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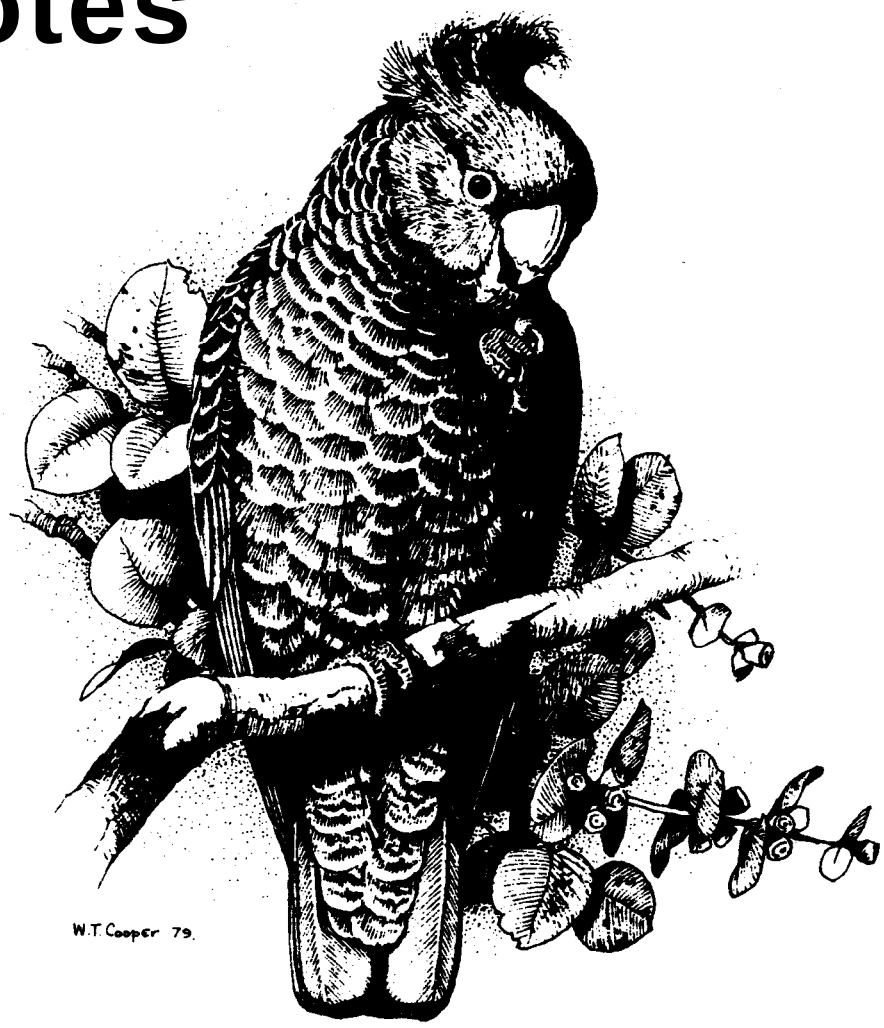

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THE BIRDS OF JINDALEE STATE FOREST, NSW

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Abstract

Birds of the Mugga Ironbark *Eucalyptus sideroxylon* and Grey Box *E. microcarpa* communities of Jindalee State Forest were surveyed in September 2000. The results of the survey were compared with the data so far collected for the reserve from the ongoing Birds Australia Atlas project, and examined in context with the pattern of broad-scale species decline across the NSW sheep-wheat belt described by Reid (1999).

Many of the species described by Reid as declining, or listed as threatened under Federal and NSW legislation, were absent or recorded only in low numbers at Jindalee, while the species described as increasing were recorded in good numbers and were widespread across the reserve. The results were also consistent with Reid's finding that ground- and shrub-dwelling species and flesh-eating species are especially susceptible to decline.

Historical and management records for Jindalee SF show that some of the key threatening processes across the NSW sheep-wheat belt, such as grazing and firewood collection, are still practiced at Jindalee or have only recently been curtailed. Despite the existence of a continuous canopy, most of the reserve has been subject to alteration or disturbance (Leavesley 2000, Bos & Lockwood 1996). A small section of the reserve, which has had a measure of protection from grazing for more than 50 years, had a significantly higher shrub, mammal and reptile diversity than the rest of the reserve (Leavesley 2000), but it was not possible to draw any conclusions about bird diversity from this patch.

A combined bird list compiled from this survey and the Birds Australia Atlas project totals 112 species. Of these, 4 are threatened, 14 are 'declining' and 23 are 'increasing'.

Jindalee State Forest

Jindalee State Forest is a 1076-ha reserve, 12 km north-east of Cootamundra and 9 km west of Wallendbeen. It is situated at the northern edge of the South Western Slopes bio-region, close to the boundary with the Central Western Slopes, and lies in the heart of the NSW sheep-wheat belt. The reserve consists of two irregularly shaped blocks surrounded by agricultural land. The larger western block is approximately 5 km north-south and 1.5 km east-west, while the smaller eastern block is approximately 2.5 km north-south and 1 km east-west. The reserve is managed by NSW State Forests, primarily for conservation and recreation.

Methods

Bird data were gathered over a four-day period in late September 2000 as part of a biodiversity assessment of Jindalee State Forest (Leavesley 2000). The survey comprised twelve separate 2-ha searches (following the Birds Australia Atlas protocol) carried out between 6:45 h and 8:00 h on 21, 22 and 23 September. Sites were selected to give an even distribution over the two blocks of the reserve. In addition, targeted searches were made for the Superb Parrot *Polytelis swainsonii,* Tawny Frogmouth *Podargus strigoides,* Southern Boobook *Ninox novaeseelandiae,* Barking Owl *Ninox connivens* and Australian Owlet-nightjar *Aegotheles cristatus.* Incidental sightings made during the field study were also recorded.

The results of the survey were examined in context with the conclusions of Reid's analysis of the decline of bird populations across the NSW sheep-wheat belt. Reid (1999) identified `threatening processes' which were contributing to the decline of NSW sheep-wheat belt bird populations and these were compared with historical information and vegetation data from this study (Leavesley 2000).

Data from this survey and the ongoing Birds Australia Atlas project were compiled to create a Jindalee State Forest species list for further comparison. The combined list was only used to determine presence/absence of particular species.

Results

Birds recorded

67 bird species were recorded during the survey (Table 1). Due to variable observer expertise, results were biased towards large, easily identifiable species. A record of a Topknot Pigeon *Lopholaimus antarcticus* (confused by the common name sometimes being applied to the Crested Pigeon *Ocyphaps lophotes)* and a doubtful record of a Lewin's Honeyeater *Meliphaga lewinii* have been discounted.

Reid identified 254 bird species (past and present) for the NSW sheep-wheat belt. Of these 38 were listed as threatened under Australian Federal and State legislation, 20 were diagnosed as 'declining', 29 as 'increasing' and two as of 'special concern' due to lack of data. Of the 67 species recorded during this survey, two were threatened, ten were 'decliners' and 16 were 'increasers' (see Table 1). A combined list compiled from this study and the Birds Australia Atlas data totals 112 species and includes four threatened species, 14 'decliners', 23 'increasers' and one species of 'special concern' (the Black-chinned Honeyeater *Melithreptus gularis).* These statistics are summarised in Table 2 and discussed below.

Table **1.** Bird species recorded at Jindalee State Forest in September 2000, with an indication of their status as defined by Reid (1999).

