

Gang-gang

Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc

Canberra Birds Newsletter
OCTOBER 2025

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OCTOBER MEETING

Wednesday 8 October 2025

7:30 pm

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

The October 2025 meeting will be a normal face-to-face one at the Canberra Girls Grammar School but will again 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).

Kushini Kalupahana – Mimicry under pressure: Investigating accuracy variations in the vocal mimicry of Brown Thornbills

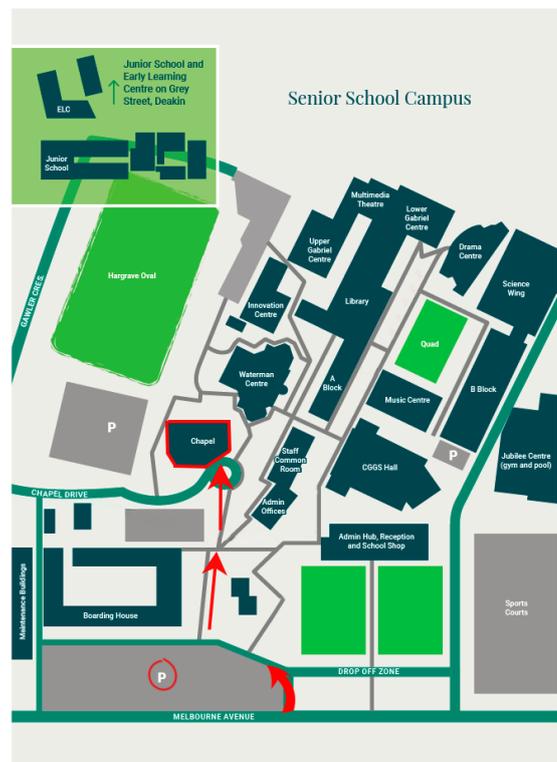
Russell McGregor - *Enchantment by Birds: Writing the history of birdwatching in Australia*

The Chapel is much easier to find than the MMT. 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 **Kushini Kalupahana**, a Ph D student at the Research School of Biology at the ANU, on **“Mimicry under pressure: Investigating accuracy variations in the vocal mimicry of Brown Thornbills.”**

The Brown Thornbill (*Acanthiza pusilla*), an Australian songbird weighing just 7 grams, employs a remarkable survival strategy: mimicking the alarm calls of various sympatric species to deter nest predators. Apart from their species-specific vocalizations, Brown Thornbills "impersonate" species up to 20 times their size when under threat. However, our research has revealed that these tiny mimics face significant anatomical constraints - they accurately replicate calls from similar-sized species but struggle with the lower-frequency alarm calls of larger models. We've also found striking sexual dimorphism in mimetic abilities, with smaller females proving to be weaker mimics than their larger male counterparts. These accuracy limitations undoubtedly impact predator deterrence effectiveness, a consequence we're now investigating through playback experiments with nest predators. Understanding how small birds overcome - or fail to overcome - size limitations through vocal deception reveals important insights into predator-prey dynamics and evolutionary mechanisms driving acoustic adaptations in songbirds.

The main presentation will be by **Russell McGregor**, Adjunct Professor of History, James Cook University, entitled “**Enchantment by Birds: Writing the history of birdwatching in Australia**”

In this talk, Russell will explain how and why he came to write his latest book, *Enchantment by Birds: A history of birdwatching in 22 species*. It's the first book ever published on the history of birdwatching in Australia, and the first history book anywhere to be structured around birds. He will explain why he structured it this way, why he chose those 22 species, and how the history of birding can deepen our appreciation of nature. He will show, too, that this is a book not only for birders; it's for nature lovers of every stripe. Birds have a special magic, carrying us into the world of nature more colourfully, more melodiously and more ethereally than any other creature. But their magic captivates all nature lovers, not only those who dangle binoculars around their necks. Enchantment by birds is open to us all.

Russell McGregor has been a birdwatcher since childhood and an historian for over 40 years, so he's perfectly positioned to write a book on the history of birdwatching. His latest book, *Enchantment by Birds: A history of birdwatching in 22 species*, is available from the publisher, Scribe, <https://scribepublications.com.au/books-authors/books/enchantment-by-birds-9781761381447> and from all good bookshops. Readers might also be interested to read an in-depth review of this book by Kevin Windle in Canberra Bird Notes 49 (2) 146-148 (2024).

News from the Committee

- The Committee met on the 18th September. A key item was discussion of the ACT Conservation Council's campaign to prevent further urban development along the **Western Edge of Canberra** - the land west of Mt Stromlo and south to Tuggeranong. The campaign is seeking to protect the Murrumbidgee River Corridor's habitats and biodiversity, and to preserve natural connectivity along the corridor. Canberra Birds is a long term member of the Council and supports the campaign, which ties directly to Canberra Bird's purpose to promote the conservation of native birds and their habitats. Another agenda item was very different: the consideration and approval of expenditure to remediate parts of the **Canberra Birds website**. The site is 13 years old and has performed well, but now needs work to improve usability and optimise performance. Later, in another change of pace, we noted the **community events** to which Canberra Birds has contributed in recent months - with stalls, bird walks and talks, These activities are one of the ways in which Canberra Birds engages with the wider community to encourage interest and develop knowledge of the birds of our local region.
- A reminder to members that the **Canberra Birds Blitz** is coming up on the weekend of **25-26 October**. Last month's Gang-gang described changes to the Blitz - needed because we have no volunteer Blitz coordinator this year. In summary, vehicle access beyond locked gates in Namadgi will not be possible, and while people are encouraged to survey traditional Blitz sites there will be no coordination of site selection. Other information, including the list of Blitz sites, the data sheet and advice about Blitz data submission for both eBird and the COG data sheet can be found on the [Blitz web page](#) .
- And a note too about the Canberra Birds **Annual General Meeting on Wednesday 18 November**. More on this, including the Agenda and other papers will be in the November Gang-gang. A Call for Nominations to the committee will be made in the next few weeks. As in other years, members may attend in person or by Zoom.
- Finally, see also the piece in this issue about the repeat of the **Honeyeater Migration Survey** in autumn 2026.

Kim Farley, President

Michael Reeves

I am trying to contact Michael who paid his membership subscription recently. If anyone has his contact details, could you please pass them onto me.

Prue Watters, Acting Treasurer, prue.watters@gmail.com

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

The weather over the 4 weeks from 27 August to 23 September covered by this column has been very changeable, often windy with 2 major fronts moving through and significantly more rain than in the previous period. While there have still been some frosts throughout, with it gradually warming up spring is clearly here. In support both my notes and analysis below confirm that most of the over wintering and early spring/summer migrants are by now well established. Otherwise bird activity in the COG Area of Interest (Aoi) has been mixed, with some of the autumn/winter altitudinal migrants slow to leave and, except for the **Rose Robin**, others in low numbers. Apart from the two special species highlighted below reports of “unusual” species remained low.

Highlights – Brown Honeyeater recorded in the ACT

2025 has continued as the Year for “unusual” honeyeaters in the COG Aoi.

The undoubted highlight for the past month was the **Brown Honeyeater** first discovered at the Fassifern Pond in West Macgregor by Peter Christian at around 10:30 h on 2 September, and within the hour confirmed and entered onto eBird by Christine D. Unlike the bird at South Tralee just across the NSW border in June, this bird was subsequently able to be found and photographed by many observers to 13 September.

Several of the early observers suspected 2 birds but this was only confirmed by 4 observers on 5-6 September who either saw or could clearly hear 2 birds at different spots (including making audio recordings). Some support for this also came from the diagnostic small yellow eye patch being not clear on quite a few of the early photos, and much clearer on some of the later ones, as it was on the South Tralee bird (it is tempting to speculate whether it was the South Tralee bird having moved on about 20 km NNW).



Brown Honeyeater - Fassifern Pond, ACT - 5 September 2025
Elliot Overs

Secretary of the COG Rarities Panel Barbara Allan has confirmed that this sighting has been endorsed as the first **Brown Honeyeater** record for the ACT, noting the comments in the Rarities Panel’s ENDORSED LIST 106 in the July 2025 issue of CBN that “The Panel was unable to endorse two Brown Honeyeater records **last century**.....”. However, Peter and Christine alerted me to the inclusion of a record in the COG 2006-2007 Annual Bird Report (ABR; in the March 2008 issue of CBN) which is listed as an ABA [Australian Bird Atlas (COG’s general survey)] report in TABLE 1 (note eBird is not listed as a source).

We noted in particular the last bit of the words under the heading “**Unusual sightings not endorsed by the Rarities Panel are not included.**” However, I could not find the record in the Rarities Panel’s ENDORSED LISTS 68, 69, 70 or 71, in the September and December 2006, March 2007 and December 2007 issues of CBN, respectively, which cover the likely range in which a 2006-2007 record would be included. So, we wondered whether it may be the 5 March 2007 eBird record from the Warks/Blundell Creeks Rd area in the Brindabellas (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S27149250>) that Christine had also uncovered. However, Barbara has confirmed that an Unusual Bird Form for this record was never received and thus the origin of the 2007-2008 ABR record remains unclear.

On the morning of 17 July, Jack N and Carmel P found a **Singing Honeyeater** at the northern corner of Cresswell and Chowne Sts in Campbell. Again, this bird was subsequently able to be found and photographed by a number of observers, but less so than the above, to 21 September. COG’s 2018-2019 ABR lists this species as a non-breeding vagrant, with a usual distribution well inland of the ACT, with 1 record in Steve Wilson’s book *Birds of the ACT: Two Centuries of Change* and records in 4 years since: 2007, 2010, 2014 and 2018. The eBird map shows that it has been record from 6 other locations since, the most recent being a number of sightings from Casey in July 2024. All other

locations were also from the very North of Canberra, with the current one the most southerly though still North of Lake Burley Griffin.

Interestingly I spent some time in Perth over the period, where the above 2 are the most common, constantly calling small honeyeaters on the coastal plain, with the “Singer” often quite conspicuous on the first dune. I was also reminded how large it is compared with the **Yellow-faced Honeyeater**.

Spring/summer migrants

Of the spring/summer migrants expected to first arrive in September the **Western Gerygone** was first reported from Gunning on 31 August, but then not until the end of the first week of September, with an influx from mid-month resulting in reports from 18 locations for the period. The first **White-throated Gerygone** was reported from the Goorooyaroo NR on 6 September, and again an influx since then has resulted in reports from 23 locations for the period, with both species now well established.

