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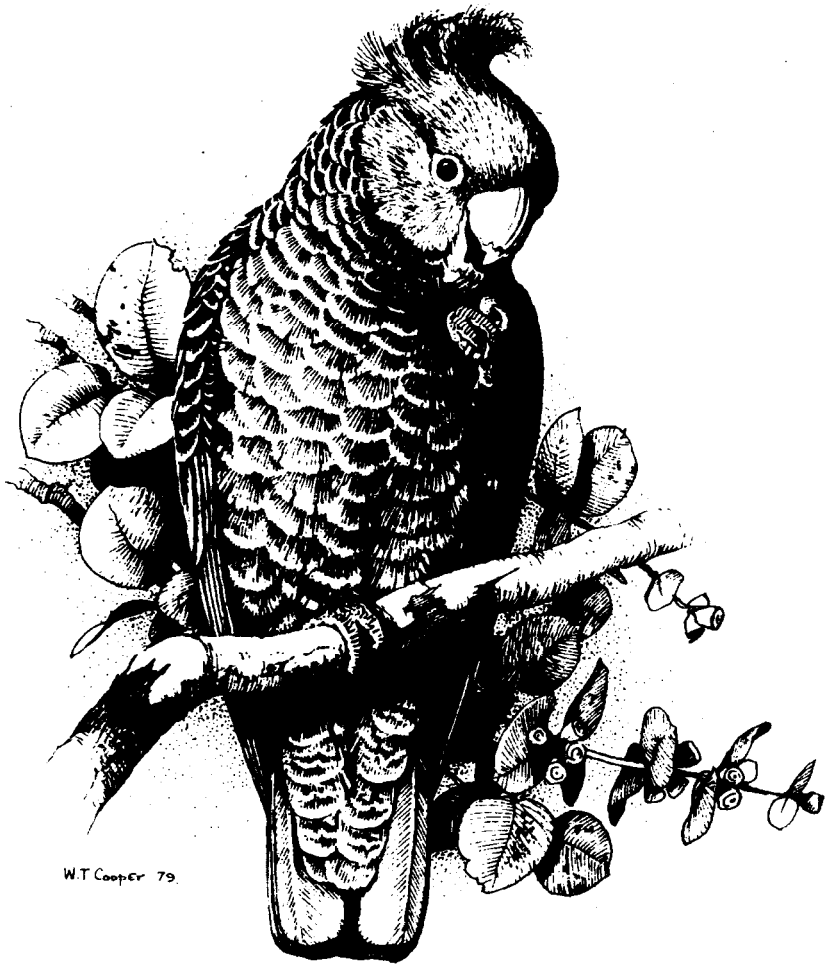

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THE STATUS OF HOODED ROBINS IN THE HALL TO NEWLINE WOODLAND CORRIDOR

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Abstract. *This article documents the occurrence and abundance of Hooded Robins Melanodryas cucullata in what is regarded as the largest woodland corridor in the ACT from Hall to Newline. It draws largely on information from the COG Woodland Project and COG databases and discusses the status of the Hooded Robin in that corridor. The latest data analysis from the COG Woodland Project, which has eight survey locations in the corridor (86 monitoring points), shows a worrying trend for Hooded Robin, a significant decreasing trend in occupancy (detection) rate.*

Background

The Hall to Newline woodland corridor is a relatively extensive area of woodland and dry forest which forms the landscape backdrop for the northern part of the ACT. This corridor runs from around Hall Cemetery to the Newline Quarry woodland and Molonglo River. The grassy woodland mosaic in the corridor, some of which is largely unmodified, is broadly representative of the landscape which once covered much of sub-coastal South-east Australia, and is recognised in the ACT Lowland Woodland Conservation Strategy as one of the largest areas of contiguous woodland in the ACT (Environment ACT 2004).

This relatively extensive area of woodland contributes significantly to the landscape pattern by size and connectivity, potentially linking with other key woodland corridors in the ACT (Callum Brae-Jerrabomberra in central Canberra) and into rural areas of adjacent NSW, thus providing important access from the north, particularly for more mobile species of birds (Environment ACT 2004).

The corridor contains the largest area of endangered Yellow Box *Eucalyptus melliodora* and Red Gum *E. blakelyi* ecological community in the ACT and has, for the most part, good connectivity values for birds generally, although there are areas where these linkages could be improved on ground. For example, the narrow link between Mulligans Flat and Goorooyarroo Reserves is regarded as inadequate, especially if the proposed suburb of Throsby goes ahead as on the plan. Also, the links between the Newline woodland, Molonglo River and woodlands in the Jerrabomberra Valley need to be improved (Environment ACT 2004).

The Corridor comprises two large woodland complexes, Gungahlin (4435 ha) and Majura-Kowen (4900 ha), and includes Hall Cemetery, Hall and environs, the Kinlyside woodlands adjacent to Hall (currently leaseholds), wooded and forested slopes and ridges in north and central Gungahlin running around the northern border of the ACT with NSW (largely hills, ridges and buffers under the ACT Territory Plan),

the Mulligans Flat and Goorooyarroo Nature Reserves, the Mt Majura and Mt Ainslie Nature Reserves, Campbell Park woodlands, woodlands and grasslands in and around the Majura Field Firing Range, the Kowen Forest area and the Newline woodland (Environment ACT 2004).

The corridor supports habitat for the eight bird species listed in the ACT as threatened (vulnerable or endangered status) under the *Nature Conservation Act 1980*, another four bird species of concern under a 'watching brief, as well as other rare or uncommon woodland birds (Environment ACT 2004). All twelve species of birds on the ACT listing have been recorded in the corridor. Some of these species, for example the Hooded Robin *Melanodryas cucullata,* are known to require **large,** well-connected and complex-structured woodland patches (Freudenberger 1999).

Discussion

It is known from COG's Woodland Project surveys and other records, that there are small groups of Hooded Robins resident within the Hall to Newline corridor. Although COG does not undertake surveys across all areas of the woodland corridor, surveys at eight locations in representative areas of good quality grassy woodland (total of 86 monitoring points), indicate that small groups of Hooded Robins are clustered in particular areas, where the habitat is apparently most favourable to them, but are not widespread (COG Databases, Cunningham and Rowell 2006).

Locally, the Hooded Robin is known to be restricted to habitats away from the urban areas, that contain a mixture of woodland and grassland, with trees for protective cover, areas of open grass for feeding (with insects and invertebrates), perching sites from which to forage and suitable trees with cover for nesting (Graham 1990).

In his study across 72 woodland remnants in and around the ACT for Greening Australia's Vegetation Investment Project, Freudenberger found that the Hooded Robin was the most 'sensitive' or demanding bird species (the focal species), requiring structurally complex habitat patches greater than 100 hectares, that are within about 1000 metres of other patches (Freudenberger 1999).

Based on COG database records and anecdotal information from the coordinators of COG Woodland Project surveys at locations in the corridor, it is estimated there are only four to six Hooded Robin territories in the whole of the Mulligans Flat/Goorooyarroo Nature Reserve complex of around 1500 hectares - possibly two territories in Mulligans Flat on the eastern side of the reserve, and two to three territories in nearby Goorooyarroo, only in the northern part of the reserve. There are possibly only one or two territories in the Kinlyside woodlands near Hall (though the current status is uncertain) and possibly two to three territories in the Majura Field Range (N Taws, A Rowell pers comm, J Bounds pers obs.)

Why Hooded Robins do not occur more widely in these very large woodland areas is not clear. What is known is that

the right mix of habitat structures for nesting and shelter, with tree and shrub cover, eucalypt re-growth and open feeding areas, appears to be very important for Hooded Robins to persist and breed successfully.

Hooded Robins used to occur in places like Black Mountain and Mt Mugga Mugga, but are no longer found in these areas close to urban Canberra (Graham 1995, COG Databases). Urban-related impacts from a large and growing Gungahlin community adjacent to much of the corridor, especially the Mulligans Flat and Goorooyarroo Nature Reserves, are an emerging issue for birds and other fauna, as there is likely to be increased use of the reserves for recreational purposes. There are likely to be impacts from a variety of other factors such as feral predators (foxes and roaming cats), climate related factors, drought, kangaroo grazing etc.

Maybe the 'extinction debt', the final outcome of land clearance and fragmentation and other factors which reduces some bird populations to small, isolated groups and eventual extinction, is almost played out with respect to this remaining woodland corridor. Have Hooded Robins reduced to such low numbers in the corridor and are able to persist as breeding groups only in the most optimum habitat patches within the larger woodland complexes? The Brown Treecreeper *Climacteris picumnus*, another ACT threatened species which requires large woodland patches and good connectivity to other woodland patches, has already become extinct in Mulligans Flat and Goorooyarroo reserves, has disappeared from the Campbell Park woodlands at the foot of Mt Ainslie, and is known to occur in only two Woodland Project locations in the corridor, Majura Field Firing Range and Newline (COG Databases).

The experimental research being conducted in the Mulligans Flat and Goorooyarroo Reserves by the Australian National University/CRES and the ACT Government should assist in better understanding the resident bird populations, their habitat preferences and the long-term conservation and management needs, especially for highly sensitive species like the Hooded Robin.

The latest data analysis from the COG Woodland Project, from surveys conducted between 1998 to 2005, indicates that the Hooded Robin is decreasing in occupancy rate (detection rate) across the Project's fourteen locations, a 24% change in occupancy rate (Bounds, Cunningham and Taws, 2007, in press). In the previous analysis of Woodland Project data to the end of 2004, the trend for Hooded Robins was listed as uncertain, needing more years' data to clarify the trend (Cunningham and Rowell 2006).

Eight of the fourteen COG Woodland Project locations are in the corridor, of which five of those locations have recorded Hooded Robins, although the status of the Kinlyside population remains uncertain with no recent survey records. Occupancy rates for Hooded Robin in the Woodland Project are low and irregular, with the highest in 1999 and the lowest in 2004-05 (Bounds, Cunningham and Taws, 2007 in press). Overall, this trend is very worrying.

Kinlyside

This is an area of grassy woodland to the north-east of the village of Hall, which incorporates the Gold Creek leasehold. There may be one, possibly two, Hooded Robin territories here, however, there are no recent records and the status of the small population there is uncertain. This is a leasehold with stock grazing and horse riding, but it has generally not been grazed heavily. The habitat is Yellow Box Red/Gum woodland with a mosaic of patches of trees and open grassland areas and some re-growth patches, with predominately native ground cover. Hooded Robins are recorded mostly in and around COG sites 5 and 6.

The Kinlyside woodlands are currently zoned for urban development and were proposed (unsuccessfully) for rural residential development by the ACT Government led by then Liberal Chief Minister Kate Camel' some years ago. The area is currently under a planning review, as one of the current ALP Government's commitments in the last ACT election to resolve the boundary between urban areas and areas to be managed for conservation. The ACT Conservation Council has submitted a proposal and lobbied for their conservation through a mix of nature reserve and leases with conservation management provisions (J Bounds pers comm).

Mulligans Flat Nature Reserve

At Mulligans Flat Nature Reserve, small groups of Hooded Robins are generally found only in one area on the eastern side of the reserve, which includes the COG monitoring sites 21 and 22. Breeding has also been regularly recorded in that area. The species is not recorded on every COG survey and uses a much larger area than the immediate environs of sites 21 and 22 (COG Databases and records). Hooded Robins were also recorded in this general area during the ANU/CRES bird surveys in October 2006, but not at survey points in the other survey locations in the reserve (B Lindenmayer and others pers comm).

During the ACT Atlas surveys in the mid-1980s, Hooded Robins were recorded more widely at Mulligans Flat (then a grazing leasehold) and were regularly recorded on the western side of the reserve, particularly in an area referred to as the central flat (J Bounds pers obs).

In his 'Bird of the Year' study on the Hooded Robin in 1991 and 1992, Graham surveyed only one area in the Hall to Newline corridor, at Mulligans Flat around the central flat near the old woolshed and surrounding woodland and dams. This area is on the western side of the reserve. Graham reported up to four birds on one survey. Graham noted that later work by Purcell (published in 1993) indicated there were four territories at this location (Graham 1995). Hooded Robin territories are no longer found in that area.

There have been only two records in the last five years of one Hooded Robin on the western side of the reserve, both near the western ridge (COG Database); possibly these single birds were passing through. It is noted that urban

development in Gungahlin has gradually encroached on the western boundary of Mulligans Flat, (and houses will abut that boundary in the next couple of years), but whether this has contributed to the lack of Hooded Robin breeding territories around the central flat area is not certain.

Hooded Robin territories are in preferred areas on the eastern side of the Mulligans Flat Reserve, where there is a mix of woodland patches and open grassland patches, with a lot of Silver Wattle *Acacia dealbata,* including senescent, dead and fallen wattles. This is an open woodland area on the eastern side of the quartz ridge (which runs roughly north/south through the centre of the reserve), sloping gently to the east, grading to flat open land which can be boggy when there is abundant rain. There are several drainage lines from the ridge, leading to dams in the area. While there are some small patches of this kind of structured habitat elsewhere in the reserve, this is the largest and most significant patch.

There are a number of species of eucalypts, including Yellow Box *Eucalyptus melliodora* and Red Stringybark *E. macrorhyncha,* some Blakely's Red Gum *E. blakelyi* and Scribbly Gum *E. rossii,* mostly small to medium trees in height, scattered across the area or in small groves. A dominant feature is a medium to tall shrub layer of Silver Wattle, a mix of standing dead trunks, fallen dead shrubs, stumps, as well as live wattles of various heights.

There are patches of Red-anther Wallaby Grass *Joycea pallida,* mainly around groups of small to medium sized eucalypts, and the grass layer of mostly native species is usually short overall in the more open areas. This may currently be related to drought and/or grazing by Eastern Grey Kangaroos which are numerous in the reserve.