Common Name	**Scientific name**	**Status**
Brown Quail	*Coturnix ypsilophora*	
Australian Wood Duck	*Chenonetta jubata*	
White-faced Heron	*Egretta novaehollandiae*	
White-necked Heron	*Ardea pacifica*	
Australian White Ibis	*Threskiornis molucca*	
Straw-necked Ibis	*Threskiornis spinicollis*	
Royal Spoonbill	*Platalea regia*	
Painted Button-quail	*Turnix varia*	declining
Masked Lapwing	*Vanellus miles*	
Common Bronzewing	*Phaps chalcoptera*	
Crested Pigeon	*Ocyphaps lophotes*	increasing
Galah	*Cacatua roseicapilla*	increasing
Little Lorikeet	*Glossopsitta pusilla*	
Superb Parrot	*Polytelis swainsonii*	threatened
Crimson Rosella	*Platycercus elegans*	
Eastern Rosella	*Platycercus eximius*	increasing
Red-rumped Parrot	*Psephotus haematonotus*	increasing
Southern Boobook	*Ninox novaeseelandiae*	
Tawny Frogmouth	*Podargus strigoides*	
Australian Owlet-Nightjar	*Aegotheles cristatus*	
Laughing Kookaburra	*Dacelo novaeguineae*	
Sacred Kingfisher	*Todiramphus sanctus*	
Rainbow Bee-eater	*Merops ornatus*	
White-throated Treecreeper	*Cormobates leucophaeus*	
Brown Treecreeper	*Climacteris picumnus*	declining
Superb Fairy-wren	*Malurus cyaneus*	
Spotted Pardalote	*Pardalotus punctatus*	
Striated pardalote	*Pardalotus striatus*	
Speckled Warbler	*Chthonicola sagittata*	declining
Weebill	*Smicrornis brevirostris*	
White-throated Gerygone	*Gerygone olivacea*	
Buff-rumped Thornbill	*Acanthiza reguloides*	
Yellow-rumped Thornbill	*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*	increasing
Yellow Thornbill	*Acanthiza nana*	
Red Wattlebird	*Anthochaera carunculata*	
Noisy Friarbird	*Philemon corniculatus*	
Noisy Miner	*Manorina melanocephala*	increasing
Yellow-faced Honeyeater	*Lichenostomus chrysops*	

Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	*Lichenostomus melanops*	
White-plumed Honeyeater	*Lichenostomus penicillatus*	increasing
Brown-headed Honeyeater	*Melithreptus brevirostris*	
White-naped Honeyeater	*Melithreptus lunatus*	
Painted Honeyeater	*Grantiella picta*	threatened
White-fronted Chat	*Epthianura albifrons*	
Jacky Winter	*Microeca fascinans*	declining
Red-capped Robin	*Petroica goodenovii*	declining
Eastern Yellow Robin	*Eopsaltria australis*	declining
Grey-crowned Babbler	*Pomatostomus temporalis*	declining
White-browed Babbler	*Pomatostomus superciliosus*	declining
Golden Whistler	*Pachycephala pectoralis*	
Rufous Whistler	*Pachycephala rufiventris*	declining
Grey Strike-thrush	*Colluricincla harmonica*	
Magpie-lark	*Grallina cyanoleuca*	increasing
Grey Fantail	*Rhipidura fuliginosa*	
Willie Wagtail	*Rhipidura leucophrys*	increasing
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	*Coracina novaehollandiae*	increasing
White-winged Triller	*Lalage sueurii*	
Olive-backed Oriole	*Oriolus sagittatus*	
Dusky Woodswallow	*Artamus cyanopterus*	declining
Australian Magpie	*Gymnorhina tibicen*	increasing
Pied Currawong	*Strepera graculina*	increasing
Grey Currawong	*Strepera versicolor*	
Australian Raven	*Corvus coronoides*	increasing
White-winged Chough	*Corcorax melanorhamphos*	increasing
Mistletoebird	*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*	
Welcome Swallow	*Hirundo neoxena*	increasing
Silvereye	*Zosterops lateralis*	
Common Starling	*Sturnus vulgaris*	increasing

Table 2. Summary of numbers and status of birds from this study (ANU), a combined list for Jindalee SF from this study, Birds Australia Atlas data (ANU/BA) and Reid (1999).

	Jindalee State Forest		**NSW sheepwheat belt**
	ANU	ANU/BA	Reid
Total species	67	112	254
Threatened	2	4	38
Declining	10	14	20
Increasing	16	23	29
Special concern	0	1	2

Threatened species

The two threatened species recorded in this study were the Superb Parrot and the Painted Honeyeater. The Superb Parrot was recorded in three of the 2-ha searches and a flock of approximately 30 individuals was seen on several occasions. The Painted Honeyeater record was an incidental sighting of a single individual.

The threatened Swift Parrot *Lathamus discolor* and Regent Honeyeater *Xanthomyza phrygia* are recorded in the Birds Australia Atlas data in low numbers.

Declining species

This study recorded 10 of Reid's 20 'declining' species. These were the Painted Button-quail, Brown Treecreeper, Speckled Warbler, Jacky Winter, Red-capped Robin, Eastern Yellow Robin, Grey-crowned Babbler, White-browed Babbler, Rufous Whistler, and Dusky Woodswallow. None of these species was recorded more than twice except the Rufous Whistler which was recorded four times.

The Varied Sittella *Daphoenositta chrysoptera*, Crested shrike-tit *Falcunculus frontatus*, White-browed Woodswallow *Artamus superciliosus*, and Diamond Firetail *Stagonopleura guttata* are additional 'decliners' found in the Birds Australia Atlas data for Jindalee SF.

Life history and ecological traits of decliners

Reid found that the 20 declining species of the NSW sheep-wheat belt were *'characterised strongly by being ground and/or low shrub feeders and dwellers'*. Another characteristic of 'declining' species was dietary specialisation and this was especially true for flesh eating species.

The findings of this study are consistent with Reid's observations. With the exception of the Grey Fantail, many notable shrub-dependent species such as the Superb Fairy-wren were absent or rarely recorded at Jindalee. No Falconiforms were recorded and only one Strigiform, the Southern Boobook, was recorded during the survey. Caution must be exercised when drawing conclusions about the flesh-eating species, however, because of the low densities at which they typically exist and the short duration of the survey.

Increasing species

Sixteen of Reid's 29 'increasing' species were recorded in this study. These were the Crested Pigeon, Galah, Eastern Rosella, Red-rumped Parrot, Yellow- rumped Thornbill, Noisy Miner, White- plumed Honeyeater, Magpie-lark, Willie Wagtail, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Australian Magpie, Pied Currawong, Australian Raven, White-winged Chough, Welcome Swallow, and Common Starling. Eleven of these species were recorded three or more times, with four species recorded twice or less.

The Peaceful Dove *Geopelia striata*, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua galerita*, Pied Butcherbird *Cracticus*

nigrogularis, House Sparrow *Passer domesticus,* Fairy Martin *Hirundo ariel,* Brown Songlark *Cincloramphus cruralis,* and Common Blackbird *Turdus merula* are additional 'increasers' found in the Birds Australia Atlas data for Jindalee SF.

Threatening processes

Clearance of native vegetation, particularly from the most fertile soils, was described by Reid (1999) as the ultimate driver of decline amongst bird populations of the NSW sheep-wheat belt. Also of significance was the decline in the quality of the patches of remnant vegetation due to grazing, removal of timber for fuel and general 'tidying up' by farmers. Reid also notes recurring references in the literature to the inability of many species to bounce back after drought.

Although the canopy at Jindalee is intact, the reserve has, during the past five years, been subject to all of the other major 'threatening processes' mentioned above (Leavesley 2000, Bos & Lockwood 1996). Cattle and sheep were grazed on improved pasture under license, firewood removal was legal until the beginning of 2000, pasture improvement has taken place (Leavesley 2000), and in 1996 the area suffered a severe drought (Bos & Lockwood 1996).

As a consequence, a 'naturalness' rating by Bos & Lockwood (1996) found that 33% of Jindalee was altered and the remaining 67% was disturbed. In this study we found that at least 30% of the grass and shrub species were introduced and that 94% of survey plots contained introduced species. Furthermore, 14% of non-tree plant species were adapted to disturbed sites. A summary of vegetation status at Jindalee SF is provided in Table 3

Leavesley (2000) reported that one plot, in a small area that had been protected from grazing for more than 50 years, contained seven shrub species, compared to a mean number of 1.8. Although it was not possible to draw conclusions about the bird diversity associated with this plot, the area was found to have a relatively high mammal and reptile diversity.

