirteen members met at the Wildbark centre at 8.30 on a fine Canberra morning after light frost, to explore the southern fringe of Mulligans Flat. McComas Taylor led us on a walk along the boardwalk from Wildbark to the big dam.

Close to our starting point, we were detained by a **Black-shouldered Kite**, posing nicely atop a tall eucalypt. Two **Australian Magpies** made a feeble attack, leaving the kite unperturbed. Other magpies were later seen with **Noisy Miners** in hot pursuit. A **Striated Pardalote**, calling persistently, proved harder to locate than the kite.

McComas took time to inform the group about local dialects in bird calls, age and sex differences in **Australian Magpies** and sex differences in **Magpie-larks**, and such matters as the etymology of the word 'pardalote'. He also led a successful sortie into the long grass to track down some elusive **Golden-headed Cisticolas**.

The water-level was low in the big dam, but sufficient to support a variety of waterfowl, including 11 **Pink-eared Duck** and two **Australian Shelduck**, which have been in residence for a while. A confiding **Grey Teal**, very close to us, surprised us by executing repeated grebe-like dives.

A total of 33 species was seen or heard. Our thanks to McComas for a very pleasant outing and to Sandra for recording the birds.

Kevin Windle

Sunday 11 May – Tin Hut Dam

Thirteen COG members accompanied leader Mark Tindale on a lovely 2.5 km stroll around Tin Hut Dam on the south-western edge of Googong Reservoir, just north of where Burra Creek and the Queanbeyan River converge. The surrounding open woodland and tussock grassland were looking in good health considering the current dry conditions. A total of 36 bird species were observed (thanks to Sandra for recording the bird list).

The dam itself, which is reasonably large when full, is currently less so, but still attracted good waterbird numbers and species. Five duck species were seen, including a pair of **Musk Duck**, a single **Australasian Shoveler**, **Australian Wood Duck**, **Grey Teal** and 59 **Pacific Black Duck**. A dozen **Black-fronted Dotterel** bobbed around the water's edge, and four **Golden-headed Cisticola** flitted



Musk Duck

Sandra Henderson



Black-fronted Dotterel, Scarlet Robin Sandra Henderson

around patches of thick vegetation. The dam has a bird hide, two additional bird screens and several seats along the surrounding loop walk. Two eagle species were seen soaring, **Wedge-tailed** and **White-bellied Sea-Eagle**, the area being known for both. Two **Australasian Darter** were also seen soaring. Twenty-two species were seen in the surrounding woodland, highlights being four **Thornbill** species (**Brown, Buff-rumped, Yellow-rumped** and **Striated**), four **Scarlet Robin** and an **Eastern Yellow Robin, Red-Browed Finch** and **European Goldfinch**. Twenty-eight **Red Wattlebirds** were seen flying as a loose group towards the south-east, but no other honeyeater activity was observed apart from a handful of individual **White-eared Honeyeaters**.

Thanks to Mark for a very pleasant couple of hours stroll in lovely autumn weather in an area likely infrequently visited by Canberra birdwatchers. Definitely worth a return visit.
Julie McGuinness

Wednesday 21 May - Black Mountain Forest Loop

Black Mountain Forest Loop is a 2.2km trail encircling Black Mountain, approximately 60 metres of altitude lower than the summit. The trail passes through stringybark/scribbly gum woodland with occasional stands of red box and cherry ballart. Twelve members set out counter-clockwise from the carpark on a mild and sunny, autumn morning. **Crimson Rosellas** were ubiquitous throughout the walk, almost all in adult plumage, and mostly in pairs or groups of two pairs per sighting, for a total of over 30 birds. Many were inspecting hollows, or chewing the edges of hollows. Twenty-two **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos** were dotted throughout the walk, as well as one **Eastern Rosella**, with three **Australian King Parrots** heard. We enjoyed good views of **White-throated Treecreeper**.

The morning's highlight was a close and sustained view of a group of **Striated Pardalotes**, foraging in good light. One of the pardalotes gave a perched display of wings outstretched and tail fanned, initially to two other pardalotes, and then towards Sandra, who at the lead of the group was closest to the bird. We quickly noticed that a pardalote-sized hollow, at human head-height, was directly beneath the displaying bird. The pardalote broke off its display to briefly fly down to the lip of this hollow, then back to a perch to resume displaying. As we left the bird in peace, we speculated that the display had some kind of territorial function. As well as 15 **Striated Pardalotes**, 12 **Spotted Pardalotes** were also seen or heard.

The only other small woodland birds encountered were **Superb Fairywren, Brown Thornbill** and **Golden Whistler**. Of the honeyeaters, we encountered one each of **Eastern Spinebill, Red Wattlebird** and **White-eared Honeyeater**.



