Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2026

2026 been another great year for Canberra Birds, as demonstrated by this report – with continuity in COG's areas of strength, developments to help take us into the future, and active work on several challenges.

First and foremost, I thank our wonderful volunteers who keep Canberra Birds running. COG surveys, publications, field trips, Facebook, members meetings and the Committee all depend on the goodwill, energy and dedication of volunteers. Over time, as volunteers step back, opportunities open up for different people to become involved. Birding experience is not a requirement for many tasks and, perhaps surprisingly to some, we are currently looking for people with good admin skills to help with our everyday work, or with the project work we inevitably have in hand.

Key Points from 2026:

- From January 2026, monthly **Avian Flu Waterbird Surveys**. This work is in partnership with ACT Government Office of Nature Conservation.
- Publication of a Commemorative Issue of ***Canberra Bird Notes*** in early 2025 to celebrate the publication's 50 volumes. See *CBN,* Volume 50.1, December 2025 on the website.
- Canberra Birds organised and led the pre and post conference trips program for the **Birdlife Australia Photography Conference** in March. Over 100 delegates attended our walks.
- An **Agreement with ACT Government for supply of data from our Woodland Survey** for the ACT Threatened Species Index.
- A detailed review of our **Constitution**, required by changes to the ACT Model Rules for Incorporated Associations. The changes will be put to members for approval at the 2026 Annual General Meeting.
- Sadly, the **Garden Bird Survey will cease** after June 2027. This decision was made after much consideration by the Committee. More about this in the Surveys section.
- The **Woodland Survey Access Database** and its data entry processes were reviewed, updated, and post-2019 data uploaded to bring the database up to date.
- Steady progress on building a **bird hide at Big Dam at Mulligans Flat**. Funded by bequests from the estate of Bruce Lindenmayer to Canberra Birds, and the Woodlands & Wetlands Trust, ACT Parks & Conservation staff are providing project management and logistics.

The Committee

The 2026 Committee executive was Kim Farley (President), Julie Hotchin (Vice-President), Sandie Jones (Secretary) and Peter Miller (Treasurer). General members of the 2026 Committee were Jenny Bounds, Chris Davey, Bill Graham and Prue Watters. Congratulations Sandie and Peter for completing your first year on the Committee. Prue is retiring from the Committee at the end of 2026. This follows nine years of Committee membership, including seven as Treasurer, for which we thank you. Prue continues as Membership Officer.

Canberra Birds membership

At the end of June 2026 we had 390 members, up from 350 at June 2025. The Committee has worked hard over the last couple of years to build and broaden our membership base. Obviously, we are also keen for this to be reflected in some of those people coming forward to volunteer their time to help Canberra Birds!

Bird Databases and Annual Bird Report/Bird Info on the website

Technical and other issues relating to upgrades of our databases have been intractable for more than five years to 2026. These difficulties have prevented the creation of the *Annual Bird Report* over that period.

Excellent progress has been made in 2026 and particularly with the Woodland Survey Database. This has been almost entirely due to the expertise of members Julie King and Richard Marris, along with input from Chris Davey, Kim Farley and Nick Nicholls. The Database and the data are up to date. Comprehensive support documentation has been created.

We have also engaged ACT Office of Nature Conservation staff to advise and progress the use of eBird data to help us create an ongoing summary report of bird abundance in the ACT. This will be released on the website. It is not intended to replace the *Annual Bird Report* but will provide information of value to users of our website.

Data provision

- **ACT Threatened Species Index (TSX)**, In September, Canberra Birds signed an Agreement with ACT Government to provide long-term Woodland Survey data for six threatened bird species. These data will be used within an ACT TSX. This local TSX will use the same protocols and infrastructure as the Australian TSX, run by the Terrestrial Ecosystem Research Network**.** For interest, see the Australian TSX here https://tsx.org.au/

- **Gang-gang Cockatoo data**. In 2026, Canberra Birds provided ACT Gang-gang Cockatoo records to researchers at the Australian National University developing a Species Distribution Model. This is a computer-based tool that will predict where the species can live across the landscape.

Conservation advocacy and submissions

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.

