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A RECORD OF THE FIRST BIG YEAR FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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Abstract: *This article documents the author's planning and conduct of a 'Big Year' in the Australian Capital Territory. In the 2006 calendar year he observed 208 bird species within the geographical boundaries of the ACT.*

Introduction

I was watching a Royal Spoonbill *Platalea regia* flying over the grassland paddocks to the north of Jerrabomberra Wetlands, when I turned to Milburn, and jokingly said, 'I think I saw a yellow bill'. I desperately wanted a Yellow-billed Spoonbill *Platalea flavipes* for my Big Year list, and I was willing every Royal Spoonbill we saw that morning to morph into the required species. We were at the Wetlands specifically to follow up a sighting of Yellow-billed Spoonbill from the previous day. Milburn's reply was a nonchalant, 'I don't think so' but less than five minutes later, there it was; great views as a Yellow-billed Spoonbill flew over the two of us in amongst a flock of Australian White Ibis *Threskiornis molucca*. I was ecstatic - for me this was more than just a sighting - it was bird number 199 for calendar year 2006. One to go , or so I thought.[1]

So, where had this Big Year started? A quest to see 200 birds, in a calendar year within the geographical boundaries of the ACT …

Background

My father is a birdwatcher, so it was not surprising that as a boy I should become interested in birds. While I cannot remember where or when it all started for me, I recently found the logbook for my Duke of Edinburgh Award which stated the purpose for my bronze award expedition (as a 16 year-old in 1979) was 'to observe birds'.

On leaving school I joined the Navy and served from 1982 to 1996. During those formative years birding largely took a back seat. I never let on that I was a birder for fear of being ridiculed by my colleagues, who I could hear saying 'yeah, I like birdwatching too … not the feathered ones … ha ha'.

It was only after leaving the Navy and moving to Canberra in 1996 that my interest gradually reawakened and birdwatching became more than just a passing hobby. It still took me

[1] I recall the account of the Spoonbill as a later reconciliation of my count would indicate that it was this bird and not the Glossy Ibis that was bird number 200.

a few years to realise the birding potential of Canberra, but by 2000 I was no longer in denial and I was actively birdwatching again. It was that year I joined the Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG).

In 2004 I accepted an offer from the Navy to teach leadership for 12 months at the naval college at Jervis Bay. I continued to subscribe to the Canberrabirds discussion forum and read about a great year for vagrants and rarities in the ACT, with my birding contemporaries adding many new species to their totals. I also read a number of books about twitching which included Mark Obmascik's *The Big Year, Kingbird Highway* by Ken Kauffman, *Call collect ask for Birdman* by James M Vardaman and *Arrivals and Rivals* by Adrian Riley.

When I returned to Canberra in January 2005 I was keen to make up for lost time and I birded steadily, adding 22 new species to my ACT list. The idea of a Big Year had its genesis during this 11 months of intensive birding and I made this announcement public when I reviewed Sean Dooley's *The Big Twitch* in Canberra Bird Notes with the words, 'as for me after reading the book … I am attempting my own big year in 2006, within the ACT … stay tuned (Smith 2005).

Planning for a Big Year

I am not aware of any previous attempt at an ACT Big Year and so there was no total for me to challenge. I had to decide to either (a) aspire to a hypothetical total like Sean Dooley had done in his Australia-wide 'Big Twitch' – a goal of 700 Australian species in calendar year 2002 (Dooley 2005), or (b) leave myself in the lap of the gods and just see what total I had achieved by year's end. I reasoned that the goal of aiming for a total would provide my quest with much needed impetus. The question was then, 'just how high should that total be?'

According to the most current revision of the COG checklist (COG 2003a), some 282 species of birds have been recorded in the ACT.[2] A supplementary list documents a further 38 species that have been recorded in the ACT but are generally considered to have been escapees, birds deliberately released (both native and feral) or misidentifications. I maintain my bird sighting records in a 'Birdinfo' database[3] and I have 290 species listed in my personal ACT checklist.