Table 3. Selected characteristics of the vegetation of Jindalee State Forest.

	no. species	**non-native**	**poor soils'**	**disturbed sites2**	**moist sites3**
trees	6	0%	83%	0%	0%
shrubs	13	• 0%	92%	15%	0%
grasses/herbs	37	30%-36%4	5%	16%	5%
total	56	20%-23%4	36%	14%	4%

1. Plants adapted to poor soils, following Harden (1990-1993).
2. Plants adapted to disturbed sites, following Harden (1990-1993)
3. Plants adapted to moist, damp or swampy conditions, following Harden (1990-1993)
4. The range indicated for this figure is due to identification of plants to a genus which has examples of native and non-native species in Australia.

Discussion

The ability to draw detailed conclusions from this study is unfortunately limited by the small sample size and the short duration of the field work. As a result only general conclusions can be drawn.

The vast majority of threatened and declining species identified by Reid (1999) were either absent or recorded in only low numbers at Jindalee SF. This is consistent with the pattern of decline noted by Reid across the NSW Sheep-wheat belt. There were, however, two exceptions. The most significant of these was the threatened Superb Parrot which was recorded in reasonable numbers. It should also be noted that the 'declining' Rufous Whistler was recorded more often than the other declining species, but no firm conclusions about its status at Jindalee can be made.

The pattern of species increase noted by Reid was not so faithfully reflected in this study. Although three of the six most frequently recorded and widespread species were 'increasers', 13 of the total of 29 'increasers' listed by Reid were not recorded at all. An explanation for this may simply be that Jindalee lacks many of the habitats found over the wider sheep-wheat belt, so this study is not necessarily inconsistent with Reid.

Two of the most frequently recorded and widespread 'increasers' at Jindalee, the Australian Magpie and the Australian Raven have been associated with reduced bird diversity (Birds Australia 2000), and were therefore likely to be further contributing to the decline of woodland species in the reserve. Nest predatory species such as these were also found to be more common at sites that were grazed continuously (Birds Australia 2000). While it is not known if Jindalee is continuously grazed, the impacts of grazing were found right across the reserve and so were two nest predatory species.

Although care must be taken when interpreting absence data from this survey, relatively common ground-dwelling and shrub-dependent species such as the Superb Fairy-wren were not well represented at Jindalee. This may be attributed to the lack of ground cover caused by grazing and the removal of fallen timber for firewood.

Overall the results raise some questions about the contribution that even relatively large patches of woodland and forest within the NSW sheep-wheat belt can make to the maintenance of bird diversity if they are subject to grazing and firewood collection. The study gives good cause for a review of the management regime for Jindalee, given that one of the top management priorities is conservation.

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OCCURRENCE OF THE BRUSH BRONZEWING IN THE ACT

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This paper looks at the reported occurrence of the Brush Bronzewing *Phaps elegans* in the ACT region. It was inspired by a record of this species on 1 July 1996, on Gordon Ridge on the edge of the Tuggeranong Valley (COG Grid J18), in COG's 1996-97 Annual Bird Report (COG 1999). The Brush Bronzewing is known to be a dense understorey specialist, in our region associated with the ranges of Namadgi National Park. An open, dry habitat such as Gordon Ridge near the urban fringe of Canberra seems an unlikely place for this species. As the Brush Bronzewing is infrequently reported, I have written this article to improve awareness and understanding about its local occurrence.

Habitat preference

The literature indicates that this species is sedentary, with a restricted habitat requirement, preferring dense, thick areas of vegetation. It is reliant on legumes, for example, acacia or wattle seeds are one of its main foods (Crome & Shields 1992). By contrast, the Common Bronzewing *Phaps chalcoptera* has different habitat preferences and, while these cover a wide range of habitats, it tends to live in more open areas (Crome & Shields 1992).

HANZAB Volume 3 (Higgins & Davies 1996) indicates the Brush Bronzewing has been recorded in a number of different habitat types, including mallee, forest and heath, and occasionally in more open habitats such as 'stunted subalpine woodlands, heath sedgelands or tussock grasslands'. The species is described as preferring habitats with dense shrub layers, often in thickets of acacia, melaleuca, banksia, casuarina and other shrubs and trees with dense foliage. It nests in densely vegetated habitats, often on ground beneath shrubs and forages on the ground, below dense shrub layer. It is often seen feeding on gravel or grassy tracks in scrub or forest.

This corresponds with my own observations of the Brush Bronzewing. I have encountered the species in various places, all associated with thick vegetation, for example, Jervis Bay National Park in tall heath, Gabo Island off Mallacoota (Victoria) near cover of banksia and wattle scrub, Eyre Bird Observatory (WA) in mallee/coastal wattle scrub, and the Errinundra Plateau (NE Victoria), 1000 metres up in wet eucalypt forest with a dense understorey including wattles. In some of these places, I've seen Brush Bronzewings on forest tracks or in the open adjacent to cover, but they have all been associated with dense vegetation nearby.

In the ACT, I have observed this species only once, in 1988, during the COG ACT Atlas project, when Brendan Lepschi and I were atlassing along a firetrail in the Coronet Peak area, not far from Cotter Flats. While the record was not endorsed by the then Rarities Panel, it was on the basis of the inadequate description, rather than the inherent

improbability of the sighting. Dr Dick Schodde, a current member of the Rarities Panel, says, 'there is a thin resident population of Brush Bronzewings in the upper Cotter Valley down to about Bendora...we see them most times we go up, though our last confirmed record is 1989...in the ACT Brush Bronzewings are particularly choosy and local' (Dick Schodde pers. comm.)

This comment is corroborated by the ACT Bird Atlas: 'a small population of Brush Bronzewings inhabits gullies in the middle reaches of the Cotter River between Corin Dam and Bulls Head. These gullies are amongst the wettest in the ACT and are lined with a dense understorey of tea-tree, treeferns and Blackwoods.' (Taylor 1992).

In 1974 a special edition of *Canberra Bird Notes* was published, with the aim of providing more information on the status of birds in the Canberra district. It was largely based on records in observation books, which were used at COG meetings some years ago for members to record their bird sightings. Unfortunately those observation books can no longer be located in COG's records and could not be perused for the purpose of this article. The 1974 publication based on them (COG 1974a) describes the Brush Bronzewing as follows:

> Breeding resident. Restricted to localised areas of denser habitat (wet eucalypt forest) such as occur on the Brindabella Range to the west and in the Tallaganda State Forest east of Hoskinstown. True status is uncertain, but birds have been observed at all times of the year. Although most records are for suminer, birds have been netted and banded in early winter at New Chums Road. Possibly there is a movement of birds into tableland areas from coastal sources. First breeding record 6/1/73. Nest with 2 eggs at New Chums Road.

The mention of a possible movement of birds into tableland areas from coastal sources is interesting, but **I** have not been able to find more information about this.

In the 1981-82 Annual Bird Report (Taylor 1984), the Brush Bronzewing is described as 'moderately common breeding resident, in wetter eucalypt forests, no records in urban area'.

In *Birds of the ACT: Two centuries of change* (Wilson 1999) the Brush Bronzewing's status is listed as 'rare resident in restricted habitat':

> In the ACT the Brush Bronzewing inhabits the wet gullies of the Brindabella Ranges and similar terrain. It was first identified from Warks Road in February 1964 (Schodde 1965). It is present in small numbers, but is not reported with any regularity. Sightings have covered most months of the year.

Brush Bronzewing vis-à-vis Common Bronzewing

The two species of bronzewing found locally can present some problems in identification for the inexperienced, especially as these birds have a habit of quickly flying off when disturbed, appearing as brownish shapes heading away with rapidly beating wings. The Brush Bronzewing is smaller than the Common Bronzewing, and the deep chestnut colouring on the back of the

neck, shoulders and upper back of the Brush Bronzewing also distinguishes it from its dull, grey cousin.

At a COG meeting 'bird of the month' talk in April 2000, Jack Holland provided very good pointers to the identification of the Brush Bronzewing vis-à-vis the Common Bronzewing. Apart from the latter being far more common and widespread in the Canberra region, Jack indicated that a pronounced, double row of irridescent wing bands is diagnostic in the Brush Bronzewing, and contrasts with more than two, less distinct, irridescent bands over the whole of the wing in the Common Bronzewing (COG 2000a). I have tested this out in the field; it is a very clear and simple distinguishing feature between the two species, in addition to other plumage differences.