Hooded Robins use the dead timber for perching and for foraging for prey. They have been observed extracting grubs from the timber, using their familiar perch and pounce technique. They also take insects from around the timber on the ground, and fly up to small eucalypts or dead shrubs to scan for more prey. On one morning over two hours, a group of three Hooded Robins was observed gradually working their way across an area of this habitat of around 600 metres. The territory used in the winter months appears to extend right across the more open Silver Wattle dominated woodland (J Bounds pers obs).

Goorooyarroo Nature Reserve

Surveys commenced in the northern part of Goorooyarroo Nature Reserve in 1998 when the area was a leasehold. Small groups of Hooded Robins have been recorded in only one particular location in that northern part of the reserve, a large, complex structured woodland patch with multi-aged trees and shrubby re-growth, adjacent to a more open, mostly cleared paddock surrounded by a fence (COG Databases and Woodland Project records).

Hooded Robins have not been recorded by COG in the southern half of Goorooyarroo since surveys began there in 2000, when the area became a nature

reserve. The southern part of Goorooyarroo is more hilly and open, with scattered trees, some re-vegetation plantings, and generally less structural complexity.

In Goorooyarroo, Hooded Robin nests are typically sited a metre or so above the ground in small, shrubby Blakely's Red Gum saplings within a fairly complex structured woodland breeding territory. Non-breeding territories are larger and include the open paddock area adjacent to the woodland patch (N Taws pers comm).

COG sites 1, 3, 8, and 4 have recorded Hooded Robins; the first 3 sites are in the woodland area and site 4 is in the adjacent open paddock. Hooded Robins have also been recorded regularly on the edge of that open paddock near COG site 4 around fallen timber and on the fences (COG Databases, J Bounds pers obs).

Majura Field Firing Range

This is a Commonwealth Department of Defence facility for military training including shooting. The Range includes extensive areas of woodland and dry forest and some natural temperate grasslands. The Department employs environmental officers to develop strategies and provide advice on management issues. In the past, sheep have been regularly grazed in some parts of the Range, to control introduced grasses and environmental weeds.

There are possibly two Hooded Robin territories in the southern part of the Field Firing Range. However, extensive surveys outside the eight COG monitoring plots spread across the whole Range have not been possible (due to access and safety issues). The habitat is woodland of Yellow Box, Blakely's Red Gum and significant stands of Red Box *E. polyanthemos*, with a good native understory of shrubs and grasses.

Hooded Robins are regularly recorded in an open area near a dam, with scattered small trees and shrubs, including some dead trees and shrubs, not far from COG site 3 and more dense habitat. A male Hooded Robin was recorded once in COG site 3 which is in woodland near an open grassland area, and there are some records of sightings on the edge of this woodland around fence lines and an old stockyard (J Bounds pers obs).

Newline

The Newline woodlands are agisted blocks under ACT Government control, with some current and past industrial uses, including a builder's waste dump, storage of explosives, and a stone quarry at the southern end which still operates. COG surveys and records indicate there are no current Hooded Robin territories at the Newline woodlands. However, there have been very occasional records of one male bird in the front paddock, not far from COG site 1. There are historical records of possibly two Hooded Robin territories from surveys undertaken by Environment ACT, in an area near COG site 5, and in the most southern paddock adjacent to COG site

7 (A Rowell/P Ormay pers comm; COG databases; J Bounds pers obs).

The Newline woodlands contain stands of large, mature eucalypts, mostly Yellow Box, Blakely's Red Gum and Red Box, but not a varied, multi-aged structure. The highest quality woodland and favoured area for native woodland birds is in the front paddocks; paddocks in the southern part of the woodland tend to be dominated by Noisy Miners *Manorina melanocephala*. There is no shrub layer, very little eucalypt regrowth and no significant patches of thicker vegetation at Newline. It is likely the lack of structural variety/complexity and vegetation cover is a limiting factor for Hooded Robins maintaining active territories and breeding at the Newline site.

Summary of COG database records

Hooded Robin records to 2006 for the Hall to Newline corridor, both from the regular Woodland Project surveys and ad hoc observations in the COG general database, are presented in Table 1.

Acknowledgments

Thanks go to Nicki Taws who has undertaken COG Woodland Project surveys at Hall/Gold Creek and Goorooyarroo North sites, and who reviewed a final draft of this article.

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Table 1. Hooded Robin records from the Hall to Newline corridor in COG's databases

Location	Records/abundance	Date range of records	Comments
Kinlyside area (Hall/Gold Creek) Woodland Project records & off site records	3 records of 1-2 birds between 2002 and 2003	2002 to 2006	Recorded near COG sites 5 and 6.
Mulligans Flat NR General records	53 records of 1 to 6 birds one record of 8 birds (unconfirmed)	1986 to 2006	6 birds recorded in October 2005 COG Blitz in M10 - male, female, young male and 3 immatures in one group. 3 birds including one young bird recorded in 2006 COG Blitz in same general area.
Mulligans Flat NR Woodland Project records	5 records of 2-3 birds	1999 to 2006	Sites 21 or 22 on eastern side of reserve; one breeding record of 1 immature.
Goorooyarroo NR Woodland Project records	18 records of 1-3 birds, plus breeding records	1998 to 2006	Majority of records around sites 1, 3, 4 & 8, only in northern part of reserve.
Goorooyarroo NR General records	28 records of 1-5 birds 1 record of 9 birds in December 1998	1998 to 2006	All in Grid M11. Record of 9 birds includes dependent young. 3 birds with a dependent young recorded in COG Blitz 2006.
Majura Field Firing Range Woodland Project and off site records	11 records of 1-5 birds	1998 to 2006 (Note: no surveys between 2001 and 2003, due to access problems)	2004 record of a group of 2 males, 1 female and 2 immatures. Pair recorded on June 2006 survey. All records in southern end of Range, in or near COG Site 3, Grid N13.
Newline Woodland Project and general records	2 records of 1 bird	March and December 2002	Male birds seen in front paddock.
Note: Woodland Project records are observations within standard plots of 50 metre radius recorded for 10 minutes, four times a year. Off site records are those recorded outside monitoring plots & between monitoring plots during the Woodland Project surveys. There are also a number of ad hoc records in the General COG Database.			

Hooded Robin nest, Goorooyarroo Nature Reserve Photo: Nicki Taws

Hooded Robin territory, Goorooyarroo Nature Reserve. Photo: Jenny Bounds

NUMBERS OF BREEDING LITTLE EAGLES IN THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY IN 2006

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Abstract. *We surveyed 11 Little Eagle Hieraaetus morphnoides territories in and near the Australian Capital Territory that were occupied 1990-1992, and two other territories where single adults were found in 2005. We also solicited reports from COG members and ACT Parks and Conservation rangers for other possible nesting attempts. From the 11 active nests surveyed in the early 1990s, breeding pairs had fallen to two in 2006 - one abandoned early in the breeding season, the other fledged one young No young were fledged from other sites reported to us by COG members or rangers. We discuss this collapse in breeding of Little Eagles in the ACT.*

Introduction

Taylor and COG (1992) said 13 Little Eagle territories had been identified in the ACT, many in reserves and bushland on the perimeter of the city. The highest concentrations were in the Murrumbidgee and Molonglo River Corridors, especially Uriarra Crossing. Olsen and Fuentes (2004) warned that some of the richness of species and breeding numbers would be lost if plans for expansion of Canberra's suburbs went ahead, and that Little Eagles were already declining. They found only one Little Eagle nest in the Murrumbidgee and Molonglo River Corridors in 2002-03. Olsen and Fuentes (2005) discussed the collapse of Little Eagles breeding territories from 11 active nests in the early 1990s to two active territories in 2005. Some of this was linked to displacement by Wedge-tailed Eagles *Aquila audax*, but other pairs disappeared for reasons unrelated to Wedge-tailed Eagles. Our aims in the current study were to search in 2006 for active nests (at least one egg or young) in the same areas searched in 2005, and in the 1990-1992 survey; check the two territories where we found single adults in 2005, and follow up reports from COG members and ACT Parks and Conservation rangers.

Methods

In 2006 we searched on foot and by car the original Little Eagle territories that were located in the early 1990s (Olsen 1992), and the two additional sites containing single males in 2005. Reports of Little Eagle sightings from COG members were also followed up.

Results

The two single males found in 2005 in the upper Molonglo Gorge, and on Mount Pleasant had disappeared by 2006. A nest on the Googong Foreshores not included in the 11

surveyed in the early 1990s, but active through the 1990s to about 2002, was also abandoned. We saw Little Eagles at only three locations: 1) A single adult was found at Site # 7 on Mount Ainslie/Majura (Table 1) but we found no nest. (Michael Lenz also reported a single adult in this area.); 2) Site # 5 on the Molonglo River had a single egg but the pair abandoned early in the season; 3) Site #11 had a single young. A pair was reported at Fyshwick (Geoffrey Dabb pers comm) but no birds were present on the three occasions we visited, though there were food remains under the nest indicating that raptors had been there earlier. The total then for the ACT and areas along the ACT/NSW border in 2006 (Table 1) was a single fledged young, much lower than the productivity for Little Eagles found in the early 1990s (Olsen 1992). We found no successful nests (fledging at least one young) in the Molonglo or Murrumbidgee River Corridors.

Table 1. *Active Hieraaetus morphnoides* nests inside the ACT and *straddling the ACT/NSW Border Occupied in the 1990s (1990 -1992) and in 2002 -2006 - Active = containing eggs or young (A), Pair (P), Single adult (S), and Abandoned by the pair (-).

	1990s	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
1)	**A**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**
2)	**A**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**
3)	**A**	**A**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**
4)	**A**	**A**	**A**	**-**	**-**	**-**
5)	**A**	**A**	**A**	**A**	**A**	**A (failed)**
6)	**A**	**S**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**
7)	**A**	**P**	**P**	**P**	**P**	**S**
8)	**A**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**
***9)**	**A**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**
10)	**A**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**
11)	**A**	**?**	**A**	**A**	**-**	**A**

Dead adults

Olsen and Fuentes (2005) reported dead Little Eagles, Wedge-tailed Eagles, Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus*, and Whistling Kites *Haliastur sphenurus* found at nests in or near the ACT. In 2005 three Wedge-tailed Eagles were found standing on the ground at different locations on the ACT border, just inside the ACT, or in New South Wales. All died, but only one, from Murrumbateman, was analysed. Tests showed it was killed by Mevinphos, a broad-spectrum organophosphorus insecticide used on vegetables and sometimes on growing flowers. Mevinphos is highly toxic to birds, but it breaks down quickly in the environment (NRAAVC 2002) so the eagle (or eagles) that were killed by it may or may not have been killed from secondary or tertiary poisoning after, for example, consuming a starling that consumed an insect that consumed Mevinphos. Luke Bond (pers comm) from the NSW Environment Protection Agency (EPA) said it was more likely that the eagle was poisoned directly with Mevinphos applied to some form of meat.

Discussion

The stability of most breeding raptor species in the ACT suggests that the ACT remains rich in breeding raptors (Fuentes and Olsen 2005). The decline of Little Eagle numbers is a concern and shows how a breeding species can decline unnoticed by ornithologists. A major problem is that no radio-tagging has been done with any Australian diurnal raptor species, so we have no accurate data on habitat use and home-range size. Saving nest trees, or placing a buffer around these nest trees is pointless because we don't understand the home-range requirements (Olsen and Fuentes 2004). A housing or industrial development can destroy a food source and cause an eagle to abandon a nest territory one or two kilometres away. In addition, there could be toxic materials being used in or around the ACT that kill adult eagles nesting some distance from the point of application.

The ACT Government displaced one of the last pairs of Little Eagles in the ACT by developing East O'Malley, in spite of the fact that *Eucalyptus melliodora* and *E. blakelyi* woodland has been nominated for inclusion in the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act, and the Australian government has signed the Bonn Convention protecting all birds in the families *Accipitridae* (including Little Eagles) and *Falconidae* (DEH 2005). The ACT government plans to develop the Molonglo Valley even though raptors there are under stress. The single pair found on the Molonglo River failed in 2005 and 2006 at the incubation stage of breeding. Reasons for stress on this pair are unclear, but the site is easily disturbed and the pair is wary of humans.

In the 2006 survey we found that reports from COG members were instrumental in confirming pairs of raptors we knew of, or tracking down new pairs, particularly the report from Michael Lenz, and from Geoffrey Dabb who provided photographs of a Little Eagle at a nest. However, most reports were misidentified Whistling Kites, Swamp Harriers *Circus approximans* and other

raptors. Little Eagles and Whistling Kites may not be as distinct as the examples in field guides, for example, Simpson and Day (1999) and Taylor and Day (1993) suggest. Adult Whistling Kites at nests in the ACT did not have the clear 'windows' in the underwing shown in some texts. For our survey this was never a problem because we are interested in all raptor nests, including those of Little Eagles. All reports were positive and helpful. However, if reports alone are used as data showing declines or increases in the abundance of a raptor species in the ACT, it would be helpful if members could confirm their sightings with photographs or video footage.

Conclusions

In the early 1990s we had 11 pairs of Little Eagles under observation in and near the ACT, and Taylor and COG (1992) identified thirteen pairs in the ACT. In our 2005 survey we found no successful nests, and in 2006 we found one successful nest. Most territories were abandoned. The reason for the decline needs to be determined, and those remaining pairs protected. We need to consider at least three things: 1) radio-tracking studies to determine home range size and habitat use; 2) determine if pesticides like Mevinphos are implicated in the death of adult raptors; and 3) lobby the ACT government to retain woodland in the ACT where Little Eagles nest.