To help me decide on a total, I extracted from my database all six years worth of sightings and 'coded' the birds. Code One were birds that I had been seen at least five years out

[2] Two records in the supplementary list are seabirds - one a White-faced Storm-Petrel *Pelagodroma marina* found on the road to Kelly's Swamp and the other a Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus pacificus* found at a petrol station. Anecdotally, I have heard that the remains of a jaeger were found in a Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* nest.

[3] These records are exported to Birds Australia on an annual basis and later extracted by COG for its database.

of six – I had a near certain chance of seeing these 108 birds in 2006; Code Two were birds that I had seen at least three years out of six – a pretty good chance of seeing these 38 birds; birds I had seen only once were labelled Code Three – it would be much more difficult to add any of these 71 birds to my list. The most unlikely or difficult birds for me to see were Code Four - birds that I have not previously observed in the ACT – my list contained 73 Code Four birds.

From my coded list I concluded a total of 200 species was a nice round number that sat agreeably between my highest annual total to date (183 species seen in calendar year 2005) and my ACT regional total of 216 species.[4] Additionally, 200 species was a number at the very top end of all probabilities. At the time my annual average number of species over the previous six years (including the big total in 2005) was just 139 species per year. Indeed, the 2003-2004 annual bird report (COG 2005) reported an annual average of only 215 species[5] recorded in the whole COG area of interest (AOI)[6] by in excess of 100 birdwatchers.

Several years of severe drought and below average rainfall in eastern Australia had helped gradually increase the total number of species I have observed. This weather pattern has seen an easterly movement of species not normally recorded in the ACT, illustrated by the Painted Honeyeater *Grantiella picta*, a very rare vagrant in the ACT. Normally confined to western NSW and southern Qld, between 1951 and 2002 there were only five published records of single birds or a pair. During an influx of the species in 2002 (thought to be because of an abundance of mistletoe in our local region and drought conditions further west), I recorded seven individuals on three occasions in October that year. Since this influx, only two subsequent sightings have been endorsed. I certainly was hoping - but not counting on - seeing this bird in 2006[7]!

The final requirement for my Big Year was a set of rules for me to follow. I had to see (visually acquire) each bird, within the geographical boundaries of the ACT and the birds had to be alive and wild.[8] A final rule was that birds had to be positively identified by me - I could

[4] My record of sightings placed me some way behind the top ACT lister, Milburn, who had recorded 246 species.

[5] In both 2005-2006 and 2006-2007, 233 species were recorded in the COG AOI (COG 2008).

[6] The ACT comprises 2 357 km^2 - only 17.2 per cent of the COG area of interest at 13 675 km^2 (COG 2008).

[7] A Painted Honeyeater was seen by birdwatchers looking for the Black Honeyeater at Mulligan's Flat in December.

[8] For example, birds like the Common Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* resident in Narrabundah and domestic geese *Anser anser* on Lake Burley Griffin could not count towards my total.

not rely on someone else's identification of a fleeting bird.

Despite my relative inexperience birding in the Territory, armed with this information I reasoned I had an understanding of the temporal and spatial movement of birds in our region. With large doses of both determination and luck, observing 200 species in a calendar year was achievable.

The Big Year Begins

With my planning behind me, it was with both excitement and trepidation that I embarked on my quest, making my first birding excursion a visit to Kelly's Swamp on 1 January 2006 with Michael Wright. In the first five months of the year I was able to find all the 'usual' resident species and migrants, which would ensure that I did not have to spend time in the second half of the year mopping up those species. The first 100 birds came in the first five days of January and included my first new bird for the ACT, a single Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* observed at Kelly's Swamp. I have included some of the other individual highlights of the year.

Un-extinct Babblers

While babblers have been recorded in the ACT, there were no recent records and they were presumed to be locally extinct until a lone female Grey-crowned Babbler *Pomatostomus temporalis* was reported in the grounds of the Royal Military College in 2005. I ticked this species off on the last day of January as bird number 147.