The first **Sacred Kingfisher** was reported from the Uriarra West Reserve on 30 August (quite early), but then not until 8 September at the Mcleods Creek NR near Gundaroo, with reports from 9 locations to date. However, there have been no reports of the **Rainbow Bee-eater**, or (more surprisingly) of the **Leaden Flycatcher** so far.

The **Latham’s Snipe** has been reported from 5 locations, the first being from the Jerrabomberra Wetlands NR (JWNR) on 24 August from where the first **Eastern Koel** was also heard on 22 September, the only location to date.

The **White-winged Triller** was first reported from London Bridge in the Googong Dam Reserve on 6 September (also quite early), and since 12 September (at Kama) from another 6 locations. In contrast the **Rufous Songlark** has only been reported from 1 location, the “Monash waterway” on 17 September, and there have been no reports to date of the **White-browed** and **Masked Woodswallow**. The extent these 4 species will visit the COG Aol this spring/summer will depend on how dry it is in the inland, I understand there have been good rainfalls there recently.

So in October please keep a lookout for the species mentioned above which have only arrived so far in small numbers, or have yet to be reported, as well as the **Channel-billed Cuckoo**, **Sahul Brush Cuckoo**, **Dollarbird**, **Horsfield’s Bushlark** and **Brown Songlark** (one was reported from the Euralie Rd SW of Yass on 20 September), and the passage migrants, the **Satin Flycatcher** (please be very careful of your identification), **Rufous Fantail** and **Sahul Cicadabird**.

Of the spring/summer migrants present at only a few locations in August the **Shining Bronze-Cuckoo** has been reported from 20 locations and the **Horsfield’s Bronze-Cuckoo** from 14 locations, compared with 1 each in August. The **Pallid Cuckoo** has also been reported from 12 locations (also just 1 in August). So, all three are reasonably established so far, but less so than the **Fan-tailed Cuckoo**, the least migratory species of the local cuckoos, reported from a remarkable around 50 locations compared with 12 in August.

There has also been an influx of **Noisy Friarbirds** during the period, reported from over 50 locations compared with just 1 in August. The **Rufous Whistler** is also well established, reported from around 40 locations compared with 6 in August. Similarly, the **Australian Reed-Warblers** have been reported from around 40 locations compared with 3 in August, and **Fairy Martins** have been reported from around 20 locations, compared with 3 in August.



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Plains-wanderer Weekend

6 & 7 December 2025

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Returning birds have boosted the overwintering numbers of the **Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike** reported from around 80 locations (compared with 25 in August), and particularly of the **Grey Fantail** reported from over 120 locations compared with 36 in August (see my comments under migration below). Likewise, the **Dusky Woodswallow** was reported from over 50 locations (compared with 7 in August), and the **Olive-backed Oriole** was reported from close to 40 locations compared with 15 in August. The **Tree Martin** was reported from around 40 locations compared with 16 in August. Similarly, the **Mistletoebird** was reported from 15 locations compared with 4 in August

Interestingly the **Superb Parrot**, the species with the highest number of locations for overwintering birds, has been reported from around 50 locations (about 20 south of the lake), down from the over 60 in August, and is the only overwintering species for which numbers seem to have gone down.

Autumn and 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 **White-eared Honeyeater** and **Golden Whistler** were still reported from around 35 and close to 60 urban/peri-urban locations, respectively. This is very similar to August, so continue to keep an eye out for them, they are often quieter before they leave. The latter is also often slow to leave.

In contrast **Scarlet Robins** have clearly been moving away, with reports from around 20 urban/peri-urban locations, compared with around 45 in August. **Flame Robins** seem to have been slower to move out, reported from 15 such locations, compared with 20 in August. Both species have been absent from Cooleman Ridge and Narrabundah Hill in the past month.

Remarkably there have been reports of the **Rose Robin** from 15 such locations (compared with 5 in August), as well as a bird at the SW corner of Lake George on 3 September. This is in keeping with its often-considered status as a passage migrant through the ACT on its way to breed in the mountains to the W of the Murrumbidgee River, from where it was reported from a further 7 locations. Again, there have been no confirmed **Pink Robin** sightings during the period, the closest location being from the Errinundra Plateau NP to the S just across the NSW/Vic border.

The **Crescent Honeyeater** has been reported from 4 locations (half of August), 3 of which were urban/peri-urban; 1 bird regularly at the ANBG to 9 September, a single bird at the adjacent ANU on 21 September, and one bird on the Murrumbidgee Discovery track to Red Rocks Gorge on 2 September. A further bird was at the Casuarina Sands NR on 12 September. The **Yellow-tufted Honeyeater** was not reported from anywhere in the COG Aol during the period (compared with 1 location in August).

The **Bassian Thrush** was reported from 5 locations (compared with 3 in August) with up to 2 birds at the ANBG to 13 September. The peri-urban location was 2 birds at the Stranger Pond on 20 September, with the remaining locations in the mountains to the W of the ACT. An **Olive Whistler** was reported only from the Nursery Swamp track in the Namadgi NP on 22 August (also missed in my September column), but no **Brown Gerygones** were reported from anywhere within the COG Aol during the period. **Swift Parrots** were again also not reported, with eBird showing the closest sightings being near Chiltern well across the NSW/Vic border.

During October, please keep an eye out for the species mentioned above in urban/peri-urban locations as they continue to move away.

Unusual species

Apart from the **Brown** and **Singing Honeyeaters** noted above, there were no other special “unusual” species 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 4 ducks continuing to be present at the JWNR throughout the period. There were 115 ducks (plus 8 from the adjacent Morass; well up from the 19 in August) counted on the Lake Bathurst waterbird survey on 13 September, but no ducks were reported from Lake George.

During the period, the **Australian Shelduck** was reported from 12 locations in an arc from the North through to the South-East (Harolds Cross) of the ACT, with 19 ducks on the Lake Bathurst survey on 13 September (with 3 on the adjacent Morass; this is the same as for August). The maximum number was the 32 ducks seen on the Wollogorang Rd on 3 September, otherwise the maximum was 4 ducks at several locations.

Blue-billed Ducks were reported from 5 locations during the period, with again up to 6 ducks regularly reported from the Upper Stranger Pond. Up to 4 ducks were regularly reported from the JWNR and up to 2 from the adjacent Fyshwick Sewage Treatment Ponds (FSTP), and again up to 20 ducks were reported from Rowes Lagoon. Interestingly there was 1 duck recorded on the Lake Bathurst survey on 13 September, compared with none there in August.

Musk Ducks were reported from 5 locations (up from 3 in August), with none in the ACT and 47 ducks recorded at Lake Bathurst on 13 September when there were also 28 reported from the adjacent Morass (nearly 4 X the numbers there in August). Up to 2 ducks were also reported from Rowes Lagoon as well as 2 from Greenwood Rd, Murrumbateman on 12 September. An unusual location was the 2 ducks reported from the Back Creek TSR (SW of Braidwood) on 6 September.

The **Great-crested Grebe** was reported from 3 locations (compared with 1 in August), with 2 on Lake Bathurst and one on the adjacent Morass on 13 September, with one also reported from Stranger Pond on 17 September.

There were no **Stubble Quail** were reported from anywhere in the COG Aol during the period. Clearly the grass is not yet long enough, so listen out for them as it grows and they start calling. **Brown Quail** were reported from 6 locations (double that in August), with a maximum of 3 birds. A **Painted Button-quail** was reported only from the Mount Painter NR on 28 August, and again no **Little Button-quail** were reported during the period.

Up to 8 **Peaceful Doves** were reported from the Cotter Rd (a very large number at a well-known spot for them) during the period, as well as 1 from the JWNR on 11 and 21 September, but again, no **White-headed Pigeon**, **Brown Cuckoo-Dove**, **Brush Bronzewing** or **Diamond Doves**, or **White-throated Nightjars** were reported during the period.

A single **Baillon's Crake** was reported from the JWNR on 18 September, the first there since late February. **Spotless Crakes** were reported from 2 locations (well down from the 9 in August), with up to 5 birds regularly at the JWNR, and two and single birds from the Isabella Pond on 6 and 22 September, respectively. Up to 2 **Australian Spotted Crake** were regularly reported only from the Isabella Pond during the period, with one at the JWNR on 23 September.

Buff-banded Rails were reported from 3 locations (compared with 2 in August), up to 2 birds regularly from the JWNR, and 2 and 1 birds from the Isabella Pond on 17 and 22 September, with also one bird from the nearby "Monash waterway" on 21 September. Single **Lewin's Rails** were reported from 3 locations (down from 5 in August) with up to 2 birds regularly at the JWNR and one at the Franklin Ponds system on 5 and 12 September. There was also 1 bird at the Rock Valley in the Tidbinbilla NR on 31 August. However, no **Black-tailed Nativehen** were reported during the period.

Four (compared with 8 in August) **Red-capped Plovers** were reported from the Lake Bathurst survey on 13 September. **Pied Stilts** were reported 5 locations (up from 1 in August) with up to 6 birds at the JWNR from 12 September, as well as from the adjacent Canturf farm from 13-15 September, and 4 from the nearby Eyre St wetlands on 13 September. Three birds were reported from Orana Bay on LBG on 9 September, 6 from the SW end of Lake George on 13 September but these numbers pale in comparison to the 26 birds at the Morass that same day.



Glossy Ibis - Jerrabomberra Wetlands NR, ACT - 14 September 2025 -
Reeni Martinez

However, no **Red-necked Avocets**, **Australian Painted-snipe**, **Pacific Golden Plover**, **Banded Lapwing**, **Comb-crested Jacana**, **Sharp-tailed**, **Pectoral** or **Common Sandpipers**, or **Red-necked Stint** were reported during the period. No **Caspian**, **Whiskered** or **White-winged Black Terns**, **Australasian** or **Australian Little/Black-backed Bitterns** were reported during the period.

No **Little** or **Plumed Egrets** were again reported during the period. Single **Great Egrets** were reported from 4 locations (as for August) during the past month. Single **White-necked Herons** were reported from 6 locations (slightly up from August). However, there were no **Royal Spoonbills** were reported during the period (compared with 2 locations in August). **Yellow-billed Spoonbills** were reported from 3 locations (up from 1 in August), 2 birds from SW Lake George on 13 September, with 7 at the

Morass that same day, as well as 2 birds at Breadalbane on 31 August. About 10 **Glossy Ibis** were photographed flying over the Jerrabomberra Wetlands Nature Reserve on 14 September, a rare local record of these species in recent times.

