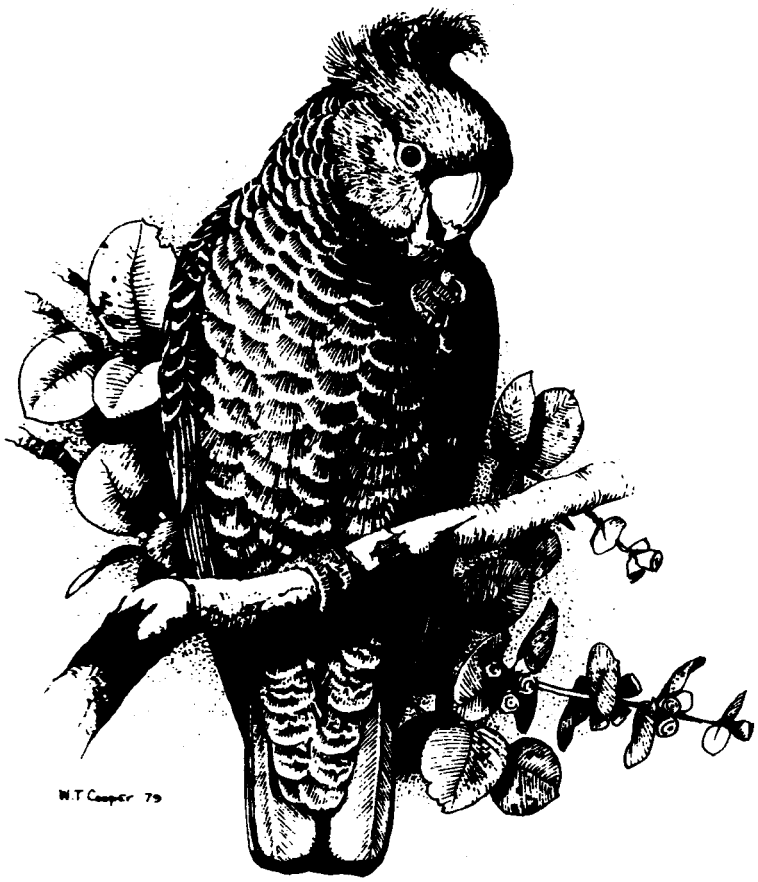
canberra bird notes

ISSN 0314-8211

Volume 29
Number 4
December 2004



Registered by Australia Post — Publication No. NBH 0255

CANBERRA ORNITHOLOGISTS GROUP INC
PO Box 301 Civic Square ACT 2608

2004-05 Committee

President	Jack Holland 6288 7840 (h)
Vice-President	Nicki Taws 6251 0303 (w/h)
Secretary	Barbara Allan 6254 6520 (h)
Treasurer	Joan Lipscombe 6262 7975 (h)
Members	Jenny Bounds - Conservation officer - 6288 7802 (h)
	David Cook — Webmastercanberrabirds.org.au
	Sue Lashko - Meetings venue - 6251 4485
	Julie McGuiness — Conservation officer - 6249 6491 (w)
	Anthony Overs - 6254 0168 (h)
	David Rees — 6242 4517 (h)
	Tanya Rough - *Gang-gang* editor — 6161 0151 (h)

Other COG contacts

CBN editors	Harvey Perkins and Barbara Allan cbn@canberrabirds.org.au	
COG sales	Carol Macleay	6286 2624 (h)
Databases	Paul Fennell	6254 1804 (h)
Email discussion list	David McDonald	6231 8904
Field trips	Jack Holland	6288 7840 (h)
Garden Bird Survey	Martin Butterfield	6253 1286 (h)
Membership inquiries	Alastair Smith	alastair@home.netspeed.com.au
Office	cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au 6247 4996 (answering service)	
Rarities Panel	Grahame Clark (Chairman), Richard Allen, Jenny Bounds, Mark Clayton and Dick Schodde; Barbara	

THE GLOSSY BLACK-COCKATOO IN THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Steve Holliday
90 Duffy St, Ainslie, ACT 2602

Abstract *Glossy Black-Cockatoos are considered to be irregular visitors to the ACT, most commonly reported from the Mt Majura-Mt Ainslie range where stands of Allocasuarina provide food for the birds. During the 2003-04 season relatively large numbers of birds were recorded from this area and a breeding event was even recorded. This influx raises many questions about the provenance of these birds, their movements, and the carrying capacity of the Majura-Ainslie Nature Reserves.*

Introduction

The Glossy Black-Cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus lathami* is regarded as an uncommon non-breeding visitor to the Australian Capital Territory (Wilson 1999). Reports have been irregular, with none some years, and many in others. For example, there were no records during the three years covered by the ACT bird atlas, 1 September 1986 to 31 August 1989 (Taylor & COG 1992). The distribution of the species is limited by its specialised diet, feeding almost solely on the seeds of *Allocasuarina* species (Higgins 1999). In the Canberra region the most widespread food plant is *A. verticillata* (Drooping Sheoak); *A. littoralis* (Black Sheoak) is also present, though of limited occurrence (Burbidge & Gray 1970). The Glossy Black-Cockatoo is not listed as being of conservation concern in the ACT, and is regarded as being of Least Concern conservation status nationally (Garnett & Crowley 2000), but is considered to be Vulnerable in New South Wales (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service 2004a), and the Riverina population is listed as Endangered (NSW NPWS 2004b).

Most ACT records are from the Majura Range, This area is mostly reserved within Canberra Nature Park, and comprises Mt Majura Nature Reserve in the north, and Mt Ainslie Nature Reserve in the south. The vegetation consists largely of various eucalypt associations, with the most common species being Scribbly Gum *Eucalyptus rossii*, Blakely's Red Gum *E. blakelyi*, Yellow Box *E. melliodora*, Brittle Gum *E. mannifera* and Apple Box *E. bridgesiana;* importantly there are also extensive stands of *A. verticillata*, particularly on the upper slopes (Ingwersen et al. 1974).

During late 2003 to the present (December 2004) relatively high numbers and many sightings of the Glossy Black-Cockatoo were reported from the Majura Range, including a breeding record - the first from the ACT. The purpose of this paper is to provide a list of historical occurrences of this species in the ACT, and to summarise and discuss the latest influx.

Previous records

The first report of the Glossy Black-Cockatoo from the ACT was in a brief general survey of the natural history of Canberra (Daley 1946). It was regarded as appearing 'once in a while'. The next report was from the Tharwa-Tidbinbilla Road in March 1974 (Scrivenor 1974), with other records from around the same time in the Tinderry Range, close by in NSW (Baker & Bennett 1974; McRae 1974). Then followed a record of three on Mount Ainslie in March 1982 (Fitzgerald & Morrison 1983), Regular records of up to 14 birds were made on Mount Ainslie in 1983, and there were also seven birds reported from Red Hill in September 1983. In October 1983 a single bird was reported from a COG Garden Bird Survey site in O'Connor. These were the only records from the Annual Bird Reports published in *Canberra Bird Notes* during the 1980s (Taylor 1984; Taylor & Davey 1985). All subsequent records are taken from the COG database unless otherwise noted. Email reports refer to COG's email list: canberrabirds@canberrabirds.org,au

The next reported occurrences in the ACT were during May-August 1992 on Ainslie-Majura. Further reports from this area were made in most subsequent years of the 1990s, although there are no reports from 1994, 1997 or from 2000-2002. There were a number of reports from other sites in the ACT, These records are summarised in Table 1. It should be noted that Terry Gourlay (personal communication) has seen small numbers of Glossies on Mt Majura on and off for the past 11 years, including periods for which there are no database records.

Table 1.

COG database records of Glossy Black-Cockatoos in the ACT (1992 to August 2003).

Site	Year	Months recorded	Numbers
Mt Majura	1992	May-June, August	2-11
Mt Ainslie	1992	June	6
Mt Majura	1993	May	10
Red Hill	1993	May, August	3-4
Mt Majura	1995	March-May	3-11
Tharwa Hil1	1995	July	3-4
Watson	1996	March	2-7
Mt Majura	1996	March, July-August, November	1-5
Manuka	1996	March	2
Mt Majura	1998	June, August-November	1-9
Mt Ainslie	1998	July-August	6-7
Mt Ainslie	1999	November-December	2-3
Gibraltar Falls	2000	November	3
Lower Molonglo River	2003	May	1

2003-2004 Records

An observation of two birds near Mt Majura on 31 March 2003 **(J.** Goldie email) pre-dated the main influx by some seven months, and was the first report from Ainslie-Majura since 1999-2000. The next report was of two birds on 12 October by Terry Gourlay (email). There were a number of records of one or two birds over the next couple of months, until three were reported on 15 January 2004 (T. Gourlay email), All records were from Mt Majura except for an unusual report of two birds flying over suburban Page on 2 February 2004 (B. Allan email). By January four to five birds had been reported drinking at two dams just south of Mount Majura. These dams proved to be a good observation point for Glossies and increasing numbers were recorded, with 15 being counted at the dams on 10 July (M. Lenz email). Smaller numbers were seen feeding on Mt Majura, and later Mt Ainslie, throughout this period.

On 16 July 2004 10+ birds were reported from a dam further south on the range (T. Gourlay email). In view of this it was decided to organise coordinated counts at the dams, in an attempt to determine how many Glossies were involved and whether more than one group of birds was in the area. The preceding six months had been very dry and these dams were thought to be the only ones containing reasonable amounts of water in the nature reserves, indicating that a total count of Glossies was feasible. A total of 15 birds was recorded during the initial count on 31 July, and no follow up counts recorded more than this. The 15 appeared to consist of eight males, five females and two immature birds. A count on 2 September produced a nil result, and it was thought that the birds may have left the area, or had alternative drinking points following heavy rain in late August. Subsequent reports, including a pair with a fledgling on 15 October (C, Mobbs per J. Holland email), indicated that some birds were still present, although numbers had apparently decreased, At least 6 birds were seen on Mt Majura on 2 December 2004 (T. Gourlay email), and then 11+ near one of the dams on 3 December (B. Whitworth email), indicating that numbers had built up again.

During dam watches in August it became apparent that one pair may have been breeding. This was eventually confirmed by observations of a recently fledged bird. This record is discussed in detail elsewhere in this journal (Lenz et al. 2004, see pp 131-136), It is highly probable that subsequent sightings of a pair with a fledgling were of this same breeding group.

A few chewed cones, almost certainly feeding remains from Glossies, were found in Goorooyarroo Nature Reserve, ACT, in April 2004 (personal observation). This was in a small stand of *A. verticillata* in a gully in the south of the reserve. Goorooyarroo has only a small number of casuarinas at present, insufficient to support Glossies for any length of time, and their presumably brief presence was probably due to the close proximity of the site to Mt Majura. The removal of grazing pressure following declaration of the area as a nature reserve should encourage regeneration of *A. verticillata,* and the site may become more suitable for Glossies in the future.

Occurrences elsewhere in the region

There are relatively few records of Glossy Black-Cockatoos in COG's area of concern in adjacent parts of NSW. Apart from the 1974 records in the Tinderry Range noted earlier, there were three birds reported at `Urila' (6 km south-east of Burra at the northern end of the Tinderry Range) in June 1991 (COG 1993), and a few records from other sites since then (Table 2). The only regular reports have come from the Burra Creek area since 1999, with up to 16 birds feeding on *A.verticillata* (Ian Anderson, pers comm; COG database), This is almost certainly an underestimate of the species' abundance in adjacent parts of NSW; it is likely to occur almost anywhere food plants are present, if only irregularly. For example, chewed cones were found in a fairly extensive, though isolated, stand of *A. littoralis* at a site on private land about 10 km south-west of Tarago in early May 2004. The feeding sign was thought to be less than six months old and was almost certainly from Glossies (personal observation). There was also a report of a single bird at a site 14 km east of Bungendore in July 2004 (G. Dabb email). The species is apparently regular there. The location is within an orienteering course that straddles the hills comprising the Great Dividing Range at that point, Other orienteers reported small numbers of Glossies in the area around the same time (G. Dabb, pers comm).

Table 2.

COG Database records of Glossy Black-Cockatoos in COGS area of concern in New South Wales (1992-August 2003).

Location	Year	Months recorded	Numbers
Googong	1995	February	3
Burra Creek	1999	July	2
3km north of Rose Lagoon	1999	December	2
Burra Creek	2000	February	2
Burra Creek	2001	October-December	2-3
Burra Creek	2002	March-May, August-December	1-7
North of TSR 36	2002	September	3
Burra Creek	2003	January-May, July-August	1-16
Smith's Road	2003	February	9
Murrumbidgee River, Smith's Rd	2003	April	3

Discussion

A minimum of 16 Glossy Black-Cockatoos (including a nestling / fledgling) were present on the Majura Range during July-August 2004. This appears to be the largest number reported from the ACT at one time, the previous highest count being 14 birds on Mount Ainslie in May 1983. Numbers declined after the July-August peak, but had built up again by the time of writing (December 2004) and it will be interesting to see how long they remain this time.

Where do the Ainslie-Majura Glossies come from? Any attempt to determine the origin of the ACT birds is guesswork, however the current influx has not come from the Burra Creek population as Ian Anderson (pers comm) was regularly observing up to eight birds throughout the period that maximum counts were being made on Ainslie-Majura. The endangered Riverina population is one potential source, as are populations on the New South Wales south coast and ranges, and the Illawarra-Shoalhaven area. There is also the possibility that the birds are under-reported, and have been present more regularly than records indicate. The size and rugged terrain of the Majura Range can make the Glossies hard to locate, even when they are known to be in the area. Their unobtrusive behaviour compounds the difficulty and they could easily go undetected, particularly when present in low numbers.