Later in March I received word that for a month a single White-browed Babbler *Pomatostomus superciliosus* had been observed on private land in Aranda. Prior to this record, Wilson (1999) reported that the last sighting of White-browed was a group near Mt Stromlo 'until at least 1950'.

On 17 March I spent a very cold morning locating the babbler, obtaining only fleeting glimpses as it flitted through tea tree understorey. I was able to observe the diagnostic brown head and thin white supercilium, which was enough to add it to my list as bird number 168. I made another three visits over the ensuing week in order to obtain better views and also to guide other birders, including David McDonald, Sue Lashko, Ian Fraser and ABC journalist Louise Maher.

A Big Week in a Big Year

Every Big Year needs a 'Big Week' and for me this was 14-20 May - a week that started and ended with emails which belatedly reported Code 4 birds.[9] A timely report of a third Code 4 bird was reported in between.

The first Code 4 was the report of two Musk Lorikeets *Glossopsitta concinna* at a suburban oval in Chapman, observed by a non-birder earlier in the week and not made

[9] *Code 4* birds were those I have not previously seen in the ACT.

public for four days. I made two trips to Chapman on Friday afternoon and Saturday morning with no hint of their existence. On Saturday night their presence was again confirmed on Canberrabirds and so on Mother's Day, with the blessing of my long suffering (non-birding) wife, I made a third trip. As soon as I got out of the car, I heard the unmistakeable call of a lorikeet and within two minutes I found two birds feeding in an Argyle Apple *Eucalyptus cinerea*.

Just after lunch on 17 May I received a call from Marnix to say that he had seen two, possibly three, Brown Gerygones *Gerygone mouki* in Westbourne Woods on the south-western shore of Lake Burley Griffin. Another Code 4 bird so, straight after work, I hurried out to the location. Within 10-15 minutes I had found one, possibly two birds, but the views were fleeting and in poor light with the sun disappearing behind the Brindabella Ranges so I could not add them to my list. I met Martyn Moffat and Sue, who were also looking for the birds and we agreed to return in the early morning. At 0645 the next day we were out looking but, despite the appearance of mixed feeding flocks, we saw no gerygones before Sue and I had to leave for work. Of course soon after we disappeared, Martyn found them. It was back again at lunchtime, where again in the company of other birders, I found three birds and was rewarded with wonderful views of this tiny passerine, normally associated with wetter forest on the coast.

If Brown Gerygone and Musk Lorikeets were not enough, the pièce de résistance was the report of a Blue-faced Honeyeater *Entomyzon cyanotis* at the Australian National University. Again, this bird had been around a while (indeed since the first week of May) but the general birding community was not alerted to its presence until 19 May.

I was at the campus just after sunrise on Saturday 20 May, looking for a bird that had last been observed in the ACT in 1943 (Wilson 1999). I walked around likely habitat for 45 minutes without a sighting nor call, when all of a sudden there was bird number 182 in front of me, perched about 2.5 metres above the ground in a eucalypt. I watched as it moved to a Coast Banksia *Banksia integrifolia* where it fed on the 'brushes'.

The Blue-faced Honeyeater is known for its aggressive behaviour and I observed this first hand when it chased a Crimson Rosella *Platycercus elegans* for approximately 30 seconds. A second crimson rosella was observed following the two. A very satisfying morning indeed. I was later to see another Blue-faced honeyeater (probably the same bird) in Garran in September when it flew, calling, into a next door neighbour's *Eucalyptus blakelyi*.

24 May

In response to another 'off-hand' report on Canberrabirds of an Olive Whistler *Pachycephala olivacea* at the Australian National Botanic Gardens (ANBG), I was picked up from a conference I was attending by

Michael Wright and together we went to the gardens. I had visited the ANBG the previous Sunday in the hope of seeing the first Crescent Honeyeaters *Phylidonyris pyrrhoptera* of the season but no Crescents were seen nor heard.

