



Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2024-25

2025 been a good year for Canberra Birds, with continuity in our traditional areas of strength, and also a few changes and developments to help take us into the future.

Of note is a recent review of Canberra Birds' activities and roles that found that we have 30-40 volunteers who keep Canberra Birds running. Our surveys, website, publications, communication infrastructure, members meetings and field trips are all dependent on this relatively small group of volunteers. On behalf of the Committee, I express my strong gratitude to all our volunteers for the work they do. Many of you have taken responsibility for our activities for a long time, and for various reasons some of you are planning to step back from these roles in the short to medium term. This means we will be looking for additional folk to take up these roles if we are going to continue Canberra Birds' breadth of activities. I encourage members to keep an eye out for opportunities to get involved when they are advertised.

A few highlights from 2025:

- The February 2025 gazetting of Bluetts Block as a Nature Reserve was the culmination of years of work by multiple groups and individuals in the ACT conservation community.
- More than 50 people turned out in April 2025 for the Honeyeater Migration survey. This survey collected valuable data and also introduced new people to citizen science, under the expert tutelage of our experienced long-term members.
- There is nothing to show on the ground as yet, but Canberra Birds, the Woodland & Wetlands Trust, and ACT government staff are working together to build a bird hide at Big Dam at Mulligans Flat. The hide will be funded by Canberra Birds and the Trust from the generous bequests to both bodies from the estate of Bruce Lindenmayer. Bruce was instrumental in the establishment of Mulligans Flat Nature Reserve.
- A Memorandum of Understanding between Canberra Birds and Birdlife Australia was signed in April 2025. This followed the passing of a Special Motion at the 2024 COG AGM regarding the legal requirement that COG nominate another organisation to accept our funds and assets in the unlikely event that we are ever dissolved or wound up.
- During 2025 we again supported two ANU post graduate students to present their research on local birds at the biennial Australasian Ornithological Conference.
- Looking ahead, in March 2026 Canberra Birds is leading the pre and post conference trips program for the Birdlife Australia Photography Conference.

The Committee

In 2025 the executive members of the Committee were Kim Farley (President), Julie Hotchin (Vice-President), Margaret Robertson (Secretary) and Prue Watters (Acting Treasurer). General members of the 2025 Committee were Jenny Bounds, Brittany Brockett, and Bill Graham.

Margaret Robertson is not renominating for Secretary for 2026. Margaret has been a very conscientious Secretary and Committee member and we have valued her quiet commitment to the role.

Brittany Brockett is stepping back from the Committee to pursue career opportunities. Thank you, Britt for your inputs to committee discussion and decision making over the last several years.

New President, Kim Farley and new Vice-President Julie Hotchin strongly appreciate the expertise, experience, and support of the other members of the Committee during 2025, as well as guidance from experienced former Committee members.

Canberra Birds members and volunteers

Our membership numbers have held steady over the last few years, at around 350. There is some 'churn' among the membership with nearly half of members not renewing after their first year of membership. This is not necessarily a new phenomenon, but the reasons and significance of it are being considered by the Committee.

Canberra Birds is very fortunate in its volunteers who keep our citizen science programs, website, field trips, publications, communications, member meeting and speaker program, and a wealth of other large and small activities running.

During 2025, a replacement membership records management system was developed. The brief was for a system that would: keep our member records up to date, streamline queries between members and the Membership Officer and Treasurer, and reduce workload. The system was built in Excel by Julian Robinson, with input from Acting Treasurer Prue Watters. The new system has allowed Sandra Henderson, our Membership Officer, to step aside after 20 years in the role. Thank you, Sandra for your work as Membership Officer over that long period.

COG's Bird Databases and Annual Bird Report/Bird Info on the website

During the year, the Committee had hoped to make significant progress on upgrading and/or replacing our legacy databases. Until this work is done it is very difficult to create a new Annual Bird Report (ABR) or to update the bird statistics pages on the website (Bird Info). The technical issues have remained intractable for more than five years. The retirement of key people with detailed knowledge of the databases has exacerbated the difficulties since 2020.