Striated Pardalote

Tee Tong Teo



Crimson Rosella

Tee Tong Teo

Whilst the species count of 16 was unexpectedly low, we were more than compensated by the beauty of the woodland walk and the expansive views in all directions of Canberra and beyond.

Many thanks to Sandra for leading us on such a pleasant walk, and to Lia for keeping the list.
Mitchell Kelly

Sunday 25 May Bango NR

A small, but happy, team of four COG members met at Hall on a fine clear still late Autumn day - perfect for birding. The outing got off to a great start when, while driving north, the party encountered a lone **Cattle Egret** amongst some cows on Cooks Hill Road. Arriving at Bango NR, the party undertook a very productive circuit through the lovely woodland, listing 30 species.

A highlight were the multiple **Scarlet Robins** and the mixed feeding flocks. Most unusual, given the time of year, was a **Shining Bronze Cuckoo**, calling nearby. The woodland itself was very attractive, with several different healthy-looking eucalypt species and a ground cover of poa grass and thick leaf litter. Fresh water from the recent rain trickled down the creek, filling clear pools among ancient volcanic rocks.



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After Bango, the party recharged their birding batteries with some delicious fare at Cafe Dolcetto in Yass, before proceeding on to even more birding along Gums Lane, a back-road leading south, back to Murrumbateman. On this southward leg, there were two more exciting sites. One roadside spot yielded multiple **Flame Robins**, and further south, another roadside location with a dam produced multiple waterbirds and woodland birds, including **Varied Sittellas**.

Many thanks to Bill for organising and leading such a successful day, in great company.
David D



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

Canberra Birds 8-pack of greeting cards

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Each fun and vibrant card pairs a different bird species with an iconic Canberra location. The cards are drawn by local cartoonist **Stuart McMillen**, a resident of Gorman Arts Centre, Braddon.

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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 June – Glendale Depot

Description: We will park at Glendale Depot and follow the Brandy Flat track for approximately 2kms before returning through Glendale Depot. This is not a difficult or overly hilly walk and will take us through open eucalypt forest. Sightings might include **Scarlet Robin, Crescent Honeyeater, Golden Whistler** and **Jacky Winter**.

Meet at Lanyon Marketplace carpark at 8:30 am for carpooling

Walking distance: Approx. 4 kms

End time (approx.): 11:30

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

Name of leader and contact details: Please **register** with the leader, Prue Watters, by email to prue.watters@gmail.com providing your name and mobile number, and the name and mobile number of an emergency contact. Please do so **before 7pm on Friday 6 June**. Numbers will be limited to 16.

Saturday 14 June – Tidbinbilla NR – Superb Lyrebird survey

Since the January 2003 bushfires we have been monitoring the return of the **Superb Lyrebird** to an area of the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. We wish to get an idea of the present distribution within the Reserve and are asking COG members to join us for a morning's survey. We are calling for expressions of interest to join us at 8.00am at the Reserve car park to walk the trails and to record the location of calling birds. Depending on the trails walked the survey should take about three hours.

This outing will be a repeat of the very successful surveys conducted at this time of the year since 2004. For previous survey results see *Gang-gang* p11, July 2023.

Chris Davey (daveychris12@gmail.com) 0418 679 847 and Peter Fullagar

Wednesday 18 June – Queanbeyan River Corridor

Meet at Isabella St, close to the suspension bridge. We will walk to the Railway Bridge (about 2.4km) and return (partly on the opposite side of the river). The walk takes us from the Queanbeyan town centre to the ACT border (Oaks Estate). Most of the time we'll be on footpaths, with occasional forays down to the edge of the river. As usual, wear sturdy shoes, hat, sunscreen.

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

Sandra Henderson

Sunday 6 July – Farrer Ridge NR

Description: We will walk a loop through the remnant woodland vegetation along the trails that are mostly flat, but with the occasional short climb. Birds to be seen include: **Scarlet Robin**, various thornbill species, pardalotes, rosellas, **Australian King Parrots** and possibly **Wedge-tailed Eagles** and other small raptors.

Meeting time and place: 0830 at Muresk St entrance to the reserve.

Walking distance: Approx 4 km

Degree of difficulty: medium

End time (approx.): 1100

Registration: Participants must register with Angela at angkrb@gmail.com (at least 24 hours before the start of the field trip), providing their name and mobile number, and the name and mobile number of an emergency contact; Numbers limited: 16
Angela Booth

Sunday 13 July – Urambi Hills NR

Joint outing with Urambi Hills Park Care Group

Meet at 9:00 am at Meredith Circuit, Kambah, between houses 34 & 42 for entrance to Urambi Hills Nature Reserve. This walk will explore the lower western slopes of Urambi Hills to Tuggeranong Creek. Depending on the day we may visit Urambi Hills trig via the new path, an easy zig-zag to the top. Then on the return route to Meredith Circuit, we will visit a few of the sites Michael surveys*, as well as other 'birdy' spots and note a few interesting plants in the Reserve. This is a repeat of successful outings in 2023 and 2024, on which, during one or other, we saw **Little Eagle** and **Southern Whiteface**, as well as some of the more usually seen birds e.g. **Speckled Warbler**, and **Scarlet and Flame Robin**.