The Olive Whistler was another Code 4 and one that I was expecting to put in a fair bit of time locating in its summer range at Ginnini Flats in the Brindabella Ranges, so to have one close at hand was like manna from heaven. In the car park we spied Geoffrey Dabb with camera in hand and the three of us made our way to the last known location of the Olive Whistler. If I was looking to add birdwatchers to my Big Year list I would have scored well, as Marnix and his brother Maurits were also out looking for the whistler. Despite a combined 90 minute search we saw and heard nothing, but there is nothing like a dip to sharpen the senses.

I made a total of five trips to the gardens that week looking for the whistler but it was to be a species that either didn't exist or the one that got away. I did pick up a Tawny Frogmouth *Podargus strigoides* perched in a *Eucalyptus viminalis* and looking very much part of the tree as they are want to do. If one nocturnal bird in a week wasn't enough, Lindsay Northrupp and I met on Mt Ainslie the following Saturday morning for what turned out to be my only sighting of an Australian Owlet-nightjar *Aegotheles cristatus*. Right on cue we found the bird sunning itself in an *Eucalyptus rossii* hollow. I can never tire of these birds, so mammal-like in appearance, and while probably reasonably common, difficult to observe.

My final trip to the ANBG that week was early on Sunday 28 May, just after the gardens opened. One of the first birds I saw was a small dumpy non-descript brown robin bouncing along a path. I made a note of its appearance and 'mentally identified' it as a female Rose Robin *Petroica rosea* - a number of males had been observed in the gardens during the week and I was to see at least two during my walk. That afternoon as I entered the morning's sightings into my Birdinfo database I thought I had better consult the field guides … then HANZAB. Female Pink Robin *Petroica rodinogaster* and bird 185! I had only seen this species once previously, a male in 2000 at Blue Range hut before the 2003 fires devastated the area. Best described as brown jobs, the variation in plumage between all female and immature robins is slight; I felt that I was putting my credibility well and truly on the line by reporting its presence. I was relieved to hear Milburn confirm my sighting the following morning.

21-23 September

In another good week of sightings, a Scarlet Honeyeater *Myzomela sanguinolenta* (Code 4) was reported in suburban Cook by Nicki Taws. Responding quickly to the report, Anthony Overs picked me up from work and we met Marnix (notably all Commonwealth public servants) in Wybalena Grove, where the three of us and Nicki found a single male

bird calling. Our decision to leave work was justified as this bird only remained in the area for a short period of time, and those whose jobs dictated they stay at work, dipped.

Later that week I followed up a report from Michael Lenz of Glossy Black-Cockatoos *Calyptorhynchus lathami* drinking at a dam on Mt Majura. Just prior to sunset on 23 September I was rewarded with the sight of two males and one female coming to drink at the dam. The birds flew in from the south calling loudly and landed in a eucalypt where they remained for about five minutes before disappearing out of sight at the dam. They then flew into a eucalypt before flying off and fading from view. While waiting for the Cockatoos I was watching four Common Bronzewings *Phaps chalcoptera* drinking at the dam when a noticeably smaller and more compact bronzewing approached. It also appeared to be darker in overall appearance – a Brush Bronzewing *Phaps elegans* (bird number 194). The grey dorsal plumage contrasted with the pink of the Common Bronzewings and I was also able to discern the two wing panels, which I compared with the iridescent panel on the Common Bronzewings.[10]

[10] Nicki Taws had previously reported Brush Bronzewings on Mt Majura in May 2003, approximately 2.5 km from my sighting (COG 2003b). Interestingly for both these sightings, this species is usually associated with wetter habitat in the Brindabella Ranges (Wilson 1999).

Closing on my goal

During a trip to Campbell Park in the last week of September I saw a White-bellied Cuckoo-Shrike *Coracina papuensis* (race *robusta*) and on returning home via the turf farms at Dairy Flat, I observed the first Whiskered Terns *Chlidonias hybrida* of the season. It was only then, that I thought with three months still to go until the end of the year, and with birds 195 and 196 under my belt, 200 species was within my grasp. I still had a small number of outstanding Code 1 and Code 2 birds on the list, and also Code 4 birds that had recently been reported on Canberrabirds. At this time, Ian Fraser arranged for me to be interviewed by Louise Maher about my Big Year on ABC local radio. The goodwill that this interview generated provided me with further incentive to reach my goal.