Some progress has been made in 2025. An audit of, and storage of COG data resources into one central location is almost complete. Central storage of the Woodland Survey Database, along with its additional data files and associated information, has helped get that part of the project restarted, since we are now able to understand more about where problems lie.

Paradoxically, we have both too little documentation on, for example, data entry and data transformation in key databases (notably Woodland Survey) and very extensive historical

documentation covering the planning and specification work done over the last five years. Both these points mean it has been challenging for new people to establish a single point of truth for specification of new systems. We are aware that we need an expert IT project manager as well as a programmer. We are optimistic that recent steps in several areas will take us forward.

Conservation

Canberra Birds has a strong and long-term commitment to providing responses, expertise and views on matters which impact birds and their habitats in the ACT, including with regard to urban planning and greenfields development.

Jenny Bounds continues as Conservation Officer, and represents Canberra Birds in various forums and stakeholder groups, including the **Biodiversity Working Group of the ACT Conservation Council**, and the **ACT Government Biodiversity Conservation Forum**, a regular meeting with the Government for environmental community groups.

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

Selected Canberra Birds submissions are listed on the Canberra Birds website at www.canberrabirds.org.au under the Conservation tab.

Submissions and responses made in the last year include:

- Comments on the ten-year review reports of **Plans of Management for Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, Namadgi National Park** and the **Jerrabomberra Wetlands Nature Reserve**
- A submission to an EPBC Act referral, concerning **relocation of a major transmission line in West Belconnen**: a small loss of some habitat/trees, potentially for Superb Parrot. This was later not deemed to be a controlled action and went ahead.
- Ongoing input to the development of a **new ACT Nature Conservation Strategy**, intended to focus on landscape scale approaches to biodiversity conservation and connectivity, on-reserve and off-reserve (including rural land/leaseholds). Canberra Birds participated in workshops and reviewed some draft elements of the proposed Strategy through a process managed by the Conservation Council.
- Input to the Conservation Council's submission on the **Light Rail Stage 2 EIS**, which indicated potential impacts on mature eucalypts (e.g. around Parliament House), potential trees for Gang-gang and Superb Parrot movement corridor.
- Input to the **Conservation Council's Draft Strategic Plan 2026-2030**.
- Following the ACT Government's decision in 2024 to reserve **Bluetts Block**, there have been changes to the **ACT Territory Plan** to enable this, with a response in support of this from Canberra Birds. However, there are ongoing efforts by the Friends of Bluetts Block, with other groups (including Canberra Birds) for an **area of land to be added** from the rural block on Bluetts western edge, so the reserve is a more sustainable size and shape, with improved connectivity to the Molonglo River.
- Participation in discussions and a workshop concerning restoration proposed on the **Coombs Peninsula abutting the Molonglo River Reserve**. This had been a deferred urban

area more than a decade ago following a successful ACAT case/decision concerning fire management zones being inappropriately within habitat for threatened species (Pink-tailed Worm-Lizard). This area is now to be rezoned and protected as part of the River Reserve.

- Working with the ACT Conservation Council and Friends of Grasslands, to **protect grasslands habitats** under threat of development/infrastructure, including habitat for the ACT threatened Earless Dragon at Canberra Airport.
- Finally, during 2025 the Conservation Council ACT began a Campaign to Save Canberra's **Western Edge** from inappropriate urban development and protect the ecologically important Murrumbidgee River corridor. Canberra Birds is a member of the Council and actively supports the Campaign. Field inspections of some properties to document the values (plants, birds, connectivity etc) are occurring. Canberra Birds has made a donation to the Campaign, recognising the importance of protecting this area for birds.