An **Eastern Barn Owl** was reported from 1 location only (compared with 2 in August), the JWNR on 31 August. No **Powerful Owls** were reported during the period. **Black-shouldered Kites** were reported from around 20 locations in the period, slightly down from the 25 for August. Single **Spotted Harriers** were reported from Carwoola and Lake Bathurst on 8 and 13 September, respectively. A single **Black Kite** was reported soaring over the Molonglo River on the Tuggeranong Parkway on 29 August. However, no **Pacific Baza**, **Grey Goshawks** or **Black Falcons** were reported from anywhere in the COG Aol during the period.

An **Azure Kingfisher** was reported from the “lower Molonglo River fishing spot” on 14 September, but no **Red-backed** or **Forest Kingfishers** were reported during the period.

Two **Glossy Black-Cockatoos** were reported from Lower Boro (SSE of The Morass) on 4 September. No **Cockatiel**, **Turquoise Parrot**, **Scaly-breasted**, **Little** or **Purple-crowned Lorikeets** were reported over the period. **Musk Lorikeets** were reported from 2 locations (compared with 3 in August), single birds at the Kambah District Playing Fields and at the Callum Brae NR on 13 and 22 September, respectively.

The **Little Wattlebird** continued to be reported from the ANBG to 19 September. A **Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater** was reported from the known location at the Rock Valley in the Tidbinbilla NR on 30-31 August, and on 19 September Lyndon Howe photographed one at southern end of West Belconnen Pond. No-one else seems to have observed it at this is new location. A **Blue-faced Honeyeater** was reported only from Farrer on 19 September (note 3 locations in August).

White-fronted Chats were reported from just 1 location in the ACT, 2 birds at the Coombs Pond on 26 August and 4 September. Otherwise, 11 birds (up from the 8 in August) were recorded at Lake Bathurst waterbird survey on 13 September (as well as 2 from the Lumley Rd at its southern end), and 3 birds from the Wet Lagoon, Breadalbane on 31 August. No **Striped**, **Scarlet** or **Painted Honeyeaters** or **Little Friarbirds** were reported during the period.

Up to 3 **Chestnut-rumped Heathwren** were reported from 1 location only (compared with 3 in August), at Carwoola from 1-19 September. However, no **White-bellied Cuckoo-shrikes**, **White-browed Babbler**, **Apostlebird**, **Spangled Drongo**, **Black-faced Monarch**, **Red-capped Robin**, **Tawny Grassbird** or **Zebra Finches** were reported during the period.

Jacky Winters were reported from 8 locations (compared with 2 for August), with 1 bird at Mulligans Flat NR on 1 and 13 September, up to 2 birds at the Gambles TSR from 27 August to 19 September, and one bird at the Greenway#1 on the Bywong/Wamboin border track on 5 September. The last named is the only new one of these N of Canberra locations, as is Hall from where Stuart Rae reported one on 5 September. South of Canberra locations were: 1 bird at the Yankee Hut car park and track on 1 September, 1 at Glendale Crossing on 12 September, 2 at Tharwa on 22 September; with the bird heard on the Brandy Flat walking track (south) on 23 August a new location missed in last month’s column.

Hooded Robins were reported from 3 locations (compared with 5 in August), all from their stronghold to the S of Canberra, with 1 and 2 birds (a male and a pair) from the Naas Rd at Apollo Rd on 1 and 5 September, respectively. A bird at London Bridge on the Googong Dam Reserve on 6 September was at a new location, at least recently), as was the bird on the Boboyon Rd at Shannon’s Flat just S of the ACT border on 7 September.

Restless Flycatchers were reported from 2 locations (compared with none in August), both to the N of the ACT with a single bird at the known location Nelanglo TSR on 3 and 17 September and at the Lada Vale Rd stockpile (a new location) on 12 September. Again, where has this often-conspicuous bird in the S of the ACT in winter gone?

Brown Treecreepers were reported from 3 locations (compared with 2 in August), 3 birds at the Nelanglo TSR on 17 September, and 2 birds at the Naas Rd at Apollo Rd on 1 September and the nearby Apollo Rd (all known locations) on 5 September. The peri-urban bird at the Kama NR and the adjacent The Pinnacle NR seems to have moved away from there.

The number of “unusual” birds reported is again very low, with in particular very few reports of pigeons/doves, raptors, parrots or passerines.

Breeding

First I need to remind readers of the care that needs to be taken around breeding birds as outlined in the [Ethical Birding Guidelines - Canberra Birds](#) which can be found through the [Canberra Birds web site](#) (in particular please read and follow the sections on Nesting Birds and Bird Photography).

Surprisingly very little early spring breeding has come to my attention. I was finally able to confirm the **White-browed Scrubwren** breeding in my garden when on 17 September I could hear nestlings/fledglings very high in the pittosporum. The next day two very small birds were being fed on the ground nearby, but on the day after unfortunately one was found dead without any visible signs of harm.

As there has been no further publicity I assume the **Silver Gulls** trying to nest again in the forecourt of Parliament House were moved on. However, they do not seem to be nesting on Spinnaker Island, the closest alternative site, with on 29 August Peter Fullagar posting on eBird “A check on the possible breeding activity this season. Definitely no gulls on the island but two seen fly over high up. No gulls otherwise in this area.”

On their Mt Majura Woodland Surveys conducted over 21 and 23 September Kathy Walter and John Goldie found **Grey Butcherbird** nests with young at two separate sites.

Flocks, including of migrating birds

Very few mixed feeding flocks (MFF) have been reported, but on 8 September Andrea and I found an unusual one mainly feeding on the ground in the horse paddocks off the SW corner of Narrabundah Hill. This consisted of **Yellow-rumped Thornbills**, **Red-browed Finch**, 2 **Willie Wagtails** and a couple of **Common Starlings**, with up to 4 **Dusky Woodswallows** hawking above them.

A number of observers noted **Yellow-faced** and **White-naped Honeyeaters** moving back on return migration during September, but these were not noticed in my local area of Cooleman Ridge/Narrabundah Hill/Molonglo until the days after the good evening rain on 19 September when the former was clearly moving through in numbers. The species even more conspicuous moving with them “clumps” of the **Grey Fantail**, in far greater numbers than when they first returned earlier in the month.

Otherwise, large single species flocks seem to have broken up with nothing significant to report for the period.

Finally, on 27 August Rob Parnell posted on the COG chat line (as well as directly to me) that there has been a **Superb Lyrebird** hanging around the northern end of Blackall St in Barton near the Charles Sturt University for a couple of months or longer. It had also been seen near the NFF building on Brisbane Ave. Rob was alerted to it the day before and had no problems finding it that afternoon in the Rainforest Gully below the Outdoor Chapel. He took a couple of photos and put them on Canberra Nature Map (where there were already 5 photos from 25 Feb 2024 to 21 Jun 2025) and noted there was also a post on Facebook "Canberra Wildlife Photography on 13 Oct 2024".

Rob found it odd that it hasn't found its way into the Gang-gang newsletter, eBird or the bird chatline. I responded to him that I had included a paragraph on this bird as well as some sightings in Mawson on 11 and 18 August 2023 in my column in the November 2023 issue of Gang-gang. Checking eBird confirmed there were records from 47 Blackall St Barton on 16 September 2023, and from St Marks and Barton Grasslands between 6 December 2023 and 3 March 2024, as well as a very recent one from Barton on 3 August 2025 (which may have been his NFF one). There was also a quite recent one in Garran on 8 May 2025.

Further checking by Rob found a number of social media posts, some quite recent (July 2025), one of which also mentions it being reported from Deakin. So, it seems this female **Superb Lyrebird** is quite resilient and happy to remain in the area where it has been for at least 2 years, attracting the attention of the local residents and the “non-birding” public.

October is the middle month of the significant spring bird activity in the COG AoI. So please watch out for more of the returning spring/summer migrants mentioned above, for the last of the leaving altitudinal migrants, for roost sites and flights, for any late MFFs or single species flocks, and especially for any breeding activity. 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 10 September meeting presentations

First **Yiqing Chen**, a Ph D student at the Research School of Biology, gave a very interesting presentation “**Global distribution and evolution of mixed-species flocking in birds**”

It was very well prepared, and delivered clearly and confidently, with excellent slides, and enjoyed by everyone.

Yiqing began by indicating mixed-species grouping is considered uncommon in animals, but while frequently seen in birds, she asked just how common is this behaviour? She noted studies on mixed-species flocking have focused on benefits, costs and things happening within the flocks. However, to date we still do not know how many species join mixed-species flocks.

To try to answer this question, Yiqing’s group extracted flocking behaviour data not just from published literature, but also from field guides, which she noted can be rich in natural history information. The example she illustrated, the **Fuscous Honeyeater**, was very appropriate as an attendee had earlier raised it as an interesting sighting during the past month and it was also the subject of a Bird of the Month presentation in June.

Due to their known aggregating behaviour, in this study they excluded raptors, water-, sea- and shorebirds but still ended up with 8230 species of which 56% showed mixed-species flocking behaviour. The earlier Zou et al (2018) paper she referenced included 2049 species and 19% of such behaviour.

Yiqing noted the interesting mixed-species flocks’ distribution which is centred in hot tropical rain forest, but with North America and South-Eastern Australia also prominent, and that their size could range from 2 to >100 birds. She also noted that they do not just contain small birds.

Yiqing also asked the question how they evolved, was it an ancestral character and did single bird flocks turn into mixed -species ones but concluded that there were multiple pathways.

Once again on behalf of COG/Canberra Birds members, many thanks to Yiqing for giving this very interesting presentation on mixed-species flocks which many of us observe and appreciate in the ACT area, in particular during autumn/winter. We wish her the very best with her proposed further Ph D studies on this very interesting topic and to hearing about them in the future, in particular the practical part on mixed-species thornbills flocks in Canberra.

The main presentation was a very interesting and informative one 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**”.

It was very well prepared, and delivered clearly and confidently, with excellent slides, and clearly of great interest to many of our members.

Bethany outlined that the 2003 and 2020 bush fires burnt a very significant proportion of the Namadgi NP, with 90% overlap. While it was not as intensive, the second fire in <20 years had significant impact on the park, in particular on the Snow Gums which range over about 42% of the park.