Why do they come? Widespread drought conditions prevailing over much of New South Wales in recent years would be one explanation for the Glossies' appearance in such numbers, with the relatively large areas of sheoak providing a drought refuge. Natural range expansion is another possibility, as historical records indicate that they have been recorded more regularly over the last decade or so, however this may simply reflect that there have been more people looking. A third explanation could be that groups of Glossies, at least locally, use casuarina stands over a large area in a cyclic fashion. This would certainly explain the intermittent nature of the species' appearance in the ACT. It has been estimated that a pair of Glossies' yearly requirement of *A. verticillata* cones is in the order of 60,000 - 89,000 (Lenz 2004, see pp 139-141), and food supply at some sites is likely to become exhausted, causing the birds to move.

While on current knowledge the Glossy Black-Cockatoo is probably still best regarded as an uncommon visitor to the ACT as stated by Wilson (1999), it is also an occasional breeder (Lenz et al. 2004). It also appears to have been recorded more regularly in recent years, although whether this is due to an actual increase in occurrence, or is a result of greater observer effort is uncertain. Whatever its status here, it seems likely that larger areas of *A. verticillata*, such as those on the Majura Range, may be an important refuge for a declining species and it is vital that these stands are conserved and managed appropriately to ensure that local populations of the Glossy Black-Cockatoo have a secure future. The fact that they are now known to breed, if only occasionally, makes this even more important. Given the species' conservation status in New South Wales, listing in the ACT may also be appropriate.

Acknowledgments

Many thanks for advice, information and/or company in the field to Ian Anderson, Prue Buckley, David Cook, Geoffrey Dabb, Terry Gourlay, Tom Green, Michael Lenz and Yarden Oren. Thanks also to all the observers who have made their observations available via the COG email discussion list.

References

Baker B & Bennett S (1974). Glossy Cockatoos in the Tinderry Ranges. *Canberra Bird Notes* 2(10): 21-22.

Burbidge NT & Gray M (1970). *Flora of the Australian Capital Territory.* Australian National University Press, Canberra.

COG (1993). Annual Bird Report: 1 July 1990 to 30 June 1991. *Canberra Bird Notes* 18: 53-108.

Daley C (1946). Nature notes on Canberra. *Victorian Naturalist* 63: 52-54.

Fitzgerald B & Morrison A (1983). Some Mount Ainslie observations: Glossy Black *Cockatoo Calyptorhynchus lathami. Canberra Bird Notes* 8: 62.

Garnett ST & Crowley GM (2000). *The Action Plan for Australian birds 2000.* Environment Australia, Canberra.

Higgins PJ, editor (1999). *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic birds. Volume 4: Parrots to Dollarbird.* Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Ingwersen F, Evans **O, &** Griffiths B (1974). *Vegetation of the Ainslie-Majura Reserve.* Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.

Lenz, M (2004). A pair of Glossy Black-Cockatoos needs 60-89 thousand *Allocasuarina* cones per year. *Canberra Bird Notes* 29: 139-141.

Lenz M, Dabb G, Green T, Gourlay T, Holliday S, Buckley P and Oren Y (2004). First record of Glossy Black-Cockatoos breeding in the Australian Capital Territory. *Canberra Bird Notes* 29: 131-136.

McRae I (1974). Further observations of Glossy Cockatoo in the Tinderry Ranges. *Canberra Bird Notes* 2(11): 22-23.

NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (2004a). Glossy black-cockatoo - vulnerable species listing. Online: http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/npws.nsf/Content/Glossy+black-cockatoo+vulnerable+species+listing

NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (2004b). Glossy black-cockatoo population, Riverina - endangered population listing. Online: http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/npws.nsf/Content/Glossy+black+cockatoo+population+Riverina+endangered+population+listing

Scrivenor M (1974). Glossy Cockatoos on the Tharwa-Tidbinbilla Road. *Canberra Bird Notes* 2(11): 8-9.

Taylor I (1984). Annual Bird Report: 1 July 1982 to 30 June 1983. *Canberra Bird Notes* 9: 50-139.

Taylor **I &** Davey C (1985). Annual Bird Report: 1 July 1983 to 30 June 1984. *Canberra Bird Notes* 10: 26-85.

Taylor M & Canberra Ornithologists Group (1992). *Birds of the Australian Capital Territory: an atlas.* Canberra Ornithologists Group and National Capital Planning Authority, Canberra.

Wilson S (1999). *Birds of the ACT: two centuries of change.* Canberra Ornithologists Group, Canberra.

FIRST RECORD OF GLOSSY BLACK-COCKATOOS BREEDING IN THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Michael Lenz[1], Geoffrey Dabb[2], Tom Green[3], Terry Gourlay[4], Steve Holliday[5], Prue Buckley[5] and Yarden Oren[6]

[1] 8 Suttor Street, Ainslie, ACT 2602

[2] 24 Brockmann Street, Narrabundah, ACT 2604

[3] 15 Wongalla Street, O'Connor, ACT 2602

[4] 57 Mackenzie Street, Watson Act 2602
[5] 90 Duffy Street, Ainslie, ACT 2602
[6] 34 Manning Street, Watson ACT 2602

Abstract *During the 2003-04 season an influx of Glossy Black-Cockatoos to the Mt Majura-Mt Ainslie range in Canberra was monitored relatively intensively. This led to the first ever reported record of a breeding event for this species in the ACT. The young bird was first observed on the day it left the nest hollow, with follow-up observations over the next twelve days. The significance of this event is discussed in terms of the local population's breeding potential and the carrying capacity of the Majura-Ainslie Nature Reserves.*

Introduction

The status of the Glossy Black-Cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus lathami* in the ACT is given as 'uncommon non-breeding visitor' (Wilson 1999). Sightings are irregular: if the species is present, birds are seen most frequently in stands of Drooping Sheoak *Allocasuarina verticillata* along the Majura Range (Wilson 1999; Holliday 2004). The seeds of this tree, almost exclusively, form the diet of this Cockatoo. Glossy Black-Cockatoos may also occur at other sites within COG's area of concern in nearby NSW, but its preferred habitat, woodlands with a major component of *A. verticillata,* are not necessarily among the sites favoured by bird watchers, hence the species may well be under-recorded. The bird is rather unobtrusive, with quiet calls and spending much of the day feeding in *Allocasuarina* trees. The sounds of cones being ripped apart to get at the seeds and the tell-tale signs of cone litter under trees are often the best indications of its presence.

In late 2003, and for many months in 2004, a group of birds (max. 15, see Holliday 2004, pp 125-130) could frequently be watched coming to drink in the evenings at two small dams on the eastern slopes of Mt Majura. A group of COG members, the authors of this article, spent some time counting the Glossy Black-Cockatoos and trying to get a picture of their movements. The Cockatoos were fairly tolerant of people, but were sometimes disturbed when unrestrained dogs were allowed to run near or swim in the dams. Birds announced their arrival by soft calls before perching in trees close to the

water. Individuals or groups of two to four would come down to drink briefly after first watching their surroundings (spending little, if any, time in the case of late arrivals), Having satisfied their thirst, some would stay for a while in trees near the dam, Sometimes they would move a little further from the dam, into the denser outer foliage of large eucalypts, and settle for the night.

One of the pairs showed somewhat different behaviour. After drinking and sitting in a nearby tree for a little while, the female would call loudly - a distinctive persistent complaining call - and a few minutes later it and its partner would fly off while the remaining birds stayed for the night near the dams (G. Dabb). We suspected this pair was breeding somewhere on the Majura Range. From the end of July 2004 onwards, the movements of this pair was followed over several evenings. By early August we had narrowed down the potential breeding site to a certain patch of woodland about 1,5 km distant from the drinking spot. (Note: in this text some details are omitted to prevent disclosure of actual locations.)

The Observations

6 August 2004, evening
(T. Green, S. Holliday, M Lenz)
Clear skies, sunset at 17.25 h. The pair arrived in the suspected breeding area at 17.37 h; they called a few times as they landed, but were very soon quiet,

7 August 2004, morning
(M Lenz)
Foggy, sunrise at 6.53 h. A little after sunrise two quiet calls as the birds departed from the nesting site, Called again a little later and a bit further away as they headed in the direction of their feeding grounds. Birds were not visible due to foggy conditions,

7 August 2004, afternoon

(M Lenz, S. Holliday, P. Buckley)

Clear skies, sunset at 17.26 h. Birds arrived in the breeding area at 17.47 h, called several times, then, while still calling, continued to fly around low over canopy, ending up in an area several hundred metres to the west, There was more frequent calling, and a third bird was visible briefly, Birds settled in a tree and fell quiet, It soon became too dark to investigate further,

8 August 2004, morning

(M. Lenz)

Foggy, sunrise at 6.54 h. At the site where the three birds were seen the previous evening, the first calls were heard from the pair at 7.02 h; and from a third bird within dense foliage, loud begging calls - a young bird! It slowly and somewhat clumsily emerged from its foliage hide to a firmer, more exposed tree branch,

The young bird still had a couple of whitish down feathers in the crest, a pale bill (in contrast to the dark bill of the adults), its tail feathers were not yet fully grown and the red field in them was fully barred, the chest was paler than the rest of the brownish body,

Over the next 20 minutes, with the parents giving soft calls and the young giving bouts of begging calls, the group moved slowly into a mixed stand of *Allocasuarina* and eucalypts. At 7.21 h the parents flew into an *Allocasuarina*

soon after to the young. At 7.23 h the male resumed feeding in the previously occupied tree, the female followed a minute later. The parents appeared somewhat nervous so the observer kept a greater distance.

At 7.38 h the male returned to the young and stayed close to it, preening, for a while. The young begged quietly,

7.44 h, the male flew into an *Allocasuarina* between the young and the observer, moved two minutes later to another *Allocasuarina* closer to the young. A further three minutes later the male moved to a eucalypt close to the juvenile. Shortly after it joined the female and began feeding.

7.57 h, the pair flew up into a eucalypt briefly as Australian Magpies *Gymnorhina tibicen* and Crimson Rosellas *Platycercus elegans* gave warning calls. The pair selected another *Allocasuarina* close to the young and resumed feeding.

7.59 h, the male returned to the juvenile and landed close to it; the female continued feeding.

8.03 h, the young cockatoo was begging louder and more often. At this point six Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos *Calyptorhynchus funereus* landed in a tree nearby and called for a while before flying up-slope as the fog began to lift.

8.04 h, the female also flew up-slope towards the main stands of *Allocasuarina* and disappeared from sight. The juvenile, moved around a little on its chosen perch, making begging calls.

8,06 h, the male followed the female and also disappeared from view. The youngster stayed; it resumed a straight posture in the top part of the small tree and kept quiet, With this behaviour the bird was easily overlooked. Since waking up a good hour earlier it had as yet received no food from its parents, No further observations were possible.

8 August 2004, afternoon
(S. Holliday, P. Buckley)
17,35-17.45 h, The Pair flew into woodland close to the breeding area. The birds seemed very nervous and flew off when the observers were still some hundred metres away. Brief views of a third bird flying with them were suspected to be of the fledgling. Calls were heard some distance away, but it had grown too dark to see much; the birds quickly fell silent and could not be located.

10 August 2004, morning
(G. Dabb, S. Holliday, M Lenz)
A search of the area where the birds were seen roosting the previous evening failed to locate the pair, although G. Dabb and S, Holliday later located a pair feeding in a more distant area. No begging calls from the young were heard, We assumed the parents had left the young behind somewhere, and it kept still and quiet as it had the day before, thus avoiding detection.

18 August 2004 early afternoon
(Y. Oren)
At 16,20 h, three individuals (1 male, 1 female, 1 juvenile) seen in a tree overhanging one of the small dams at which Glossy Black-Cockatoos had previously been seen drinking. Their

presence was made conspicuous by the long-carrying begging calls of the juvenile. Both adults responded by approaching it and forcing food down its beak,

In appearance, the juvenile was closer to a male bird though its plumage was greyish rather than black, while the head and chest had a yellowish undertone to them and the beak was light-coloured. The scapulars and coverts, as well as the inner coverts, were freckled with reddish spots. The black barring on the tail feathers was clear and complete. Some of the feathers were ruffled and out of place, showing their lighter tinge. The juvenile's motor skills were yet to develop fully: it was easily knocked off the branch by feeding parents, and took time to rebalance on a lower branch.

16.31 h, the male took off with a trumpeting call, followed close behind by the female and, after a minute or so, by the juvenile; all moved some 70 m away from the dam, Again, the juvenile's lack of flight skill was apparent, alighting in trees every 10-20 metres.

16.36 h. Followed by a series of calls from the adults, the juvenile again began uttering begging calls. All three then moved, tree by tree, in the same general up-slope direction for some further 150 metres, settling in trees. The juvenile perched in a eucalypt, and the adults in an *Allocasuarina* where they began feeding.