Registration essential to mrobbins@home.netspeed.com.au, with your name and phone number, and name and number of an emergency contact. Maximum 20 attendees.

Please bring binoculars, a hat, water, sunscreen, morning tea and wear sturdy shoes.

* Michael has been helping the Urambi Hills Park Care group by conducting bird surveys each three months using the Woodland Bird Survey protocol at 8 sites in UHNR since 2017.

Michael Robbins

Sunday 20 July – venue required, leader required

Sunday 3 August – Kambah Pool to Red Rocks Reserve

Description: The narrow path to Red Rocks Gorge is fairly easy, with some undulating parts, and there are usually plenty of birds to see along the way. On our return walk, we will have an optional detour down a short, steep path to the river and aim to walk back to the carpark along the river bank. Members are welcome to instead take the main path back to the carpark. Please wear sturdy shoes, and bring water, sunscreen and a hat.

Meet at 9am at the Kambah Pool carpark (follow signs to the left to Kambah Beach). The path starts about 20m uphill of the carpark. There are toilets at the carpark.

Walking distance: Approx 7.5 kms.

End time (approx.): 11:30am to 12 noon.

Name of leader and contact details: **Please register** before 7pm on Friday 1 August with the leader, Judi, by email on JudithPaulM@gmail.com with your name and mobile number, and the name and mobile number of an emergency contact.

Field trips later in the year that require early booking – one mid-week accommodated trip in September and two pelagics in October

Tathra Trip-- Monday 15 to Thursday 18 September

Description:

This is a mid-week trip to Tathra staying for 3 nights in the Kianinny Bush Cottages located in bushland just outside Tathra. There will be bird walks around our accommodation as well as excursions to sites within Mimosa Rocks National Park and nearby wetlands. We can expect to see around 100 species including Glossy Black Cockatoos, Superb Lyrebirds, Crescent Honeyeaters, Hooded Plovers and other shorebirds and seabirds.

Meeting time and place: Drive to Kianinny Cottages on the morning of 15th of August. Expect a bird walk that afternoon from about 1.30pm.

Walking distance: 2-5 km each day

What to bring: Self-catering (BYO meals or dinner at Tathra Hotel or other eateries in town). Packed lunches some days. More detailed information will be provided to those who register. Participants must register with the leader at prue.watters@gmail.com, providing their name and mobile number, and the name and mobile number of an

emergency contact. Six cottages have been booked. Each cottage has 2 bedrooms, one with a queen-sized bed and another with twin beds, plus bathroom, kitchen and living area. When you register, if you wish to share a cabin with particular people, please notify the leader. The cost will depend on the number in each cabin. The cost for one cabin for 3 nights with 3 people sharing is approximately \$600 (ie about \$200 per person for a 3 night stay).

Prue Watters - 0414 357 456

Saturday 18 and Sunday 19 October – Eden pelagics

Two one-day pelagics have been booked, departing from Eden at 7am to approximately 3pm each day. Cost will be about \$164 per day. The boat holds just 12 passengers, so early booking is recommended. At this stage, to maximise the number of people who can participate, **bookings will only be accepted for one day**, but if numbers are insufficient to fill the boat on both days or if there are late cancellations, there may be the opportunity to go on both days. **To register, I require the following information (please reply by numbering 1 to 4 and providing your answers):**

1. Name and mobile number
2. Name and number of an emergency contact
3. Which day do you wish to register for? Sat 18, or Sun 19, or don't mind
4. Would you like to express an interest in a second day if it becomes available? yes or no.

Register at smlashko@gmail.com

Sue Lashko and Julian Teh



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Canberra Birds Conservation Fund

Donations to this fund are tax deductible. Funds are used to support projects that protect and enhance native birds and the environments that sustain them.

COG membership

2024-2025 memberships:

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

New members

COG welcomes the following new members:

NEXT NEWSLETTER

Deadline for July 2025 edition:

Wednesday 25 June 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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COG E-mail Discussion List

COG E-mail Discussion List COG has an email discussion list for members and friends: 'CanberraBirds'. Join (subscribe to) the list by following the links on the COG website or by sending an email message to canberrabirds-subscribe@lists.canberrabirds.org.au. The subject line and body of the email can be empty.

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Gang-gang is published on COG's website in PDF format.

ISSN 2208-018X