Local records

According to COG's Annual Bird Reports, and other records reported in the volumes of *Canberra Bird Notes* (published since 1968) and the COG database (records from 1987), the Brush Bronzewing has been reported in the following years and locations in the ACT region:

- 1965 to 1969 — ten records of one to three birds, most in New Chums Road or Bushrangers Creek areas of the Brindabella Ranges or shown as `Ranges'; one Lees Creek (in the lower catchment of the Brindabella Ranges);
- 1971 October — four birds Bushrangers Creek;
- 1973 January — nest with two eggs New Chums Road (the first ACT breeding record);
- 1987 to 1989 — 11 records of single birds, nine in the Cotter catchment - several of these at Bendora Dam, one Corin Dam Rd near ski area, one west of Gudgenby, Middle Creek eastern flank of Mt Kelly;
- 1996 July — one bird Gordon Ridge in Tuggeranong Valley;
- 1999 January — one bird Moonlight Hollow Road in Brindabella Ranges (COG 1969; Wilson 1970; COG 1974a; COG 1974b; Dow 1988; Veerman et al. 1988; COG 1990; COG 1999; COG 2000b; COG database unpublished).

Some of the records in the 1960s and 1970s would be associated with Steve Wilson's banding studies in the Brindabella Ranges on New Chums Road and environs. Records in the years 1987 to 1989 are associated with the ACT Bird Atlas project. The ACT Bird Atlas confirms that Brush Bronzewing is found in the Upper Naas Valley as well as in the Cotter catchment (Taylor 1992). In total, there are very few records over the last 35 years, and no records at all in the eight-year period 1974 to 1986 and in the five years between 1990 and 1995 (possibly due to lower survey effort in those years, rather than the absence of the species).

Further information about the 1999 record was provided by Joan Lipscombe. The bird was seen 'along the Moonlight Hollow Road .... where the track rises away from the creek. from dense wet

(Joan Lipscombe pers. comm.). Joan's comment about 'lots of wattles' is borne out in the ACT Bird Atlas which indicates a possible link between Blackwood *Acacia melanoxylon* and the species' occurrence in our region (Taylor 1992). Blackwood is found extensively in the wet forests of the Brindabella Ranges.

All of these records, with the exception of the 1996 Gordon Ridge record, are in the Cotter catchment of the Brindabella Ranges or Upper Naas Valley, in areas with habitats where one would expect Brush Bronzewings to be.

A Regional Rarities Records Review 1964 to 1974, published in *Canberra Bird Notes* (Dow 1988), included a list of Brush Bronzewing records, most of which were the records from 1965 to 1973 referred to above. The Review also lists three records of Brush Bronzewing on Black Mountain: one bird in June 1966 notated as 'probable'; one nest in November 1967; and three pairs in January 1968. The source material for the records cited in this Review included unpublished material in 'manuscript' or `typescript' and included COG observation books; the article also acknowledges that due to the nature of the source material, some inaccuracies or incompleteness may result.

While the source of the record listed as `probable' is unknown and cannot be checked further, the other two Black Mountain records listed in the Dow article are documented as Common Bronzewing in the 1967-68 Annual Bird Report published in *Canberra Bird Notes* (COG 1969). The Common Bronzewing was a common breeding species on Black Mountain and in the Botanic Gardens around those years (COG 1974a). I think it is most likely, therefore, that all three Black Mountain records cited in the Dow article are Common Bronzewing, not Brush Bronzewing.

A list of common birds observed nesting in the Canberra Botanic Gardens in the 1971-72 season included 'Brush Bronze wing . 5 nests ... 6 fledglings' (Green 1973). I suspect this may also be a mistake for Common Bronzewing: these records are not documented elsewhere, the other birds in the list are quite common to the area, and such a large number of nests and fledglings seems very odd, there being only one confirmed Brush Bronzewing breeding event ever recorded in the ACT.

Conclusion

At the time the 1996-97 Annual Bird Report was prepared, it was not possible to obtain more information about the 1996 Gordon Ridge record from the observer. Of course, birds can turn up in unexpected places. One would have to say, however, on the basis of the available COG records and the known information about the Brush Bronzewing's occurrence and specialised habitat preference in the ACT region, that the Gordon Ridge record is suspicious.

There might have been some confusion in the past over the common names for bronzewings. The Common Bronzewing has been known as the Forest Bronzewing, even though the species is found in many different habitats and not just forests. It would be easy for the

rather similar terms 'Brush' and 'Forest' to be confused.

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A BREEDING RECORD FOR THE WHITE-BELLIED SEA-EAGLE IN THE ACT

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Within Australia, the White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* is found coastally, around the mainland and Tasmania, and on many offshore islands, and inland, along major waterways and on large man-made waterbodies (Marchant & Higgins 1993). In the ACT region it is patchily distributed in appropriate habitat, apparently mostly as a visitor, along the Murrumbidgee and Molonglo Rivers, including Lake Burley Griffin and Jerrabomberra Wetlands, sometimes staying for several months (Taylor 1987; Taylor & COG 1992; Olsen 1999). Each year there are up to about 14 local sightings reported in the Annual Bird Report of the Canberra Ornithologists Group.

In the local region, pairs breed regularly at Lake George and Burrinjuck Dam (e.g., Anon. 1973, 1975; **P.** Olsen pers. obs.) and, until recent dry years, on Lake Bathurst (Mark Clayton pers. comm.). However, there are no published records of breeding in the ACT.

In 1995, one of us (Alf McWilliam) followed an apparently successful nesting attempt by White-bellied Sea-Eagles at Shepherds Lookout on the Molonglo River. The pair built a large stick nest in a large eucalypt in dense tea-tree on the west bank, upstream from the old gravel pit. The birds were first seen soaring in the area on 15 June and then monthly until 23 August when they appeared to be courting: wheeling; soaring; making mock attacks at each other; and calling continually. On 4 September one of the sea-eagles swooped at a passing Wedge-tailed Eagle *Aquila audax,* which rolled onto its back and they briefly clasped talons. On 19 September, the sea-eagle was attacked by a Little Eagle *Hieraaetus morphnoides,* again with talon clasping. In October the sea-eagles were heard calling and were found with a large fish 200 m downstream from the Lookout. Their nest was discovered on 18 October and on 3 November a large dark-feathered nestling was seen moving about in it. By 9 November the chick appeared to have fledged and the eagles were not seen subsequently, nor in 1996.

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A SUCCESSFUL BREEDING ATTEMPT OF THE SATIN BOWERBIRD IN A CANBERRA SUBURB

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The spread of the Satin Bowerbird *Ptilonorhynchus violaceus* into the ACT suburbs since the early 1980s has been well documented recently. Despite a large increase in numbers and the presence of many bowers in suburban gardens, especially in Weston Creek, there have been few suburban breeding records. In fact since unsuccessful attempts in successive years in the Botanic Gardens in the late 1970s, the only documented records appear to be that by James Nicholls of a bird on the nest in LaTrobe Park in Deakin on 24 November 1996 (Holland and Veerman 2000), plus a dependent young seen being fed once in Chapman on 19 February 1998 (Holland 1999).

In mid-November 2000, one of us (RG) noticed the presence of an unfamiliar plumpish largely green and brown bird in his garden in Red Hill. It soon became apparent that it was building a nest about 17 metres high in an upright fork of one of the main trunks of a mature golden cypress *Cupressus macrocarpa*. Nest building was completed by 28 November. The nest was about the size of a magpie's but appeared to be made of relatively large sticks and was well set into the deep fork. It was therefore particularly difficult to see the bird on the nest.

The bird was positively identified as a female Satin Bowerbird by both of us on 9 December, when it conveniently landed on a relatively open perch about a metre from the nest before returning and settling on the nest.

The bird continued to sit on the nest but came down to the bird bath several times, preened on an open perch and was also seen feeding on wild strawberries in the garden. Just before Christmas it became clear that feeding of young had begun. This continued until 15 January by which time one of the two chicks was already venturing out of the nest. By the evening of 17 January the nest was empty and there were no signs of the birds in the immediate vicinity. Shortly thereafter the female was observed gathering food in Mugga Way and what was thought to be a fledgling was seen in a neighbour's garden several days later. It is assumed from these sightings that the chicks fledged safely.