Discussion

The breeding record

From the behaviour of the adults we can assume that the young left the nest-hollow on 7 August, The normal evening routine for the pair was to return to the nest-site, give a few calls and then settle quickly for the night. On the evening of 7 August the birds flew to the nest-site as usual, but then had to search for the juvenile, flying in circles and calling frequently until they located it outside the nest-hollow some distance away.

The incubation period for Glossy Black-Cockatoos lasts 28-33 days (Higgins 1999) and it takes 60 days for the young to fledge (Forshaw and Cooper 1981). This would mean that this clutch was produced in early May. The breeding season for this species (across its range) extends from March to August. Young from replacement clutches may fledge as late as October (Higgins 1999). The fledgling period lasts from 60 to 105 days. Further observations of a pair with a begging young on the Majura Range in October, were most likely of 'our' pair with its offspring.

While the 2004 observations represent the first definite ACT breeding record, it may not necessarily have been the first breeding event in the area. Terry. Gourlay has observed Glossy Black-Cockatoos on the Majura Range for the last **11** years. He has seen a female with a bent tail (most likely as a result of incubating within a rather confined nest-hollow), as well as a pair with a begging young in an earlier year, (There are, however, no records of these observations in the COG database).

Many birds present but only one pair breeding

While it is very good news that a pair succeeded in raising a young in our area, it is intriguing to note that out of the maximum five females and eight males recorded over the 2004 breeding season (Holliday 2004) it seems that only one pair actually bred. This raises many questions: is this a common occurrence?, what are the possible reasons?, what are the long-term impacts on the population if only a portion can manage to reproduce?

At a COG talk earlier in 2004, Matt Cameron gave insights into the biology of the Glossy Black-Cockatoo from his study of birds in western NSW, He found that birds practically stop breeding after prolonged periods of drought. When conditions improve they may `bounce back' reasonably well.

It is safe to assume that a severe drought will affect the quality and quantity of *Allocasuarina* seeds, the almost exclusive staple diet of this Cockatoo. Inadequate food supplies may not only make it difficult or impossible to raise young but may further force the birds to move around in search of an adequate food supply for their own survival. Very rough calculations based on observations at Mt Ainslie indicate that a pair of Glossy Black-Cockatoos may require 60,000 to 89,000 cones of *A. verticillata* (the local species of sheoak) cones each year (Lenz 2004, see pp 139-141).

With fires, clearing, habitat fragmentation and grazing pressure from feral animals on regeneration, stands of suitable food trees are shrinking and are becoming increasingly patchy in distribution. Differences in rainfall patterns over the distribution range of our birds (notably below average rainfalls) will also result in a patchy distribution of quality cones, The intermittent appearance of birds in varying numbers in the ACT and surroundings (Holliday 2004) is probably a reflection of these circumstances and indicates better or poorer years for this cockatoo in the area(s) where the birds spend most of their time - wherever that may be.

We could perhaps argue that, in the tough drought years currently being experienced throughout south-eastern Australia, the Majura Range provided a refuge in 2004 for up to 15 birds, even allowing one pair to successfully raise a young. However, increases in the length and severity of droughts over wider areas as a result of climate change would significantly impact on the population of this species as a whole (Matt Cameron, presentation to COG) since the number of breeding events would significantly decline and conditions for the survival of adults would deteriorate.

A more optimistic (but far less likely) interpretation may be that the species has done well in the source area of the 2003/2004 visiting cockatoos; hence they have expanded their range. At the same time, the size of the sheoak stands on the Majura Range and the quality and quantity of seeds may support only a limited number of non-breeders and breeders. Fifteen birds, and later an extra young, is in the range of previous maxima recorded for this site (Holliday 2004), Keeping the requirement for considerable numbers of cones in mind,

this may be close to the maximum carrying capacity of the area for Glossy Black-Cockatoos, On the other hand, the 15 birds may simply reflect the size of the population in the source area.

We are left with too many unanswered questions about where the Glossy Black-Cockatoos come from and where they go and whether or not they are a population under stress. But if a significant percentage of these visitors is unable to breed it would indicate that, overall, they did not have a good year. Their stay in our region provides us with a little glimpse into their lives and the difficulties they are faced with against the background of increasing patchiness of their resources in space and time (and these discussions have not even considered the issue of availability of nesting sites, predation pressures and other factors). It may also be prudent for COG to discuss with Environment ACT aspects of the management of the Majura Range within Canberra Nature Park in light of the significance this area has for the Glossy-Black-Cockatoo.

Let us treat these visitors with respect and care and keep recording their activities. Over time we may be able to uncover a few more of their secrets,

References

Forshaw JM and Cooper WT (1981) *Australian parrots.* Lansdowne Press, Melbourne, 2nd edition.

Higgins PJ (1999). *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds. Volume 4: Parrots to Dollarbird.* Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Holliday S (2004). The Glossy Black-Cockatoo in the Australian Capital Territory. *Canberra Bird Notes* 29: 125-130.

Lenz, M (2004), A pair of Glossy Black-Cockatoos needs 60-89 thousand *Allocasuarina* cones per year. *Canberra Bird Notes* 29: 139-141.

Wilson S (1999). *Birds of the ACT: Two centuries of change.* Canberra Ornithologists Group, Canberra.

GLOSSY BLACK-COCKATOOS AT BURRA CREEK BLOCK

Ian Anderson
12 Wylly Place, Hughes, ACT 2605

Abstract *Glossy Black-Cockatoos have been recorded at a bush block at Burra Creek, about 40 km south of Canberra, over the past seven years. The birds are present mainly in winter and spring, with a young bird being present in August of 2002. The regeneration of Drooping Sheoak on the block since being burnt out 25 years ago is likely to be responsible for the increasing numbers of both records and individuals.*

The block of about 16 ha was purchased in the autumn of 1982, and was part of a subdivision of a large grazing property. The area has been grazed since the 1850s. The block is hilly apart from a flat of several hectares, the underlying geology being granodiorite. There are plenty of boulders visible, especially on the north-facing hill and there is a lot of sand in the soil profile, The block had not been pasture-improved so consisted of native woodland and grassland. It had a significant erosion gully which is now no longer actively eroding.

The predominant eucalypt is Yellow Box *Eucalyptus melliodora*. The block has recently been accepted for membership of the New South Wales Grassy Box Woodland Conservation Management Network, coordinated by the State Government. Burra Creek is in New South Wales, about 40 km south of Canberra, near the Tinderry Range,

I have been recording birds on the block since its purchase. This has been useful for improving bird-watching skills.

It is well known that Glossy Black-Cockatoos are selective feeders, Their diet consists mainly of the seeds of a limited number of species of Casuarina/Allocasuarina. One of the favourite species in the Canberra region is the Drooping Sheoak *Allocasuarina verticillata.*

I had become familiar with the haunting call of the Glossy Black-Cockatoo on a visit to Kangaroo Island in the 1980s. They roosted there near the small resort of American River.

About two years before I bought the block it had been totally burnt by an accidental fire. A couple of badly burnt but still just-alive old Drooping Sheoaks were all that was left of what must have been a forest of them of several hectares on the dry north-facing rocky hillside. The forest has subsequently gradually regenerated on my block and those of my immediate neighbours. There has obviously been regeneration from seed although there is a reference in the literature to the ability of Drooping Sheoak to regenerate also from root suckers.

It was a delightful surprise to see and hear the first Glossy Black-Cockatoo in the sheoak forest in March 1998, about 18 years after it had been burnt.

Subsequent records are set out in Table 1 below. The numbers are an estimate of the numbers of birds seen or heard. Sometimes numbers have been difficult to estimate, particularly when the birds are calling only from the depths of the forest and do not fly. I have never seen the birds drinking at the dam or at the bird baths.

Until mid-2000, I counted the birds on the block once a fortnight; since then, once a week, on average,, except when I have been away from Canberra. After the first sighting, the birds have been seen regularly except for during 2000-01. The greatest number of sightings were in 2002 and 2003, the years of the Canberra bushfires and a very dry time. Perhaps the block functioned as something of a refuge as other feeding areas failed, perhaps some being burnt,

2002 was also the year of the only breeding record for the Glossy Black-Cockatoo on the block. In the second week of August, there were two birds in a dead tree. One, an immature, was making begging calls in the direction of the other,

Table 1.
Glossy Black-Cockatoo sightings at the Burra Creek block.

1999	2	4th week July
2000	nil	
2001	2	4th week October
2002	2	2nd week August*
	1	4th week September
	3	15t week October
	2	2nd week October
	3	3`d week October
	3	5th week October
2003	4	15t week June
	3	4th week July
	6	15t week August
	1	4th week August
	3	5th week October

(* includes a begging young)

A PAIR OF GLOSSY BLACK-COCKATOOS NEEDS 60-89 THOUSAND *ALLOCASUARINA* CONES PER YEAR

Michael Lenz
8 Suttor Street, Ainslie, ACT 2602

Abstract *Glossy Black-Cockatoos feed almost exclusively on the small seeds of sheoaks (Allocasuarina). The time spent extracting these seeds from the cones, and the number of cones needed to sustain each bird is large. In this paper an estimate of the number of cones required over a year is calculated based on observations made on Mt Majura in Canberra.*

On 1 August 2004 I watched for several hours a pair of Glossy Black-Cockatoos *Calyptorhynchus lathami* on Mt Majura in Canberra. They were feeding in a Drooping Sheoak *Allocasuarina verticillata* (formerly *Casuarina stricta).* The tree was loaded with younger closed cones and also some older cones. From the amount of cone remains under the tree, the birds must have been visiting it for several days.

I particularly took note of how long it took them to tear up a cone and extract the seeds. On average, the birds spent 4.2 minutes handling a cone (range 2-6 min; processing of 22 cones timed): grabbing it with the bill, shredding it to get at the seeds and dropping the last section they were holding in their (left) foot [see Clout (1989) and Higgins (1999) for detailed descriptions of feeding behaviour].

Birds near Eden, feeding on cones of Black Sheoak *A. littoralis* [which has cones up to 3 cm long (Burbidge and Gray 1979)] were found to spend between 1.5 to 2 minutes (max. 3 minutes) on extracting the seeds before selecting the next cone (Clout 1989).

This is a considerably shorter handling time than for the birds observed in *A. verticillata* on Mt Majura. However, the latter species has larger cones, between 3 to 5 cm length, so processing the more substantial cones would take more time. However, handling time of cones is not just influenced by cone size, but also by its hardness and amount (weight, quality) of seeds, i.e. the return for the effort of breaking up the cone (Clout 1989). Cones set within the year, the ones the Glossy Black-Cockatoos use, are probably softer and the seeds richer in nutrients (especially protein content), than cones of the previous year (Clout 1989; T, Green, pers comm).

Clout (1989) concluded that Glossy Black- Cockatoos around Eden spent (in winter - June to August - their breeding season) about 88% of daytime activity feeding, i.e. extracting *Allocasuarina* seeds. On Kangaroo Island, the corresponding figure (not necessarily just for the winter season) was 60% (Higgins 1999).

These various observations allow us to calculate roughly the number of *Allocasuarina* cones a pair of cockatoos

may process in a day. In late July/early August birds at Mt Majura started their day shortly after sunrise and visited their watering hole and roost site within about 30 minutes before to about 15 minutes after sunset, This gave them about 9,45 hours (585 minutes) of day time for other activities. If we assume 60 to 88% of that time was spent feeding, as found for birds at other locations (see above), i.e. 351 to 514 minutes (about 6 to 8.5 hours) and with 4.2 minutes of handling time per cone, this would translate to 83 to 122 cones per bird per day, or 166 to 244 cones for a pair per day, or 60,000 to 89,000 cones in a year for a pair! This is a remarkable effort. Watching these birds certainly gives the impression of their being extremely focussed on food. This becomes very understandable when we consider that, according to studies on Kangaroo Island, only 5.7% by weight of an *A. verticillata* cone is edible in the form of 0.3g (range: 0.19 to 0,36g) of seeds (Pepper, 1997),

Tom Green provided data on cone and seed weight of *A. verticilla* collected from Mt, Ainslie (4 km south of Mt Majura) several years ago. They give a similar picture (see table 1 below). Cones from a tree heavily visited by Glossy Black-Cockatoos contained 5.1% seeds by dry weight, For Mt, Ainslie cones contained maximal 0.7g seeds (dry weight) per cone.

Table 1.
Seed weight and proportion of cone weight for *A. verticillata* on Mt Ainslie

Seed source	No	Total cone weight (g)		Seeds		
		Fresh	Dry,less seed weight	Total dry weight (g)	dry weight of cone (%)	Weight per cone (g)
Smaller cones	18	250.3	135.0	5.4	3.8	0.30
Cones from visited tree	30	692.6	389.3	20.9	5.1	0.70
Cones from adjacent tree	31	737.3	397.9	19.0	4.6	0.61

Although these calculations on cone numbers required per year are clearly an oversimplification, they nevertheless effectively underscore the problem Glossy Black-Cockatoos face: with an almost exclusive reliance on *Allocasuarina* seeds all-year-round: the birds require significant stands of these trees, Unfortunately, suitable habitat is shrinking due to clearing and fire; it is becoming increasingly fragmented; and regeneration is often reduced by grazing stock and feral animals.

The Glossy Black-Cockatoos appear in our area only intermittently, indicating that they move at least between two if not more sites to survive. In 2003-2004 the Majura-Ainslie Range supported up to 15 birds (Holiday 2004) for many months, one pair even bred successfully (Lenz et al. 2004). Having these vulnerable birds as visitors to our area is certainly a special treat, but our recent observations only underscore how little we know about them.