Jenny Bounds continues as Conservation Officer and represents Canberra Birds in the **Biodiversity Working Group of the ACT Conservation Council**, and in the **ACT Government Nature Conservation Forum** (previously known as the Biodiversity Conservation Forum). As a Forum member, Jenny also attends online briefings and discussion of concerns and issues regarding the ACT Government's H5N1 Avian Flu preparedness. To date, H5N1 has not been detected in the ACT.

Chris Davey represents Canberra Birds on the **Ginninderry Bush on the Boundary Panel**, which gives us a voice concerning activity in the Ginninderry Conservation Corridor, which is part of the Murrumbidgee River Corridor.

Selected Canberra Birds submissions are listed on our website under the 'Conservation & Research' tab.

Submissions and responses from the year include:

- Comments on the **ACT Draft Nature Conservation Strategy 2026-2036.**
- Support and input to the Conservation Council's **Western Edge Campaign**. This includes:
    - Work by Jenny Bounds to develop an alternative proposal for conservation management and restoration of the Western Edge. See https://conservationcouncil.org.au/blog/2026/10/12/conservation-council-launches-positive-vision-for-future-of-the-western-edge/
    - Work to promote and further protect Stromlo Woodlands by Kim Farley and member Rainer Rehwinkel.
- Submission to the Commonwealth **Gang-gang Cockatoo National Draft Recovery Plan**.
- Response to the **North Curtin residential estate development.**
- Work on the Conservation Council's response to the Government's Nature Conservation Forum on the **Central Molonglo land and offsets sites protection.**
- Input to the **Review of the Murrumbidgee River Corridor (MRC) Plan of Management** stakeholder workshop.
- Comments on the **[Draft] ACT Conservator guidelines for artificial arboreal habitat** (nest boxes).

Bird Surveys

- Since 2005, the **Woodland Bird Monitoring Program,** has undertaken quarterly surveys at 15 Sites/142 subsites in the ACT. Thank you, Jenny Bounds who continues as Survey Coordinator, Helen Mason for data entry, the survey teams, and a special thank you to Julie King and Richard Marris for their further development and management of the Woodland Survey Database during 2026 and into 2027.
- **Memorandum of Understanding with ACT Government, Office of Nature Conservation Government for Avian Flu Waterbird surveys**. Canberra Birds was approached to conduct monthly surveys of waterbirds on Canberra's urban lakes in anticipation of the almost

inevitable arrival of Avian Flu in the ACT. Surveys commenced January 2026 and will establish baseline data. Chris Davey is Survey Coordinator.

- The autumn 2026 **Honeyeater Migration Survey** along the Murrumbidgee River Corridor saw nearly 40 volunteers counting honeyeaters at multiple sites from mid-March to mid-May. Survey Coordinator, Chris Davey presented findings at the October members meeting and is also presenting a paper on the findings at the November meeting of BIGNet (Bird Interest Group Network in New South Wales) of which Canberra Birds is a member.
- The **Canberra Birds Blitz**, last weekend every October. Its Coordinator stepped down in early 2025 and despite much effort, no one was found to take on the role. The Blitz continues but from 2025 has been in a different form. Without a Coordinator to organise access behind locked gates, nor is assignment of sites possible, but observers are encouraged to enter their Blitz records to eBird. Paper forms remain very acceptable! We are grateful to Zac Flegg for his presentation at the August members meeting of high-level summary results for the 2024 and 2025 Blitzes.
- **Garden Bird Survey (GBS).** After strong and heartfelt consideration during the year, the Committee agreed to cease the GBS after June 2027. Paper charts and Excel templates will be available for those wishing to continue the survey in a private capacity.

  Several factors influenced the decision. The external environment of birding and data collection has changed enormously in recent years. The majority of birders now use online tools such as eBird, Birdata or iNaturalist. These have changed the means of recording bird observations and also provide attractive features such as keeping a birder's stats, uploads of photos and audio files, and maps of bird sightings. The GBS, with its once-a-year submission of a paper or Excel chart is hard to "sell" to potential new contributors who already use an online tool.

  A further challenge is that there are now fewer than 30 GBS contributors and the geographic spread of contributors is no longer representative of Canberra's urban areas.