To determine the recovery of this important part of the ecosystem, they set up 62 monitoring sites stratified by fire history and fire severity along the W and S sides of the ACT. These consist of 50 X 20 m plots where they have surveyed for birds over 10 days for 4.5 h from 30 minutes before sunrise and 30 minutes before sunset, respectively.

Samplers used included IR/white flash cameras (mainly to fauna) as well as song meters. Monitoring has been conducted once a year in spring/summer, which means they now have 4 years of data post-fire (as they skipped one year). This is a significant amount in particular acoustic data which may be accessed on <https://www.ecosounds.org/projects/1151/regions/46>.

To analyse some of these remotely Stuart was employed and with his characteristic humour he recalled how he sat with his headphones for hours trying to determine what species were making the sounds. Among the dingoes, pigs and brumbies his favourites were the unusual call of the **Pilotbird** and the numbers of **Gang-gang Cockatoo** calls compared to when he was surveying there previously.

To overcome this very time-consuming task, Bethany very recently turned to the BirdNET-Analyzer which is an open-source software tool that uses machine learning to identify bird species from audio recordings. She gave a live demonstration of the power of this AI tool using one of the song meter recordings to identify the species calling, in particular lots of **Brown Thornbills** and **Grey Fantails**.

Once again on behalf of COG/Canberra Birds members, many thanks to Bethany and Stuart for giving up their very valuable time to give us this very interesting and informative presentation on the very important monitoring work that the ACT Government is conducting on the recovering Snow Gums ecosystem in the Namadgi NP. We wish them the very best with the continuing project and look forward to hearing about a more complete analysis of the audio recordings in the future.

Jack Holland



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Have you considered nominating for the Canberra Birds Committee?

Would you like to contribute to the future directions of Canberra Birds? Are you passionate about birds, want to contribute to bird conservation, or want to share ideas and keep Canberra Birds fresh and current? Committee membership is a one of the ways you can contribute to Canberra Birds, and we are seeking nominations for 2026.

About the Committee

The Committee provides leadership, direction and governance for Canberra Birds – and consists of the President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary and up to ten general members. In 2025 we have only three general members meaning the committee has only seven people in total. This is affecting our ability to progress some of the important and interesting work of Canberra Birds.

Committee work needs people with a broad range of skills and experience. You don't need specialist skills or experience with birds or bird conservation (though this would be highly valued).

What's involved in being a Committee member?

Participate in a Zoom meeting once a month for 1.5 hours, and contribute to our discussions and decision making.

Prepare for the meeting by reading the meeting papers.

Take part in any out-of-session email discussions and decisions, as these arise

After settling into the Committee, consider putting up your hand to contribute to a working group or activity that interests you. This is not expected of the Minutes Secretary or Treasurer, though enthusiasm and new ideas are welcome from everyone.

And in 2026?

In 2026 we have a particular need for **someone with secretariat experience to serve as our Minutes Secretary** and also a person to step into the **Treasurer** role.

Our areas of focus for next year include rebuilding how we store, access and publish bird data, work on building our community profile through social media and publications, and refreshing our website.

Interested?

To nominate, please complete this form: [Committee Nomination Form](#). Email your completed form to the Secretary at cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au or post it to Canberra Birds at P. O. Box 331, Jamison Centre A.C.T. 2614. **Completed nomination forms must be received by the Secretary no later than 5 November 2025.**

Coffee and Chat at the Gardens Tuesday, 14 October

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.

Members may also nominate at the AGM, but those nominations will only progress if vacancies remain following the nominations received by 5 November.

Or, 'Try Before you Buy'

If you're interested, but not sure whether the Committee is for you at this stage, you are welcome to come to one or more of our meetings as an observer. Or you can shadow another Committee member for a month or two to get a feel for Committee work. To discuss, send COG Office an email or chat to Julie at a meeting or by email.

Julie Hotchin, Vice-President
julie.hotchin@gmail.com

Volunteer for the 2026 honeyeater migration survey

In April 2025 Canberra Birds conducted surveys of migrating honeyeaters along the Murrumbidgee River Corridor. Many of our members took part, with preliminary results presented by survey coordinator, Chris Davey in the May issue of Gang-gang and in more detail at the July members meeting.

The honeyeater migration is a feature of the local birding scene and occurs twice a year, with birds passing through the ACT in spring and autumn. The autumn movement is the more obvious, as birds move in flocks from their breeding grounds in the Brindabella Ranges and beyond.

The April 2025 survey was very successful and revealed that numbers of migrating birds were well down from our previous survey in 1997. Impressions from the local bush telegraph indicate that the main passage of migratory birds may have been in late March-early April. So we will repeat and extend the survey in autumn 2026 - starting mid-March and finishing mid-May.

We are again seeking volunteers to take part. All levels of experience are welcome. If you haven't surveyed before or want to develop your identification skills this is a great opportunity to do so. It is not necessary to commit to attend all 10 survey days!

In 2025, eighty-eight species were reported during the passage. The survey therefore provides a great opportunity to view the migration and also record other species in the area.



White-naped Honeyeater -

John Hurrell



Yellow-faced Honeyeater -

John Hurrell

What's involved?

Our volunteer surveyors count the number of birds passing through nine locations along the Murrumbidgee River Corridor. Teams of 2-3 people count birds at each site, with experienced observers teamed with less-experienced observers.

When and Where: The mornings of 14, 21 and 28 March, 4, 11, 18 and 25 April and 2, 9 and 16 May at Casuarina Sands, Pine Island, Gigerline A (Tharwa Sandwash) and Angle Crossing. In addition, if we have enough volunteers, we will survey Uriarra Crossing, Kambah Pool, Point Hut, Gigerline B and Williamsdale on the 11, 18 and 25 April.

What: Count the number of each migrating species over 15 minute periods between 8:00 am and 1.00 pm and record these on a special survey sheet.

Information and support: At present we are **NOT** calling for volunteers but if you are interested, keep the dates and await our next update in early 2026. For any queries email Chris Davey at daveychris12@gmail.com

I encourage you to get involved with this interesting survey. As in 2025, it will be most enjoyable, and you will be contributing to a very worthwhile citizen science project.

Kim Farley
President, Canberra Birds

Field Trip Reports

Sunday 31 August – Goorooyarroo Nature Reserve

On a chilly last day of winter, 19 birders gathered at the eastern edge of the predator-exclusion-fenced Goorooyarroo Nature Reserve. Leader Bill Graham began the walk by showing us an old beer bottle he'd recently prised from the earth at Lamb's TSR, in the spirit of litter removal. Inside the bottle, past the improbably narrow opening, Bill had discovered a perfect, now disused **Spotted Pardalote** nest, woven inside from strands the enterprising bird must have squeezed itself into the bottle with, one by one. We could only speculate on how the plump fledglings managed to eventually escape their natal bottle.

Once through the gate we walked north into an open landscape of box/gum grassy woodland, with many large Yellow Box and Blakely's Red Gum trees, liberally festooned with Box Mistletoe. A **Grey Currawong** was heard to the north-east but not sighted. Although technically still winter, the birds had clearly decided it was spring. A **Superb Fairywren** male and, shortly after, an **Australian Golden Whistler** male, both spent considerable time at the very tops of tall eucalypts, calling to all directions, in what looked like the avian equivalent of the behaviour lepidopterists describe as 'tree-topping' or 'hill-topping', where male butterflies fly to the highest point in their landscape to advertise to females. The whistler in particular did not appear to feed over the many minutes we watched it, preferring to travel through the tree-tops purely for the benefit of trying new calling locations.

A pair of **Shining Bronze Cuckoos** soon overtook our attention, first heard then sighted. The pair travelled tightly together and called incessantly, in what must have been courtship. Great naturalists that they are, the cuckoos were methodically investigating every mistletoe clump in each tree they visited, no doubt knowing the propensity for many birds to nest in mistletoe.

Amongst these highlights we enjoyed good views of **Brown-headed Honeyeater**, both **Striated** and **Spotted Pardalotes**, **Weebill**, and a **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike**. During a clear sighting of **Grey Shrike-thrush** fossicking high in a gum, we soon spotted four **Varied Sittella** gleaning along and down the branches. Prolonged observation was rewarded with several sights of wing fluttering, interpreted by us as courtship.

Seven **White-winged Chough** lured us to a large fallen tree for morning tea, before we headed back in the opposite direction but slightly downhill of our outward route. **Yellow-rumped Thornbill** fed on the ground, whilst **Welcome Swallows** and **Tree Martins** hawked overhead. Of the parrots and cockatoos, we saw **Crimson** and **Eastern Rosellas**, a **Red-rumped Parrot**, **Galahs**, **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos** and **Little Corellas**, the latter two species each entering and exiting tree hollows that were possibly nest sites.

In total 164 birds were encountered, representing 33 species, only one of which was feral (**European Starling**). It was a delight to wander this feral-ground-predator excluded landscape and see so much interesting bird behaviour. Thanks to Bill Graham for leading us over such rich terrain, and to Kim Farley for keeping the list.
Mitchell Kelly

Sunday 7 September -Namarag-Molonglo River Reserve

Nineteen members and guests headed out on a beautiful, sunny morning to walk a picturesque loop of this area. Upon arrival, some of us were lucky enough to see the display flights of **Australian Pipits**.

Along the Molonglo River banks we had very good views of two **Yellow Thornbills** enjoying their wattle and Casuarina habitats. **Superb Fairywrens**, **Yellow-faced** and **White-plumed Honeyeaters**, **Spotted Pardalotes**, **Grey Fantails**, **Yellow-rumped** and **Brown Thornbills**, and a **Mistletoebird** were also enjoying the sunshine. Further back from the river, we spotted



Yellow Thornbill - Namarag-Molonglo River Reserve, ACT -
7 September 2025 -
Tee Tong Teo



Nankeen Kestrel - Namarag-Molonglo River Reserve, ACT -
7 September 2025 - Tee Tong Teo

Grey Shrikethrush, a **Black-faced Cuckooshrike** and a **Dusky Woodswallows**, and heard a **White-throated Treecreepers**.

On the Molonglo River we spotted **Pacific Black** and **Australian Wood Ducks**, an **Australasian Grebe** and a **Little Pied Cormorant**.

A highlight of the morning was some very good views of 4 **Black-fronted Dotterels** feeding, flying and scurrying along the water's edge of one of the ponds.

Crimson Rosellas and **Red-rumped Parrots** provided spectacular colourful views against the dead tree trunk hollows and blue skies. **Nankeen Kestrels** and a **Black-shouldered Kite** patrolled the skies.