The literature (Vellenga 1980) indicates that Satin Bowerbird fledglings leave the nest at an early stage and keep very quiet; observations in Chapman during January/February 2001 suggest that they are much quieter than those of other species such as Pied Currawong *Strepera graculina* and Noisy Friarbird *Philemon corniculatus*.

These observations constitute a rare breeding record for this species, with approximate dates and times for nest

building, hatching and fledging. They roughly correspond with those recorded by Vellenga (1980), who estimated a nesting cycle of about six weeks (7 days for nest building, 19 for incubation and 19 for nesting).

It was surprising that this breeding record should occur in Red Hill, a suburb for which there has been only one previous recorded sighting of a single bird, in June 1997 (Holland and Veerman 2000). However, we subsequently learnt that there had been an active bower for one to two years previously in nearby Baudin Street, Forrest. This was reported to have been attended by both a blue male and a green bird but was destroyed when the wattle under which it was situated was removed about a year ago. Interestingly there has also been only the one previous record from Forrest, of three birds in July 1996 (Holland and Veerman 2000). While not as common in the Red Hill/Forrest area as in Weston Creek, the Satin Bowerbird is clearly underreported from this local area.

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AN ACTIVE BOWER OF A SATIN BOWERBIRD IN A CHAPMAN GARDEN OVER THE SUMMER 2000-01

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The spread of the Satin Bowerbird *Ptilonorhynchus violaceus* into Canberra's suburbs since the early 1980s has recently been well documented (Holland 1999, Holland and Veerman 2000). While observations were initially confined to autumn/winter/spring, it is clear some birds do stay in the suburbs over summer, though numbers are typically about 10% of their winter peak. One of the species' preoccupations is the building of bowers, and there are now many records of this occurring, particularly in Weston Creek. Again the available evidence supports that this is mainly an autumn/winter/spring activity, though at least one bower in Chapman was regularly visited by green birds during the summers of 1996-97 and 1997-98 (Holland 1999). There is a question as to whether this bower building actually represents breeding activity, or whether these are only `practice' bowers. Indeed I believe the Garden Bird Survey (GBS) does not accept the presence of a bower in a GBS site as a breeding record. The following account of both an active bower in Chapman over the 2000-01 summer and a likely associated breeding event is therefore of interest.

Holland (2000) reported, *inter alia*, on the activities associated with an active bower in his neighbour's garden until mid-October 2000. The bower was built early in February 2000 and presided over by a full male bird. At that time mainly the male was present though he managed to attract the occasional green bird. Similar activity was observed until the end of October, with a maximum of two green birds being seen together in the garden. The male was mainly alone and had started calling loudly very early (before 6:00 h) from the tree above and other vantage spots near the bower.

From mid-November to mid-December, with the exception of occasional sightings of single green birds on 18 and 19 November as well as one at the bower late on 3 December, only the male was present. For the last two weeks of this period, the male called less and was less active around the bower. Then on the evening of 17 December a male and two green birds were quite active round the bower area. No further observations were made until our return from holidays on 9 January 2001.

A green bird was calling at the bower at 6:45 h on the following morning, followed shortly after by the full male. This heralded a period of quite sustained activity around the bower area. The male continued to call above and display at the bower but was often seen in loose association with a group of up to three, sometimes four, green birds over the rest of January and February. The latter appeared to consist of a family party comprising a mother plus fledglings, but they were very difficult to tell apart from their plumage characteristics. A number of them seemed browner around the head/face area (see Vellenga 1980a) and

one seemed to have a white lining around the wings, but I was never able to distinguish between mature and juvenile birds readily and as all flew well there may have been older green birds present. Feeding of the young was observed on at least six occasions between 20 January and 18 February. This was done very surreptitiously though on several other occasions the young birds were also heard to beg quietly. The literature (Vellenga 1980b) supports that Satin Bowerbird fledglings keep very quiet; and my observations certainly indicate them to be much quieter than the fledglings of other species.

This represents another rare record of breeding in a Canberra suburb. It is tempting to speculate that it was the result of a successful mating at the bower and later return after nesting was complete. The literature indicates that the female nests at least 200 m from the bower (Vellenga 1980b). However, in spite of the above and all the other observations of bower building and the resulting display activity, I have yet to observe mating. There are few, if any, local records of this occurring. Sexton (1997) doesn't mention it occurring at the bowers in his garden. However, Barrie Pennefather (pers. comm.) has seen it happen on a number of occasions in association with the bower which has been in his garden since the mid-1980s, adding that it was quick and often not actually at the bower itself. Vellenga (1980b) in her much more extensive studies notes that mating was difficult to observe and records witnessing it only twice, though her earlier paper (Vellenga 1970) notes more instances by the same male, always close to the bower.

It also represents a rare record of an active bower over the summer period. During this time the bower was always very close to complete, coming nearly to a close at the top and adorned with at least 20 blue objects. This contrasts with the literature as Vellenga (1970) records that in her experience bowers were either dismantled or fell in disrepair over the summer period, even if an adult remained.

Another interesting observation during this time was of a moulting young male who was more than 80% blue but with one brown primary wing and tail feather on the left hand side clearly visible. He visited the bower on 24 February and was displayed to for at least 20 minutes by the male owner, almost a year to the day since a similar occurrence (Holland 2000).

Surprisingly, around mid-March activity round the bower was lower than at any time over the previous year. On a couple of days the male was only seen briefly: for example early on 12 March (a rather wet day) and late on 17 March, though green birds were present earlier that day. However, any thoughts that the male was about to abandon and build or re-activate a bower elsewhere were dispelled on 24 March when at 8:15 h the male was first observed displaying at the bower and then intermittently heard calling harshly from his usual vantage points. This seemed to be rewarded as at noon three green birds were attracted to the bower, around which fresh yellow leaves had been placed for the first time in several months.

Subsequent activity confirmed it had been only a brief respite before the

expected autumn/winter activity resumed. The male was at the bower from as early as 6:25 h during the next week after daylight saving had finished, and also visited the nearby bower site at 54 Darwinia Terrace. According to the owner, the bower had been destroyed and all the blue objects removed by about the end of October though the male was still seen visiting the area up to the end of November. Interestingly the bower at 14 Burgan Place (Holland 2000) remained untouched from about mid-September till the end of March, except for the encroaching creeper and grass.

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ODD OBS

Breeding of the Australian White Ibis and the Eurasian Coot at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve

The Australian White Ibis *Threskiornis molucca* is a common visitor to the ACT (Wilson 1999). The breeding of the species in the COG area of interest was dealt with by Davey (1995) and since then breeding seems to be increasingly common in that area. There was, for example, a large colony in the reeds at Rose Lagoon near the Federal Highway in the spring of 2000 **(B.** Wilson, pers. comm.). The only ACT breeding record reported previously was that of Delia Johnson in the Annual Bird Report 199798 (COG 1999) and this related to one nest seen on 5 February 1998 at Jerrabomberra Wetlands Nature Park.

On 19 November 2000 my wife and I visited Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve with a group of friends. In the wetlands area, we walked to the bird hide facing pool no. 2, as designated on the wildlife enclosures map. There were many Australian White Ibis flying to and from the wetlands area, presumably to feed. On a bank opposite the hide, reeds and grasses were trampled and about 30 occupied nests were noted with a single nest in a tree a little further away. Because of the distance involved, which was about 100 metres, the nests could not be inspected but it appeared that the birds were sitting on eggs. This is therefore the second breeding record of this species in the ACT.

At pool no. 3 there was a small area of flattened grass at the water's edge on the northern side and inspection with binoculars showed a nest of the Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* under the arched stems of reeds about 75 cm from the water. One bird was on the nest and another swimming close by. This too seemed to be an active nest with eggs. It is regarded as a 'common species on suitable water, breeding here very occasionally'.