Bird data collection programs

- The **Woodland Bird Monitoring Program**, a survey undertaken quarterly at 15 locations/142 sites in the ACT, is now in its 26th year, and continues to be coordinated by Jenny Bounds. Thanks are due to the team of dedicated site coordinators and their survey helpers. Their commitment over time is a significant factor in the success of this survey and is strongly valued by Canberra Birds. The Mulligans Flat surveys (part of the woodland program) commenced in 1995 and reached its 30-year survey milestone in 2025.
- A **Honeyeater Migration Survey** along the Murrumbidgee River corridor was undertaken in April 2025 and will be repeated in autumn 2026. Fifty volunteers took part in 2025, with preliminary results reported in the May issue of Gang-gang and at the July members meeting.
- The **Canberra Birds Blitz** has been held in late October since 2005. With 20 years of data, insights are available about changes to the abundance, breeding activity and range of Canberra's birds. Nicki Taws stepped down from the role as Blitz Coordinator in January 2025. We thank her for her work in supporting the Blitz in recent years. Unfortunately, and despite much effort, a new Coordinator has not been found. Without a Coordinator some aspects of the Blitz were changed to ensure the Blitz could place in 2025.
- The **Garden Bird Survey** continues, now in its 44th year. Thank you, Duncan McCaskill, the GBS Coordinator and database manager.
- **Latham's Snipe surveys** are part of a national survey organised by Dr Birgita Hansen, Federation University, Ballarat and run locally by our own Lori Gould. Canberra Birds members have contributed to this survey throughout its history.
- The annual **Lyrebird survey** at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve continued in 2025 under the coordination of Chris Davey.
- Surveys of waterbirds undertaken by COG volunteers at **Lakes George and Bathurst**. Lake Bathurst is a Birdlife Australia Key Biodiversity Area (KBA). The KBA Guardian role, previously held by Michael Lenz is now held by Sue Lashko. Sue is assisted by a younger generation of surveyors: Luke Downey, Liam Manderson, Zeb Muller and Elliott Overs.

- Quarterly bird surveys at the **Jerrabomberra Wetlands**, run since 2012 by the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust, and organised by Chris Davey with volunteers from Canberra Birds.
- **NSW Landcare K2C (Kosciusko To Coast) surveys** include Canberra Birds volunteers.
- Regular surveys at a high-quality Travelling Stock Reserve (TSR) north of Canberra near Gundaroo (**Nelanglo**) inform NSW Local Land Services' management of the TSR. This survey is undertaken by Michael Lenz and Nick Nicholls.

Gang-gang newsletter

A key resource for members is our monthly newsletter *Gang-gang*, released on the website in pdf format. During 2025, Zachary Flegg (*Gang-gang* editor) and Gail Neuman (layout editor), have been progressively updating *Gang-gang*'s look and feel. Most of the changes have been subtle, but a photo cover of a local bird each month is a more obvious change. The new look, and the cover in particular, have received positive feedback from members.

Canberra Bird Notes

Michael Lenz and Kevin Windle continue their excellent work as Editors of *Canberra Bird Notes*. We thank them and all those who have contributed to *CBN* over the past year. *CBN* is a well-respected and valued source of information about the birds of the Canberra region.

Canberra Birds website

Our website is a key source of information about Canberra Birds and the birds of Canberra: for our members, for members of the community, and for ACT government staff and others who continue to use the information on our Bird Info pages despite these not having been updated since June 2017.

In late 2024, an external security issue impacted the website. This did not affect Canberra Birds' financial information or the personal information of members because this is not held on the website. However, it did render multiple web pages inaccessible. The underlying problem was rectified but the inaccessible pages need individual remediation. These issues highlighted the need to update the technology behind our website, which is now 13 years old. The work will take place over the next few months. Thank you, Julian Robinson, our website manager, who has worked closely with our website support provider to rectify the problems and plan the upgrades.

Thanks also to Sue Lashko, Jack Holland, David McDonald and Margaret Robertson for their regular updating of the web pages for which they are responsible and to Alison MacKerras for her updates to pages right across the website.

Field Trips

One of Canberra Birds' many strengths is our active program of field trips for members and visitors. We offer a monthly Wednesday Walk, a Saturday or Sunday outing most weeks of the year, and several longer trips annually. In 2024-25 there were 641 participants on 48 different field trips. This is 140 more participants than in 2023-24.

Locally, we ran trips in and near the city, and to Namadgi National Park and neighbouring areas in NSW. Further afield, a mixture of longer camping and accommodated trips were held: to Culburra and the Shoalhaven (October 2024), Warren and the Macquarie Marshes (November 2024), Crowdy Bay (April), the Eden pelagic, and the Easter camp at Wanganella (April).

Thank you Sue Lashko for organising a program of outings that cater for everyone from beginners to expert birders, and thank you to Sandra Henderson who runs the Wednesday Walks.