We saw 48 species in total, finishing off with a flock of 71 **Straw-Necked Ibis** flying overhead.

Thanks to Sandra for taking us to this delightful and varied reserve. Considerable consultation with Ngunnawal traditional owners has occurred to celebrate and preserve this area.



Canberra Bird Members at Namarag-Molonglo River Reserve, ACT - 7 September 2025 -

Tee Tong Teo

Mary Pekin

Sunday 14 September – Bowning, Lambs TSR and Manton

This was another of Bill Graham's well researched outings to the rural areas and villages north of Canberra that most of us never visit. After meeting at Hall, the 5 attendees travelled in one car to Bowning Cemetery where migrants put on a good show, with **Sacred Kingfisher**, a very cooperative **Eastern Shrike-tit**, **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike**, **Olive-backed Oriole** and **Dusky Woodswallow**. As we wandered among the gravestones, the short lives lived by many early Bowning residents gave pause for contemplation of the hardships faced by early settlers.

On the nearby Common Road, we made several stops. Highlights included a pair of nest-building **Restless Flycatchers**, with the nest near to completion; each visit with nesting material was followed by the bird shuffling down into the nest cup to compress the latest contribution. **White-throated Gerygone**, **Golden Whistler** and a family of **White-winged Choughs** with 3 very recently-fledged, short-tailed chicks were also seen. **Yellow Thornbill** were seen in two locations, one in an exotic, deciduous tree just coming into bud and the other in eucalypts, although there were wattles just across the road.



Eastern Shrike-tit - Bowning, NSW - 14 September 2025 -
Richard Marris

Lambs Travelling Stock Reserve had the expected range of woodland birds, with both pardalotes, three thornbill species, a **Western Gerygone** and 4 **Golden Whistlers**, as well as at least 16 **Grey Fantails**. There were some fine, old trees but some planting of understorey species would certainly enhance the TSR.

We wended our way back to Hall via Yass River Road, continuing to see and/or hear small flocks of **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** moving through. Raptors included **Whistling Kite** and **Nankeen Kestrel**. We enjoyed a late lunch stop near the river, adding **Tree Martin** to our list, and made a brief stop at a dam on Greenwood Road where a variety of waterbirds was seen, contributing to our total for the day of 64 species.

Many thanks to Bill for all the effort he put into planning yet another fascinating adventure and sharing various anecdotes he had gleaned from locals on his earlier exploration of our route.

Sue Lashko

Monday 15 to Thursday 18 September - Tathra area

Three days of benign weather, spectacular coastal scenery comprising rocky headlands, pristine beaches, forests and dunes, with a hundred seen and heard bird species were enjoyed by the fourteen trip participants to Tathra and surrounding region. We are all grateful for the efficient trip logistics arranged by Prue Watters; eBird logging executed and distributed by Lia Battisson; and expert identification with accompanying commentary on the birds sustained by Sue Lashko and Sandra Henderson.

With our first stop on the Monday afternoon, highlights commenced with the first views eastwards over the Tasman Sea from the observation deck at Tathra Headland revealing: humpback whales seen breaching on their southern migration, a pair of **White-bellied Sea Eagles** soaring, a **Black-shouldered Kite** hovering over the cliff-top vegetation, numerous **Little Wattlebirds** busy chasing each other, and on the rocky shoreline, an **Eastern Reef Egret** (grey morph) displaying its crab-eating abilities.

Our next stop that afternoon was at the Tathra sewage works – in addition to numerous **Grey** and **Chestnut Teal** resting on the banks of the settling ponds, three **Australasian Grebes** were engaged in the early stages of constructing a nest in the westernmost pond. Nearby, following the first hundred metres of the start of the “Poo Ponds Mountain Bike Trail”, we encountered numerous small bird species including **Lewin’s** and **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters**, a **Scarlet Myzomela**, thornbills and **Grey Fantails**.

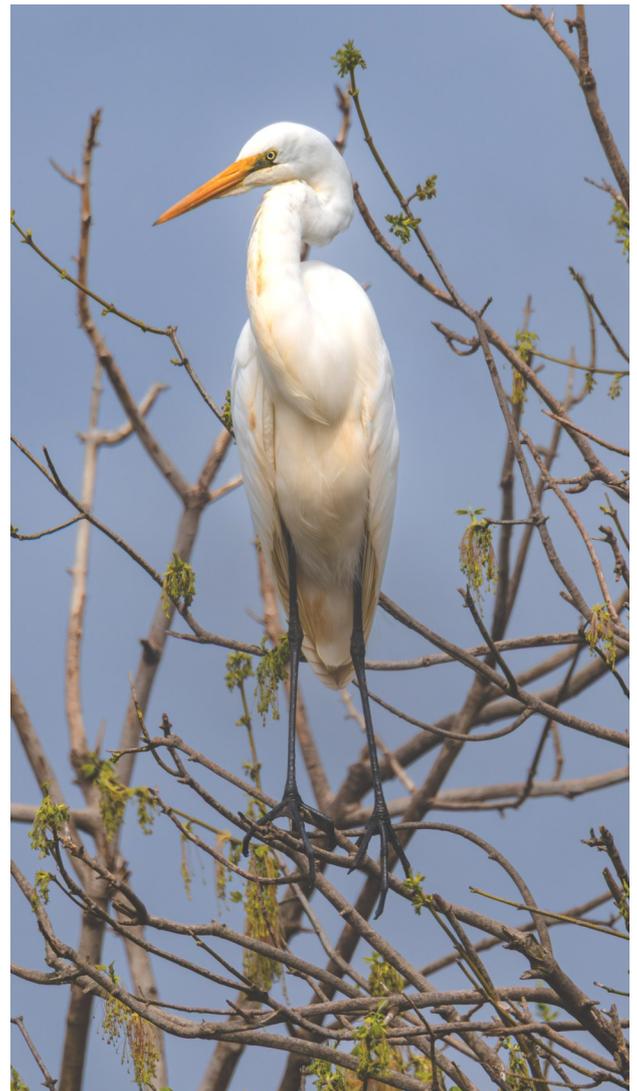
Crossing the bridge over the Bega River, we parked the fleet of cars in the Ray Whyman Reserve looking eastwards to the rocky shore of Paspalum Point. Numerous terns, cormorants, and gulls were resting or flying around these rocks. A young, self-declared bird enthusiast approached us and led us across the road towards the Mogareeka boat ramp, and showed us seven **Nankeen Night-Herons** roosting in the canopy of a number of pine trees next to the ramp.

Our group plan for the rest of Tuesday was to travel northwards to Bermagui, and then work southwards visiting bays and headlands *en route*. But our progress was delayed, firstly before leaving Tathra, with good views of three **White-headed Pigeons** sitting on a power line and, secondly, by close views of a **Buff-banded Rail** on the mudflats of the lagoon on the west side of the southern end of the Bega River Road bridge.

After journeying north from Tathra, we turned east on Wapengo Street after crossing the Bermagui River, parked close to the junction of this street with the Wallaga Lake Road, and walked eastwards viewing the sandbanks exposed in the river, and thick brush alongside the road. The dominant bird species on the sandbanks and flying above these and the river were **Great Crested Terns**, **Silver Gulls**, **Royal Spoonbills** and **Australian Pelicans**. And in the brush, both **Superb** and **Variiegated Fairy-wrens** were actively feeding and calling, together with **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** and other species.



White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Hooded Plover, White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike, Eastern Reef Heron, Bell Miner - Tathra area, NSW - 15-18 September 2025 - *Richard Arculus*



Buff-banded Rail - Bega - 16 September 2025, **Royal Spoonbill**, **Great Egret**, **Pink-eared Duck** - Glebe Park, Bega, NSW - 16 September 2025, **Fan-tailed Cuckoo** - Tathra area, NSW—15-18 September 2025.

Richard Arculus

At the northern end of Bermagui is a lake called North Lagoon by eBird or simply Bermagui Lagoon by Google Maps. We saw 27 species in 40 minutes at this location, walking along the western bank and then on a short boardwalk out over the lagoon – highlights were our first sightings for the trip of **Hoary-headed Grebes**, nest-building by a pair of **Australasian Grebes**, two juvenile (fluffy balls) **Masked Lapwings** accompanied by their vigilant parents, numerous **Eurasian Coots**, and our first **Australian Reed Warbler** and **Latham's Snipe**.

Retracing our route, we headed south pausing at a river crossing or two, and then turned eastwards into Mimosa Rocks National Park. Between the campground of Aragunnu where we had lunch and Mimosa Rock itself, we wandered along the walking track hearing numerous different bird calls and enjoyed sightings of many of these. For example, our first **Superb Lyrebirds** were spotted – another of these leapt spectacularly across the dirt road on our way out of the Park, with outstretched neck and wonderful trailing tail feathers. **Bell Miners**, thornbills, honeyeaters, **Golden Whistlers**, **Grey Fantails**, and an **Eastern Yellow Robin** were among the bush birds. ~30 **Great** and 2 **Little Pied Cormorants** were seen along the shore.

Next stop southwards was Bithry Inlet on Wapengo Creek. It became clear that two pairs of **Pied Oystercatchers** were fighting off attacks on their nesting patches by **Australian Ravens**. Spectacular aerobatics were on display by both species of bird, eventually with the ravens retreating to high observation branches of the trees bordering the creek. No doubt, the struggle to survive would continue. Other bird species were dominated by **Cormorants**, mostly **Great** with two **Little Pied**.

We headed back to the main Tathra–Bermagui Road, turned south then shortly left the highway to head eastwards again along Gillards Road, stopping short of the campground at the turning for Tommy's Bay Track. Our return walk along this track took about 50 minutes in the course of which we saw 24 species. The distinctive calls of **Shining Bronze-** and **Fan-tailed Cuckoos** were heard, and a **Spotted Pardalote** was seen entering and leaving a nesting hole in piled-up dirt from grading of the Track. A few hundred metres further east along Gillards Road and at the end of the Campground, we strolled along Tommys Bay Walk to the beach. Returning to the vehicles, our eagle-eyed spotter Brendah alerted us to a pair of **Fan-tailed Cuckoos**, busy feeding off a multitude of flying termites whose mound had been disrupted by a fallen tree.

While I had been spending first light on Tuesday morning at Tathra Headland, Sandra had walked around the forest surrounding the Kianinny Bush Cottage reserve, sighting a large number of species. Accordingly, the group decided to repeat her walk on Wednesday morning. In about an hour, we observed 27 species, of which **Brown Gerygone** were the largest number of individuals followed by **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** and **Grey Fantails**.