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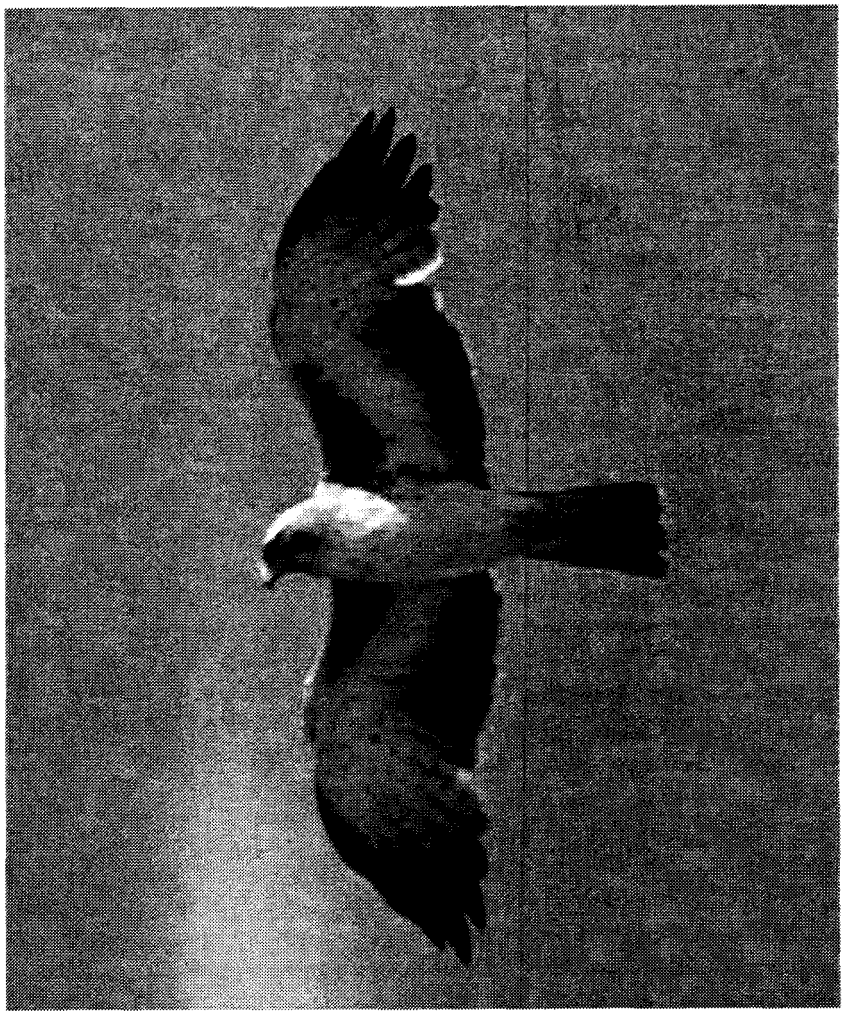

Little Eagle Photo: G Dabb

COMMON MYNA NESTING AND EGGS III: COMPARISON OF CLUTCHES

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Abstract. *In October and November 2006 Common Mynas Acridotheres tristis, nested in a nest-box for the third time in eight years. The event was monitored and, once complete, the clutch was removed and donated to the Australian National Wildlife Collection. Weights and measurements of the eggs were taken and compared to the previous two clutches.*

Background

In October and November of 2006 Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis* nested in a nest-box on the south-west corner of my house in Kambah. This is the third time that Mynas have nested in this box in the eight years it has been in place, the other occasions being in November 1999 and November 2003 (Perkins 2000, 2004), No other species has seriously or successfully attempted nesting in the nest-box in that time, though Crimson Rosellas *Platycercus elegans* and Eastern Rosellas *P. eximius* have showed limited interest in the box on occasion, and a pair of Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* failed in their nesting attempt as described below.

Nesting and laying

In August 2006, a pair of starlings was frequently in the vicinity of the nest-box and behaved in a very proprietary manner. On 12 August one of them was seen singing from the nest-box entrance and over the next few hours the pair was seen removing a lot of old dry material from the box. A pair of mynas was also present and showed interest either in the starlings' activities or in the box itself. Starling activity in and around the nest-box continued at fairly low intensity until 5 September when one of the birds was seen taking nest material into the box. The mynas were frequently seen in the area over this period and appeared to be keeping an eye on the starlings. By 14 September the pair of mynas had displaced the starlings, apparently simply through intimidation as no actual conflict was ever observed, and were seen taking nesting material into the box. Little further activity was observed until 14 October when the mynas again took nesting material to the nest-box, and continued to do so over the following two weeks.

The mynas' first egg was laid some time on 30 October, and the second some time after 8:25 h on 31 October. The third egg was laid between 8:30 h and 8:40 h on 1 November. At 8:12 h on 2 November a myna was in the nest-box, possibly attempting to lay, but it vacated the box at 8:20 h and had not returned by 8:37 h when I left for work. There was still no fourth egg that evening at 18:20 h. As I was away over the weekend I didn't record the fourth egg until the evening of Sunday 5 November, but I assume it was laid sometime on Friday morning after I had left for work.

In most respects this nesting effort was similar to previous efforts (Perkins 2000, 2004), but was nine days earlier than in 1999 and twelve days earlier than in 2003. As previously, it appears that eggs were laid in the morning, at roughly 24-hour intervals. The delay in laying of the fourth egg may have been due to disturbance to the bird by my monitoring activity. On this occasion, the order of lay was recorded by pencilling a number on each egg after it was laid.

The clutch

The clutch was removed from the nest-box on the morning of Monday 6 Nov, three days after the fourth and final egg was assumed to have been laid. The eggs were measured and weighed (Table 1), and donated (as were the previous two clutches from 1999 and 2003) to the Australian National Wildlife Collection (Registration Number E15294).

Table 1. Details of the 2006 clutch

egg	weight (g)	length (mm)	width (mm)	ratio
1	5.95	27.5	20.6	1.33
2	6.22	27.3	20.8	1.31
3	6.54	28.5	21.0	1.36
4	6.36	27.7	21.0	1.32
mean	6.27	27.75	20.85	1.33
SD	0.25	0.53	0.19	0.02

Comparison of three clutches

The dimensions and weights (where available) of the eggs of all three clutches are compared in Table 2, and shown graphically in the scatter plot in Figure 1. It is clear from these data that, as a group, eggs from any given clutch cluster more closely in size to each other than they do to the eggs of the other clutches. It is also clear that, within a clutch, there is more variability in length than there is in width between the eggs. The overall average egg size of these three clutches is 27.6 x 20.3 mm, smaller than the 31 x 22 mm size claimed by most Australian popular references (see references in Perkins 2000).

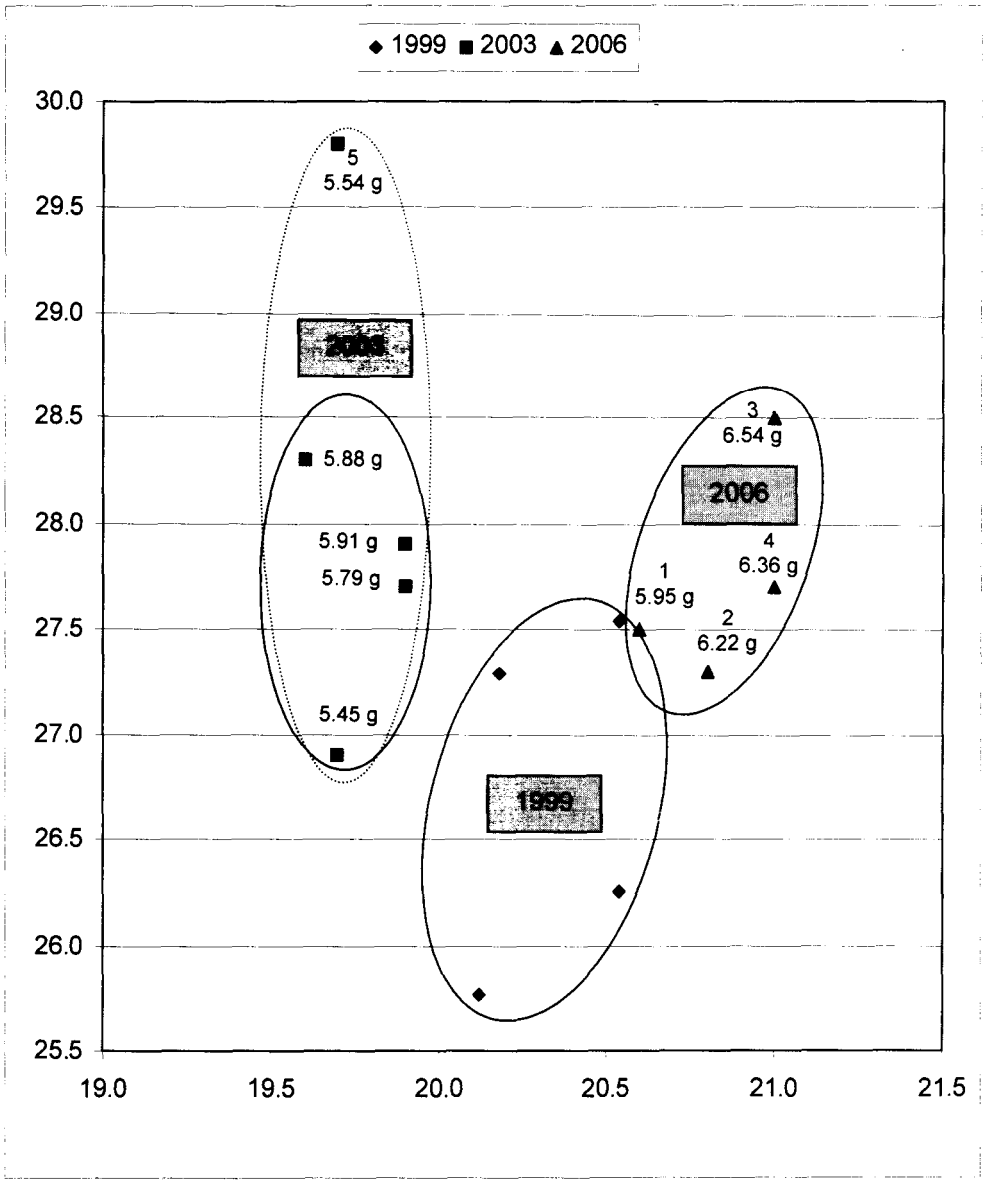
Table 2. Comparison of eggs from the three clutches

The fifth egg of the 2003 clutch was unusually long, atypically pyriform in shape, and chalky in texture; the figures in parentheses exclude this egg from the calculated values.

egg	weight (g)	length (mm)	width (mm)	ratio
1999 clutch			**(E6373)**	
A	-		27.5	1.34
B			20.5	1.28
C	-		26.3	1.28
D			20.5	1.35
mean	-		26.73	1.31
SD			20.33	0.04
2003 clutch			**(E14297)**	
A	5.88	28.3	19.6	1.44
B	5.45	26.9	19.7	1.37
C	5.79	27.7	19.9	1.39
D	5.91	27.9	19.9	1.40
5	5.54	29.8	19.7	1.51
mean	5.71	28.12	19.76	1.42
SD	0.21	1.07	0.13	0.06
(mean)	(5.76)	(27.70)	(19.78)	(1.40)
(SD)	(0.21)	(0.59)	(0.15)	(0.03)
2006 clutch			**(E15294)**	
1	5.95	27.5	20.6	1.33
2	6.22	27.3	20.8	1.31
3	6.54	28.5	21.0	1.36
4	6.36	27.7	21.0	1.32
mean	6.27	27.75	20.85	1.33
SD	0.25	0.53	0.19	0.02
all three clutches combined				
mean	5.96	27.58	20.27	1.36
SD	0.36	0.99	0.50	0.06
(mean)	(6.01)	(27.39)	(20.32)	(1.35)
(SD)	(0.35)	(0.77)	(0.49)	(0.05)

Figure 1. Clustering of egg size within clutches

Dimensions of the eggs of the three clutches (width on x axis, length on y axis, mm) are represented by diamonds (1999 clutch), squares (2003 clutch) and triangles (2006 clutch). Where known, the order of lay and weight of egg is indicated adjacent to the relevant symbol. Clustering of egg sizes within a clutch is emphasised by the enclosing ellipses. The fifth egg of the 2003 clutch was unusually long, atypically pyriform in shape and chalky in texture, and is enclosed by the dotted ellipse. Note that the egg size quoted in field guides (31 x 22 mm) would locate outside the top right corner of this plot.



Discussion

It is clear from these data that eggs from any of the given clutches aggregate on size as determined by their dimensions. This is perhaps not surprising. The width of an egg is likely determined primarily by the physical dimensions of the reproductive tract of the female (particularly the magnum of the oviduct) through which the egg passes (Welty 1975). Presumably the volume of the yolk and albumen layers then help to determine the final length of the egg.

For any given laying female the oviduct properties are likely to be fairly static over the brief laying period so it would be expected that egg widths would be fairly similar. The difference in widths of eggs from within a clutch for these three clutches vary by only 0.3 to 0.4 mm or 1.5% to 2% of total egg width. Comparatively, the lengths of eggs within a clutch vary by 1.2 to 2.9 mm (or 1.2 to 1.7 mm if the atypical fifth egg of 2003 is disregarded), a difference of 4.2% to 9.7% (4.2% to 6.2%) of total egg length.

Given that the physical properties of the oviduct is likely to change slightly with hormonal, physiological and environmental influences it is probably not possible to predict the size of eggs from a given bird from one season to the next. Nevertheless, it seems more likely than not, particularly given the time period involved, that these three clutches were laid by different females.

The sizes of the eggs from all three clutches are significantly smaller than the 31 x 22 mm size invariably stated in most Australian field guides and other popular references (see Perkins 2000 for more detailed list and discussion). The recent publication of the final volume of HANZAB (Higgins et al 2006) provides updated (though barely more detailed) information on myna egg sizes. Dimensions of eggs from Australia are given as 28.5 x 21.1 mm (based on seven eggs of which four were from my 1999 clutch), and eggs from New Zealand are given as 29 x 22 mm (taken from Heather and Robertson's field guide). Egg weights are stated as 8.5 g (n=3) for Australia, and 7.5 g for New Zealand.

Thus, at a mean size of 27.6 x 20.3 mm and mean weight of 6 g, the eggs from these three clutches still appear to be relatively small.