Acknowledgment

I am grateful to Tom Green for making his data on cone and seed weights available and for general discussion,

References

Burbidge NT and Gray M (1979). *Flora of the Australian Capital Territory.* Australian National University Press, Canberra.

Clout MN (1989). Foraging behaviour of Glossy Black-Cockatoos. *Australian Wildlife Research* 16: 467-473.

Higgins PJ (1999). *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antartic Birds. Volume 4: Parrots to Dollarbird.* Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Holiday S (2004). The Glossy Black-Cockatoo in the Australian Capital Territory. *Canberra Bird Notes* 29: 125-130.

Lenz M, Dabb G, Green T, Gourlay T, Holliday S, Buckley P and Oren Y (2004). First record of Glossy Black-Cockatoos breeding in the Australian Capital Territory. *Canberra Bird Notes* 29: 131-136.

Pepper JW (1997). A survey of the South Australian Glossy Black-cockatoo *(Calyptorhynchus lathami halmaturinus)* and its habitat. *Wildlife Research* 24:

GLOSSY BLACK-COCKATOO FOOD SCRAPS - PICKINGS FOR CRIMSON ROSELLAS

Michael Lenz
8 Suttor Street, Ainslie, ACT 2602

Abstract *Glossy Black-Cockatoos are well known for leaving a tell-tale debris of chewed Allocasuarina cones underneath trees in which they feed. This paper shows that Crimson Rosellas can clearly make use of this debris by extracting seeds which have been overlooked or ignored by the cockatoos, thereby exploiting a food source otherwise unavailable to them due to the hardness of the cones.*

Triggered by the influx of Glossy Black-Cockatoos *Calyptorhynchus lathami* into the Mt Majura Range in 2003-2004 (Holliday 2004, Lenz et al 2004), COG members were encouraged to search other sites with stands of *Allocasuarina* for the tell-tale signs of the presence of this uncommon bird in our region — cone husks underneath *Allocasuarina* trees. *Allocasuarina* seeds are the almost exclusive food for these birds.

One consequence of this was a discussion on COG's email chat-line about whether other birds can also break open *Allocasuarina* cones, and whether the litter could be confused with that produced by Glossy Black-Cockatoos. The discussion developed into a listing of birds seen feeding in *Allocasuarina* rather than producing any detailed knowledge of whether other species, except for some of the larger parrots,

would break up the cones to extract the seeds. For example, Red-browed Finches *Neochmia temporalis* will feed on sheoak seeds, but can only do so when the valves in the cones have opened at least a little (Tom Green, pers comm). It is interesting that the Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus funereus* (a common sight in and around Canberra since the 2002 bushfires) did not show any interest in *Allocasuarina* cones. The Crimson Rosella *Platycercus elegans* was among the birds seen feeding on cones, however, it was not clear whether the species is able to break up closed cones - they may become interested in cones only as they open up to release their seeds, or they may pick seeds from the ground. *Allocasuarina* seeds are certainly listed in the Crimson Rosella diet (Higgins 1999).

On 1 August 2004 **I** watched a pair of Glossy Black-Cockatoos on the Mt Majura Range for about two hours feeding in a Drooping Sheoak *Allocasuarina verticillata*. After a few minutes of watching the cockatoos, two Crimson Rosellas - one in adult plumage, the other with remnant immature plumage - flew in and landed under the tree. They immediately started picking up cones and the remains of shredded cones. The birds focussed largely on parts of shredded cones; any intact cones (older cones that had fallen from the tree naturally) were briefly examined and then dropped. The top section of the cone is the last (and larger) part the cockatoos drop. Chiefly, these were more closely examined and probed by the rosellas, I assumed for remaining seeds. The rosellas also chewed on cone remains, but mostly from the inner opened and softer side, hardly ever from the harder outer shell. This way they could access some of the remaining seeds, The two birds spent eight minutes working through cone remains: they were certainly still getting some seeds left behind by the Glossy Black-Cockatoos. The rosellas flew off when another two Crimson Rosellas appeared nearby. About an hour and a half later another two Crimson Rosellas arrived (both in adult plumage), and spent about twelve minutes on the ground, following the same seed-extracting routine as the previous visitors, The Crimson Rosellas, and the cockatoos, left when they were briefly startled by an unknown cause. The cockatoos settled quickly and resumed feeding but the Crimson Rosellas did not return.

Later, once all birds had left, **I** could confirm that quite a few of the cone remains still contained some seeds, making it worthwhile for the Crimson Rosellas to inspect and exploit a food source that otherwise may not be readily available to them,

References

Higgins PJ *(1999). Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antartic Birds. Volume 4: Parrots to Dollarbird.* Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Holiday S (2004). The Glossy Black-Cockatoo in the Australian Capital *Territory. Canberra Bird Notes* 29:125-130.

Lenz M, Dabb G, Green T, Gourlay T, Holliday S, Buckley P and Oren Y (2004). First record of Glossy Black Cockatoos breeding in the Australian Capital Territory. *Canberra Bird* Notes 29: 131-136

PAINTED HONEYEATER REPORTS IN THE CANBERRA REGION SINCE THE 2002-03 INFLUX

Jenny Bounds, PO Box 403, Woden, ACT 2606

Abstract *This article updates the published record of reports of Painted Honeyeater Grantiella picta in the Canberra region since the significant influx of this species in the 2002-03 spring and summer season.*

The 2002-03 influx of an estimated 35 Painted Honeyeaters at various locations was reported in two articles in *Canberra Bird Notes* (Lenz and Dabb 2003, Bounds 2003a). In the summer of 2003, the last reported sighting of the species was at Mt Taylor Canberra Nature Park on 18 January 2003 (Bounds 2003b).

Four new reports, detailed in the table below, are known between September 2003 and November 2003. These are of single birds only.

- One of these reports, from a COG field trip in November 2003, at Caloola Farm, a private property in the Naas Valley, appears to be the most southerly record of the species in the ACT region; this species has not previously been recorded there.
- The other three reports are from two locations where the species was recorded in the 2002/03 season (Campbell Park on the eastern side of Mt Ainslie, and TSR 48 on the Gunning-Gundaroo Road, north of Gundaroo).

Most recently, in the late spring of 2004, there have been sightings from late October 2004 to late December 2004, again in TSR 48 where there were four birds (two pairs confirmed) and possibly up to two other birds.

The records in this table are from the COG database, reports on the COG email discussion list (Cog-l), some reported personally to the author or observed by the author.

Table 1. Painted Honeyeater observations spring-summer 2003-04 and 2004

Location	Date	No of birds	Source/observer/comments
TSR 48 Gunning- Gundaroo Road, north of	29 Sep 2003	1	Cog ─l P Wicksteed Observed in an open dead sapling; further visits provided no more sightings
Campbell Park (woodland near offices carpark) COG Grid M13	6 Nov 2003	1	COG database R Bell

Caloola Farm, Naas Valley COG Grid J23	22 Nov 2003	1 male	COG Database; J Bounds and others Bird observed late morning around Caloola Farm homestead during a break in a weekend of almost continuous rain; bird was calling and flying high over trees, and feeding in mistletoe clumps in trees. The bird was observed for half an hour when it flew off down the valley. Habitat is mature, widely spaced Yellow Box trees with good amounts of mistletoe.
Campbell Park (creek line near the triangular dam) COG Grid M l 3	29 Nov 2003	1	Cog ─ l; S Holliday The bird was calling from mistletoe in a Yellow Box for several minutes before flying off; more distant calls were heard. Observer had wandered through the area earlier and had not seen or heard the species.
TSR 48 Gunning-Gundaroo Road, north of Gundaroo COG Grid O5	31 Oct 2004	4	Cog ─l; P Wicksteed/S Lashko and others; 2 birds seen feeding in mistletoe and another 2 flying. On 2 November, 4 birds were confirmed at the same location by M & F Butterfield
TSR 48 Gunning-Gundaroo Road, north of Gundaroo COG Grid O5	21 Nov 2004 21 Nov 2004	4 2 at nest	J Bounds, J Holland and S Lashko. On a brief visit in the afternoon near the gate at the top of the laneway into the TRS, observed 2 birds perched in a dead eucalypt and estimated two others were calling from a distance away. P Wicksteed reported a pair at a nest on the same day, following a visit in the morning.
TSR 48 Gunning-Gundaroo Road, north of Gundaroo COG Grid O5	23 Nov 2004	4 seen; possibly 5 birds	J Bounds Three birds were perched in trees with dead upper branches or in dead trees, then flew some distance to mistletoe clumps; the others were seen flying. Another bird was heard calling from some distance away. One territory appeared to be just inside the TSR gate and up the hill to the SW, another was around the top of the laneway and included the adjacent woodland to the west, and a possible third was up the hill wel1 into the NW part of the reserve.
TSR 48 Gunning-Gundaroo Road, north of Gundaroo COG Grid O5	19 Dec 2004	4 birds seen, possibly one other calling	J Bounds Two territories, the same as on the visit 23 Nov. Another bird heard calling some distance away to the west ─ possibly another territory. The pair centred on an area up the hill just inside the TSR gate were observed

Travelling Stock Reserve No. 48

TSR 48 is a small, 18-ha area of mainly Yellow Box *Eucalyptus melliodora* and Red Box *E. polyanthemos* woodland on a hillside, There are some Red Stringybark *E. macrorhyncha* a few Scribbly Gum *E. rossii*, and an occasional Apple Box *E. bridgesiana*, It has a grassy understorey of mixed native and exotic grasses, some eucalypt regrowth and saplings, some low shrubs such as *Melichrus sp.* and an occasional tall wattle *Acacia sp.*, but most of the original shrub layer has been removed. There is some fallen timber and stumps from previous clearing/ timber cutting activities. There is a moderate to high amount of mistletoe in many trees in the reserve and in isolated trees in adjacent paddocks. There are a few dead trees or trees with dead upper limbs. These are favoured by the Painted Honeyeaters which have been observed calling from them regularly.

The reserve appears to have some connectivity to the north-west with scattered patches of remnant open woodland in the landscape, but the land is substantially cleared to the south, west and east. The reserve is currently grazed by sheep. Access is by arrangement with the land managers.

Other woodland bird species of interest recorded in TSR 48 include Diamond Firetail *Stagonopleura guttata*, Hooded Robin *Melanodryas cucullata*, Brown Treecreeper *Climacteris picumnus*, Crested Shriketit *Falcunculus frontatus*,

White winged Triller *Lalage sueurii*,

Jacky Winter *Microeca fascinans* and Dusky Woodswallow *Artamus cyanopterus*.

This list is based on the COG database records from the TSR (Pauline Wicksteed's observations from regular visits), plus recent observations by the author. Some of the smaller passerines such as the thornbills, which prefer a more complex lower layer of shrubs/smaller trees, are absent from the list. However, this TSR is obviously an important habitat for a variety of woodland birds which are locally uncommon or on the threatened list.

References

Bounds J (2003a). Painted Honeyeater reports in the Canberra region during the 2002-03 influx. *Canberra Bird Notes* 28: 56-62.

Bounds J (2003b). Addenda and corrigenda to previous issues of *Canberra Bird Notes*. *Canberra Bird Notes* **28:** 95.

Lenz M and Dabb G (2003). Breeding by Painted Honeyeaters in the Canberra region during the 2002-03 influx. *Canberra Bird Notes* 28: 1-8.

ODD OBS

A possible melanistic Pink Robin at Thredbo

For many years now, I have been recording Pink Robins *Petroica rodinogaster* and their breeding in a number of gullies near Thredbo Village, in Kosciuszko National Park. The strongholds of the species are in Tasmania and the mountain ranges of northern Victoria, yet the Pink Robin regularly appears in spring in the cool, dense undercover of the mountain gullies around Thredbo, breeds there, then disappears in autumn.

While holidaying at Thredbo in January 2004, **I** walked up Merritts Nature Track as far as a little footbridge over a creek, known locally as Merritts Creek. About 30 m downstream from the footbridge was a Pink Robin's nest, built in the fork of a small dead tea-tree *Leptospermum grandifolium* standing in the then dry outer creek bed. While I watched, the male robin brought food to the sitting female. Curiously, the male was breeding in brown plumage, though a shade darker brown than the female. The female flew off the nest for brief periods, before returning to settle silently back on the nest.

Then a sudden flurry of small birds erupted in a nearby live leptospermum. One of the participants was the female Pink Robin, who quickly returned and settled low onto her nest. **I** then noticed what **I** thought was a second male robin, which alighted on more distant leptospermum with its back towards me. Its back was the customary black plumage of a male Pink Robin. When it moved, however, I was startled to see that its breast plumage was not pink, but black. A "Black Robin"! Was this bird the reason for the sudden scuffle a few minutes earlier, **I** wondered. After perching for a while, the black bird flew in and alighted on a twiggy branch of the nesting tree, quite close to the nest. The female Pink Robin, meanwhile, remained sitting very low on the nest.

Through binoculars, I inspected the newcomer closely. It was a completely black robin-like bird, of similar size, shape and habit to a Pink Robin. Its eyes were black, as was its bill and legs. Its most outstanding feature, in the sunshine, was its shiny, sharp black bill.

After a brief stay, it turned and flew off down the creek, keeping under the canopy of the tea-trees. I searched the area thoroughly, and again the next day, but failed to find it again.