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A large group of Australian Ravens

In the Canberra region, the Australian Raven *Corvus coronoides* is the common corvid of woodland and urban areas, usually occurring in pairs or small groups. The Little Raven *Corvus mellori* occurs less commonly, mainly in the higher ranges, and usually in larger flocks of anything up to several hundred birds. While analysing Garden Bird Survey data, Philip Veerman noticed 21 records of large numbers of Australian Ravens (15 to 78 individuals). Suspicious of the large group sizes, he postulated by email to a number of COG members (8 March 1999) that the birds

might in fact have been Little Ravens mistakenly identified or recorded as Australian Ravens. This may well be the case, particularly for the larger groups, but it is nevertheless possible to see large groups of Australian Ravens occasionally.

My observation of a group of 29 Australian Ravens on Tuesday 23 March 1999, just two weeks after Philip's email, is a case in point. The ravens were foraging on Willows Oval at the Australian National University, adjacent to Barry Drive and Sullivans Creek. The oval was badly chopped up, presumably the result of either sporting activity or ibis (I had watched flocks of up to 73 Straw-necked Ibis *Threskiornis spinicollis* foraging on various ANU ovals over the previous two weeks and they were causing a great deal of damage to the turf). The ravens were apparently exploiting this damage and were probing into the turf and further dislodging the sods.

That they were Australian Ravens rather than Little Ravens was borne out by their calls, including the distinctive trailing-off wail, and their obvious throat hackles.

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Nest robbers

Welcome Swallows *Hirundo neoxena* have nested for the past two years above the back door of my house near Colinton (COG grid L27). The nest is not observed continuously but as it happens to be within two metres of my bed, I can hear the birds going about their daily business. In the spring of 1999, there was a great commotion but I did not go out and investigate immediately. Only later that day I found dead hatchlings lying near the back door. I then remembered the earlier commotion and, as a Pied Currawong *Strepera graculina* had been in the area, it became the chief suspect, as currawongs are known nest robbers (Readers Digest 1976). The literature shows that currawongs are omnivorous, eating young birds, carrion, insects and berries (Frith 1969).

More recently there was another commotion at about 9:00 h on 5 October 2000. This time I looked out and saw a Grey Shrike-thrush *Colluricincla harmonica* near the back step. It seemed to ponder the situation for a while as if not knowing what to do, but then it made up its mind and flew straight to the nest to help itself to a second course. A later inspection of the nest revealed that indeed three or four eggs were missing, judging by the imprint left in the feathers in the nest. The literature indicates that the Grey Shrike-thrush occasionally eats nestlings and eggs, though its primary diet is insects, small lizards and mammals (Readers Digest 1976, Frith 1969).

But life goes on for some, and although the adult birds may be absent for a day or two, they soon return and raise another clutch. Despite the previous year's depredation, five swallows returned to the nesting site in spring 2000 instead of the previous two. It seems that even though nesting above the back door of a house has its dangers, swallows may have a better chance of survival and reproduction near human habitation than

away from it. And they seem to be aware of that. Despite having their nest robbed on at least two occasions, they did not change the location of their nest.

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Satin Bowerbird invasion

Since 1972 we have been living on the eastern border of the Canberra suburb of Chapman, in the Weston Creek area. Our garden is now a mature one, planted largely with exotic trees and shrubs. In all the years we have spent here, **I** had never observed a Satin Bowerbird *Ptilonorhyncus violaceus* in or around our garden until the morning of 28 May 2000 when our garden was 'invaded' by them, much to my surprise.

The weather was bitterly cold, the sky overcast and grey and a heavy mantle of snow covered the Brindabella Ranges to the west. When **I** went out to pick up the newspaper at about 7:30 h, I noticed a large number of birds feeding on the berries of a large privet overhanging our driveway and assumed they were Red Wattlebirds *Anthochaera carunculata*. At about 11:00 h, however, four or five birds which I recognised as Satin Bowerbirds flew into our trees from a westerly direction, in advance of a snowstorm. As the minutes ticked by, Satin Bowerbirds continued to arrive in ever-increasing numbers, 'flopping' onto the branches of the Japanese maple and silver birch trees, into a large pittosporum, into and under camellia bushes, onto the lawn. Some even drank from the bird bath. They were everywhere! The next door privet became loaded with them, making me suspect that the birds I had seen earlier in it were also Satin Bowerbirds. Following the initial 'invasion' the Satin Bowerbirds increased in numbers, arriving in two or three waves. As more arrived, the earlier arrivals moved off in an easterly direction.

The Satin Bowerbirds were mainly green birds, although there was at least one and possibly more blue adult males. A majority of the green birds had dark bills, with only a few having pale or whitish bills.

My interest was diverted from the birds for about 15 minutes, but then **I** noticed a few snowflakes falling, just a light flurry at first, followed by a very heavy fall. By this time, nearly all the bowerbirds had departed. I estimate that over 60 bowerbirds visited the garden during the time I observed them.

I once witnessed a similar behaviour in Flame Robins *Petroica phoenicea* at Thredbo Diggings camping area during a summer snowfall at Thredbo Village, which is some 10 km west and at a higher altitude. The Flame Robins congregated in huge numbers at the Diggings, where there was no snow falling. They flew in and out of low-growing trees and hopped about on the ground. Most were brown birds, although some showed vestiges of colour

and a few were adult males in full colour.

The interesting end to this story is that the 'invasion' of Satin Bowerbirds on 28 May 2000 has not been repeated. Were they migrating? Or were they a congregation of birds which moved out of the mountain ranges ahead of the heavy snowstorms?

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Woodswallow migration

The spring migratory passage over the Canberra region of the White-browed Woodswallow *Artamus superciliosus* is recorded infrequently. According to COG's Annual Bird Reports (ABR), there were no records of migration in 1992 or 1993. In 1994 in the last week of October, a flock of some 100 birds was recorded at CSIRO Gungahlin (COG 1998) but again in 1995 and 1996 the migration was not reported. Flocks of high-flying woodswallows were reported in October 1997 on COG's telephone hotline, and the ABR recorded flocks of some 200 of these birds over the Australian National Botanic Gardens in the same month (COG 1999). In 1998, 40 White-browed Woodswallows were recorded over the suburb of Cook (COG 2000). But in 21 years of residence in Canberra, I had never witnessed the woodswallow migration.

That changed on Saturday, 7 October 2000. While attacking rampant weed growth in my suburban garden in Page, some nine kilometres west of the GPO, on a pleasant mild spring afternoon, I happened to glance upwards and to my considerable surprise saw that the sky was flecked with large numbers of dark shapes with diagnostic triangular wings. Binoculars helped me confirm that the birds were woodswallows: mainly White-browed, with a few paler-bodied Masked Woodswallows *Artamus personatus* intermingled amongst them. The birds were twisting and turning, with some of the White-broweds swooping low enough to display their rich dark red-brown bellies clearly, even to the naked eye.

The birds appeared to come from the south-east and, despite much swirling around, moved in a generally north-westerly direction. They were first observed at 16:00 h and the flock continued to pass through until 19:00 h. Numbers varied from a few to a maximum of 45 visible at any one time. Some were very high indeed so it is highly probable that more were out of sight. I estimate that several thousand birds passed over during that three-hour period and more may have done so before I first noticed them.

A question at the following COG meeting elicited the information that the migration had been observed by about half a dozen members over suburbs ranging from Hackett in the north, to Scullin in the west and Gilmore in the south. A resident of Wallaroo Road, west of Hall, indicated that the birds roosted for the night in roadside eucalypts but were not seen again (V Wiseman pers. comm.).

This observation raises a number of questions. How flexible is the woodswallows' migratory route? With

the number of birdwatchers resident in Canberra, it seems improbable that such large numbers of birds could pass Canberra regularly without being noticed. And what route does their migration take? The south-easterly approach surprised me and it is unclear why they should have come from that direction. There was little wind at the time. Or is their absence from the ACT in some years a reflection of the fact that they are more nomadic than truly migratory?

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CANBERRA ORNITHOLOGISTS GROUP

PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR 2000

In this my first year as President, I am happy to report on what I believe has been a very successful year for COG.