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THE CANBERRA BIRD BLITZ 2006

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Abstract. *This paper describes the conduct of Canberra's second 'bird blitz' held on 28-29 October 2006, outlines some findings and comparisons with the blitz of 2005.*

Introduction

On Saturday 28 and Sunday 29 October 2006, the Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG) conducted its second `bird blitz', the first having been held the previous year, also on the last weekend in October.

Our aim was to record all species of bird present in the ACT over that weekend in all habitats, to obtain a broad indication of their abundance, and whether they were breeding. To achieve this, we set out to conduct a minimum of one 20-minute 2-hectare survey within each of the 165 grid cells covering the ACT (a 2.5 minute grid on lines of latitude and longitude, so each cell measures approximately 3.5 km by 4.5 km). By this exercise, we also hoped to encourage more of our members to get out and survey and submit datasheets.

Conduct of the blitz

Participants registered for their preferred grid cells, on a first-in, best-dressed basis. In the allocation process, some site preference was given to members who surveyed given sites on a regular basis. More tardy volunteers were cajoled by the organiser into surveying the remaining sites. Less experienced birders were allocated to accompany those experienced birders who had indicated a willingness to take them along. And as a modest inducement to participants, all were offered a native plant, courtesy of Stocks Native Nursery, Harden.

Participants were allowed to choose their preferred methodology from the three Birds Australia Atlas options! a 2-minute/2-ha survey; within 500 m of a central point, for >20 mins; or within 5 km of a central point, for >20 mins (with the proviso that the survey in all cases remained within a given COG grid cell).

Results and discussion

Operational problems

Once again, our chosen weekend was less than ideal. Those who blitzed in the ranges on the Saturday even experienced light snow, while elsewhere it was moderately windy. Sunday was mild and sunny, however, in contrast to last year's rain. Again a few areas in Namadgi National Park were declared off-limits by Park management, on safety grounds. Most adopters of grid cells managed to conduct their surveys this time, and a few did a few optional extras.

Level of participation

At least 62 COG members took part in the blitz, plus a number of unnamed

`extras' (a list of known participants is at Table 1). This compares with the 75 named participants in 2005. Again, this participation level was a little disappointing. Some keen birders were simply unavailable on the appointed weekend; and it may be that some non-participants were not sufficiently confident of their birding skills to join in.

Of the participants, 38 were male and 24 female. Twenty-five hardy souls warmed to the task and blitzed for part or all of the two days compared with 18 who did so last year.

Despite the level of uncertainty about the numbers participating, we achieved our aim of encouraging a few more of our members to survey. There were 18 named members who participated in the blitz for the first time in 2006.

Coverage

We fell far short of our aim of blanket coverage of the ACT, with surveys conducted in 99 of the 165 possible grid cells (60%), compared with 109 in 2005. The grid cells surveyed are shown in Map 1. In fact, more grid cells were partially surveyed than are indicated, as a number of observers perhaps unwittingly gave as their central point coordinates a location virtually on the boundary of two grid cells. Total coverage was never going to be possible, because of the Namadgi National Park exclusions. However, virtually all habitat types were covered.

The possible total of 165 grid cells in the ACT includes cells which are only partly in the ACT. It has been argued that we could legitimately base our grid cell total on those cells totally within the ACT. Many surveys, however, were conducted in the ACT portion of cells only partly in the ACT, and it would have been unfortunate to discount them on a technicality.

Habitats surveyed

While specific habitat types have not yet been analysed, a broad land use division of datasheets has again been attempted. Last year's figures are provided for comparison, in parentheses. Urban areas were covered in 34 surveys (21 last year); rural or semi-rural 21 (47); Namadgi National Park 95 (84); Canberra Nature Park or nature reserves, 67 (77); the Murrumbidgee River Corridor, 15 (14); the Australian National Botanic Gardens, 3 (8); Fyshwick sewage ponds and environs, 3 (3); Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve 4 (not segregated in 2005).

The richest bird areas, notwithstanding the experience of the observers or the time spent surveying, were undoubtedly the nature parks and reserves. It is possible, and even likely, that this effect is magnified by the familiarity of many participants with the areas they chose to survey.

Datasheets received

Participants returned some 242 datasheets for the 2006 blitz weekend, compared with 254 datasheets for 2005. It is unclear again if this is the final total as, despite the pleas of the organiser for the sheets to be returned promptly, they were still arriving in late December. Disappointingly, there are now a few

additional datasheets in COG's databases for the blitz weekend in 2005 which were not submitted to the organiser. These have been excluded from all analyses.

While the total of 242 datasheets for the 2006 blitz is a relatively modest response from our 300 potentially eligible members for two days, it must be seen in the context of an overall reluctance of members to submit datasheets. The total number of datasheets received for the 2004-05 year, for example, was only 1957 and this total included many for grid cells within COG's area of concern but outside the ACT (COG 2006).

Type of survey

Participants were given the option of choosing their survey type to best fit the grid cell they were surveying, and to allow for personal preference and time or other constraints. In the event, most adopted the Birds Australia Atlas recommended option, namely 2-ha 20-minute surveys. Of the datasheets received, 117 (48%) were for 2-ha surveys; 78 (32%) were for surveys within 500 m of a central point; 32 (13%) were for surveys within 5 km of a central point (though in effect they had to be within a smaller area, to remain within a COG grid cell); and 15 (6%) were for incidental records.

Choice of day

A slight preference was shown for surveying on the Saturday, despite its less clement weather, with 132 datasheeets returned for 28 October compared with 110 for Sunday 29 October. This may have resulted in part from the fact that a major bike race was held in and around Namadgi National Park on the Sunday and some birders may have decided to avoid the area that day.

Species recorded

As Table 2 shows, a total of 161 species of bird was recorded in the ACT over the two blitz days. This compares with *157* in 2005, and a yearly total for 2004-05 of 216 from COG's broader area of concern.

Highlights included observations of several species badly affected by the current drought and the aftermath of the 2003 fires: Superb Lyrebird, Bassian Thrush, Eastern Whipbird, Red-browed Treecreeper and Spotted Quail-thrush.

The expected cuckoo species were all recorded, but in much reduced numbers compared with last year's surprising abundances. There were, for example, only 18 records of the Fan-tailed Cuckoo, compared with 49 in 2005. All the usual raptors were again present, though not, generally speaking, in significantly greater numbers than in 2005. The 2006 survey showed the return of the quail, with both Brown and Stubble Quail being recorded; and of the herons, egrets and ibises, with Glossy Ibis, Straw-necked Ibis, Royal Spoonbill, Great Egret, Cattle Egret and White-necked Heron all being recorded.

During the blitz 76 species (47% of the 161 species recorded) were recorded as breeding, when the broadest possible indicators of breeding were used (see Table 2). This compares with 67

breeding species recorded in the 2005 blitz and 116 breeding species in 2004-05 across all of COG's area of concern (COG 2006). The species most commonly recorded as breeding was the Australian Magpie (26 breeding records), followed by the Pied Currawong (19 records), the Magpie-lark (13 records) and the Red Wattlebird (11 records). Breeding highlights for 2006 included Darter, Superb Parrot, Southern Whiteface, Yellow-faced and New Holland Honeyeaters, Red-capped, Flame, Scarlet, Hooded and Eastern Yellow Robin, Crested Shrike-tit and White-browed Woodswallow.

Most frequently recorded species

The ten most frequently recorded species overall in the 2006 blitz (the number of records in parentheses) were:

Crimson Rosella (159)
Australian Magpie (138)
Grey Fantail (135)

Red Wattlebird (128)
Striated Pardalote (124)
Pied Currawong (117)

Yellow-faced Honeyeater (111)
Australian Raven (110)

Superb Fairy-wren (109)
Spotted Pardalote (109).

Species recorded only once
(abundances in parentheses)

Peaceful Dove (1) Pink-eared Duck (69) Whistling Kite (1) Southern Boobook (1) Glossy Black-Cockatoo (4)

Brush Cuckoo (1)
Brown Songlark (1)
Little Grassbird (1)
Buff-banded Rail (1)
Red-kneed Dotterel (1)
Glossy Ibis (3)

Royal Spoonbill (3).

Species not recorded

Species which were recorded in 2005 but which were not recorded in 2006 included oddities such as the resident Indian Peafowl in Narrabundah, and presumed escapes including Indian Ringneck and the Red Junglefowl. The more significant 'misses' included:

Emu
Painted Button-quail
Wonga Pigeon

Great Crested Grebe
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper
Australian Shelduck
Rufous Fantail

Pilotbird
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater
Turquoise Parrot
European Greenfinch.

These are, however, species which are not commonly recorded in the ACT, or in the case of the Rufous Fantail, a summer migrant, it had possibly not arrived back at the time of the blitz.

Species recorded in neither 2005 nor 2006 include bitterns, owlet-nightjar, Olive Whistler, Cicadabird, Zebra Finch, and most crakes and rails.

Vulnerable species

No endangered species were recorded, but five species regarded as vulnerable in the ACT were: Hooded Robin, Superb Parrot, Brown Treecreeper,

Varied Sittella and White-winged Triller.

There were four records of the Hooded Robin, from two grid cells, with abundances ranging from 1-4. Young birds were observed at both Mulligans Flat and Goorooyarro, and a male bird was also seen carrying food at the latter.

Superb Parrots (6 records, of 1-4 birds) were seen in their now-usual haunts at Goorooyarro, Mulligans Flat and in suburban Belconnen, with an indication of breeding at Goorooyarro.

Brown Treecreepers were recorded eight times, with a range of 1-7 birds, from seven grid cells, mainly in Namadgi NP but also in known locations at Newline Quarry and Castle Hill. Dependent young were recorded at Brandy Flat.

There were 11 record from eight widespread grid cells of Varied Sittella, ranging from 1-7 birds. Nest-building was reported from Mulligans Flat, while the Uriarra Crossing birds had dependent young.

White-winged Trillers were recorded 18 times, 1-6 birds, from many urban or urban-fringe nature reserves. Two instances of birds displaying were reported.

Conclusions and lessons for the future

Perhaps the main lesson to be drawn from both our blitzes is that, when prompted, more of our members will get out, survey, and submit datasheets. And as in 2005, many blitzers took the opportunity to spend longer than their regular 20 minutes surveying their special spots.

As for the results, there was, inevitably, an element of 'luck of the day' and the final species total is not of huge significance. In the grand scheme of things, however, the cumulative input of 242 additional datasheets to the COG database can only be a plus. We managed to survey many rarely surveyed spots and, if we continue to do so, we will be able to build up a more complete picture of the ACT avifauna.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, thanks must go to all COG members who participated in the blitz, and particularly to those who put in two full days in sometimes challenging areas in sometimes less than ideal weather conditions. The assistance of staff at Namadgi National Park in providing advice, and access to areas behind locked gates, is greatly appreciated. And sincere thanks go to Stocks Native Nursery who donated the native plant prizes.

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Table 1 Blitz participants 2006

Barbara Allan*
Ian Anderson*
Margaret Aston
Shaun Bagley*
Joe Barr*

Darryl Beaumont*
Rosemary Bell*
Jenny Bounds*
John Brannan
Muriel Brookfield*
Prue Buckley* Mark Clayton* Bill Compston* Elizabeth Compston*

John Cummings
Roger Curnow
Dianne Deans
Paul Fennell

Matthew Frawley*
Joe Forshaw
Phyl Goddard*
John Goldie*
Tom Green*
Horst Hahne*
Kay Hahne*
Beverley Hammond*
Bill Handke*
Stuart Harris*
Jack Holland*
Steve Holliday*
Owen Holton
Jim Hone

Janet Irons*
Julienne Kamprad
Shirley Kral*
Sue Lashko*
Tony Lawson*
John Layton
Michael Lenz*

Bruce Lindenmayer*
Noel Luff
Sue Mathews
David McDonald*
Julie McGuiness*
Louise Muir*
Gail Neumann*
Anthony Overs*
Stuart Rae*
David Rees*
Bill Robertson
Margaret Robertson
Susan Robertson*
David Rosalky*
Brian Scales*
Alastair Smith*
Nicki Taws
Alan Thomas
Philip Veerman*
John Waldron
Kathy Walter*
Tony Willis*
Lyndall Young

Plus many unnamed accompanying persons.