After breakfast, we headed southwards along Sapphire Coast Drive turning eastwards at Wallagoot Lake Road. At our first stop close to the first cluster of houses on the north side of the road, we saw a remarkable raft of 64 **Hoary-headed Grebes**, a hundred metres offshore. Closer to us were various groups of **Black Swans** with numerous **Yellow-faced** and **White-naped Honeyeaters** in the trees near the shoreline.

Eastwards again, we stopped close to the Wallagoot Lake Boat Club buildings, attracted by the numerous calls of **Bell Miners**, and succeeded in close-up views of this species. At the edge of the lake and flying by were many **Little Pied Cormorants**, a few **Great Cormorants**, and a number of **White-faced Herons**. An **Australian Magpie** and **Welcome Swallows** were sitting on respective nests.

We continued along the road to the Turingal Head picnic area, where we parked the vehicles, and walked towards Moncks Creek and Wallagoot Beach. Close to the beach, a large goanna (*Varanus* sp) was sunning itself just off the track. At the beach itself, binoculars and scopes were trained on the sand dunes in a search for **Hooded Plover**. **Red-capped Plover** were the first to be seen, shortly followed by Brendah spying the prime target – one of which had a tag Y2 on its left leg. Alarming, the population of **Hooded Plovers** in NSW now comprises only a hundred individuals.

As we paused by the striking view over Wallagoot Gap and the Tasman Sea, a **Whistling Kite** flew overhead followed shortly by a **White-bellied Sea-Eagle**. Our sightings of raptors were augmented by a distant **Collared Sparrowhawk** overhead at the carpark as we ate lunch.

Back to Sapphire Coast Drive, then southwards followed by a turn on to Bournda Road and then north along Scotts Bay Road to the south side of Wallagoot Lake. In 30 minutes, we saw 14 species, including 16 **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** and 3 **Scarlet Myzomelas**. We followed Bournda Road to its end at Hobart Beach Campground, also on the shores of

Wallagoot Lake. **Bell Miners** dominated the bird population there. Twenty-one other bird species were observed in 30 minutes. Then we headed for the Tasman Sea coast, crossing a large dune en route, and with views back north-eastwards to Turingal Head and southwards to Tura Beach. An identification challenge presented itself as a large raptor flew overhead – despite the dark brown colouration and wedge-tailed appearance, our collective conclusion was we had seen a juvenile **White-bellied Sea-Eagle**. For our final walk in the vicinity of the lagoon that backs Bournda Beach, we headed south-westwards along a track that borders the Bondi Lagoon’s western shore. There is no access to the lagoon from this track. We returned to Kianinny Bush Cottages, voting to patronise the Tathra Bowling Club for dinner. Later that evening, because Sue Lashko had heard a **Greater Sooty Owl** outside her cabin the previous night, some of us assembled at the same cabin at about 8.30 pm hoping to catch a glimpse of it, but without luck.

On our final morning, Thursday 18 September, we again drove south along Sapphire Coast Road, turned northwest on Wallagoot Lane, parked the cars and walked down Jellat Road towards the Sapphire Coast Turf Club. The primary interest in terms of birds seen were three **White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike** flying then resting high in bare branches.

On the way to Tathra at the beginning of the field trip, several participants had stopped at the southeastern outskirts of Bega and visited the pond at Glebe Park. On their advice, others visited this Park on the return to Canberra. A remarkable number of bird species were seen there, including numerous **Freckled Ducks**, **Royal Spoonbills** and a **Great Egret**. In conclusion, an excellent, superbly run and organised field trip, enjoyed by all participants.

Richard Arculus

Wednesday 17 September – Gossan Hill NR

Eight members and guests met our leader Michael Robbins on a sunny, windy morning. Parts of the track were more sheltered than others and we were surprised by the number of small birds we saw, including **Superb Fairy-wren**, **Eastern Spinebill**, **Spotted Pardalote**, **Brown Thornbill** and **Weebill**. **Striated Pardalote** and **Yellow-faced Honeyeater** were identified by their calls. We were also fortunate to see about ten **Varied Sitella** working their way down higher branches probing for insects and spiders and calling to each other as they went.

We had good sightings of **Golden Whistler** (male and female), a male **Rufous Whistler**, **White-throated Treecreeper**, **Laughing Kookaburra** (one investigating a hollow) and numerous **Grey Fantail**. Highlights of the morning were a female **Rose Robin**, **Horsfield’s Bronze Cuckoo** and **Fan-tailed Cuckoo**.

As we neared the top of the hill we had great views over the city, but only larger birds such as **Australian Raven**, **Pied Currawong**, **Red Wattlebird** and **Australian Magpie** were seen. Altogether 29 species were observed. Thanks to Michael for his leadership and Sonya for keeping the list.

Tina Bromhead

Sunday, 21 September – Greenways of Bywong and Wamboin

A small group of seven COG members gathered at the Bywong Community Centre at 10 am for a chilly, yet fine, spring walk. From the carpark, we quickly spotted a **Common Bronzewing**, **Crimson Rosellas**, **Red Wattlebirds**, **Australian Magpies**, a **Magpie-lark** and **Eastern Spinebills**.

Following the trail towards the equestrian cross-country course, we moved through an area of scattered eucalypts and acacias, where a **White-throated Treecreeper**, a **Grey Butcherbird**, and numerous **Grey Fantails** were seen, while **Pacific Black Ducks** passed overhead. Entering the greenway, blooming wattles and native peas provided a colourful backdrop as **Galahs** and **Striated Thornbills** were noted. Calls of **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos**, **Spotted Pardalotes** and a **Noisy Friarbird** were heard.



Varied Sitella - Bywong, NSW - 21 September 2025 -

Julian Robinson

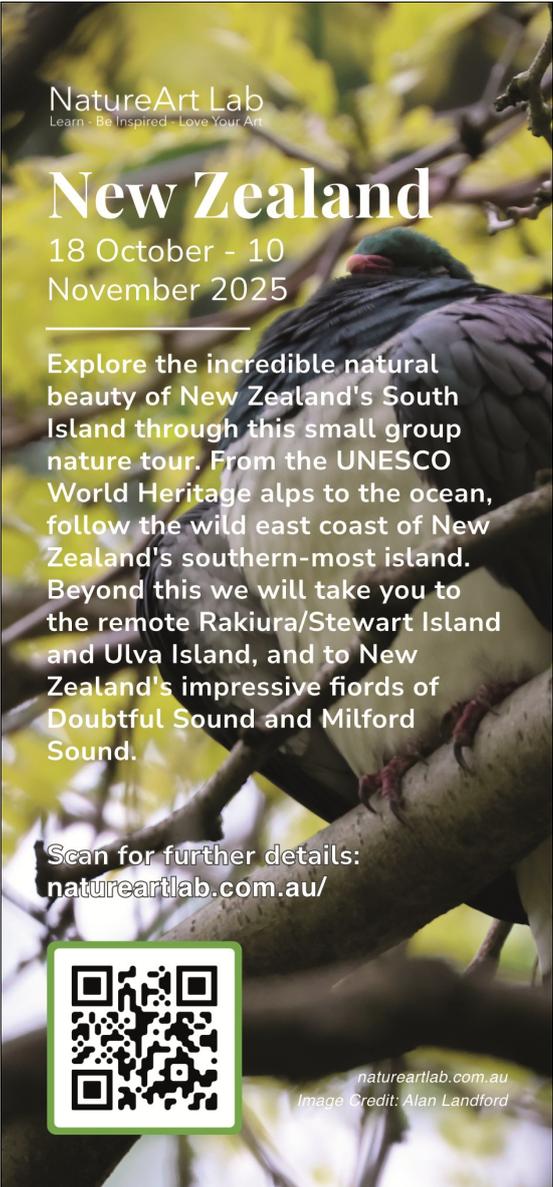
Climbing into the hills, the habitat shifted to older trees with a well-developed understorey. Here, we encountered **Superb Fairy-wrens** and a striking **Shining Bronze-Cuckoo**. A red-headed mouse spider briefly distracted us, before **Australian Ravens**, **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters**, **Silvereyes**, **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos** and a **Grey Shrikethrush** brought our attention back to the birds.

The valley produced **White-browed Scrubwrens**, a **Striated Pardalote**, and a female **Flame Robin**, with a **Laughing Kookaburra** calling across the surrounding woodland. A nesting female **Common Bronzewing** surprised us with her luxurious (and likely commandeered) nest. Birchmans Grove offered a rich mix of varied canopies, supporting **Buff-rumped** and **Brown Thornbills** and a **Golden Whistler**.

Wrapping up the trail, we moved through medium to low canopy woodland, where we spotted **White-eared Honeyeater**, **Welcome Swallow**, **Fan-tailed Cuckoo**, **Rufous Whistler**, **Sacred Kingfisher** and **Brown-headed Honeyeater**. Finally, we were surprised by a group of **Varied Sittellas** foraging acrobatically across the branches.

In total, 38 species were recorded on the outing. A big thanks to Lauren for leading this successful field trip.

Michael Wade



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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 5 October – private property near Braidwood

The property owners are in the process of establishing a wildlife corridor on their farm, about a third of which is woodland with a large dam. We visited the property in 2023, so it will be interesting to see how tree planting and the creation of wetlands has affected the birdlife.

Meet at 7.30 am in the Spotlight carpark at Queanbeyan for carpooling. We will take a maximum of 16 people in 4 cars.

Wear long pants and sturdy shoes, as snakes may be out and about. Bring hat and morning tea.

Registration is essential to smlashko@gmail.com, with your name and phone number, and name and number of an emergency contact.

Sue Lashko

Saturday 11 October - Australian National Botanic Gardens - beginners outing

This morning walk will be aimed specifically to help beginners and new members identify birds and to learn about their behaviour and calls. The Botanic Gardens are especially suitable for such an outing, as they allow the opportunity to observe a range of local bush birds in a variety of habitats. Due to the available food supply, they are also a relative haven for birds during late autumn/winter. Anthony Overs will lead this outing, which will consist of a stroll through this lovely part of Canberra for a couple of hours. Meet at 9.15am at the ANBG bus shelter.

Registration is essential; please provide your name and mobile phone number, as well as an emergency contact name and number.