This sighting reminded me of a similar occurrence 20 years ago, when I also saw a sooty black robin-like bird, in a Thredbo mountain gully about 1.1 km east of Merritts Creek, at a similar altitude (1440-1500 m) and in a known Pink Robin breeding territory.

As the area is outside COG's area of concern, I submitted my field notes of the "black robin" to Birds Australia. The reply was, in part,

> Thank you for sending in details of your "black robin". I think the bird has to be a melanistic robin. Melanism is an extremely rare plumage abnormality and it has never been recorded in *Petroica*

> robins that we know of (including HANZAB). If possible, its important to get a positive identification of the species. From your notes, it would certainly appear to be a Pink Robin. I take it the bird didn't call, as that could prove identification.

I shall search again for my black Pink Robin when I go to Thredbo in January 2005, and I urge any birdwatcher who visits Thredbo to do likewise.

Jean Whatman

154 Namatjira Drive, Chapman, ACT

2611

Bush birds, bush tucker

Walter, an elderly mate, often reminisces about life in the bush during the Great Depression. While many a battler survived on rabbits, birds were a welcome respite from 'underground mutton'. A few rosellas or a brace of galahs stuffed with bread crumbs and fried in mutton fat often relieved a Depression family's hunger. According to Walt, the hindquarters of currawongs proved quite succulent, but the forequarters were discarded because they were tough and stringy. Wattlebirds, pigeons, ducks, swans, curlews, lapwings and snipe were among the more favoured species. Small boys made bullroarers by tying the tail of a snipe to a piece of string and whirling it above their heads, producing a thrumming sound.

South Australians have long been called Crow Eaters. But **I** wonder if the birds they allegedly consumed were in fact crows? Going on what Walt said about currawongs being good bush tucker, perhaps South Aussies should be called Currawong Eaters. You see, I've struck a few old bush hands who referred to currawongs as Pied Crows.

Then again, one time, in outback South Australia, I met an octogenarian descendent of Afghan camel drivers who told me that when times were hard, and the tucker box empty, his forebears ate crows. He recited the following recipe: "Place your crow in a glazed earthenware jar together with a pint of vinegar, two tablespoons of kerosene, a handful of salt, and a small stone. Cover the jar and allow to marinate until the stone has dissolved. Then drain, eat and enjoy your crow." Perhaps this may be the origin of the Australian expression, "Stone the crows".

As colonial capitals began to burgeon during the latter half of the 19th century, professional hunters made a fair living supplying city markets with native birds. By the 1860s, a pair of Black Swans brought the princely sum of ten shillings in Melbourne.

However, in the days before refrigeration and readily available ice, many birds spoiled before they reached market. Accordingly, hunters gutted them and sprinkled a mixture of cayenne pepper and saltpeter in the abdominal cavities "to preserve the natural flavour". I daresay it was also intended to repel flies and mask the taste of rancid meat.

On the Victorian gold fields of the 1850s, diggers called kookaburras ha-ha pigeons, and found them good to eat. A century later, along the Murray River near Albury, some newly-arrived European migrants hunted chuckle ducks, until the local magistrates

convinced them there was no open season on kookaburras.

In 1944, my uncle managed a grazing property near Wagga Wagga and employed a couple of Italian prisoners of war. They proved good workers, happy to be away from the fighting. Much to Unk's amazement they set a bird trap in the orchard and feasted on a bounty of Common Starlings.

John K Layton

14 Beach Place, Holt, ACT 2615

Mt Taylor: the birds return

The 18 January 2003 firestorm took out Mt Taylor in ten minutes. Previous to this day, we had recorded some 68 species either living on the mountain, or in its suburban environs. Whilst many of the residents were fairly common to Canberra, our Double-barred Finches *Taeniopygia bichenovii,* Superb Fairy-wrens *Malurus cyaneus,* White-browed Scrubwrens *Sericornis frontalis,* Mistletoebirds *Dicaeum hirundinaceum,* White-throated Treecreepers *Cormobates leucophaeus,* Rufous Whistlers *Pachycephala rufiventris* and Varied Sittellas *Daphoenositta chrysoptera* were a constant delight, along with Olive-backed Orioles *Oriolus sagittatus,* nesting in a large *Exocarpus cupressiformis!* The mountain smoked for days, deserted, except for the treecreepers who returned very quickly, rummaging under damaged bark.

Spring 2003 produced nesting by Galahs *Cacatua roseicapilla,* Crimson Rosellas *Platycercus elegans,* Australian Ravens *Corvus coronoides,* Australian Magpies *Gymnorhina tibicen,* Pied Currawongs *Strepera graculina,* Laughing Kookaburras *Dacelo novaeguineae* and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos *Cacatua galerita,* all competing for desirable real estate in damaged eucalypts. Red Wattlebirds *Anthochaera carunculata,* Magpie-larks *Grallina cyanoleuca,* Noisy Miners *Manorina melanocephala,* White-winged Choughs *Corcorax melanorhamphos,* Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis* and Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* fought for branches or holes either in the park or nearby. Smaller birds were observed making use of numerous small holes in badly damaged eucalypts, and Speckled Warblers *Chthonicola sagittata* appeared in the sparse undergrowth near the dam. Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina novaehollandiae* pairs were present, and a group of six White-winged Trillers *Lalage sueurii* appeared in mid-summer. Three Wedge-tailed Eagles *Aquila audax* often visited the summit, barreling along the updraughts.

Spring 2004 burst late: the delayed rains have accelerated the epicormic growth and thickened the understorey with a magnificent display of flowers, grasses, *Bursaria spinosa* and other shrubs, vastly improving the small bird habitat. All the 2003 nesters have returned, with the addition of numerous Weebills *Smicrornis brevirostris,* Yellow-rumped Thornbills *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa,* Striated Pardalotes *Pardalotus striatus,* Spotted Pardalotes *P. punctatus,* Noisy Friarbirds *Philemon corniculatus,* Australian Wood Ducks *Chenonetta jubata* (a family of seven hatched in a *Eucalyptus polyanthemos* near the first dam), and Tree Martins *Hirundo nigricans.* There was even the amazing White-winged Chough pudding bowl of

a nest. A Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus axillaris* and a Nankeen Kestrel *Falco cenchroides* fly the winds, reportedly nesting on nearby hills. Eastern Spinebills *Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris* have over-wintered in our garden, a Red-browed Finch *Neochmia temporalis* passed through, along with numerous honeyeaters. And last night, two Southern Boobooks *Ninox novaeseelandiae* called into the night, only the second time I have heard them in three years. To those of us who have suffered with the birds, living in the fire aftermath, the recovery has been a miracle.

Anne I'Ons
5 Provis Place, Kambah, ACT 2902

Probable breeding of Southern Boobooks in Red Hill

Each year for the past three years, in early January, young Southern Boobooks have come into the garden, or roosted in two sites at the rear of 46 Mugga Way. In January 2003, there was a single young boobook; in 2004 there were two; and this year on 1 January 2005 four young birds were crowded into a Silver Birch, though they later found a better roost site in the weeping habit of a cedar.

I have been unable to find the actual nest site, although my neighbours on the southern side believe it is in their place. There is a 200-year old Yellow Box next door, but it seems to lack a good nesting hole. My neighbours are always the first to see the young birds. This season, they were flying around in the neighbours' yard four or five days before they ventured further afield into mine.

The young stay around for about a month, and don't always roost in the same tree, or even in my garden, during that time. Quite often they will stay for a couple of days, then will go to another roost for a further few days, before returning, I don't know where the adults roost, although often at night during the year you can hear their calls from the south-west.

Rob Griffiths
46 Mugga Way, Red Hill, ACT 2603

A Grey-crowned Babbler in Canberra

On 23 September 2004, Michael Kingsford reported on the COG email discussion list that he had observed a Grey-crowned Babbler *Pomatostomus temporalis* at Duntroon Golf Course. On the following day, I went in search of the bird and was successful in finding it, as were many other COG members over the next few days.

The bird was approximately 27-30 cm in length. Its crown and nape were pale grey; it had a black mask extending from bill to shoulder; a broad white eyebrow; a white throat; dark brown upperparts; paler brown underparts; a blackish tail with obvious white tips; and dark legs. It had yellow eyes, indicating that it was at least three years or older.

The bird gave several calls, including a 'ya' call, which indicated that it was a female bird. The 'ya' is part of the antiphonal 'yahoo' call, with a male making the 'hoo'. This antiphon can be repeated up to thirty times. The female gave the 'ya' call of her own accord. She also gave the 'ya' call when I solicited a call by mimicking the male's 'hoo' call.

We traded calls continuously for nine or ten 'yahoos'. The bird also gave a 'wee-oo' call, a 'chuck' or 'wuck' contact call, and a harsh 'chack' alarm call.

When I first located the bird, it was feeding on open grassy ground beside a football oval on Hopkins Rd. It was close to a pair of Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* feeding on the ground. The bird flew up to a tree and proceeded to feed amongst pine cones in two large *Pinus radiata* by the roadside. The bird then flew 200 m west to the area between the sixth tee and the groundskeeper's sheds. The bird fed on the ground under several *Prunus* trees, sometimes venturing out from the trees as far as 20 m onto the fairway. The bird rested for a period of ten minutes in a large conifer beside the sheds. The bird gave the typical harsh 'chack' alarm call when swooped by an Australian Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen*. The bird also reacted to alarm calls from Noisy Miners *Manorina melanocephala* and leapt into a *Prunus* tree for cover.

While the golf course comprised mostly exotic vegetation, the closely mown lawn provided suitable foraging on the ground. A large stand of planted *Eucalyptus globulus* with an understorey of planted native grasses around 100 m to the north may have provided other suitable foraging habitat.

There was some speculation amongst other observers about the origin of this bird. In his outline of the history of the species, Wilson (1999) recorded that several Grey-crowned Babbler colonies existed between Red Hill and Tuggeranong prior to 1950. In a review of regional rarities, Dow (1988) reported records of two Grey-crowned Babblers in Majura pines on 21/02/66; at Ginninderra, four on 4/2/67, three on 17/8/67, three on 12/12/67 and one on 1/11/68; the species was also recorded at Gidleigh Station, Bungendore on 23/2/74 and eight birds were recorded at Bungendore on 16/3/74, There have been unconfirmed recent records from Majura Rd, Spring Range Rd just north of the ACT border, Googong foreshores and Strikealight Creek between Googong and the Tinderry Range, so it is possible that the bird has moved locally. It would be possible but very surprising for the bird to have moved here from the nearest group location known to me, near Boorowa.

It is highly unlikely that the bird was a cage escapee as the species is not regularly kept as an aviary species, and the bird in question behaved exactly as a wild bird would. It was quite approachable, but did not allow me to get closer than about 10-12 m. The bird would give a quiet alarm call and move away if I got too close. This is normal behaviour for the species, based on many hours of observation in the field.

Two photos of this bird appear in the photo gallery section of the COG website.

References

Wilson S (1999). *Birds of the ACT: two centuries of change.* Canberra Ornithologists Group, Canberra, p. 60.
Dow C (1988). Regional rarities records review, *Canberra Bird Notes* 13: 18.

Anthony Overs

50 Ross Smith Cres., Scullin, ACT 2614

BOOK REVIEW

Australian birds, their nests and eggs, by Gordon Beruldsen, [2004], self-published. 424 pp. A guide to the nests and eggs of those Australian birds that are known to breed in Australia and on offshore islands (excluding Christmas and Lord Howe Islands). *Available from the author, 47 Broadmoor Street, Kenmore Hills Qld 4069 or bookstores. $40.*

The original *Field Guide to Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds* was published in 1980, and has long been hard to find, even second-hand. No other single source covers nests and eggs in such comprehensive detail, so the revised second edition will be welcomed by many birders.

The new volume has been expanded and up-dated to some extent, but largely follows the layout of the first edition. It is similar in size, making it quite portable for fieldwork. Importantly, the do's and don't's of nest-finding are still listed prominently at the start of the book. The list of species covered has been expanded, and arrangement and nomenclature updated. New sections added include Nests, Egg Structure, Colour and Markings, Egg Size and Shape, Clutch Size and The Effects of Weather. All the photographs of eggs are new and there are additional new photos of birds, nests and eggs in situ. Beyond this, the layout of the book closely follows the first edition: Nests, Keys to Nest Identification, Eggs, Keys to Egg Identification, Individual Species Descriptions, Although new material is included, much of the original wording is unchanged. There is a short list of Selected Reading, an Index of Common Names and an Index of Scientific Names.

This is a book written by a clearly knowledgeable and enthusiastic birdwatcher with a huge fund of personal experience. It is full of observation, speculation and anecdote, and conveys a real passion for the subject. For instance, there are the fascinating photos of very varied clutches from within a species, or several pages of stories, speculation and questions about nest parasites. This depth of individual knowledge and experience is one of the book's main strengths.

The photographs of the eggs are all new and generally good, though not dramatically better than in the first edition. More species are included and clutches are numbered on each plate to refer to the species listed below, an improvement on the first edition. Two background colours are used in the egg photos, which seems unnecessary, and the inclusion of a wooden frame at the bottom of each plate is certainly distracting. It would have been useful to have an indication of scale on each plate as well as in the individual species' accounts.