* also participated in 2005

Table 2 Species recorded during the 2006 blitz

Common name	Scientific name	Breeding code
Stubble Quail	*Coturnix pectoralis*	
Brown Quail	*Coturnix ypsilophora*	
Blue billed Duck	*Oxyura australis*	
Musk Duck	*Biziura lobata*	juv
Black Swan	*Cygnus atratus*	dy
Australian Wood Duck	*Chenonetta jubata*	dy
Mallard	*Anas platyrhynchos*	
Pacific Black Duck	*Anas superciliosa*	dy
Australasian Shoveler	*Anas rhynchotis*	dy
Grey Teal	*Anas gracilis*	
Chestnut Teal	*Anas castanea*	
Pink eared Duck	*Malacorhynchus membranaceus*	
Hardhead	*Aythya australis*	
Domestic duck/geese*		
Australasian Grebe	*Tachybaptus novaehollandiae*	
Hoary headed Grebe	*Poliocephalus poliocephalus*	
Darter	*Anhinga melanogaster*	on; ny
Little Pied Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*	
Little Black Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*	
Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*	
Australian Pelican	*Pelecanus conspicillatus*	
White faced Heron	*Egretta novaehollandiae*	ny
White-necked Heron	*Ardea pacifica*	
Great Egret	*Ardea alba*	
Cattle Egret	*Ardea ibis*	
Nankeen Night Heron	*Nycticorax caledonicus*	
Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*	
Australian White Ibis	*Threskiornis molucca*	
Straw necked Ibis	*Threskiornis spinicollis*	
Royal Spoonbil1	*Platalea regia*	
Black-shouldered Kite	*Elanus axillaris*	
Whistling Kite	*Haliastur sphenurus*	
Swamp Harrier	*Circus approximans*	
Brown Goshawk	*Accipiter fasciatus*	cf
Collared Sparrowhawk	*Accipiter cirrhocephalus*	
Wedge tailed Eagle	*Aquila audax*	
Little Eagle	*Hieraaetus morphnoides*	
Brown Falcon	*Falco berigora*	
Australian Hobby	*Falco longipennis*	
Peregrine Falcon	*Falco peregrinus*	
Nankeen Kestrel	*Falco cenchroides*	ih
Buff banded Rail	*Gallirallus philippensis*	
Purple Swamphen	*Porphyrio porphyrio*	dy
Dusky Moorhen	*Gallinula tenebrosa*	dy

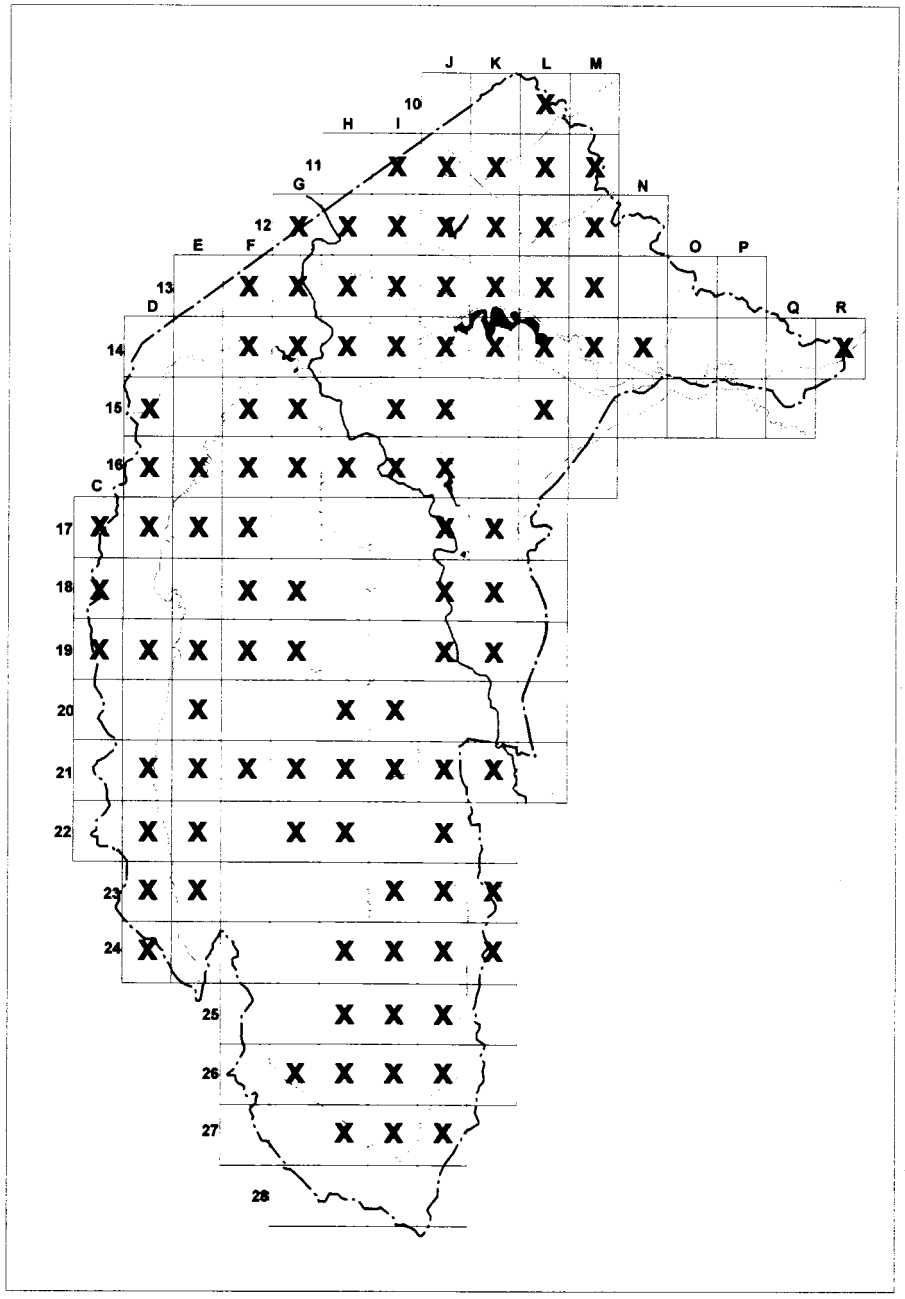
Eurasian Coot	*Fulica atra*	
Latham's Snipe	*Gallinago hardwickii*	
Black fronted Dotterel	*Elseyornis melanops*	
Red kneed Dotterel	*Erythrogonys cinctus*	
Masked Lapwing	*Vanellus miles*	dy
Silver Gull	*Larus novaehollandiae*	on
Rock *Dove*	*Columba livia*	
Common Bronzewing	*Phaps chalcoptera*	
Crested Pigeon	*Ocyphaps lophotes*	di; on
Peaceful Dove	*Geopelia striata*	
Glossy Black Cockatoo	*Calyptorhynchus lathami*	
Yellow tailed Black Cockatoo	*Calyptorhynchus funereus*	
Gang gang Cockatoo	*Callocephalon fimbriatum*	
Galah	*Cacatua roseicapilla*	nb
Little Corella	*Cacatua sanguinea*	on
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	*Cacatua galerita*	ih; dy
Rainbow *Lorikeet*	*Trichoglossus haematodus*	
Australian King Parrot	*Alisterus scapularis*	
Superb Parrot	*Polytelis swainsonii*	ih
Crimson Rosella	*Platycercus elegans*	ih; on
Eastern Rosella	*Platycercus eximius*	ih; dy
Red rumped Parrot	*Psephotus haematonotus*	on
Pallid Cuckoo	*Cuculus pallidus*	di
Brush *Cuckoo*	*Cacomantis variolosus*	
Fan tailed Cuckoo	*Cacomantis flabelliformis*	
Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo	*Chrysococcyx basalis*	juv
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo	*Chrysococcyx lucidus*	di
Southern Boobook	*Ninox novaeseelandiae*	
Tawny Frogmouth	*Podargus strigoides*	on; ny
Laughing Kookaburra	*Dacelo novaeguineae*	cf
Sacred Kingfisher	*Todiramphus sanctus*	ih; cf
Rainbow Bee-eater	*Merops ornatus*	
Dollarbird	*Eurystomus orientalis*	
Superb Lyrebird	*Menura novaehollandiae*	
White-throated Treecreeper	*Cormobates leucophaeus*	ny
Red-browed Treecreeper	*Climacteris erythrops*	
Brown Treecreeper	*Climacteris picumnus*	
Superb Fairy-wren	*Malurus cyaneus*	cf
Spotted Pardalote	*Pardalotus punctatus*	on; ne
Striated Pardalote	*Pardalotus striatus*	ih
White-browed Scrubwren	*Sericornis frontalis*	dy
Speckled *Warbler*	*Chthonicola sagittata*	
Weebill	*Smicrornis brevirostris*	
Western Gerygone	*Gerygone fusca*	on
White-throated Gerygone	*Gerygone olivacea*	
Brown Thornbill	*Acanthiza pusilla*	cf; dy
Buff-rumped Thornbill	*Acanthiza reguloides*	on; cf; dy

Yellow-rumped Thornbill	*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*	cf; ny; dy
Yellow Thornbill	*Acanthiza nana*	
Striated Thornbill	*Acanthiza lineata*	ny; dy
Southern Whiteface	*Aphelocephala leucopsis*	dy
Red Wattlebird	*Anthochaera carunculata*	on; dy
Noisy Friarbird	*Philemon corniculatus*	nb; on; cf
Noisy Miner	*Manorina melanocephala*	ny; dy
Yellow-faced Honeyeater	*Lichenostomus chrysops*	on
White-eared Honeyeater	*Lichenostomus leucotis*	
Fuscous Honeyeater	*Lichenostomus fuscus*	
White plumed Honeyeater	*Lichenostomus penicillatus*	nb; on; dy
Brown headed Honeyeater	*Melithreptus brevirostris*	
White naped Honeyeater	*Melithreptus lunatus*	
New Holland Honeyeater	*Phylidonyris novaehollandiae*	cf
Eastern Spinebill	*Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*	nb
Jacky Winter	*Microeca fascinans*	on; cf
Scarlet Robin	*Petroica multicolor*	cf; ny; dy
Red-capped Robin	*Petroica goodenovii*	dy
Flame Robin	*Petroica phoenicea*	di; cf; dy
Rose Robin	*Petroica rosea*	
Hooded Robin	*Melanodryas cucullata*	cf; dy
Eastern Yellow Robin	*Eopsaltria australis*	dy
Eastern Whipbird	*Psophodes olivaceus*	
Spotted Quail thrush	*Cinclosoma punctatum*	
Varied Sittella	*Daphoenositta chrysoptera*	nb; dy
Crested Shrike tit	*Falcunculus frontatus*	dy
Golden Whistler	*Pachycephala pectoralis*	
Rufous Whistler	*Pachycephala rufiventris*	cf
Grey Shrike thrush	*Colluricincla harmonica*	cf
Leaden Flycatcher	*Myiagra rubecula*	on; cf
Satin Flycatcher	*Myiagra cyanoleuca*	
Restless Flycatcher	*Myiagra inquieta*	
Magpie-lark	*Grallina cyanoleuca*	nb; on; ny; dy
Grey Fantail	*Rhipidura fuliginosa*	di; on
		on
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	*Coracina novaehollandiae*	nb; on; dy
White-winged Triller	*Lalage sueurii*	di; on
Olive-backed Oriole	*Oriolus sagittatus*	
Masked Woodswallow	*Artamus personatus*	
White-browed Woodswallow	*Artamus superciliosus*	nb
Dusky Woodswallow	*Artamus cyanopterus*	on; dy
Grey Butcherbird	*Cracticus torquatus*	dy
Pied Butcherbird	*Cracticus nigrogularis*	
Australian Magpie	*Gymnorhina tibicen*	on; cf; ny; dy
Pied Currawong	*Strepera graculina*	on; cf; ny
Grey Currawong	*Strepera versicolor*	
Australian Raven	*Corvus coronoides*	on; cf; dy

Little Raven	*Corvus mellori*	
White-winged Chough	*Corcorax melanorhamphos*	on; ny; dy
Satin *Bowerbird*	*Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*	
Skylark	*Alauda arvensis*	
Richard's Pipit	*Anthus novaeseelandiae*	
House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*	co
Double-barred Finch	*Taeniopygia bichenovii*	nb; on
Red-browed Finch	*Neochmia temporalis*	di; nb; on
Diamond Firetail	*Stagonopleura guttata*	
European Goldfinch	*Carduelis carduelis*	dy
Mistletoebird	*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*	
Welcome Swallow	*Hirundo neoxena*	on
Tree Martin	*Hirundo nigricans*	on
Fairy Martin	*Hirundo ariel*	
Clamorous Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus stentoreus*	
Little Grassbird	*Megalurus gramineus*	
Rufous Songlark	*Cincloramphus mathewsi*	
Brown Songlark	*Cincloramphus cruralis*	
Golden headed Cisticola	*Cisticola exilis*	
Silvereye	*Zosterops lateralis*	
Bassian Thrush	*Zoothera lunulata*	
Common Blackbird	*Turdus merula*	.
Common Starling	*Sturnus vulgaris*	ih; ne; cf
Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*	ih; on

**Presumed escapees*

Breeding codes: di=display; co=copulation; ih=inspecting hollow; ny=nest building; on=on nest; cf=carrying food; ny=nest with young; dy=dependent young (includes precocial young). Juv (juvenile) has been included for species where this was recorded in notes.



Map 1. Grid cells surveyed in the 2006 bird blitz

ODD OBS

Probable first successful White-fronted Chat breeding record in the ACT for 18 years

On Monday 6 November 2006, looking to do some birdwatching in my lunch break, I was driving along Uriarra Road and spotted a familiar bird perched on a fence near the intersection with Coppins Crossing Rd. I instantly recognised the bird as a male White-fronted Chat *Epthianura albifrons* and it had something in its bill.

I stopped the car and got out. I watched the chat fly across the road to the Stromlo Forest Park side and perch on a fence post. Pretty soon I saw it duck down into the grass. Over the next half hour (13:30-14:00 h) I watched both the male and female chat return to the same spot with caterpillars or grubs in their bills.

This location was the site of an unsuccessful breeding attempt by a pair of White-fronted Chats in August, reported by Perkins (2006), It seems very likely that these were the same two birds attempting to nest again.

The next day (Tuesday 7 November) I stopped by again for half an hour and watched both the parents carrying food to the presumed nest. They usually flew into the grassy paddock on the north-east side of the intersection to forage for food and then flew back to the nest site on the south-west side of the intersection.

On Thursday 9 November I arrived after 17:00 h and was soon joined by Benjamin Whitworth. I decided to take a closer look to confirm the nesting. When I approached to within a few metres a bird flew out of a grass tussock and flapped around on the ground. My first thought was that it was a nestling abandoning the nest - I was horrified and returned to where Benj was standing. After the initial shock at what I may have done I realised it was probably the female bird feigning injury to lure me away from her nest. Seconds later my suspicions were confirmed when she flew up to a nearby fence post. Nestlings are likely to leave the nest if disturbed (Higgins *et al* 2001) so I left around 18:15 h and decided not to try to find the nest again until after they fledged.

I returned briefly on Friday afternoon (17:30-18:00 h) and from within the confines of my car watched both parents carrying food to the nest again.

As I went down to the South Coast on Saturday I didn't get the chance to check on them until after 17:00 h on Sunday afternoon (12 November). I waited and waited but saw no chats. After 15-20 minutes I decided to take a closer look so I walked to the nest site. I found the nest some 20 cm above the ground near the base of a grass tussock. The nest was intact but empty. There didn't seem to be any sign of predation or foul play so I assume the nestlings had fledged sometime the day before (Saturday). I stayed in the area for a while longer looking for any sign of the birds but saw none. The fledging period can be

difficult to determine as the young are not usually seen near the nest after fledgling (Higgins *et a1*2001).