Book your place with Anthony (0419202155, or anthony.overs@gmail.com), who will be happy to discuss whether this outing is suitable for you. Please make sure to bring your binoculars and field guide. **If you do not have binoculars, please let me know as COG can supply you with a pair to use on the day.**

Note that the aim of the walk is to introduce you to bird-watching, not bird photography, so please leave your camera at home.

Anthony Overs

Sunday 12 October – K2C surveys – Bredbo area

Canberra Birds will continue with the K2C surveys that have been running since April 2010. The surveyed properties have healthy populations of many of the rarer woodland birds such as **Diamond Firetail, Hooded Robin and Speckled Warbler**. We will be visiting the same sites to continue the monitoring and see if spring migrants have arrived. The surveys will be undertaken in 'blitz' fashion; that is, observers in small groups will visit a number of sites on one or more properties before regrouping for lunch and a sharing of the survey's findings. Less experienced observers are welcome to join in the survey as each team will have at least one experienced observer.

Anyone interested in participating is asked to contact Nicki Taws before Wednesday 8 October. Email: ntaws@bigpond.com or 0408 210 736.

Wednesday 15 October – Bicentennial Park, Queanbeyan

Meet at 8.30am in the parking area off Crest Park Parade. The street is a long loop and the turn into the parking area doesn't have any street name. I'd advise looking at a map to get an idea - if you look at a satellite view the parking area is quite obvious.

This is a large park with quite a bit of bush. In the past I've seen groups of **Common Bronzewing**s, and a range of parrots.

Register with Sandra (shirmax2931@gmail.com) with your name and phone number, and the name and number of an emergency contact.

Sandra Henderson

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. **Currently, the boat is full on both days but there are often last minute cancellations, but so may yet be able to secure a spot.**

To register, I require the following information (please reply by numbering 1 to 3 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 both?

Register at smlashko@gmail.com

Sue Lashko and Julian Teh

Sunday 19 October – private property, Brindabellas

This outing is to a 300-acre wildlife/wilderness sanctuary at Brindabella surrounded by national park, and it has a network of trails. A recent visit yielded **Superb Lyrebird, Satin Bowerbird, Flame** and **Eastern Yellow Robin** and **Wonga Pigeon**, just to name a few species. We will do a loop walk through the property, and then later walk down to the Goodradigbee River.

Bring morning tea, lunch, water, hat and sunscreen, and wear appropriate footwear; walking poles optional. The tracks have been recently graded but the topography is undulating.

Numbers will be limited to 16 with 4 vehicles. Suggested contribution to drivers is \$10 per passenger – please bring correct money.

Departure time is 7.30am from Stromlo Forest Park Memorial carpark, off Swallowtail Road, Wright; the entry to the carpark is at the roundabout where Peter Cullen Way meets Swallowtail Road. Return time by 3pm. I will attempt to organise carpooling in advance.

So, when you **register** to smlashko@gmail.com, please include the following information:

- your name and phone number
- the name and number of an emergency contact
- your suburb (so I can put you in touch with participants who live nearby)
- whether you have a 4WD or AWD vehicle and are happy to drive on unsealed roads and take 3 passengers.
-

Please note that, in the event of wet weather, the outing may need to be postponed due to unsafe road conditions.

Sue Lashko, Melissa Pearce

Saturday 25 and Sunday 26 October – Bird Blitz

[See notice](#) elsewhere in the newsletter.

Sunday 2 November – Mt Mugga Mugga

The walk will be on Mt Mugga Mugga. **Meet at 8am** at Domestic Animal Services, Mugga Lane. For a description of the reserve, see: <https://www.parks.act.gov.au/find-a-nature-park/canberra-nature-park/mount-mugga-mugga-nature-reserve>

The walk will explore parts of the reserve deemed suitable for the weather on the day, and the people who register. It should take 2-3 hours. Register to attend with Michael - mrobbins at home.netspeed.com.au providing your name and mobile number, and the name and mobile number of an emergency contact.

Michael Robbins

Sunday 9 November – Old Boboyan Road & Yankee Hat

Description: We will start with a short walk along the wooded area at the beginning of Old Boboyan Road (where it comes off Boboyan Road), where **Fuscous Honeyeaters** may be sighted. Then we will proceed to Yankee Hat carpark. We will have a quick look along the 100 m before the locked gate where we might see **Brown Treecreeper** and **Dusky Woodswallow**. We will then walk through open grasslands along the Yankee Hat track, stopping for lunch at the rock art site before turning back.

Meeting time and place: 8.00 at the Namadgi Visitor Centre carpark, for carpooling.

Walking distance: The Yankee Hat walk is an easy 6 km return, taking about 2.5 hours.

End time: Mid-afternoon

What to bring: sturdy boots, hat, sunscreen, water, morning tea and lunch

Registration: Please register by 5.00 pm on Friday 7 September by email to Evan Bitmead (efbitmead@gmail.com ; mob. 0409 225 475), providing your name and mobile number, and the name and mobile number of an emergency contact. Numbers limited to 16.

Sunday 16 November – Campbell Park, Morning Nest workshop

Description: This outing will be a repeat of the very popular and practical nest workshops held over for twenty-one years. As usual it will be a very informal outing which has been timed to coincide with the peak of the breeding season. The morning will start with the usual very short presentation, including tips on the types of nests built by different species of birds, and how to find nests or nesting behaviour. This will be followed by several hours putting this into practice, with participants looking for breeding behaviour, signs of nests, etc. This will also allow plenty of opportunities for bird watching.

The workshop is particularly suitable for beginners or those relatively new to bird watching, though more experienced members and repeat customers are also very welcome.

Proposed attendees are reminded of ***the care that needs to be taken around breeding birds as outlined in the new COG Ethical Birding Guidelines which can be found through the link on the Home Page of the Canberra Birds website ([Ethical Birding Guidelines - Canberra Birds](#); in particular, please read and adhere to the guidelines on Nesting Birds and Bird Photography).***

Walking distance: While every year has been different, we often don't walk very far as there usually is a "hot spot" where most of the breeding activity occurs around 500 m from where we park. Maximum distance = 2.0 km of easy flat walking.

End Time: Between 11 am and 12 pm. Please remember to take morning tea which we will have out in the field.

Meeting time and place: Meet at 8:00 am at the far end of the car park. Take Northcott Drive up to the start of the Campbell Park Offices, where you take the right fork and keep to the outside of the very large car park, skirting it until you get to the end. Intending participants might also like to look at the Campbell Park map on the COG website under the Maps, Forms and Lists button.

Name of leader and contact details: Registration is essential no later than Friday 14 November. To participate, please contact Jack Holland by email on jandaholland@bigpond.com – please include your name and mobile number, and the name and number of an emergency contact. Could any new members who need to borrow binoculars please advise when you register?

Jack Holland

Sunday 23 November – West Belconnen

Description: This outing will be an opportunity to visit the grassy rural landscapes where Gooroomon Ponds Creek meets Ginninderra Creek beyond suburban West Belconnen. We will begin at Fassifern Pond before walking along the National Bicentennial Trail to explore the surrounding paddocks and grassland reserve. Many interesting birds are often found in the area, including waterbirds, birds of prey and grassland species.

eBird hotspots: Fassifern Pond (<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L2543573>), Jarramlee Homestead Road (<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L2070131>), Ginninderra Creek in West Macgregor (<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L2543568>)

You will also be close to some great local birdwatching sites, such as West Belconnen Pond and the Dunlop Grasslands, should you wish to visit these following the formal outing.

Meeting time and place: Meet at 8:00 am at Fassifern Pond in Dunlop. Park safely in Hugh McKay Crescent or surrounding streets and then walk down to the pond. The meeting point is also a short walk away from the R2 bus route.

Walk details: A moderate walk of approximately 6-7 kms that may take 3-4 hours at birding pace. There may be gates or stiles to navigate, as well as some wet or boggy sections. We will be flexible with the itinerary depending on weather conditions and creek levels.

What to bring: Sun protection (very important in this exposed grassy landscape), water, morning tea, binoculars, sturdy footwear (preferably waterproof in case we need to navigate boggy tracks or a high creek).

Registration: Please register with Lachlan by email (poephila@outlook.com), no later than Friday 21 November. Participants should provide their name and mobile number, and the name and mobile number of an emergency contact.

Lachlan Duncan

Sunday 30 November – Namadgi NP – Pabral Road

Pabral Rd is a mostly flat fire trail in the wide valley below Mt Coree and is reached via Brindabella and Curries Roads. We will walk for approximately 2kms, or a little less than that if we see a lot of interesting birds. The return will be the same way. The road skirts a wetland and then winds through tall forest where several small creeks running off Mt Coree provide moist conditions for the plants and wildlife that favour this habitat. The area hosts interesting bird species more usually reported higher up in Namadgi National Park. In particular we will be looking for summer migrants such as **Satin Flycatcher** and **Rufous Fantail**, but also hoping for **Eastern Shrike-tit**, **Red-browed Treecreeper**, **Rose Robin** and **Wonga Pigeon**. **Pilotbirds**, **Eastern Whipbirds** and **Superb Lyrebirds** occur in the area, though are more often heard than seen.

We will **meet at 8:00 am**, car pool for the drive up into Namadgi, start our walk around 8:30 and be back at our cars by about 11:30.

Bring a hat, water and morning tea, and wear appropriate footwear. We will stop for morning tea at a very nice little grassy meadow about halfway along our walk.

Register with kimlouiseFarley@gmail.com with your name, mobile number, and the name and mobile number of an emergency contact. Once you register you will be advised of about the meeting point and other information.

Kim Farley

Sunday 7 December – Grabben Gullen TSR , Narrawa Bridge TSR & Narrawa Stockpile

This is an all-day trip of medium difficulty, in the Crookwell district. The first stop will be Grabben Gullen Travelling Stock Reserve, a thicket of small eucalypts with sightings of **Dollarbird**. The next stop will be the Narrawa Hall with views over the rolling countryside and possible raptor sightings. There is a TSR on the other side of the road with a low bird count.

Narrawa Bridge TSR on the Lachlan River has a riverside walk, uneven in parts with wombat holes and tussocks to look out for. We will follow the fenceline up a steepish hill in open woodland. Species recorded here include: **Peaceful Dove**, **Eastern Yellow Robin**, **Rainbow Bee-eater**, **Azure Kingfisher**, **White-bellied Sea Eagle** and **Striped Honeyeater**.