  All of the above requires a Coordinator with the skillset to promote the GBS and demonstrate its value in the face of newer and more user-friendly bird reporting tools. No one has come forward with these skills, following the retirement of the previous Coordinator in late 2025.
- Latham's **Snipe surveys** are part of a national survey program 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, under the coordination of Chris Davey. Chris was very pleased with the turnout of surveyors this year.
- Waterbird surveys by Canberra Birds at **Lakes George and Bathurst.** Lake Bathurst is a Birdlife Australia Key Biodiversity Area (KBA), with Sue Lashko being its KBA Guardian. Sue is assisted in the surveys by Luke Downey, Liam Manderson, Zeb Muller and Elliott Overs.
- Quarterly bird surveys at the **Jerrabomberra Wetlands** run since 2012 by the Woodlands & Wetlands Trust, and organised by Chris Davey with volunteers from Canberra Birds.

- **NSW Landcare K2C (Kosciusko to Coast) surveys** include Canberra Birds volunteers. This survey is coordinated by Nicki Taws.
- Surveys by Michael Lenz and Nick Nicholls continue at the high-quality **Nelanglo Travelling Stock Reserve** near Gundaroo for NSW Local Land Services.

Field Trips

One of Canberra Birds' many strengths is our program of field trips for members, guests and visitors. We offer a monthly Wednesday Walk, a Saturday or Sunday outing most weeks of the year, and several longer trips annually. All our trips are advertised on the website and in *Gang-gang*. At the time of writing, we had offered 39 outings during the year, with over 500 attendees.

Locally, there were trips near the suburbs, to Namadgi National Park and Tidbinbilla and to nearby areas in NSW. Further afield there was what all agreed was a wonderful camp at Macquarie Marshes and Binnaway in September 2026, and another at Weddin Mountains National Park in February. Sadly, the planned Easter camp at Yanga National Park near Griffith was cancelled due to concerns about fuel availability in regional areas at that time. The ever-popular Eden pelagics were held in April and September.

Thank you to Sue Lashko who manages the overall trips program and to Sandra Henderson who runs the Wednesday Walks. Without them both, we would be hard pressed to offer such a rich program of trips and outings.

A further strong contribution comes from Anthony Overs, with the assistance of Elliott Overs and Sue Lashko, who run Beginners outings at the Botanic Gardens twice a year. These are very popular, with additional dates needed to meet demand. In 2026 the two scheduled outings (May and October), swelled to five outings, with 53 attendees in October alone.

Last but very much not least, thanks to our trip leaders. These are ordinary members of Canberra Birds who lead outings to places near and far. Anyone can volunteer to lead a trip, either on their own or with a friend, and a high level of bird expertise is not a requirement.

Canberra Birds website

The website is the window through which our members and the wider world learn about us, our activities, surveys and publications. It is also where they can find authoritative information about the birds of Canberra.

In 2025 an external security issue impacted the website. The problem was rectified but it highlighted the need to update the website's underlying technology – by then 14 years old. The entire website was rebuilt in early 2026 with new technology and a more modern appearance. Further work was done progressively, and in October 2026 we moved the site to a new host provider and engaged a new maintenance organisation. Julian Robinson, our website manager, has worked very hard on finding us these solutions.

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

Gang-gang newsletter

Our monthly newsletter is a popular source of information for members. Thank you Zac Flegg (*Gang-gang* editor) and Gail Neuman (layout editor) for excellent work on this valued publication. I particularly recommend Jack Holland's monthly round-up of the interesting bird sightings of the previous month and his suggestions of what to look for in the next month. It is work of considerable effort and erudition, and reflects Jack's long experience of birds in general and our local birds in particular. Long may his column continue.

Canberra Bird Notes

Canberra Bird Notes (*CBN*) has reported research, bird observations and reflections on the bird life of the Canberra region for 57 years, and is a well-respected and valued source of information. In recent times it has been released twice a year. Michael Lenz and Kevin Windle continued their excellent work as editors in 2026.