Highlights

We commenced the year when the Minister for Urban Services, Brendan Smyth, launched *Birds of Canberra Gardens*, a joint publication of Canberra Ornithologists Group and Urban Services. This book, which describes the unique bird populations which inhabit Canberra's suburbs, is believed to be a first for any city in Australia. It reports the results of 17 years of bird watching by COG members who have contributed to our Garden Bird Survey. In all, data from a total of 270 sites in urban Canberra, recorded on a weekly basis, are reported in the book. The Minister was very complimentary of COG and the links that have been built with the ACT Government. In his speech he noted that the book was another example of a productive partnership between the Government and the community, which added significantly to our understanding of Canberra's environment. The book has sold very well, and I am particularly appreciative of the efforts of Paul Fennell who edited the text and arranged the printing, Philip Veerman, who has coordinated the Garden Bird Survey for a number of years, and the ACT Government (Department of Urban Services) who provided a grant to assist in the preparation and publication costs.

In November 2000, an interpretative bird walk and pamphlet with a bird list for the Mulligans Flat Nature Reserve was launched by the ACT Minister for the Environment, Brendan Smyth. This reserve contains one of the most significant remnants of the threatened Grassy Woodland community, and the pamphlet and walk will increase community awareness and understanding of the reserve and its bird life. This was another joint project between Environment ACT (Canberra Nature Park North) and COG, and Jenny Bounds provided substantial input on COG's behalf.

In continuation of the close working arrangements we have been developing with the ACT Government, we have now been approached by Environment ACT (EACT), requesting COG's assistance in monitoring the abundance of birds listed as threatened under the *Nature Conservation Act 1980*. Action plans prepared by EACT for the Hooded Robin *Melanodryas cucullata* and Brown Treecreeper *Climacteris picumnus* have identified monitoring as a key management action. Specifically, EACT are required to liaise with COG to investigate ways in which a standardised monitoring program involving COG members may be established. The COG Committee and those members we have spoken to consider this type of project to be pivotal to bird conservation in the ACT. We are currently developing an experimental design for monitoring these species. It is our intent to build upon the existing bird monitoring work which we have been carrying out for the last five

years in the grassy woodlands of the ACT. We are also discussing the development of a Memorandum of Understanding with EACT which will formalise our relationship. Further details of this development will appear in *Ganggang* when we have made further progress.

Committee

The Committee has worked effectively and I would like to thank all for the support they have given me over the last year. Most Committee members have signalled their intent to stand for Committee again, and I look forward to their continuing support. I would like to especially thank those members who are retiring from committee. Hazel Wright, our Secretary, is resigning after ably dealing with the correspondence and managing the COG office. She will be sorely missed by Committee. Kay Hahne served for two years, and did an excellent job preparing the agenda for committee meetings and preparing the minutes. Whilst she is leaving the Committee, she still intends to continue with data input for the Garden Bird Survey, a task she has performed for many years. Margot Wade resigned from Committee a few months ago due to business pressure, but not before drafting the Education Strategy for COG. It was great to have Hazel, Margot and Kay on Committee, and we are grateful for the contribution they made.

For some time now the Committee has been working toward developing a Business Plan for COG. I am pleased to advise that a draft Business Plan has recently been completed and circulated to members in a recent edition of *Ganggang*. The Business Plan is a management document which aims to determine COG's future directions and ensure we meet the Objects of the Group as defined in the Constitution. As the Business Plan will shape our future, we welcome input from all members before finalising the Plan.

During the year we took the first steps to further interest and knowledge of birds in Canberra schools. We have developed a draft Education Strategy but, with the resignation of our education officer, we need someone to take it further. If you have an interest or background in bird conservation and education, please put your hand up for this important job. COG has an aging membership and investing in Canberra's youth is a positive step for both our group and bird conservation in the ACT.

An organisation can only be effective if it is financially secure and has an active membership. As will be evident from her report, Joan Lipscombe continues to do a great job as Treasurer, and we have a healthy bank account. Thank you Joan for all you have done. And thank you also to Noel Luff, our Honorary Auditor.

We recently appointed Michelle Penders to the position of Office Manager. There has been a pressing need to create this position for some time to share the increasing amount of administrative work required to keep COG operational and to assist with the day to day operation of the group.

Membership has declined slightly over the last 12 months. We currently have 369 memberships (of whom 121 have not renewed their subscription for 2001/2002). This is broken down as 112 family memberships, 235 individual memberships, 2 life members, 2 student

memberships and 18 organisational memberships.

Other business

It is a unique feature of COG that much of our business is carried out by keen members and project organisers who are not members of the Committee, but nevertheless make a huge contribution to the success of the organisation. Whilst it is not possible to thank them all individually, I would like to mention some names of those who quietly work away in the background.

Communications and publications

During the year Charles Buer took over as editor of *Ganggang* and, with Kathy Walter, did a wonderful job editing and publishing our newsletter. Thanks also to Rosemary Ryan and her team of helpers for distributing *Ganggang*. Harvey Perkins and Barbara Allan continued to do a professional job in editing *Canberra Bird Notes.*

Mike O'Shaughnessy maintained COG's website http://www.canberrabirds.dynamite.com.au. The website presents information about COG presentations and field trips as reported in *Ganggang*, together with other useful information about COG and its activities. Thank you Mike.

COG's email discussion list 'canberrabirds', managed by David McDonald, continued to operate effectively throughout the year. It has over 90 subscribers and averages about two messages per day, providing a useful forum for members and friends of COG to discuss topical issues relating to birds and birding in the Canberra region. It was recently characterised by Topica, the company that hosts the list, as being the most useful and informative of the 32 birding lists that Topica hosts.

The COG Hotline continues to be ably managed by Ian McMahon, and provides up-to-date information about bird sightings in the Canberra region. This service is valued by many members, although Mike has mentioned that the number of contributors to the hotline has declined since the email discussion list has been established.

Outings and field trips

The job of organising field trips has been with Jenny Bounds for a long time but, after ten years in the job, she decided to hand over management of the field trip program to Alistair Bestow. However, Jenny has not totally relinquished her interest in this task and will continue to run the odd international and other tours for COG members.

Once again, we ran an extensive range of local tours, providing members with good opportunities to see birds with an experienced guide on hand to assist with identification problems. Thank to all those who led field trips during the year. We always need more volunteers to fill this role and if you are able to assist in this area, please contact Alistair Bestow, the Field Trip Coordinator.

Atlas, Woodland Survey, Garden Bird Survey, databases

Atlas work continued with enthusiastic support and management by Malcolm Fyfe and Nicki Taws. Jenny Bounds and Alistair Bestow incorporated atlassing into all our field trips and, with David McDonald, led a number of atlassing trips during the year. I also wish to thank all members who have taken up

atlassing so enthusiastically, and particularly those who have adopted regular 2 hectare sites. It is these sites that form the backbone of much of our environmental monitoring, providing data capable of detecting future changes in bird abundance.

The other important component of COG's environmental monitoring program is the Woodland Survey. COG's surveys in grassy woodland habitats continued with further support from an ACT Government Environment Grant.. Alison Rowell was employed to coordinate this survey work and extend the number of sites being monitored. Surveys have been conducted at ten locations in key areas with one further site to be set up — all in all a total of 115 sub-sites are monitored every three months. Thank you to the people involved in this project, which include Jenny Bounds, Paul Fennell, Chris Davey, Anthony Overs, Nicki Taws, David McDonald, Harvey Perkins, Julie McGuinness, Malcolm Fyfe and Geoffrey Dabb.

Thanks to Philip Veerman for his continuing work in maintaining the Garden Bird Survey, and to Kay Hahne for entering the data. This project has now been running for 19 years and is one of our longest monitoring projects.

Paul Fennell continued to manage COG's databases, ensuring that data are effectively curated and files regularly backed-up. Special thanks to those members who assisted with data entry during the year, including Tony Harding, Malcolm Fyfe, Alan Ford, Milton Smith, Martyn Moffat, who contributed in getting record sheets into the database.

Annual Bird Reports

Many thanks to Malcolm Fyfe, David Purchase, Grahame Clark, Bob Digan, Brendan Lepschi, Ian McMahon, Nicki Taws, Harvey Perkins and Barbara Allan who have managed to keep the Annual Bird Reports up to date.