According to Perkins (2006) the last successful breeding record for White-fronted Chats in the ACT was in 1988.

References

Higgins PJ, Peter JM and Steele WK (2001). *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand & Antarctic Birds. Volume 5: Tyrant-flycatchers to Chats.* Oxford University Press, Melbourne: 1239-1253.

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[Editors' note: There have also been two reports in December of White-fronted Chats with dependent young near Uriarra Station dam, 11 km to the WNW of the site described above and across the Murrumbidgee River.]

Over-wintering honeyeaters in a Kambah garden in 2006

Since moving into my home in Kambah in February 1994 I have kept what amount to essentially daily records of the birds seen in the immediate area. One of the interesting things to come of this is an appreciation of the regularity and seasonality of certain species, particularly honeyeaters. The Red Wattlebird *Anthochaera carunculata* is resident year-round but most others tend to show regular seasonal patterns, and a few have showed up as infrequent or rare visitors.

One of the most regular and noticeable of the seasonal species is the Yellow-faced Honeyeater *Lichenostomus chrysops*. It is observed mainly as a migrant on passage, in large numbers, in autumn and spring, peaking usually in April and September. Some years, one or a few birds will over-winter and are recorded regularly in the garden through the winter months. This was the case from 1994 to 2000, and again in 2004, however, no over-wintering birds were recorded in 2001, 2002, 2003 or 2005. Up to three birds were again seen regularly through winter in 2006.

Another passage migrant which is usually recorded each year is the White-naped Honeyeater *Melithreptus lunatus*. This species is less prominent than the Yellow-faced Honeyeater but migrates at about the same times and often in associated or mixed flocks with them. **I** did not record the species in 1994, 1997, 1999 or 2000. They were recorded on autumn migration only in 2001 and 2002, on spring migration only in 1995, 1996, 1998, and 2003, and on both autumn and spring migration in 2005. In both 2004 and 2006 they were recorded not on migration (but see below), but as over-wintering birds.

In 2004, a single bird was recorded in the garden on ten days between 26 June and 4 September, with two birds being recorded on 12 September. Although this averages out at roughly a single record per week, six of the sightings were spread through July. An early

migrating flock of 30 was also recorded on 20 August.

In 2006, up to five White-naped Honeyeaters were recorded on 35 days between 12 June and 15 September. Eight birds were recorded on 28 September, and one was heard on 1 October. The 35 sightings were spread fairly evenly throughout the period with two in June, 12 in July, 17 in August, and four in September. Although only up to five birds were ever recorded at any given time, it is likely that there were six birds as there was clearly a family group of two adults and two young birds retaining some juvenile plumage, as well as a another two birds which appeared to be a pair.

Whether climate is involved in these birds over-wintering in recent years is unknown, particularly given that the garden has grown considerably over the 13-year period, but it is interesting to note that White-naped Honeryeaters were also reported (CanberraBirds email list) over-wintering in several other locations in Canberra in 2006.

Another notable record for winter 2006 was a single Yellow-tufted Honeyeater *Lichenostomus melanops* which was present in the garden on 14, 15 and 16 July after first showing up as part of a mixed feeding flock. This is the first time **I** have seen this species in the area.

The other two regular winter migrants to the garden, Eastern Spinebill *Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris* and White-eared Honeyeater *Lichenostomus leucotis* were recorded in a fairly typical pattern in 2006: between 9 April and 21 August for the former, and between 29 April and 22 June for the latter.

Harvey Perkins
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Black Honeyeaters at Mulligans Flat
I

On the morning of 28 November 2006, I went to Mulligans Flat Nature Reserve to locate the White-browed Woodswallows *Artamus superciliosus* and Little Lorikeets *Glossopsitta pusilla* that had been reported there. It was a hot cloudless day, with the temperature reaching a maximum of 34°C later in the afternoon. Having located the woodswallows in the copse of trees SW of the dam in the eastern part of the reserve, I was observing them when I noticed a pair of small birds alight in a dead tree. This would have been at approximately 10:30 h. I concentrated on the individual which had the darker and more distinguishable plumage. I had the sun behind me, which helped, but the species was something I hadn't seen before. Its black head and dark back were well delineated from the white underparts. The head was black as far down as the throat. Often a common bird can seem strange when viewed from a particular angle but this did not seem to match any local species. With recourse to my field guide, I found that the only possible species which matched what I had seen was the Black Honeyeater *Certhionyx niger* but, considering Mulligans Flat was outside its known distribution, I was still unsure.

I observed the male bird for perhaps only ten seconds before it flew away. Its companion had departed earlier and was, in hindsight, a female.

Due to the possibility of mistaken identity, **I** only mentioned the bird in an email to Marnix, my brother, and did not take the matter any further. Fortunately, he was able to confirm the sighting.

Maurits Zwankhuizen
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Black Honeyeaters at Mulligans Flat

II

On 2 December 2006, I followed the main west-east path through the Mulligans Flat Nature Reserve, then before the north-south Telstra cable track followed the north-south treeline (mostly Scribbly Gum *Eucalyptus rossii).* I then headed north on the west side of the treeline until I reached a dam after some 150 m. Just to the south of the dam is a tall large eucalypt. Here at around 18:50 h I first saw a female Black Honeyeater *Certhionyx niger* perched on a dead branch, preening. Both male and female then flew west for about 100 m to another large eucalypt, where the male was easily seen on an exposed branch. They flew west again another 100 m to a large eucalypt, and after watching them again for a few minutes, I left.

It was the first time I had seen this species but my identification was soon confirmed by other excited observers who also took copious photographs. The record has since been endorsed by COG's Rarities Panel.

Both birds were seen the following day by Peter Milburn, and from then on a constant stream of birders, including several from interstate, came to find these birds.

Over the following month the pair of Black Honeyeaters was joined by another adult male and a sub-adult male. I made the following observations of the group.

10 December: female seen at 19.45 h, 100 m W of dam; sub adult male roosting in eucalypt sapling about 1.5 m above ground.

13 December: two males and a female seen on the top of the dead tree at 18:30 h. The female quickly disappeared but I followed the two males for an hour. I watched both birds feeding on the pollen of Yellow Box *Eucalyptus melliodora* in a sapling just northeast of the huge old Yellow Box where they were usually seen. The males did not seem to mind each other's company for the whole time I watched them; in fact they seemed to want to hang out together. It was at this point while the males were low down and close to me that I heard one bird call - a soft 'seep'. One male was chased away briefly by a White-winged Triller *Lalage sueurii.* At 18.41 h I found a male in a large Blakely's Red Gum *E. blakelyi* midway between the dead tree and the huge Yellow Box, where it caught insects aerobatically. It then flew to the large Yellow Box into the mistletoe and caught insects again while the other male sat quietly preening close by. I

returned at 19:30 h to find both males catching insects from high atop a pair of mature Blakely's half way between the dead tree and the huge Yellow Box. They were joined by many other birds. At one point one male dropped down into a small acacia allowing close views before returning to the Blakely's.

The birds were reportedly still present in the Reserve on 7 January 2007.

In the past month this species has also been reported from the Bywong Hill and Nelanglo areas of nearby NSW, locations quite near to Mulligans Flat.

Marnix Zwankhuizen
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Grey Fantail migration

The cheerful little Grey Fantail *Rhipidura fuliginosa* has always been a particular favourite of mine and I have long puzzled over their movements. In our local Atlas, McComas Taylor (1992) wrote of them:

> A passage migration in spring and autumn is noticeable in suburban Canberra, but is more subtle than most other species: individuals or pairs appear in a garden, remain a day or two, then drift on.

Until recently, this had been my experience. On 2 April 2006, at 7:25 h, I walked from the de Salis Street entrance of the Pinnacle Canberra Nature Park (CNP), towards the pinnacle itself. The eucalypts on the ridge to the north of the track were literally teeming with Grey Fantails, all busily gleaning and calling excitedly. I estimated there was a minimum of 100 birds there, though given my noted propensity for undercounting, there may have been considerably more. I proceeded on to the nearby Red Stringybark *Eucalyptus macrorhyncha* woodland to do a regular two-hectare survey, which threw up a few more Grey Fantails and a lone Rufous Fantail *Rhipidura rufifrons*, also caught up in the excitement. Some half an hour later, by the time I returned to the spot where all the activity had been occurring, there was not a fantail to be seen. They had presumably set off — or continued - on their migratory journey.

The Pinnacle CNP, while not exactly `suburban', is a 126-hectare bushland reserve which lies immediately to the west of the west Belconnen suburb of Hawker. Grey Fantails can regularly be seen there in summer in low numbers, but only occasionally in winter. The weather on the day in question was mild and sunny, with a gentle breeze.

I was unable to return to the area in the following days, but John Brannan (pers. comm) reported that larger than usual numbers of Grey Fantails were present on the Pinnacle in the following week, suggesting that for 2006 at least, the Pinnacle was on their autumn migratory route.

Barbara Allan

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Peregrine Falcon nestlings

On 15 November 2006, I went with friends on a walk to the Big Hole in the Deua National Park. The Big Hole is a striking feature, being a sinkhole in limestone about 100 m deep and 30 m wide, with tree ferns at the bottom.

The weather was cool, after a very hot spell. As we stood on the viewing platform, looking into the Big Hole we observed many martins flying about and going into crevices in the steep rocky sides. I noticed excreta below a small ledge to my left, about a quarter of the way from the top of the sinkhole. On the ledge was a mound of down, about 35 cm in diameter. I had never seen anything like it before and drew it to the attention of my friends. What was it?

As we watched, a head broke through the down. It looked like the head of a fish, having a very large eye. A short time later, another head broke through the down and then a third. We kept watching over the next hour. We noticed the tail feathers protruding from the left-hand side of the down. Gradually, more of the bodies appeared above the down, and eventually one stood up. It had a dark brown head, striated brown and buff breast, harem pants and yellow legs. It was a Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* nestling.

No adult peregrines were calling or were seen while we were there.

Geoffrey Dabb went to see the birds the following day, verified our identification and said that he thought the youngsters were about 20 days old, and that they were emerging from their second covering of down. Mother Peregrine was nearby on this occasion

On a further visit on 5 December, Geoffrey found that all three nestlings had recently fledged, the last probably on that day. So the time between our seeing them and their fledging was about 20 days, a total of 40 days in the nest. According to Michael Morcombe (2000) the young usually remain in the nest for about 40 days.

Thanks to Geoffrey for his interest and information and providing the photograph.

Reference

Morcombe M. *Field Guide to Australian Birds.* Steve Parrish Publishing.

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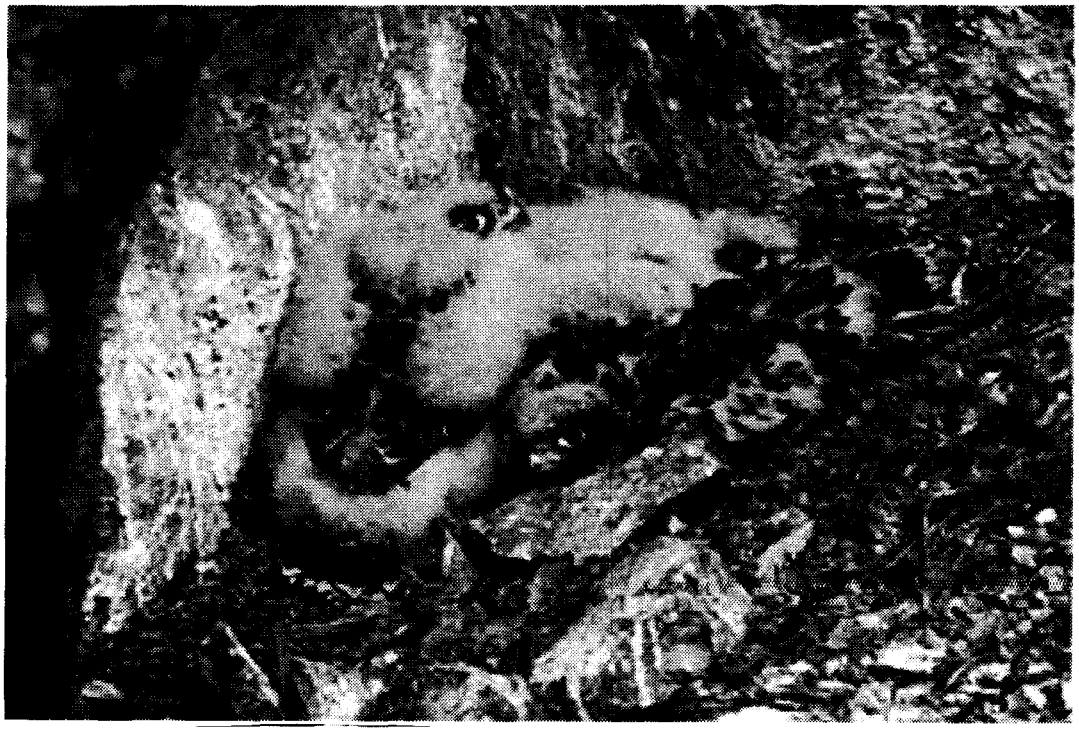

Peregrine Falcon nestlings Photo: Geoffrey Dabb

CANBERRA ORNITHOLOGISTS GROUP
PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR 2005-06

It is a pleasure to provide my third President's report, this time on COG activities for the period October 2005 to the present.

Though I feel there have been ever more demands on my time, looking back over the past 12 months there seem to have been fewer notable achievements compared with those for the previous two years. Again the reasons for this are unclear, but possibly related to when you start a job less is expected of your involvement in the day to day running of the organisation, but as time goes by and you become more familiar with the many aspects and demands this involves, the more you get tied up with the everyday happenings. For example, a significant proportion of my time in the past year seemed to be needed to sort out COG's volunteer insurance required as part of the more exacting demands of Environment ACT for the receipt of the woodland grant.