The revised section "Colour Plates — Nests" now has over 20 pages of photos of birds at the nest, nests and eggs which convey the beauty and excitement of the subject. However, the arrangement of the photos seems rather haphazard and though the images are referred to in the index the plate pages are unnumbered. Similarly, there are many excellent new

full- and part-page photos spread throughout the individual species accounts, but in some cases these are unlabelled and it is left to the reader to deduce the subject from the text. For instance, the unlabelled nest image on p.325 might be of either Brown-backed or Bar-breasted Honeyeater,

Paradoxically, the impressive individual nature of this work is also one of its weaknesses. Much of the useful and interesting introductory information would benefit from rigorous editing; it is only accessible by carefully reading long, dense passages of text with minimal subject headings. Furthermore, one person's knowledge, however extensive, cannot be complete. Although the author does refer the reader on to other useful works such as the four current field guides to Australian birds, he makes no reference to the Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds (HANZAB). Information in existing volumes of HANZAB could certainly have covered much of the missing island territories.

In spite of these criticisms this remains a useful and attractive book. It has been updated, expanded and improved since the first edition, but these changes are more in the nature of a facelift for an old friend than a complete change in personality. It should be part of every serious birdwatcher's library.

Janet Gardner and Peter Marsack
c/- School of Botany and Zoology, ANU,
Canberra, ACT

CANBERRA ORNITHOLOGISTS GROUP
PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR 2003-04

It is a pleasure to provide my first President's report on COG activities during the past year. Note that this report covers the period between AGMs; that is, November 2003 when I was elected, to the present.

One of my initial aims was to be a much more visible COG president. particularly to the membership. Chairing our monthly meeting was a very important aspect of this. As in my view an enthusiastic leadership and membership is the lifeblood of any organisation, I also considered emphasis on the social side of COG (including at meetings) as a very important element.

Even though I was formally on the committee the previous year, and was the COG secretary in the late 1980s, I felt that initially I had a number of things to learn about the vast number of matters with which COG is, or potentially can be, involved. After a few months when I was better informed, my priority was to ensure that our major projects were running as smoothly as possible. Regarding new initiatives I have been very mindful of the fact that, while we are a big organisation, it is very easy to overstretch what is possible to be done with largely volunteer work. I've been keen to ensure that before we embark on anything new it is carefully examined, particularly the likelihood whether COG can deliver in a timely and professional way. This is part of the reason we haven't embarked on a more concerted effort for bushfire recovery monitoring as I had hoped, along with the fact that in the main this would largely give post-fire data, which is of limited value unless good pre-fire information is available.

So it's been a year of learning and consolidation of commitments. As can be seen by this report our commitments are very high and many members, both on and off the committee, work hard, selflessly and tirelessly. Our work on conservation matters has in particular been very wide and demanding, so much so that it has been shared by two committee members. A number of things have not gone in our preferred direction, but in the interests of the birds of the ACT and our region we have made the best possible cases, mindful of the fact that we're an apolitical organisation.

There have been a number of achievements. With your *Canberra Birds Notes* this month you all received a copy of the *Pocket Guide: The Birds of Canberra*, which was put together as part of a joint initiative between COG and Birds Australia through some hard work by Jenny Bounds and Penny Olsen. This is designed both to enable a basic identification of local species for ACT residents as an introduction to bird watching (and hopefully to attract new members to COG), as well as to provide information of the best spots for visitors. Already I've found that by providing it to friends and colleagues it serves the former well as it allows positive identification of the birds they have been seeing in their gardens etc.

This evening the first copies of the CD of calls and songs of ACT birds will be available. This has involved a major

effort by Peter Fullagar and Ed Slater, and I'd like to thank them both, particularly for their very generous offer to allow COG to market their product. Though the cassette Birds Songs of Canberra has stood the test of time very well since it was first produced in the 1980s, many members will welcome the opportunity to purchase or update to a product containing much more modern technology and a better quality sound.

COG has also been working on a project through the University of Canberra to enable bird observation data to be entered electronically to our database. This was to be launched tonight but unfortunately a minor hiccup has meant that it will now have to be launched in 2005. Again I'd like to thank all those involved, particularly David McDonald who has supervised and driven the project. I'm sure that many members will embrace the opportunity to lodge data in this way, and I'm expecting it will assist in my plans to give bird atlassing a higher profile in 2004-2005.

Anyone reading this report will have to be impressed by COG's range of activities and the sheer volume of effort expended by our members. Still there are many things that COG does not do. For example, except in a minor way we have not been able to partake in exhibitions for the past few years, and COG for many years has done very little specifically to attract younger members, including in the areas of education. Whether we can increase our profile in these areas is up to you the members, and should include an analysis of whether we have the resources to undertake these things in a major way.

Committee

I would like to thank the Committee for all the support they have given me over the past year. Most Committee members have signalled their intention to stand again, which is very pleasing. I would like to especially thank those members who are retiring from the Committee ─ David McDonald, who has been a very long serving Committee member and has played an important role in many aspects, including being the driving force and maintainer of the chat line; Julie McGuiness, again a longstanding member who has very ably looked after conservation matters; and Harvey Perkins, only on the Committee for a short period this time, but who will continue to share the very important role of CBN editor.

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 retain a healthy bank account in spite of some of my attempts and wishes to spend quite a bit more of our surplus. Once again thank you Joan for all your sterling work. And thanks also to Noel Luff, our Honorary Auditor. Membership was 342 at 30 June 2004, three per cent up from the same time last year.

Many members not formally on the committee help COG in its day to day activities, often behind the scenes and largely unrecognized, but nevertheless make a huge contribution to the success of the organisation, Through taking on the Presidency it has become even clearer that much of our business is carried out by keen members and project

organisers who are not formal members of the Committee. While it is not possible to thank them all individually, many are named below in this report.

Conservation

Jenny Bounds and Julie McGuiness have continued to work as COG's Conservation Officers. Jenny is also Vice-President of the Conservation Council for the SE Region and Canberra, and both represent the interests of birds in that forum, participating in campaigns and various working groups of the Council.

The 2003-2004 year had mixed outcomes for our birds. Two bird species nominated by COG, the Varied Sittella and White-winged Triller, were listed as "vulnerable" under the ACT Nature Conservation Act 1980. Unfortunately our submissions for the listing of a number of others were not accepted, though four species were put on a watching brief (Diamond Firetail, Crested Shrike-tit, Dusky Woodswallow, Flame Robin), We believe the case for the Diamond Firetail in particular is strong, and COG is undertaking further analysis of its data and intends to re-submit several species for further consideration.

Urban land clearing for housing and road infrastructure continues to be a major threat to bird habitats in the ACT, particularly in woodlands. Despite community opposition, the East O'Malley woodland was sold for prestige housing and sadly has now been cleared; this area was a key breeding habitat for a number of birds, including threatened and declining species of birds. Additionally, the ACT Government proceeded to clear Canberra Nature Park on Bruce Ridge and Black Mountain for the Gungahlin Drive Extension freeway, despite vocal opposition from many environmental groups and academics, and Court action taken by the Save the Ridge Group. Notably, this freeway has fragmented a key woodland complex (hot spot for the vulnerable Varied Sittella), and destroyed a key study site for researchers, including crucial habitat for Southern Boobooks which Jerry Olsen has monitored for many years there. On our first outing for 2004 ten lucky members were able to see these birds in their post-breeding dispersal, when we also first heard about their pending plight (see also the April 2004 *Gang-Gang* for background on the boobooks). While COG had no official position on whether a freeway should be built, bird data were provided to inform submissions on the impacts on biodiversity by the Gungahlin Drive Extension. COG has provided views to public consultations over the years on the GDE, outlining potential detrimental effects on bird habitat, and stated its objection to any resumption of land in nature reserves.

Gungahlin continues to grow and woodlands continue to be cleared there, with urban development now on the doorsteps of the important Mulligans Flat and Goorooyarroo woodland complex.

Some other issues COG has been involved in, including some positive news for birds, are:

- The announcement of cat containment measures for the new suburbs of Forde and Bonner adjacent to the Mulligans Flat Reserve, a first for the ACT; residents will have to keep their cats confined to their properties. COG provided key input to a Working Group, which submitted proposals to the ACT Government, and wrote a formal letter of support to the ACT Government.
- The publication of the Lowland Woodland Strategy which includes revised Action Plans for several listed (threatened) birds — it is noted, however, that the Action Plans have not yet delivered tangible outcomes for threatened birds which continue to decline in our woodlands

Submissions were prepared and/or other input was made (including contributing to submissions made by the Conservation Council) to the following:

- the Jerrabomberra Wetlands Review of Plan of Management — COG contributed tocommunity consultations and commented on draft plans (there is a proposed urban development in the adjacent East Basin which has impacts for the reserve), the Kingston Foreshores Development and the Mt Jerrabomberra Plan of Management;

- on the East Gungahlin Preliminary Assessment (suburbs of Kenny and Throsby) and representations to the ACT Government with our concerns about the impacts of close urban development on Mulligans Flat and Goorooyarroo Nature Reserves, especially the impacts on Brown Treecreepers which possibly no longer occur there; COG has been advised that future studies are to be done in advance of the housing development;
- to the Draft Variation to the Territory Plan (Mt Mugga Mugga NR); this included COGs opposition to the housing development in the East O'Malley woodlands;
- the Minimising Mynas project being managed by Dr Chris Tidemann (ANU);
- representations to the Manager of Canberra Nature Park about unrestrained dogs in the Mt Majura NP, with concerns about impacts on Glossy Black-Cockatoos coming to drink at the dams there;
- proposals for expanded rural villages in the ACT, the ACT Recreation Strategy and Associated Bushfire Recovery Issues, and Shaping our Territory — Non Urban Land Use (covers use of forestry and other land affected by the January 2003 bushfires); and
- on the ACT Spatial Plan, the key planning document for future urban development in areas such as the Molonglo Valley, and the Kowen Plateau.

Field trips

We have continued to run a very active program of field trips. I have maintained overall responsibility for management of the COG Field Trips program, and the 2004 program was devised with assistance of the Field Trips Team (Alistair Bestow, Jenny Bounds and David McDonald). David Rees joined this team later. A new policy was

adopted of having at least two trips per month, usually a shorter local one followed by one further afield later in the month. These ranged from local half-day trips, including for beginners, to full-day outings for the more experienced birdwatchers, through to weekend and longer camp-outs. This was a more stable program than the previous year, which was severely affected by the 18 January bushfires, but was supplemented some more opportunistic trips arranged flexibly as opportunities arose and resulted in the offering of weekly opportunities for members to participate in trips at the peak of the season (spring and early summer). Unfortunately there was insufficient interest in the one longer commercial trip that was offered, and it had to be cancelled.

The aim of the program was to arrange a wide range of opportunities, so that there would be at least some trips that appealed to each member. Highlights included the Croajingalong, Yathong and Buddigower camp-outs, the latter providing an opportunity for members to witness bird banding, the Green Cape trip affording armchair views of Ground Parrots feeding, the all-found stay at Thredbo offering good food, Olive Whistlers and Pink Robins, and the Pejar Dam bus trip for Great Crested Grebes and Musk Ducks, and which helped forge links with the Goulburn Field Naturalists. There were also very successful outings watching Glossy Black-Cockatoos come in to drink at the Mt Majura dams, to Tidbinbilla to look at how this favourite spot is regenerating, and a nest workshop at Campbell Park. We also had further trips in the electric boat up the Molonglo River to see the nesting darters and cormorants, and a repeat the Swift Parrot search around Boorowa/Cowra. Some of the places we visited became hot spots on the COG email discussion list, such as 'Bibaringa' for observing Diamond Doves. On our two most recent field trips, Painted and Regent Honeyeaters, as well as Red-backed Kingfishers, were seen ─ some would call this luck but we like to think it was good planning.

I cannot overemphasise the importance of field trips in the spectrum of COG's activities. Not only do they help members learn about birds and visit places that are otherwise hard to get to, but also there are important social and conservation aspects. Thanks to all those who helped lead and organise outings during the year, and we look forward to your continued assistance. Thanks also to those who wrote up such glowing reports of trips for *Gang-gang* and on the chat line, and submitted datasheets. This is a very important but sometimes overlooked aspect of field trips, as it whets the appetites for participating in the next trip.

We have drafted a similar program for 2005, including the opportunity for a commercial trip and trust that our field trips will continue to be well patronised and will be as successful as this year has been.

Communications and publications

During the year Tanya Rough continued to do a wonderful job editing and publishing our newsletter, *Gang-gang*. Lia Battisson and the team of helpers continued to wrap and mail it. Thanks to all involved in ensuring that the major vehicle for COG communication was

prepared and distributed in such a timely fashion. Thanks also to those who made regular contribution of articles, ensuring that it was always eagerly read when it landed in letter or email boxes.

Harvey Perkins and Barbara Allan continued to do a very professional job in editing *Canberra Bird Notes*, This has continued to be published on time and also to include some very up to date and topical articles about birds in our region such as those occurring at East O'Malley, or on the site of the Gungahlin Drive Extension, the post-fire honeyeater migration pattern and Silver Gulls breeding on Lake Burley Griffin. Thanks also to those who contributed these very interesting articles.