On 1 October I eventually made the trip to Ginnini Flats in search of the Olive Whistlers and found two in some tea tree. On the downside, I left home very early that morning and in the dark I dropped my Swarovski binoculars on the driveway, which knocked the lenses out of alignment. The consequence of my carelessness was that they had to be returned to Austria for repair and a four week turnaround time. Every cloud, however, has a silver lining: Swarovski very kindly loaned me a similar pair and when my binoculars returned from their overseas convalescence, Swarovski did not charge me for the cost of repairs.

Number 200

Saturday 14 October (the day the Yellow-billed Spoonbill was bagged) had dawned six hours earlier when I was joined by five other birders at Goorooyarroo Nature Reserve in the hope of finding a Little Button-Quail *Turnix velox*. A week previously I had searched for the bird in the general vicinity of where Steve Holliday had flushed one bird in January. I had obviously been close to at least one Little Button-Quail as I heard its distinctive 'oom, oom' call. My Big Year rules stated I could only count visual records, so I was hoping to 'nail' it with a little help from twitchers who also needed the bird for their ACT lists. I anticipated that the Little Button-Quail would be bird number 199 for the 2006 calendar year but despite our combined efforts no button-quails were seen (nor indeed heard).

With little time to celebrate the sighting of the Yellow-billed Spoonbill, I observed a dark coloured bird with what appeared to be a long bill flying over the Molonglo River near the hospice. It banked to the left and I caught a hint of purple gloss - Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus,* I called expectantly. Milburn found the bird and concurred with my identification - and there (I thought) was bird number 200. We watched the ibis as it flew for quite some time over the whole Jerrabomberra Wetlands complex, apparently reconnoitring the site before landing which probably indicated it was arriving in the ACT from somewhere drier out west. I sent a message to Michael Wright who had been with me when I counted bird number one (for the record a Crested Pigeon *Ocyphaps lophotes* at Kelly's Swamp on 1 January 2006. He had passed the wetlands earlier that morning and reported 'nothing of interest'. I was still abuzz when the departing 'uber twitcher' Milburn, told me he was going to attempt a Big Year in 2007. I was somewhat deflated as I knew my record would only stand for one year!

The Birds Keep Coming

Once I had cracked the 200, the birds kept coming in relatively quick succession with Southern Boobook *Ninox novaeseelandiae* (a bird in Pearce found for me by Michael Wright) and Turquoise Parrot *Neophema pulchella* (albeit a dilute mutation). A trip up to the Brindabella Ranges and a four hour walk along Moonlight Hollow Road with Milburn, Frank Antram and Yarden Oren failed to produce Wonga Pigeon *Leucosarcia melanoleuca* or Cicadabird *Coracina lineata* but on the trip back down the mountain I received a message from Ian Fraser alerting me to a 'stint' at Kellys Swamp. We scrambled to Kelly's and, armed with scopes and field guides, the four of us finally settled on the identification as Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*.

Stubble Quail *Coturnix pectoralis* fell the following week at Mulligan's Flat with Steve Holliday, Singing Bushlark *Mirafra javanica* on Coppings Crossing Road with Frank and again at Mulligan's Flat, the

only new bird for November, Little Lorikeet *Glossopsitta pusilla*.

On 7 December 2006 my last new bird for the year and, appropriately, also a new life bird (or lifer) for my Australian list, a Black Honeyeater *Certhionyx niger* was observed at Mulligan's Flat. I was to spend a total of seven hours over four visits looking for this bird, the first ACT record since 1991 (Wilson 1999). If there is one thing more satisfying than seeing two Black Honeyeaters after seven hours of searching over two days, then it is seeing the birds with five other birding colleagues. After nearly two hours searching late on the fourth day, Martyn Moffat observed the birds whereby Sue, Michael, Yarden, Frank and I joined the visual feast.