After three years as President, and with the expectation of continuing for another year, it's perhaps a good time to reflect on how well I think COG is running. In my view there are some things we do pretty well. We run very successful meetings with an excellent range of interesting speakers, which continue to attract a significant part of the membership etc each month. We have a very varied and popular field trip (outings) program, which continues to be very well patronised and to find new places to go to, though perhaps not quite as exotic as in the past. Our work on conservation matters remains very involved and demanding, and our views as a well balanced and apolitical organisation continue to be valued. Our range of surveys and the databases into which these feed continue to provide extremely useful information to both government and industry. Our chat line has become extremely popular for the exchange of information and views on a wide range of birding topics, and our expanding web site now carries a wealth of useful information as well as the very popular Photo Gallery.

While 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, there are still many things that COG continues not to do well, or at all. For example, COG continues to do very little specifically to attract younger members, including in the areas of education, and we still have not been able to regularly partake in exhibitions, other than static unattended ones. We continue to carry a large surplus of funds. While the Committee has continued to be cautious 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, we would welcome ideas from the membership how this could be put to better use. Hopefully with the handover of some of my responsibilities that I've carried for the past three years, I'll be able to devote some of my time and energy in driving one or two projects in these areas. I'd certainly be very happy to hear of any ideas you might have.

Committee

I have again been very well supported by the Committee over the past year. At this AGM quite a few Committee members are standing down, which is understandable as everyone, no matter how energetic and hardworking, needs time to refresh. So it certainly is the time to attract 'new blood' with fresh ideas and new enthusiasm, who can help carry on and build on the good work of their predecessors.

I would like to especially thank those members who are retiring from committee. For many years Barbara Allan has done an excellent job for COG wearing many hats as Secretary and more lately our Public Officer, co-editor of *Canberra Bird Notes*, excellent organiser of speakers for our meetings, driver of the records management team and our Annual Bird Report, organiser of our bird blitz, etc, etc. On behalf of everyone I'd like to offer our sincere thanks to Barbara for all the work she has done for COG, and to wish her well as she starts a period of lower involvement. Nicki Taws, my Vice-President for the past three years, is also stepping down from the committee after a much longer involvement in surveys and organising/leading outings etc. David Rosalky is also finding that being retired is not allowing him as much time as he would like on COG matters. My thanks to both for their contributions.

Members as at 30 June 2006— 362 `subscriptions', including a number of family memberships, 11 BIGnet exchange organisations; and one copyright deposit organisation — in terms of actual individuals, this equates to a membership of over 500.

Again many members not formally on the committee have helped COG in its daily activities, making a huge contribution to the success of the organisation. It is not possible in this report to individually thank all, and I apologise to those **I** have inadvertently, or for reasons of space, neglected to mention. A particular mention and thanks should, however, go to Alastair Smith who has both developed and maintained the COG membership database for the past 6 years.

COG is regularly asked to provide speakers, or to take bird walks for the general public. My thanks go to Geoff Dabb and Anthony Overs, for talks, and to Anthony, Louise Muir, Harvey Perkins, Tom Green, Alastair Smith, Henry Nix, Jenny Bounds and many more who have led bird walks on our behalf.

Conservation

Jenny Bounds and Julie McGuiness have continued to work as COG's Conservation Officers, although Jenny has undertaken much of this work in the last six months. Julie, unfortunately, has had to step down from this role, and I thank her for her contribution over many years on the committee helping with conservation matters. Jenny, as President of the Conservation Council for the SE Region and Canberra, also represents the interests of birds in that forum.

The Molonglo Valley has emerged as an important area of interest for COG, with ACT Government plans to develop parts of the Valley for housing. Our concerns range from protection of the significant raptor community in the Valley, some 13 species including possibly the last two breeding pairs of Little Eagles in the ACT. Little Eagles have declined as a breeding species from some 13 breeding pairs identified in the ACT Atlas survey in the late 1980s. Jenny Bounds, on behalf of COG, recently drafted and submitted a nomination of the Little Eagle as a 'vulnerable' species to the ACT Government.

Other areas of concern this year include the ACT Government's budget cuts to environmental staffing and services. COG wrote to the ACT Chief Minister expressing concerns about the impacts for on-ground staff and environmental programs, the possible loss of the ACT Parks and Conservation Service name and Gang-gang logo, and the loss of a visible public identity for the environment within a large municipal services portfolio. COG is very concerned about there being inadequate on-ground staff to undertake the full range of environmental services, compliance work and community education functions associated with the management of our parks and reserves and the very large land estate in the Lower Cotter Catchment. Ranger levels are already very low and some tasks like regular patrols in our nature reserves and national parks no longer appear to be possible due to other priorities such as fire and weeds management. It is disappointing to see that illegal, sophisticated mountain bike jumps are again appearing in some of our urban reserves, going unnoticed for months, and that trail bikers have taken over in the Lower Cotter (former pine forest estate now part of the water catchment). While we understand the Gang-gang logo will be retained in some form, the final outcome of the re-structure and staffing cuts is still unclear.

An important new page, 'Conserving Birds' has been added to the COG website. This page focuses on the conservation Of woodland birds and the COG Woodland Bird Monitoring Project, featuring declining woodland birds, Woodland Project reports, and key COG conservation submissions. Recently, Fact Sheets have been developed for four of the woodland project sites, Newline, Red Hill, Callum Brae and Goorooyarroo; two of these are now available on the COG website with two others almost finalised. Jenny Bounds coordinated this work with text contributions for some sites prepared by Jenny, Harvey Perkins, Geoffrey Dabb and Nicki Taws, and layout by Anne Rawson.

COG prepared submissions and/or other input on a range of conservation matters in 2005-06 (including contributing to submissions made by the Conservation Council). These are some highlights:

- the ACT Planning Systems Reform Project: COG provided a submission to a preliminary paper, seeking better and more independent environmental impact assessments given the failures of the existing system to protect important areas of native vegetation and bird habitats from development, e.g. East

O'Malley, Black Mountain Nature Reserve.

- Inquiry into Urban Vegetation and Wildlife Corridors- Legislative Assembly Committee: Amongst other matters, COG advocated for a wider link between the two NE reserves which are joined by a narrow neck of land which may not function as a viable corridor for some species of birds/animals. COG also advocated for the borders of Mulligans Flat and Goorooyarroo to be reviewed and brought back to Horse Park Drive to create a better buffer from urban impacts. The Assembly's report agreed and recommended to the ACT Government that this be reviewed. Although not fully accepting the recommendation, the ACT Government has indicated this will be considered at an appropriate time in the future planning for the suburb of Throsby. COG is hopeful that the experimental research being undertaken by the ANU/CRES in the reserves will inform this issue in a positive way.

- Water Skiing in East Basin of Lake Burley Griffin: COG has continued to make representations to the National Capital Authority regarding their decision to allow regular water skiing in East Basin near the Jerrabomberra Wetlands, and the process involved in this outcome, especially the lack of consultation with many interest groups regarding the skiing trial; COG made an FOI request for documents regarding the environmental impact assessments and the trial, but were dismayed to learn that this would cost more than $2000; and we were unable to proceed further on this matter.

- Namadgi National Park Draft Management Plan: While endorsing the broad management objectives of the Plan, COG commented on the lack of a bird species list and fire management issues for wet forest specialists and ground foraging birds, e.g. Pilotbird, Brush Bronzewing; COG opposed a proposed tourist route including Warks Rd being established, which would mean upgrading roads and vegetation clearance; COG supported a proposal by the ACT National Parks Assoc for re-establishment of native vegetation around Gudgenby Homestead.

- Molonglo Valley Planning Study: COG sent a submission to this preliminary structure plan, outlining concerns about birds of prey habitats and impacts on a Brown Treecreeper population in woodlands near Belconnen; we await the public release of various environmental studies which have since taken place.

- Lower Cotter Catchment Draft Strategic Management Plan: COG sent a submission broadly supporting its objectives to allow the catchment to return to native vegetation and to cease further plantings of exotic pines, as this would provide significant additional habitats for a range of birds.

- Capital Wind Farm (eastern side of Lake George): COG sent a letter to the NSW Government commenting on a flora and fauna assessment which did not adequately address potential impacts on birds; while COG supports renewable energy forms this does not excuse developers from meeting their obligations to undertake proper environmental assessments. Wind farm developments have been quiet in 2006 and the proposal for the Molonglo Ridge near Googong dam is now on hold.

The above is not fully comprehensive but does give a very good picture of the very broad range of conservation issues COG faces, with our views often being actively sought.

Field trips

We have continued to run a very active program of field trips, which have been extremely well patronised. I have retained overall responsibility for management of the COG Field Trips, and the 2006 program was devised with the assistance of the Field Trips Team (Jenny Bounds, David McDonald and Tom Green). The aim of the program, to offer a wide range of both local and further afield outings opportunities to attract a broad cross-section of the membership, was maintained.

Highlights included the Cape Conran, Wadbilliga NP, Munghorn Gap NR, and Nangar NP camp-outs, the accommodated trips to Green Cape, the Shoalhaven for shorebirds, the Jamberoo Valley/Barren Grounds and Broulee, and the bus tours to the Molonglo Valley as well as attempting to locate in one day all 11 raptor species that occur in Canberra. Some places were revisited successfully such as the overnight camp-out at Frogs Hole Creek at Frogmore, the survey for the Taylors Creek Landcare Group, and the combined FOG visit to Garuwanga near Nimmitabel. We have continued our links with like-minded organisations, holding another outing with the Goulburn Field Naturalists Society with the camp-out at Bungonia. My thanks again to all those who helped lead and organise outings during the year and who wrote up reports of trips for Gang-gang and on the chat line - we look forward to your continued assistance.

My commitment to the program for the past five years, including managing it for four of these (three of which I have also been President), is testament to my view of the importance of field trips in the spectrum of COG's activities. However, I am pleased to announce that Anthony Overs, who is both an excellent birder and has lead a number of trips, especially for beginners, has offered to take over as field trips organiser for 2006-07. While I will still maintain a strong interest, it will allow my focus to be towards leading this organisation in what I expect will be my final year as President.

Communications and publications

Greg Ramsay has taken over the task of editing and publishing our newsletter, *Gang gang,* very ably assisted by Sue Lashko, while Judy Collett now co-ordinates the wrapping and mailing with

her team of helpers. Thanks to all involved for ensuring that the major vehicle for COG communication was prepared and distributed in such a timely fashion.

Harvey Perkins and Barbara Allan continued to edit *Canberra Bird Notes*, which in 2005-06 included articles on post-fire activity, the decline in Little Eagle numbers, whether Australian King-Parrots breed in Canberra Nature Park, and many other topics. Our thanks go to all contributors to CBN.

David Cook maintained and continued to expand COG's web site, http://www.canberrabirds.org.au. The *Gang-gang* newsletters continue to be available on the website in PDF format, or viewable as Web pages; the online *Birds of Canberra Gardens*, courtesy of Paul Fennell, is now available through the COG website; and indices and abstracts for recent *Canberra Bird Notes* volumes 28 (2003) to 30 (2005) are available. There are now in excess of 2200 photographs of ACT region birds submitted by COG members on the Photo Gallery - requests for their non-commercial use continue to come in. Thank you David for providing such an excellent service.

COG's email announcement and discussion list CanberraBirds, managed by David McDonald, continued to operate effectively throughout the year. The membership has increased to more than 200 subscribers, providing a very useful forum for members and friends of COG to discuss topical issues relating to birds and birding in the Canberra region. It continues to serve as an excellent way to rapidly disseminate reports of interesting sightings in the local region, as well as a useful medium to help less experienced members improve their birding skills by benefiting from the advice and wisdom of the more senior subscribers. Could I ask everyone to please be patient and helpful in this regard.

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. COG members are still encouraged to collect records for COG's area of interest, especially at regular two-hectare sites as part of Birds Australia's Ongoing Atlas project. This continues despite the Atlas having been published in 2003, and it remains very important to collect this data over time. My thanks go to Tony Harding for the data input; and Nicki Taws, Chris Davey and Harvey Perkins for checking datasheets. The successful blitz during Bird Week in October, aimed at providing a snapshot of the birds present across the whole of the ACT over one weekend, was very helpful in raising the profile of the COG database. While it is being repeated this year, more can be done. Development of a system to allow electronic submission of data should also help in this regard, and I'm pleased that after a long delay following the engagement of a professional consultant the new version is currently being road tested. I'm sure that many members will welcome the opportunity to lodge data in this way.

The COG Woodland Bird Monitoring Project continues to go from strength to strength, and has now been running for over ten years at some sites, with 14 grassy woodland locations/135 monitoring points being surveyed every three months by a dedicated group of COG members. This project is almost at its maximum capacity in terms of the number of sites we can manage; however, we are adding seven new monitoring points in a new location in the Jerrabomberra Valley, as we believe this will add value to the Project with more sites for Brown Treecreeper and several declining woodland birds.

Jenny Bounds is Convenor of the Management Committee which coordinates this project and organises much of the operational work, with Nicki Taws and Jack Holland forming the other members of the Management Team. Alison Rowell, Environmental Consultant, continues to have a key role as consultant to the project, coordinating the quarterly surveys and data collection at sites, as well as providing a voluntary input.

In 2006, an analysis of data from the Project for the years 1998 to 2004 at all locations was finalised and a report published in the June 2006 edition of *Canberra Bird Notes*, and on the COG website. This analysis showed that a number of bird species have declined in grassy woodland habitats over that period, particularly ground feeders. It also informed the ACT contribution to the *State of Australia's Birds 2005 - woodlands and birds* report published by Birds Australia as a supplement to *Wingspan* in December 2005. A further data analysis is underway including data to the end of 2005 for all sites, as well as separate analyses for Mulligans Flat and Goorooyarroo north sites.

Thank you to the members involved in this important, long-term project for COG, which include Jenny Bounds, Geoffrey Dabb, Paul Fennell, John Goldie, Steve Holliday, David Cook, Michael Lenz, David McDonald, Julie McGuinness, Harvey Perkins, Alison Rowell, Nicki Taws, Chris Davey and Kathy Walter, and others who assist the site coordinators with surveys at some sites.