David Cook maintained, updated and considerably expanded COG's website which can be found at http://www.canberrabirds.org.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, including maps of some of our most visited places. Thank you David for providing such an excellent service. One of the features now is the Photo-gallery, where subscribers can submit and view a range of images of birds from our region, including topical local rarities,

COG's email discussion list 'canberrabirds', managed by David McDonald, continued to operate effectively throughout the year. It was moved from our former hosting service, Topica.com, to the web hosting service COG now uses, Quadra Hosting, without difficulty. The new facility enables subscribers to manage their own subscriptions. The list has over 160 subscribers, a 14 per cent increase on last year, and averages about four messages per day, providing a very useful forum for members and friends of COG to discuss topical issues relating to birds and birding in the Canberra region. A significant role for the list has been that of has been that of an unusual bird alerting service, facilitating the rapid spread of information about interested bird sightings. I have been particularly impressed with the speed at which this allows members to observe and confirm unusual sightings for our region. In a recent example all doubts about the accuracy of a report of a Grey-crowned Babbler were erased when follow-up observers were able to provide confirmatory reports to the chat line, including photos within 24 hours! I do regret that not all members are able to use this service, whether it is due to a dislike of the sheer volume of correspondence clogging up their email, or lack of access to the web. I must again congratulate all subscribers for keeping the list so free of the personal vitriol that seems to characterise similar lists.

Unfortunately our highly successful publication *Birds of Canberra Gardens* is just about out of stock and costs for a reprint are prohibitive, As an interim measure this is being loaded onto a website by Paul Fennell. It is anticipated this move will facilitate the future publication of a better, revised version incorporating 25 years' data from this very important project.

Atlas, Woodland Survey, Garden Bird Survey, Waterbird Survey, databases

COG runs a number of bird monitoring projects, some of which have been operating for many years. I would like to thank all those who have continued to contribute data to these projects.

As part of Birds Australia's Ongoing Atlas project, COG members are encouraged to collect records for COG's area of interest, especially at regular 2-hectare sites. While the effort has been lower than when the data was being collected for the Atlas published in 2003, it remains very important to collect this data over time. Thank you to all members who continue to collect records, and particularly those who still regularly revisit adopted 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. I hope to raise the profile for atlassing in 2005, including through the introduction of a well publicised blitz during Bird Week in October, as well as a repeat of the very successful Taylors Creek Landcare trip recently organised by Nicki Taws.

Another important component of COG's environmental monitoring program is the Woodland Monitoring Project. COG's surveys in grassy woodland habitats continued with further support from an ACT Government Environment Grant. There is now ten years of data for some sites (Mulligans Flat NR). Jenny Bounds is Convenor of the Management Committee, which coordinates this project, with Nicki Taws and Jack Holland forming the other members of the Management Team. Alison Rowell continues to have a key role as paid consultant to the project, coordinating the quarterly surveys and data collection at sites, as well as providing a voluntary input. Steve Holliday has played a key role in ensuing timely and accurate data entry for 2003-2004.

In April 2004, COG received Alison's Progress Report on the Woodland Bird Survey (2000-2003) that was subsequently published in *Canberra Bird Notes* (Vol. 29 No. 2, June 2004). This is a key report that provided some qualitative analysis of bird species of interest and recommendations for the future. Additional locations have been added to the project with Gooroo South (in Goorooyarroo Nature Reserve) and a site in the Naas Valley, Surveys are now conducted at 13 Grassy Woodland locations in key areas; in all a total of 129 sub-sites are monitored every three months. Thank you to the people involved in this project, including Jenny Bounds, Isobel Crawford, Geoffrey Dabb, Paul Fennell, John Goldie, Steve Holliday, Dave Cook, Michael Lenz, David McDonald, Julie McGuinness, Harvey Perkins, Alison Rowell, Nicki Taws and Kathy Walter, and others who assist the site coordinators with surveys, especially at Mulligans Flat Reserve which has the largest number of sub-sites. Most recently, a brief has been prepared to undertake a statistical analysis of a number of species of interest as well as common species including an analysis of habitat variables, to determine trends; this should be finalised at the end of March 2005. A second Woodland Birds Seminar (following on from the successful seminar in 2003), on a theme to be determined, is planned for the second half of 2005.

The Waterbird Survey continues under the expert guidance of Michael Lenz, although hampered in recent times by the lack of water in Lakes Bathurst and George.

Thanks to Mark Clayton and his successor, Martin Butterfield, for their work in managing the Garden Bird Survey, and, in particular to Kay Hahne for continuing to enter the data. This major project has now been in existence for over 23 years and is our longest-running monitoring project. Martin has taken up this role with great enthusiasm and is providing a personal service delivering charts etc. It is a particular achievement that, of the 58 sites currently active in year 24 of the Survey, 11 first reported data in years 1 or 2 of the Survey. We also have a few sites in the newer suburbs and more would be welcome, especially in Gungahlin. Looking forward, we are starting on a Review of the Survey to ensure that it keeps up with developments in technology and science,

Paul Fennell continued to manage COG's databases, except for the Garden Bird Survey, which is now ably managed by Martin Butterfield. They ensure that data are effectively curated and files regularly backed up, Special thanks to those members who assisted with data checking during the year, including Chris Davey, Harvey Perkins and Nicki Taws, Tony Harding, who left the ACT some time ago now, continues to be the single support for our main survey data entry. Many thanks to Tony for keeping up his excellent work from afar.

The Rarities Panel continued to meet quarterly to consider, and endorse for publication where appropriate, records of unusual species seen in COG's area of concern. It also continuously reviews the status of birds in our area and periodically issues a revised list of 'unusual' species. The Panel farewelled long-time member Barry Baker during the year; Richard Allen was appointed to fill the vacancy.

Annual Bird Reports

Many thanks to Barbara Allan, Martin Butterfield, Grahame Clark, Bob Digan, Malcolm Fyfe, Ian McMahon, Harvey Perkins, David Purchase and Nicki Taws and others who have managed to keep the Annual Bird Reports (ABR) up to date. Many thanks are also due to Martin Butterfield and Paul Fennell who retrieve and collate the data for the authors. I found the 2002-2003 Annual Bird Report published in March very interesting reading, and I would like to congratulate the team for putting it all together so quickly in just a couple of months from the very raw state I saw it just before Christmas. It is very important that the ABR is published as soon as possible after the reporting year has finished, in order to allow feedback to contributors and to show any trends or changes.

Monthly meetings

Barbara Allan has again organised an excellent program of presentations for our monthly meetings. They included well-attended presentations on the Wedge-tailed Eagle in our area, Glossy Black-Cockatoos, the Regent Honeyeater and White-browed Scrubwrens. My thanks again go to all speakers. Thanks also to Mark Clayton for organising and

running the Bird Quiz Night in January; not to be missed next time he does one. The reports in *Gang-gang* and on the COG website every month attest to the quality of our meetings. Special thanks also to Carol Macleay and her numerous helpers for running the monthly stall and raffle at COG meetings. Barbara Allan also organised the refreshments for the meetings to ensure members stay after and enjoy some of the very important social aspects of COG.

COG administration and the COG office

COG continued to hold its meetings at the Canberra Girls Grammar School theatrette, which is proving to be an excellent venue. We are very grateful to Sue Lashko for arranging this venue.

The COG Office in the Griffin Centre continues to house COG's equipment, data sheets, the COG library, computer and database and the COG slide collection. Barbara Allan and Tom Green run the office, which is currently open on Tuesday mornings. There have been discussions about a possible move when the new Griffin Centre is built, but they have been inconclusive to date.

David McDonald, Joan Lipscombe and Geoffrey Dabb were always available to provide quality advice on COG's constitutional and organisational framework.

Canberra Birds Conservation Fund

The Canberra Birds Conservation Fund is able to receive tax-deductible donations from COG members and the general public, and uses 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, Members continue to give generously to this fund,

The Fund's first grant was made in 2001 to Adrian Manning of the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, ANU, to assist in a study he has now completed: "A multi-scale study of the Superb Parrot". He reported on this study to COG's April meeting. During the year under review, the Fund's Management Committee provided a grant to Ms Suzi Bond to support a study "Do woodland birds breed in revegetated sites?" The findings of this study should be available soon.

Conclusion

I would like to thank everyone else who has provided with me assistance over the past year to make my first year as COG President both enjoyable and relatively smooth. **I** am extremely grateful for the support given by so many of COG's members to ensure our good work promoting the birds of Canberra and their conservation has continued. As departing President Barry Baker said last year, COG is a great organisation, and it has been an honour to serve as President during 2003-2004. I look forward to another active year guiding this very impressive organisation.

Jack Holland
10 November 2004

COLUMNISTS' CORNER

Capturing and expressing bird voice

The achievement of Peter Fullagar and Ederic Slater in producing their new 'Birds of the ACT' CD should earn the gratitude of local birdwatchers. With the CD, the ability to cue the relevant bird with few clicks of the button on the CD player is a most convenient advance from the audio-cassette.

For our intensively-watched Canberra area, it is also an advantage to have a CD sound-guide that, like the Taylor/Day field guide, is limited to the local birds, When it is made more comprehensive, as promised, it will be even better.

Useful as this is, I suppose we all assume that the recording, storing and playing of natural sounds will just keep getting easier, with ever-improving quality, *Stentoreus* was reflecting on this recently while reading an autobiography of Ludwig Koch, who is said to have made his — and the world's — first recording of bird-song in 1889, at the age of eight. Later, with the support of Julian Huxley, he produced the first British bird 'sound book', in 1936.

This innovative product was of great interest at the time to Neville Chamberlain, himself a keen birdwatcher. (He is said to have left an important meeting at 10 Downing Street to listen to a blackbird in his garden mimicking a Song Thrush.)

Ludwig Koch says that, in those dark days just before WWII, he was attacked by a Swiss newspaper for taking up the British Prime Minister's time with listening to bird-song when he (the Prime Minister) should have been listening to the threatened people of Czechoslovakia.

Ludwig began in his native Germany with wax cylinders. When an eight-year old, apart from bird and animal sounds, he liked to record voices of important people:

> I even approached the great Bismarck, who took it as a joke, and I wish I could still play the wax, primitive though it was, that recorded the high-pitched falsetto voice of this huge man.

The wax cylinders had their difficulties. They couldn't record unless they were kept warm, and they were fragile, sometimes shattering merely from being carried in a motor vehicle. After some years of acoustic recording, Ludwig, still then in pre-war Germany, was 'very thrilled' to be able to use the new electrical means, with gear packed into a 'huge car' presented to him by bird enthusiasts. The car could not always go where the birds were, and there were times when he had to use a 'mile of cable' and be plagued by short-circuits.

Despite the availability today of extensive sets of high quality bird recordings, good descriptions of voice are still very useful in the field guides.

From about 1935, in scientific publications, a technique was used for expressing bird songs visually — in diagrams known as 'audiospectrograms', or 'sonograms'. Called 'Sonagrams', they were first used in a field guide in 1966,

in the *Birds of North America* volume in the Golden Field Guide series. It was claimed:

> A knowledge of music helps in interpreting Sonagrams but is by no means necessary. Even a person who is tone deaf can detect the differences in pattern, timing and quality of a song.

However, sonograms, like zoom binoculars, have never really taken off with the birdwatching community. First, they are not as easy to interpret as had been claimed, Secondly, they indicate only pitch, frequency range and timing, not relative loudness of each component, or stress. Thirdly, for space reasons they can generally be used to illustrate only one example of voice, perhaps only one phrase of a song. Now, on top of those objections, actual recordings of voice can be taken into the field.

That 1966 guide had assumed that sound recordings would be used. for example, at home, and that sonograms were an opportunity to take a voice record into the field. The same purpose can now be served by carrying a pocket-sized player.

However, for when we come across an unfamiliar bird or an unfamiliar example of voice we will often want our field guide (unless we are of the class that doesn't need a field guide at all) to tell us, concisely and helpfully, what kind of sound we can expect from a particular bird. Therefore, the art of describing bird voice verbally still lives on.

These days, with compression of text essential as the more vocal users demand a guide that fits into their concept of a 'pocket', voice descriptions are highly abbreviated. Personally, I like the style of PAD Hollom's *Popular Handbook of British Birds*, where the writing is as ornamental as the illustrations, both belonging to an earlier era of bird-chasing. The following is given for the Blackbird:

> Common note when disturbed is a low "tchook, tchook, tchook"; when startled it flies off with a characteristic "Alarm rattle". A persistent "chick-chick-chick ..." is much used when going to roost. The rich fluty song is loud and fluent but the notes are not clearly defined as in Song Thrush, being merged into a continuous short warble. A certain languid ease of delivery is characteristic, and it is lower pitched, also richer and mellower, but tends to tail off into a feeble ending of subdued, creaky, chuckling notes. It is heard exceptionally or as subsong from about mid-December to early February, by the end of which month full song is regular, lasting to early July, but ceases entirely in August; there is a slight recrudescence from late August to late September.

You won't learn all that from your two- or three-second sonogram.

Australian authors have done pretty well with their voice descriptions, often employing, like writers in other places, verbal renderings of common — and sometimes uncommon — syllables heard in the songs and calls of this or that species. This has given rise to (in relation to the Pilotbird, for example) the 'guinea-a-week' school and the 'eetsi-a-cheek' school.

Stentoreus has heard that some authors have asserted copyright in these verbalisations, to guard them from use

by rival authors. Such an extreme course would be legally open, **I** suppose, provided that the 'words' used amounted to an original creation. However, as the true original, the voice of the bird, is always freely available for copying, I would expect that anyone who set out in good faith to arrive themselves, without copying someone else, at the most faithful rendering of 'tschirrikschitt' (or whatever) would be on safe ground.