The December 2025 edition was a special Commemorative Issue, for which we were fortunate to have historian and Canberra Birds' Vice-President Julie Hotchin as guest editor. The issue showcased the diversity and scope of *CBN's* content over its history by reprinting selected articles, along with introductions and commentary from internal and external experts. See it here https://canberrabirds.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/CBN-50-2-Dec-2025-Final-File-13Feb26.pdf. It has been viewed 135 times from the Canberra Birds Facebook page.

Canberra Birds Facebook and Canberra Birds email Chatline

Canberra Birds Facebook page currently has over 1,100 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 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 constant at around 365. The list, managed by David McDonald, is a forum for discussion of local birds. Posts include news, sightings information and detailed discussion of ornithological matters.

Monthly member meetings

In 2026 we moved from our long-term meeting venue at Canberra Girls Grammar School to the Denman Community Centre. This is more physically accessible than Girls Grammar, with parking close by, level access to the building, good external lighting, There is also a lift so no stairs need be climbed.

During 2026, Jack Holland organised an excellent program of speakers with members, academic researchers and speakers from government agencies providing a varied and very interesting program. Some of these presentations are posted to the Canberra Birds Facebook page, extending their reach to a wider audience.

After 19 years in the role, Jack is now stepping down from the organiser's role. We are very grateful to him for his long service. At the time of writing, no one has come forward to take on

this role for 2027. I welcome expressions of interest from any member who may wish to be involved in helping organise our monthly meeting program.

Community Engagement

In 2026 this included:

- Stalls at multiple community events - including at Wildbark at Mulligans Flat. These were tended variously by Bill Graham, Sandra Henderson, Brian Grinter, Jenny Bounds and Kim Farley. Bill Graham also made several school visits.
- During the last 12 months, COG responded to around 50 bird-specific enquiries received via email. These were from members of the public seeking information on bird sightings or specific bird behaviour, and where to go birding in the ACT from birders visiting the region. Other requests have come from schools and community groups who have asked to use the resources on our website, such as the fabulous brochures and photograph collection. Most of these queries are sent to COG Office, with a few going to the web manager and a few to the President. It is very pleasing that we can provide our valued resources to support knowledge of birds in the community.
- Canberra Birds is proud to promote ethical birding and photography among members and the wider community, and this year produced a brochure titled '*Ethical Birding and Photography: am I observing and photographing birds in a way that doesn't harm them?*'. An excellent article in the October *Gang-Gang* also prompted our further consideration of ethical birding and ways we can promote best practice.
- During the year, the President represented Canberra Birds in multiple ABC radio spots, once on ABC TV, and was a panel member in two webinars on Avian flu. She also appeared in the Conservation Council's On the Edge documentary about Canberra's western edge, and was a panel member at two public screenings of the film. A now annual event is the Birdlife Australia/Canberra Birds October bird walks for MPs, Senators and staff at Parliament House.
- Canberra Birds is proud to promote ethical birding and photography among birders and the wider community, and this year produced a brochure titled 'Ethical Birding and Photography: am I observing and photographing birds in a way that doesn't harm them?'. An excellent article in the October *Gang-Gang* also prompted our further consideration of ethical birding.

Rarities Panel

The Rarities Panel reviews reports of unusual species and publishes its endorsements in *Canberra Bird Notes*. Thanks to Grahame Clark, Richard Allen, Dick Schodde, Jenny Bounds and Nicki Taws who moderate Canberra Birds rarities records, and to Barbara Allan who coordinates the Rarities Panel's work.

Canberra Birds Conservation Fund

This Fund is a tax-deductible gift recipient, and members and friends of Canberra Birds are invited to donate to it. Many thanks to members who generously donated to the Fund during the year.

In 2025-26, the Fund made grants to Lisa Fontana for attendance at the 2025 Australasian Ornithological Conference; Zac Flegg for his White-throated Nightjar acoustic monitoring pilot study; Michael Lenz for Grey Fantail migration research, and Ben Milbourne for a winter acoustic bird monitoring pilot project.

The Fund's Committee of Management is 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 funded projects have been in support of academic research, the Fund can support any project that aligns with Canberra Birds' purposes.

I look forward to another good year for Canberra Birds in 2027.

Kim Farley
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