I'd like to thank David Rosalky who has managed the Garden Bird Survey (GBS). Also my warm thanks go to Kay Hahne for continuing to enter the data, a huge task, especially as the number of chartists increases. This major project has now completed 25 years and is our longest running monitoring project. It is used increasingly by researchers and its results used to support policy submissions. Over 70 charts have been distributed for year 26, 2006-07. With the 'Silver Jubilee' year completed, a review of the Survey, aimed at ensuring that it remains a members' survey whilst keeping up with developments in technology and science, is underway, with Chris Davey convening a team of experts who have long histories with the GBS.

COG's Rarities Panel, comprising Richard Allen, Jenny Bounds, Grahame Clark, Mark Clayton and Nicki Taws, continued to meet quarterly to consider, and endorse where appropriate, records of unusual species seen in COG's area of concern, and to continuously review

the status of birds in our area. My thanks go to the Panel for their work.

Annual Bird Reports

Thanks go to Paul Fennell and David Rosalky who continue to manage COG's databases. Paul and David extracted and collated the data for the 2004-05 annual bird report, which was compiled by a dedicated team of writers, Barbara Allan, Grahame Clark, Michael Lenz, David McDonald, Ian McMahon, Harvey Perkins, David Purchase and Nicki Taws, who produced the species reports. Thanks to all those involved, for their work in getting the report out in a timely fashion.

Monthly meetings

We again enjoyed a varied program of speakers at our monthly meetings, including good numbers of entertaining and inspiring higher degree students and post-doctoral fellows on topics as diverse as the Grey-crowned Babbler, vocal recognition in the White-browed Scrub-wren and the ecology of the Brown Treecreeper, as well as the adverse effects of the Common Myna. A very special event was the memorable Quiz night organised and presented by Ian Fraser for our January meeting. Our thanks to Sue Lashko for continuing to facilitate our use of the Canberra Girls Grammar School venue; and to Carol Macleay for her long-term commitment to the sales table.

COG administration and the COG office

As I indicated in my last report, COG decided against maintaining an office in the Griffin Centre. For the time being, our records and library are housed in a separately accessible room in our secretary's home. Access is by arrangement with the secretary or, in her absence, with any member of the COG executive. Our camping and display equipment and archival records continue to be held in storage in Belconnen and again may be accessed by arrangement with any of the executive.

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 give generously to this fund and are encouraged to continue to do so.

The Fund's third grantee, Dr Janet Gardner, used the funds provided to undertake a scholarly analysis of breeding plumage of the Speckled Warbler in the Canberra region, a woodland bird species considered by many to be threatened in this region. The fourth grantee, Mr Chris Davey, in conjunction with Dr Peter Fullagar and volunteer bird surveyors, has used the funds provided to help implement a particularly important study into the

response of the Superb Lyrebird to the 2003 wildfires in the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve.

Conclusion

I would like to thank everyone else who has provided with me assistance over the past year and look forward to one fmal and active year guiding this very worthy organisation.

Jack Holland
11 October 2006

COLUMNISTS' CORNER

HBW: nothing for the wall

From conversations and chatline messages, I gather that there are now many happy and eager Australian subscribers to the serially-published *Handbook of the Birds of the World* (HBW), from the Barcelona-based Lynx Edicions. This is an impressive series of volumes. HBW 11, 4.3 kg and approx $A260 postage-paid, has recently arrived.

Stentoreus supposes that most subscribers are keen to have a book that describes (or will when complete) all the world's birds, with great photographs and a comprehensive set of drawings. In a way, it is a more elaborate successor to those popular world-birdsurveys *Living Birds of the World* (Gilliard 1958), *Birds of the World* (Austin & Singer 1961), and *The World of Birds* (Fisher and Peterson 1964).

I believe much of the appeal of such books is that they simplify the classification of birds for many readers. Most non-experts at all interested in birds want to know what is related to what, and what 'kind' of bird they might be looking at. All the named books did that. Fisher and Peterson produced a graphic tree showing the relationships of 199 families. They were cautious in their claims for their tree. They described it as 'a very tentative sketch', adding that it may look foolish already or quite soon, for new work is published every year'.

Fisher and Peterson were on the editorial board of the subsequent *Birds of the World* (Gooders 1969-1970), a bulky serial publication that ran to 9 binder volumes over two years. A wall chart based on their graphic tree came with Part 1 Vol 1. The caveats were not prominent. Rather, it was claimed the publication would give a 'strictly scientific picture of the whole of the bird world', how 'this pattern unfolds in detail' being shown in the wall chart.

The period 1987 to 1991, the planning period for HBW, was an awkward time to be making decisions about how classification was to be treated. The first volume grappled with that dilemma. Although HBW was not to be a 'definitive taxonomic list', it needed to choose a classification to follow. The then-recent Sibley & Monroe (S&M) classification was available. However, `it was considered both risky and irresponsible to base a series of ten volumes and many years' work on views that are so new and revolutionary'.

HBW1 reproduced at pp 68-71 versions of both the S&M classification and a `traditional' classification. HBW, it was stated, would follow the latter. Since then the projected number of volumes has increased from 10 to 16, with subsequent prolongation of the publishing schedule.

This means that HBW's arrangement of the Australian passerines is going to look increasingly strange to the Australian reader. Volume 10 'Cuckoo-shrikes to Thrushes' contains at p. 39 a list of the passerine families to be treated during the remaining life of the

project. It appears that subsequent volumes will work down this list. Thus, our same-family 'Australian Chats' and `Honeyeaters', being, on the traditional view, widely separated, are likely to be in separate volumes.

After 12 years of conditioning, Australian users accept, and expect a book to be arranged on the basis, that there is an Australian-centred group of passerine families that should be placed together rather than mixed up with the (much less closely-related) northern-hemisphere families. Another basis for the arrangement favoured in Australia is that the old world passerines form an inter-related branch whose members arrived in Australia much later than the distinctively Australian families. Several writers for HBW evidently subscribe to theories along those lines.

All this has led to a lot of explaining and justifying. The foreword to HBW2 contains an essay by Walter Bock which maintains sternly that classifications must not be confused with 'sequences', which are for information retrieval, and which should be standard and maintained for a long time, and only changed when there has been 'wide acceptance of radical modifications in the underlying classification'. HBW, he says, was doing the right thing in choosing a traditional approach.

Presumably Walter Bock would say that Birds Australia and Australian authors' have jumped the sequential gun, and if Australians are going to have difficulty finding their birds in HBW they've no-one to blame but themselves. That argument seems weakened by HBW1 discussing its choices on 'classification' and `macrosystematics', and not just `sequence', in foreshadowing its editorial policy. Perhaps they should have said something like:

Look, we're not going to do this alphabetically. We had to choose a sequence in which to present bird families, and we've chosen a traditional one because that will help our world readership to find the different families. This series is going to be published over 20 years or more and it's possible that our traditional sequence will be outdated by the time we're finished, but we'll have to stick with it. As to what classification we'll finish up subscribing to, well, that's another matter.

The foreword to HBW8 (2003) is devoted to a valuable article by Murray Bruce, *A Brief History of Classifying Birds*. Towards the end of that, he points out that some regional checklists and field guides have already followed the 'new [S&M] classification' but others have adhered to the traditional approach.

Bruce describes Christidis & Boles (C&B) (1994) and HANZAB5 as following an 'eclectic classification'. That comment does not quite do justice to what has happened in Australia. C&B was intended to provide a long-overdue standard Australian list, which it has done.

It gives explicit reasons for its decisions, as does the authoritative Schodde/Mason *Directory of Australian Birds* [DAB] (1999, but not mentioned by Bruce among some 260 references). Thus, C&B, as expected to be revised to take up minor changes made in DAB,

has been followed by HANZAB. All Australian guides, depending on date of publication, have conformed. This has led to a satisfyingly consensual Australian approach on family arrangement.

What can be expected of HBW as its production schedule extends over the next few years? It will probably remain faithful to its threat to stay 'traditional' at the `macrosystematic level' while following recent developments on subspecies (HBW3 p. 19). This means Australian passerines will need to be searched for in the nooks and crannies of a classification unfamiliar to many younger Australian students.

Some changes to the traditional approach might be allowed. What would `undoubtedly prove taxonomically to be the most significant deviation from traditional usage in the entire series' happened in HBW3. The Plains-wanderer was detached from the buttonquails. This was based on 'a reasonable degree of consensus' and because 'it seemed imprudent, confusing and perhaps even counterproductive for HBW to stick stubbornly to usage that has fallen into such disfavour within the species' only range country'. (There must have been some frank representations over that one.)

However, the cuckoo-shrikes have already appeared in HBW 10 between the pipits and bulbuls instead of where you might have looked for them in an Australian book. HBW 11 'Old World Flycatchers to Old World Warblers' includes our familiar fantails. However, the chapter-writer for the fantails, C&B co-author Walter Boles, is allowed to say:

> They were traditionally placed near the Old World flycatchers (Muscicapidae) .. but it is now generally accepted that they represent a component of the large Australo-Papuan songbird assemblage. Morphological and molecular data indicate that the fantails, together with the monarch-flycatchers, are widely separated from *Muscicapa* ... .

In the similarly misplaced (from the Australian viewpoint) chapter on the monarch-flycatchers, do not look for the Magpie-lark, where you would expect it in an Australian book. Although the text discussion indicates that it should be found there, you are going to come across it much later.

At the end of its non-passerine section, HBW provided a handy laminated sheet, being a portable index to where the families could be found in the volumes to that point. No doubt a similar guide will be provided at the end of the passerines.

While that might look like a simplified classification — a graphic statement of where all the birds of the world fit in — it will not be convincing if it follows the published sequence. By that time, many of HBW's own writers will have pointed out that the families they are covering should be placed somewhere else.

In these times, an international publisher who produces one of those colourful wall charts might need to be either courageous or reckless.

A. stentoreus

RARITIES PANEL NEWS

At its most recent meeting on 8 January 2007, the Rarities Panel considered 23 unusual bird reports. It endorsed 19 of them, as listed below; it was unable to endorse one; and has sought further information on three.

The majority of records are of species which, while not regularly seen in our area, do turn up from time to time. There are generally one or two records of the Channel-billed Cuckoo each summer, generally overflying our area. White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike and Pied Butcherbird are also increasingly `regular' unusuals, whose status needs to be reviewed. And as usual. there are escapees to report.

The White-throated Nightjar record is interesting, as it was a visual, not aural observation. This is not a species you would expect in urban areas, however it was seen on the fringes of the city. It was first recognised by its erratic, zigzagging flight, its fast wing beats and then short glide. The most recent previous record of the species was in February 2006, from Goorooyarro Nature Reserve.

Spangled Drongo are definitely unusual in our area. The most recent endorsed record before the two outlined below was of a bird seen in April 2006 in Holt. They have been recorded before in the Australian National Botanic Gardens, and the Panel received anecdotal accounts of other sightings in our area in the December period. Whether there was one highly mobile bird, or more than one, is impossible to say.

The greatest surprise was the appearance of Black Honeyeaters in Mulligans Flat (the story of their discovery by Maurits Zwankhuizen is described in an Odd Ob in this issue of *Canberra Bird Notes).* The species has been seen once before in the ACT — a male was recorded and photographed at Charnwood, a north-western suburb, from 9-11 January 1991.

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Diamond Dove *Geopelia cuneata*

1; 6 Oct 06; Rosemary Bell; nr Commonwealth Ave bridge GrL14 escapee

Turquoise Parrot *Neophema pulchella*

1; 21 Oct 06; Alastair Smith et al; Jerrabomberra Wetlands GrL14 - probable escapee

2; 28 Nov 06; Julian Robinson & Lindsay Northrop; Hospital Creek, Namadgi National Park, GrH25

1; 28 Nov 06; Julian Robinson & Lindsay Northrop; Old Boboyan Rd, Namadgi National Park, GrI25

Channel-billed Cuckoo *Scythrops novaehollandiae*

1; 28 Nov 06; Dick Schodde; Hughes GrK15

White-throated Nightjar *Eurostopodus mystacalis*
1; 31 Oct 06; Richard Allen; Curtin GrJ 14

Bell Miner *Manorina melanophrys*
1; 26 Nov 06; Rebecca Montague-Drake; Captains Flat GrS21

Painted Honeyeater *Grantiella picta*

1; 9 Dec 06; Michael Lenz; Mulligans Flat GrM11

Black Honeyeater *Certhionyx niger*
2; 2 Dec 06; Marnix Zwankhuizen; Mulligans Flat GrsL/M11
2; 5 Dec 06; Marnix Zwankhuizen; Mulligans Flat GrsL/M11

Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus bracteatus*

1; 6 Nov 06; Louise Muir; ANBG GrK13
1; 6 Jan 07; David McDonald; Jerrabomberra Creek GrL14

White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina papuensis*

1; 27 Sep 06; Alastair Smith; Campbell Park GrM13

Pied Butcherbird *Cracticus nigrogularis*

1; 26 Oct 06; Steve Holliday; Mulligans Flat GrL11
1; 28 Oct 06; Marnix Zwankhuizen; Horse Park Drive/Gundaroo Rd GrL11

Singing Bushlark *Mirafra javanica*

1; 12 Mar 06; Steve Holliday; Collector Rd GrV08

The Panel also considered and endorsed the following records of species which have now been dropped from the list of unusual birds, or, in the case of the Brush Bronzewing, was observed in an unusual location.

Brush Bronzewing *Phaps elegans*
1; 23 Sep 06; Alastair Smith; Mt Majura GrM13

Long-billed Corella *Cacatua tenuirostris*

2; 24 Sep 06; Michael Lenz; Mt Ainslie GrM13
1; 29 Sep 06; Jack Holland; Chapman GrI15 1; 5 Oct 06; Steve Holliday; Campbell Park GrM13

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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.

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