Some of the more useful verbalisings have a respectable pedigree. For example Pizzey' s, 'knock-at-the-door' (Crested Shrike-tit) and 'you may come, if you will, to the sea' (Flame Robin) were both given by Neville Cayley in his first edition in 1931. (Morcombe's renderings of these are, respectively, 'whiert,whi-whit, wheeeir' and 'chrip-a-chrip, chrip-a-chrip, chirripa-tirrrrrip', more accurate, perhaps, but also much more difficult to remember.)

Value as a memory aid, however, should not be allowed to stand in the way of clearly more accurate suggestions, Thus Pizzey does not follow Cayley's 'Egypt' for the Crescent Honeyeater, but gives 'high-pitched, jagged *eejile;* in winter, simply jik'.

It is a pity that the compression forces operating on modern field guides do not allow for more vivid and evocative descriptions of bird voice, Nonetheless, Graham Pizzey managed a gem in his first edition. The wafty little song of the Western Gerygone had been described by Gould as 'a somewhat pleasing and plaintive melody' and by Cayley as 'sweet but feeble'. Pizzey wrote of it:

> One of the sweetest and most oft-repeated but elfin and elusive Australian bird songs: a falling silvery thread of sound that seems to finish before the end.

However, getting, instead of that, 'sweet but feeble' is the price to be paid for being able to put the book in your pocket.

A. stentoreus

Birding in cyberspace, Canberra style

Among the many wonders of the internet is the way community organisations use it for diverse purposes, including community education and advocacy. Many Canberra region birders count Monga National Park, which is located between Braidwood and Batemans Bay, among our Best Places to Bird. (How many thousands of people whiz straight past it every week, oblivious to its delights?) We have the National Park owing to the tremendous efforts of many scientists and activists, along with far-sighted public servants and politicians. Prominent among the activists are the members of the **Friends of the Mongarlowe.** The Mongarlowe is the river of that name, believed by many to be the cleanest and most beautiful in the whole of Australia,

The Friends have a fine web site http://www.opusinfo,com.au/fmr, bannered 'preserving the integrity of our river and its catchment'. The home page has links to pages 'About the Mongarlowe River', 'What's special about Monga ?', 'What you can do...' and 'About the Friends of Mongarlowe River'. It contains a beaut map showing

the extent of the National Park and 'the last 20%', i,e. the remaining area still a state forest in which the birds and other life forms remain threatened. The page on 'What's special about Monga?' is especially informative.

Which leads to the Two Fires Festival of Arts Activism:

http://www.twofiresfestival.com. This event, based in Braidwood (the gateway to Monga) will take place on the Canberra Day long weekend, 18-21 March 2005. Its theme is celebrating and extending the legacy of the poet, conservationist and reconciliation activist Judith Wright, who was a resident of Braidwood and lover of the natural values of the area including, of course, its birds. (Who could forget her poem 'Birds'?) The program (details at the web site) includes a number of walks, one of which is an exploration of Monga, and birding is a prominent part of this, reflecting Judith's love of wild native birds. As the preliminary program puts it, 'Experience rainforest from the time of Gondwanaland, ancient Pinkwood groves in flower, Walks in Monga National Park (in conjunction with bird poetry reading and bird events in Monga.' Look out, as well, for the launch of a comprehensive book on Monga National Park, edited by local natural historian Robyn Steller.

Your columnist generally tries to avoid Topics Controversial, but nonetheless ventures, on this occasion, to share with you some gems from the national birding email discussion list BirdingAus about **playing recorded bird calls** as a means of attracting birds (playback). List member Doug Holly reported an unpleasant playback (payback?)

> I also record natural sounds, and I don't believe in playback, unless it is for research projects, I have seen the distress that it causes. One day it accidentally caused distress to me. I had been recording the sounds of an Apostlebird and, not having an external speaker on my DAT recorder, **I** was replaying the recording through earphones, it was very loud, and I use `openair 'phones, one of the Apostlebirds hit me on the head while trying to get at 'the intruding bird' inside, it drew blood.

Syd Curtis replied with an anecdote about the impact of mimicry by birds themselves:

> One might almost regard mimicry as the avian equivalent of playback, and it rarely evokes a response from the model. At least in my experience. But one time it did: an Oriole was warbling away in what I regarded as subsong and included quite a bit of mimicry. Fine, until it rashly used a butcherbird threat call a few times - and was chased through the forest by a butch with snapping beak.

So beware, oh players-back of bird call recordings!

A BirdingAus correspondent also drew our attention to an online BBC news item about **huge eagles that 'dominated New Zealand skies'** (Haast's Eagle): http://news.bbc.co,uk/2/hi/science/nature/4138147.stm. It turns out that:

> One of the largest birds of prey ever recorded, an extinct giant eagle, was once New Zealand's chief predator, DNA evidence from fossil bones indicates... it was driven to oblivion about five centuries ago, just 200 years or so after the first humans

> arrived... What they showed was that the New Zealand bird was in fact related to one of the world's smallest eagles - the Little Eagle from Australia and New Guinea, which typically weighs less than 1kg (two pounds).
>
> Yet the Haast's Eagle weighed between 10kg (1st 81b) and 14kg (2st 31b) - between 30% and 40% heavier than the largest living bird of prey alive today, the Harpy Eagle of Latin America, and was approaching the upper weight limit for powered flight.
>
> Dr Bunce said: 'Even more striking was how closely related genetically the two species were. We estimate that their common ancestor lived less than a million years ago.
>
> It means that an eagle arrived in New Zealand and increased in weight by 10 to 15 times over this period, which is very fast in evolutionary terms. Such rapid size change is unprecedented in birds and animals.'

The BBC site includes a dramatic illustration of the eagle attacking Moas.

So how does Haast's Eagle compare with living birds, weight for weight? Male Wedge-tailed Eagles weigh 3.2 kg and females 4.2 kg, according to HANZAB. And, according to The Settler of All Avian Disputes (Todd FS 1994, *10,001 titillating tidbits of avian trivia*, Ibis, San Diego, CA), the heaviest extant flying bird is the Eurasian Great Bustard, with males averaging 17 kg, with particularly large individuals up to 22 kg. (The news item identifies the Harpy Eagle as the 'largest', but it weighs a piddling 9 kg, compared with the heaviest raptor, the Andean Condor at 14 kg.)

Twitchers' Corner: Canberra birder supreme John Penhallurick has reached the incredible landmark of observing 6,000 bird species in the wild, world-wide, In December 2004 John shared this achievement with BirdChat and BirdingAus colleagues, stating:

> I am delighted to report that I got to 6000 life birds on a recent trip to Fiji. My 6000th species was the Red Shining Parrot *Prosopeia tabuensis* seen at 11.30 am on the De Voeux Peak trail on Taveuni Island Fiji. I was hoping to make Silktail my 6000th, but 3 Silktails seen just 10 minutes later represented 6002.

Congratulations, John, a fine achievement, And, as reported in an earlier column, John makes available to us all his immense knowledge of the birds of the world through his Bird Data Project web site http://worldbirdinfo.net. Highly recommended.

Birders have a range of interests. Some of us simply enjoy the sights and sounds of the wild native birds. Others work hard to learn to identify them by name, and perhaps learn about the distribution and sub-species and habits of species of particular interest. Yet others build upon this by undertaking guided studies in ornithology. In Australia, the **Charles Sturt University's graduate program in ornithology,** delivered using distance learning methods, is popular; see http://www.csu.edu.au/faculty/sciagr/eis/ornithology.htm. Highly recommended, too, is the long-standing and prestigious **Cornell University Home Study Course in Bird Biology** http://www.birds.cornell.edu/homestudy. This is a ten lesson, self-paced course. (I completed it a decade ago and found it

most worthwhile.) The course has recently been revamped and brought up-to-date. A comprehensive text book accompanying the course is now available: Podulka S (ed.) 2005, *Cornell Lab of Ornithology handbook of bird biology*, 2nd edn. This book, along with an audio CD, is also available for birders wishing to undertake private study, or simply acquire it for reference, perhaps to use alongside what many consider to be the best one-volume book on the subject up to now, Frank B. Gill's *Ornithology*, 2nd edn, 1995.

Since we are in the scholarly mood, let's turn to one of the latest and greatest internet resources, Google, and specifically **Google Scholar** http://scholar.google,com. This wonderful resource, still in beta release form, is described as follows:

> Google Scholar enables you to search specifically for scholarly literature, including peer-reviewed papers, theses, books, preprints, abstracts and technical reports from al1 broad areas of research. Use Google Scholar to find articles from a wide variety of academic publishers, professional societies, preprint repositories and universities, as well as scholarly articles available across the web.

I searched on "Superb Lyrebird". (Yes, as with Google itself, include phrases in double quotation marks.) It returned 48 hits compared with 10,800 on Google itself, separating the scholarly wheat from the internet's variable-quality chaff. Interestingly, while most of the 48 internet sources identified are scientific papers (e.g, David Lindenmayer's August 2000 report *Islands of bush in a sea of pines: a summary of studies from the Tumut Fragmentation Experiment)* it also indexed two articles published in COG's monthly newsletter *Ganggang*, a publication not even the hard-working and high-achieving editors would rate as 'scholarly'! Google Scholar is a fine supplement to Google, and the more you use it the more you will love it. Though sometimes you will be frustrated by dead hyperlinks, and will need to apply some net-savvy to locate the documents in question.

T alba

Details on how to subscribe to *Birding-Aus*, the Australian birding email discussion list, are on the web at http://www.shc.melb.catholic.edu.au/home/birding/index.html. A comprehensive searchable archive of the messages that have been posted to the list is maintained by Andrew Taylor at http: 'www.cse.unsw.edu.au/birding-aus.

To join the *Canberra Birds* email discussion list, send a blank email message to canberrabirds-subscribegcanberrabirds.org.au.

RARITIES PANEL NEWS

A most pleasing sighting, enjoyed by large numbers of COG members, was the party of Swift Parrots over Wybalena Grove, Cook, over several days in October, The birds were seen and photographed feeding on the flowering ironbarks lining the adjacent cycleway. The birds were presumably en route to their Tasmanian breeding grounds for the summer. We have recorded occasional Swift Parrots over recent years, but rarely such a large group which obliged by staying around. An article on their visit is in preparation for *Canberra Bird Notes,* Please note that datasheets from other observers listing the Swift Parrot over this period in the same location will be regarded as if endorsed by the Panel.

A small party of Crimson Chats made a brief visit in November 2003 to the shores of Yerrabi Pond, in the new suburb of Amaroo, where they were seen flitting around a patch of Patterson's curse on a building site and dicing with dogs and bicycles on the cycleway surrounding the lake. Unsurprisingly, they left fairly promptly. The only local record of the species prior to this was of eggs collected in 1957.

ENDORSED LIST 63, DECEMBER 2004

Spotless Crake *Porzana tabuensis*

2; 17 Jul 03; Mat Gilfedder; Fyshwick Sewage Ponds GrL14*
1; 17 Nov 04; Steve Holliday; Kellys Swamp GrL14

White-headed Pigeon *Columba leucomela*

1; 13 Jul 03; Eric Meijaard; Bruce, Gr K12*

1; 16 Jul 03; Harvey Perkins; Bruce, Gr K12*

1; 14 Nov 04; David Marshall; Australian National Botanic Gardens GrK13

Major Mitchell 's Cockatoo *Cacatua leadbeateri*

1; 14 Oct 04; Matthew Larkin; Stirling College Gill 5

Swift Parrot *Lathamus discolor*

9; 6-11 Oct 04; Nicki Taws; Wybalena Grove, Cook Gr J13

Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater *Acanthagenys rufogularis*

1; 30 Sep-8 Oct 04; Gutta Schoefl; 15 km N of Queanbeyan, GrO12

Little Friarbird *Philemon citreogularis*

1; 11 Dec 04; Trevor Lipscombe; Hall showgrounds GrJ 11

Painted Honeyeater *Grantiella picta*

4; 2 Nov 04; Martin Butterfield; TSR 48 GrO5

4-5; 21 Nov-19 Dec 04; Jenny Bounds; TSR 48 GrO5

Crimson Chat *Epthianura tricolor*

4; 1 Nov 03; Joe Forshaw; Yerrabi Pond, Amaroo GrL11*

White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina papuensis*

1 (dark morph); 2, 12 Oct 03; Richard Allen; Curtin GrJ14*

* omitted in error from a previous Endorsed List

The COG office is located at Room 5, Griffin Centre, Bunda Street, Civic. Opening hours are Tuesdays from approximately 10:00 - 12:30; at other times by arrangement with the secretary, Please call the office on 6247 4996 to confirm that it is open or to leave a message.

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 cbn@canberrabirds.org.au. Short notes, book reviews and other contributions should be sent to Barbara Allan, 47 Hannaford Street, Page ACT 2614 or to the above email address, 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.

Please note that the views expressed in the articles published in *Canberra Bird Notes* are those of the authors; they do not necessarily represent the views of the Canberra Ornithologists Group, Responses to the views expressed in *CBN* articles are always welcomed and will be considered for publication as letters to the editors.

Canberra Bird Notes 29 (4) December 2004

Articles

Odd Obs

Book Review

Columnists' Corner