Monthly meetings

Barbara Allan has again organised a year of the most interesting and entertaining presentations at Forestry House. The reports in *Gang-gang* and on the COG website every month attest to the quality of our presentations. Special thanks also to Carol Macleay, Ann McKenzie, Delia Johnson and Louise Muir for running the stall at COG meetings, and to Maria Lukacs for her assistance with the monthly raffle. Barbara Allan also organised the refreshment for the meetings.

COG administration & the COG office

Special thanks are due to Rosemary Ryan for her continuing work in ensuring that COG publications are in the mail, and to Alastair Smith for taking on the role of Membership Officer.

The COG Office continues to operate at the Griffin Centre. Gutta Schoefl and a small team of volunteers have been most helpful in organising the office and providing administrative assistance with the mail, telephone messages and finances. Joan Lipscombe, Hazel Wright and Jenny Bounds have worked on coordinating Office administration. Their hard work is greatly appreciated.

David McDonald, Joan Lipscombe and Geoff Dabb were always available to provide quality advice on COG's

constitutional and organisational framework.

The Canberra Birds Conservation Fund is now operating. It is able to receive tax-deductible donations from COG members and the general public, and will use the donated money on activities that help to achieve COG's environmental objectives, especially promoting the conservation of the Canberra region's native birds and their habitats. A Fund management committee has been appointed, and has commenced work to identify the first projects to be supported. All members are invited to make donations to the fund, and to encourage other people to do the same.

It has been an honour to serve as President, and I look forward to continuing in this role for another year.

Barry Baker, 10 March 2001.

RARITIES PANEL NEWS

A catch-up list again, encompassing a few older records as well as more recent ones. Two records are still under consideration by the Panel. The highlight is undoubtedly the breeding record of the Spotless Crake, confirming Steve Wilson's prediction (in *Birds of the ACT Two centuries of change)* that the species could breed here. Congratulations to Bob Rusk for his observant scanning of the reeds at the sewage ponds and for the immediate posting of the news on COG's electronic chat line. That enabled so many COG members to familiarise themselves with this fairly elusive species; it also had the additional benefit of showing ACTEW that the provision of access to the ponds would be used and used appropriately.

The number of summer koel records appears to be rising and those included here may represent a small fraction of the actual occurrences of the species, if the incidental mentions on COG's electronic chat line are taken into consideration. It is difficult to know how many birds are involved. The southern suburbs, and Kambah in particular, have always been heavily represented in koel reports but that may merely mean there are more observant birders - or willing form fillers - in that area. The Panel would like to stress that even when a species has, in the estimation of COG members, become 'common' and unworthy of the attention of the Rarities Panel, it would like an unusual bird report form to be completed. A single form will suffice for daily records over a lengthy period, if relevant. Then when the Panel revises the list of 'unusual' species, as it will do again this year, it will have better data on which to base decisions for change.

Another development becoming apparent is the rise of yet another introduced species, the Spotted Turtle-Dove. Again, to assist in giving the Panel more complete data on which to base its decisions on this species, please send in your reports of sightings of turtle-doves.

Unusual bird report forms can be obtained from the sales desk or the Records Officer at COG monthly meetings or from COG's web site. Please hand in the completed form to the Records Officer at the monthly meeting, mail it to COG Rarities Panel, PO Box 301, Civic Square, ACT 2608 or email it to the address shown on the electronic form.

ENDORSED LIST 51, March 2001

Intermediate Egret *Ardea intermedia*

2; 1 Mar 00; M Moffat; Kellys Swamp, Jerrabomberra Wetlands

1; 18 Jan 01; J Goldie; Kellys Swamp, Jerrabomberra Wetlands

Australasian Bittern *Botaurus poiciloptilus*

2; 22 Dec 95; H Perkins; Rose Lagoon
2; 12 Nov 00; H Perkins; Rose Lagoon

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*
1; 2 Nov 00; B Wilson; Kambah

Grey Goshawk *Accipiter novaehollandiae*
1 (white morph); 12 May 00; R Bell; Westbourne Woods, Yarralumla

Lewin's Rail *Rallus pectoralis*
1; 26-28 Dec 00; B Rusk; Fyshwick Sewage Ponds

Spotless Crake *Porzana tabuensis*
2-3 adults, 4-5 chicks; 26-29 Jan 01; B Rusk; Fyshwick Sewage Ponds
4 (1 adult, 3 chicks); 30 Jan 01; D McDonald; Fyshwick Sewage Ponds
4 (1 adult, 3 chicks); 9-10 Feb 01; J Goldie; Fyshwick Sewage Ponds

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*
1; 23 Feb 01; B Pennefather; Uriarra Crossing

White-headed Pigeon *Columba leucomela*
1 male; 6-7 Oct 00; B Wilson; Kambah

Spotted Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*
1; 1 Mar 00; M Moffat; Kellys Swamp, Jerrabomberra Wetlands
2; 30 Jun, 1,16 Jul 00; B Wilson; Kambah

Long-billed Corella *Cacatua tenuirostris*
1; 3 Jun 00; D Johnson; Stirling

1; 27 Jun 00; M Fyfe; Macquarie

Rainbow Lorikeet *Trichoglossus haematodus*
1; 6 Jan 01; B Allan; Page

Regent Parrot *Polytelis anthopeplus* [escapee]
1 male; 7 Aug 00; M Moffat; Curtin

Swift Parrot *Lathamus discolor*
10; 16 Apr 00; J Bounds; Namadgi National Park

Common Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea*
1 male; 21 Dec 99; B Graham; Gilmore
1; 23 Dec 99; B Wilson; Kambah
1 male; 19, 27-29 Nov 00; B Lepschi; Hackett
1; 19 Dec 00, 4 Jan 01; S Wilson; Kambah

1 male; 29 Dec 00; M Fyfe; Cook
1; 20-23 Dec 00, 4 Jan 01; D McDonald; Kambah

Channel-billed Cuckoo *Scythrops novaehollandiae*
1; 29 Nov 00; J Bounds; Weston

Chestnut-rumped Heathwren *Hylacola pyrrhopygia*
2; 26 Nov 00; M Johnson; Mundoonen Nature Reserve

Little Wattlebird *Anthochaera chrysoptera*
1; 15 Aug-1 Sep 00; N Taws; Cook

Lewin's Honeyeater *Meliphaga lewinii*
2; 11 Dec 00; M Moffat; Tallaganda State Forest

Tawny-crowned Honeyeater *Phylidonyris melanops*
1; 17 Sep 00; J Holland; Chapman

Scarlet Honeyeater *Myzomela sanguinolenta*
1 male; 15 Sep 99; H Perkins; Australian National Botanic Gardens

White-browed Babbler *Pomatostomus superciliosus*
1; 12 Jan 01; N Taws; 13km nw Gundaroo

Black-faced Monarch *Monarcha melanopsis*
1 imm; 24 Mar 01; K Walter; Queanbeyan

Pied Butcherbird *Cracticus nigrogularis*
2; 7 May 00; M Fyfe; Travelling Stock Reserve no.33, Gunning
1; 11 Jun 00; S Wilson; west of Jerrawa

The COG office is located at Room 5, Griffin Centre, Bunda Street, Civic. Opening hours depend on the availability of volunteers. Please call the office on 6247 4996 to confirm that it is open.

Canberra Bird Notes is published by the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc and is edited by Harvey Perkins and Barbara Allan. Major articles of up to 5000 words are welcome on matters of the distribution, identification or behaviour of birds occurring in the Australian Capital Territory and surrounding area. Contributions on these topics should be sent to Harvey Perkins, 42 Summerland Circuit, Kambah ACT 2902, or via email to harvey.perkins@anu.edu.au. Short notes, book reviews and other contributions should be sent to Barbara Allan, 47 Hannaford Street, Page ACT 2614 or via email to allanbm@ozemail.com.au. If you would like to discuss your proposed article in advance, please feel free to contact Harvey on 6231 8209 or Barbara on 6254 6520.

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Articles

Odd Obs