Narrawa Stockpile follows the curve of Narrawa Creek. It is a riverine woodland with 70 species on record including **Eastern Shrike-tit**, **Restless Flycatcher** and **Diamond Firetail**. We will lunch at Barbour Park in Gunning on the way back.

Meeting time and place: Victoria St. carpark by Sutton Primary School at 8.00 am for carpooling. End time about 3pm. Bring morning tea and lunch, sturdy shoes, hat, sunscreen, water and walking poles optional.

Walking distance: less than 5 km.

Registration. Please provide your name, mobile number and name and mobile number for your emergency contact. Register with Bill on bsgraham@gmail.com. Numbers will be limited to 16 people in 4 vehicles.

Bill Graham

Saturday 13 December - Urambi Hills Nature Reserve - Joint outing with Urambi Hills Park Care Group

Meet at 8:00 am in Meredith Circuit, Kambah, between houses 34 & 42 for entrance to Urambi Hills Nature Reserve. Please bring binoculars, a hat, water, sunscreen, morning tea and wear sturdy shoes.

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 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 the successful outing held in July 2025, which was oversubscribed, and on which **Southern Whiteface** were seen. In December, besides maybe **Speckled Warbler** and **Scarlet Robin**, we will hopefully see some of the summer migrants, such as **White-winged Triller**, **White-throated Gerygone**, **Rainbow Bee-eater**, and **Dollarbird**.

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

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

Michael Robbins

Sunday 14 December

Venue to be confirmed. Further details will be available on the website under the Field Trips tab.

Marcus Hellyer



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

Stock up on greeting cards, and be ready for all occasions!

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.

Greeting cards **\$6 each** or **8-packs for \$40**.

Shop directly via
stuartmcmillen.com/shop

GEORGE AND GERTIE GANG-GANG. A POEM BY EDWINA SMITH.

GEORGE:

“We don’t do desert
Forget about a search
50 C, no shade
We’d fall of the perch!
Cool climate mountains
Crisp forest air
Freezing foggy mornings
You can find us there.”

GERTIE:

“Isn’t George flash
In a splash of red!
Perched upon a wattle tree
Feather duster on his head
I wear mostly grey
With salmon-coloured bars
Don’t mistake a Gang-gang for
Those noisy, pink galahs!”

GEORGE:

“We like sawfly grubs
Don’t mind their yucky goo
Most birds turn away
We’ve downed quite a few
What the heck! There’re in check!
We’re saving leaves with ease
Gert and I do our bit
To help our favourite trees.”

GERTIE:

“Seasons flow for nature
See them come and go
By cooler days of Autumn
Time to fly down low
In warmer days of Spring
We seek higher ground
Looking for our nesting place
Where aging trees are found.”

GEORGE:

“We need the bush
And a hollow deep
Nestled in an old gum
Chicks can grow and sleep
We’ll keep them fed
And share the care
Tending ‘round the clock
If all goes well, we hope to tell
They’re off to join the flock.”

GEORGE AND GERTIE:

“Iconic something chronic
In case you haven’t heard
Many do have the view
We’re Canberra’s favourite bird!
Feathered in charisma
We just have to be
A fantastic faunal emblem
For the A.C.T.”

EDWINA SMITH.

August 3rd, 2025.



Julatten, 1½hrs. North of Cairns

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Swooping Eagles

By Trevor Costa

I had photographed the Eagles at Goorooyarroo Reserve last season when they raised two fledglings. I had got to know where their daily roosts were and where they would likely ride the thermals depending on wind direction. I also knew how to keep disturbance to a minimum and they always seemed comfortable with my presence to the point of what looked like curiosity at times. Often riding the thermals of the hill to drop low and eyeball me, never in a threatening manner, which was great for my photography. Once I just lay on my back on the hill summit and they paraded above me with the big female hovering directly above at one stage. I moved occasionally just in case she thought I was carrion, and she soon joined the others. It was a wonderful experience.

Knowing the eaglets have usually fledged by September, I thought it is time to renew this acquaintance. It is steep going up the hill where they usually soar and winter knees soon had me cutting across the slope slightly off track. Close to the summit I saw two shadows pass over and then the undeniable silhouettes of two **Wedge-tailed Eagles** against the sky circling up ahead. One was very large which I took for the female parent, the other was much smaller in comparison and a very light colour and I thought this must be a fledgling. I stopped and started to zoom in with my telephoto lens and noted the larger bird had banked and was headed in my direction. I frantically tried to focus in but was unable to match her speed, then with the camera still against my face I felt and heard an enormous swoosh. I dropped the camera to see the eagle banking sharply less than a couple of meters away. I immediately lowered the camera and moved away. She seemed to be OK with this and rejoined the other bird. She chased a few marauding magpies away with some impressive dive bombing at height, caught the thermals again and sat high above me for a while and then they both disappeared to the west. I was a little shaken by the experience. The closeness of such a large and heavily armed bird had me rattled. I was truly surprised. I had never heard of such behaviour. I sat and had lunch on a southern slope and when I stood to head back down, I saw the large female was back and riding the thermals on the western side of the hill. On seeing me she immediately dropped down and made a bee line straight for me, but a magpie dropped in and engaged her in a dogfight again. Eagles are not the only ones with young to defend in spring. While she was distracted, I took this opportunity to scuttle back down the hill.

I posted what photos I had on the Canberra Wildlife Facebook Page and shared my experience. This generated a bit of discussion on whether the swooping had been from the eagle as this type of behaviour is rarely recorded. I also let the reserve management know of the incident. They seemed comfortable with my account to the point of asking whether they could use my photos for some media postings. This made me start to doubt if in fact I had got it right. I had not seen the actual swoop as the camera was at my face, and an internet search had only one similar incident ever recorded.

So, I hiked back up the hill two days later to try and settle the issue of what really happened. There was no sign of the large female eagle or what I believe to be the fledgling. I started back down on track but close to where I had been swooped by the female, I saw what looked like the smaller dark male rising from the valley towards me from the north. Magpies and ravens were giving him hell, but he did a good job to fight them off. He then set his sights on me, sitting directly above where I cowered under a sparse tree. He then moved to the east, dived down to head height around 30 meters away and came at me hard and fast. I didn't have the forethought of filming this on my mobile but just watched stunned with camera lowered as he came within a couple of meters and peeled away to sit above me again. I ran from tree to tree all the way back down the hill with him gaining height watching the further I travelled away until he could be seen high above the hill's summit hovering.

I once again reported the incident to reserve management and voiced my concerns for public safety and the welfare of the birds, suggesting they close the area to public access. I have no explanation for this behaviour other than they may have become habituated to humans since last season and now have no fear and see humans as another intruder in their territory to defend against for the safety of their offspring. I decided that was the limit of my eagle adventures for now. Although I may have another go in a couple of months when everyone is a bit more chilled. Nesting season in the hills carry unexpected hazards it seems. I am no longer intimidated by swooping magpies.

Bower birds

By Jenny Stewart

A few months ago, an immature male Satin bower bird appeared in my garden and proceeded to build what I believe is called a training bower. I called my visitor Sir Keir, after the British Prime Minister, because he was plumpish, and a bit fussy, but was clearly intent on building the best small bower for miles around.

Over the ensuing weeks I watched, fascinated, from my sitting room window, as Sir Keir deposited bits of blue bling around his construction. At various points, there were blue pegs, blue plastic milk bottle caps, a blue pen, some random blue fabric and, very briefly, a blue guitar plectrum, which I later found out had been lost by one of the kids over the road.

Sir K was very proud of these acquisitions and bopped around the bower while he decided where to put them, squawking happily once they were in position. He kept at his work through the coldest mornings of winter, even though the bling never stayed in position for long, because rival males who must have been watching his efforts from a lookout nearby, would carry them off. The blue peg, in particular, came and went many times.

It was my introduction to the amazing bower bird world of raids and work. As a longtime bird lover but relatively recent bird watcher and Canberra Birds member, there was so much to learn. Of course I Googled and consulted my ancient *What Bird is That?* And Canberra Bird Notes had a fascinating article from 2000 by Holland and Veerman recording the winter-time march of the bowerbirds from their home across the Murrumbidgee into the Canberra suburbs of Weston Creek, Kambah and Woden Valley. But there was so much still to learn. I asked lots of questions of fellow Canberra Birds members and of course they knew so much.

There was always something going on in Buckingham Bower, as I called it. Sometimes Sir Keir was helped and sometimes harassed by other, smaller males. Often he appeared with a piece of chewed plant material in his beak. I learned that this was a kind of brush that he soaked in his saliva and used for painting the bower. Very rarely, the local mature male called Charles, glossy black in his satin feathers, would appear. Meanwhile Sir K's display routines were developing. He would do push-ups with bits of bling in his beak.

Gradually I became aware of a kind of bower bird economy that stretched through my suburb of Torrens. It's their world, but thanks to street trees and shrubs and Canberra's gardens, it's also one we can share with them. On my walk to the shops, I became alert to the female bower birds, carousing on berries in the street over the back of my place. Doubtless they would come into the picture as the spring advanced. But for now, the males were doing all the work. It was a bit hard to track them once they had knocked off for the day. A possible roosting tree for the gang was a huge old cypress over the back of my house.

And then one morning, after a number of visits from Charles, which Sir K was obviously upset about, I realised that the bower was no longer there. Closer inspection showed that it had literally been flattened. I do hope Sir Keir succeeded with the lady bower birds, who I assume must have been eyeing him off all along.

I don't have a dog or a cat but these companions, although they proved transient, have given me so much. And this brings me to a plea for Canberra to retain as many gardens as possible. I know about the need for greater density, but surely there is a case, especially as climate change closes in on us, for keeping as much of the freedom and beauty of gardens as possible.

The bower birds have discovered the bounty that is available, but longer-term visitors, such as the amazing Gang Gang, seem less plentiful than in the past. We know that it's possible to bring birds back, by banning cats, and planting small trees and shrubs that will attract them. Good planning, so often subsumed in Canberra by the imperatives of developers, is essential.

But perhaps, too, it's time to stand up for open spaces, for gardens and gardening and the remaining beauties of what used to be called the garden city.

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

2025-2026 memberships:

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

New members

COG welcomes the following new members:

Nathan Beil
Beau Colbey & family
Veronica Fortune & family
Christine Larsen & family
Liliana Lopez
Jen Finlayson & family
Line Perrins
Mark Wood
Heather Crawford & family
Qinge Du & family

NEXT NEWSLETTER

Deadline for November 2025 edition:

Wednesday 29 October 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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