A great contribution comes from Anthony Overs, with the assistance of Elliott Overs and Sue Lashko, who run beginners outings at the Botanic Gardens and Jerrabomberra Wetlands. These are very popular, with additional dates sometimes needed to meet demand. Jack Holland's Nest Workshop at Campbell Park is another highlight of the annual program.

Last but very much not least, thank you to the 20 or more members who volunteer their time every year to lead our trips and who ensure their success.

Looking ahead, in March 2026 Canberra Birds is leading the pre and post conference trips program for the Birdlife Australia Photography Conference. We will also have a stall at the Conference trade exhibition.

Canberra Birds Facebook and the Canberra Birds email Chatline

Canberra Birds Facebook page was re-launched in 2024 and has over 560 followers. This is a miniscule number in the social media world, but Facebook seems to be making a discernible difference for us – from an increase in enrolments in Canberra Birds activities (such as Beginners walks), to an up-tick in memberships in 2025 and an increase in media queries and requests for interview about birds.

The number of subscribers to the long-standing Canberra Birds email Chatline remains fairly constant at around 365. The list, managed by David McDonald, provides a forum for discussion of local bird matters. Posts include an annual 'race' to report the first Koel of the season, bird identifications, and detailed discussion of ornithological matters.

Monthly members' meetings

In 2024-25 Jack Holland organised another excellent program of speakers for our monthly meetings. With a presenter's permission, some presentations are posted to the Canberra Birds Facebook page. This extends their reach to a wider audience and also promotes the value of attending the meetings in person.

During the year, Sandra Henderson provided the raffle prizes and sold raffle tickets at meetings and Lia Battison provided the meeting supper. Thank you, Sandra and Lia.

Community Engagement

A Canberra Birds stall or bird walks at community events are two of the ways we meet the 'Education' objective on our logo. In 2025 we staffed stalls at six events, with two of these including bird walks. A new initiative in 2025 was a quarterly stall at Wildbark at Mulligans Flat.

As well as manning most of these stalls, Bill Graham also made several school and retirement home visits. Thank you, Bill.

Three new Canberra Birds promotional brochures were released early in 2025. Each describes five interesting places to observe birds in the ACT's North, the South and the Ranges. The brochures have been very popular, and a second print run is in hand. Two further brochures are close to completion: *Birding in the ACT* and *Birding at the Jerrabomberra Wetlands*. Both the Ginninderry Conservation Trust and the March 2026 Birdlife Photography Conference will include the Canberra Birds brochure in their publicity materials. This additional printing is on a cost-recovery basis. Thanks to Julie Hotchin, Steve Read, Jenny Bounds and Alison Mackerras for their work on the brochures.

Rarities Panel

The Panel continues to review reports of unusual species and to publish endorsements in Canberra Bird Notes. Thanks for the efforts of Grahame Clark, Richard Allen, Dick Schodde, Jenny Bounds and Nicki Taws who are the moderators of Canberra Birds rarities records, and Barbara Allan who coordinates the Rarities Panel's work.

Canberra Birds Conservation Fund

The Fund, established in 2000, is a tax-deductible gift recipient, and members and friends of Canberra Birds are encouraged to donate to it. Many thanks to the members who generously donated to the fund during the year.

In 2025, two grants were made by the Fund: Lisa Fontana for attendance at the Australasian Ornithological Conference and Zachary Flegg for his University of Canberra Honours project on acoustic monitoring of the White-throated Nightjar in the ACT.

The Committee of Management of the Fund (Dr Penny Olsen, Geoffrey Dabb and David McDonald) invites enquiries from people seeking financial support for projects that are consistent with its environmental objectives. Although most of the projects funded have been academic research, the Fund can support any projects that encourage interest in and develop knowledge of, the birds of the Canberra region; promote and coordinate the study of birds; and/or promote the conservation of native birds and their habitats in the Canberra region. Members of Canberra Birds are encouraged to promote the Conservation Fund, encouraging friends and businesses alike to make tax-deductible donations to it in the interests of the birds of the Canberra region, and their environments.

Kim Farley
President, Canberra Birds
05 November 2025