Final Tally

On 31 December I finished the year with a trip to Boboyan Road with Michael Wright and a final unsuccessful attempt at Wonga Pigeon. I was well and truly over my Big Year when the clock struck midnight that night, with my tally for the year at 208 birds.

As for the birds I had categorised, I had observed all 108 Code 1 birds, all 38 Code 2 birds and 47 out of the 71 birds I categorised as Code 3. I had increased my ACT list by 15 species out of the 73 possible Code 4 birds, thus bringing my ACT total to 230 species.

Of those Code 4 species, I had observed some amazing birds which included the now un-extinct White-browed Babbler, the Black, Scarlet and Blue-faced Honeyeaters and the White-fronted Chat *Epthianura albifrons*, which announced an irruption of the species in the ACT. Interestingly, I dipped on Wonga Pigeon, a bird that I would have considered an absolute certainty prior to the 2003 fires, and also Cicadabird. I had also dipped on Pied Butcherbird *Cracticus torquatus*, despite at least five trips across town to Mulligan's Flat to look after reports from multiple observers. From postings to Canberrabirds, I am also aware that I dipped on at least 11 other species that were recorded by birders during the year. These included Little Button-Quail (of course heard but not seen at Goorooyarroo), Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus bracteatus*, Painted Honeyeater, Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*, Little Bittern *Ixobrychus sinesis* and three species of raptor - Black Falcon *Falco subniger*, Black Kite *Milvus migrans* and Spotted Harrier *Circus assimilis*.

Of course, there are the bird-watching purists who will look derisively at the pursuit of 'twitching' in general and my Big Year in particular, but I hope my record-keeping in 2006 will assuage even their doubts. I submitted sixteen 'unusual bird reports' to the COG Rarities Panel and importantly for the COG database, records for 228 surveys during the year were submitted (see Figure 1).

Footnote to the Big Year

While 2007 should have been a year in which to slow down and unwind, after my mad scrambling in 2006, the number of rarities that kept arriving in Canberra conspired to make that impossible. With much less effort than in 2006, I again cracked the double ton and ended the year with 203 species. That of course was eclipsed by Milburn who, as I anticipated, on 4 October passed my total and finished the year with 220 species.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all those who encouraged me along the way, those who joined me out birding (many I have named but many others I have omitted), and those that provided me with information in my quest to find species.

Thank you to Amanda and Phoebe Wright for reviewing the manuscript.

Most importantly I would like to thank my wife and three children, who tolerated a year of outrageously obsessive behaviour.

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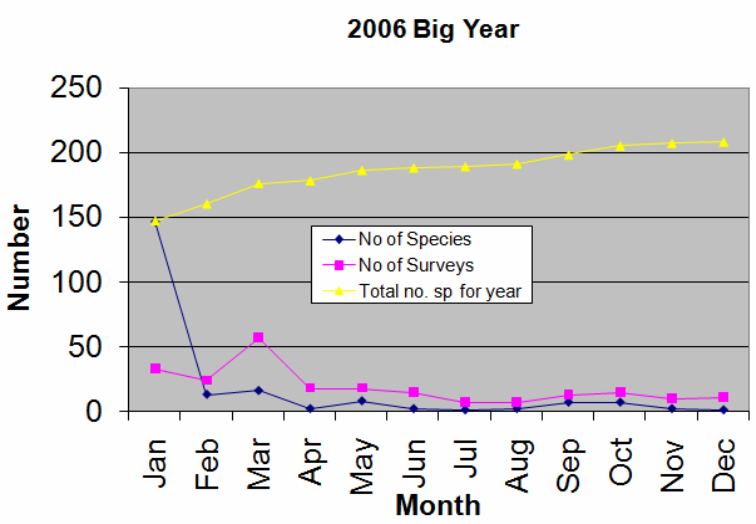

Figure 1 Species and Surveys

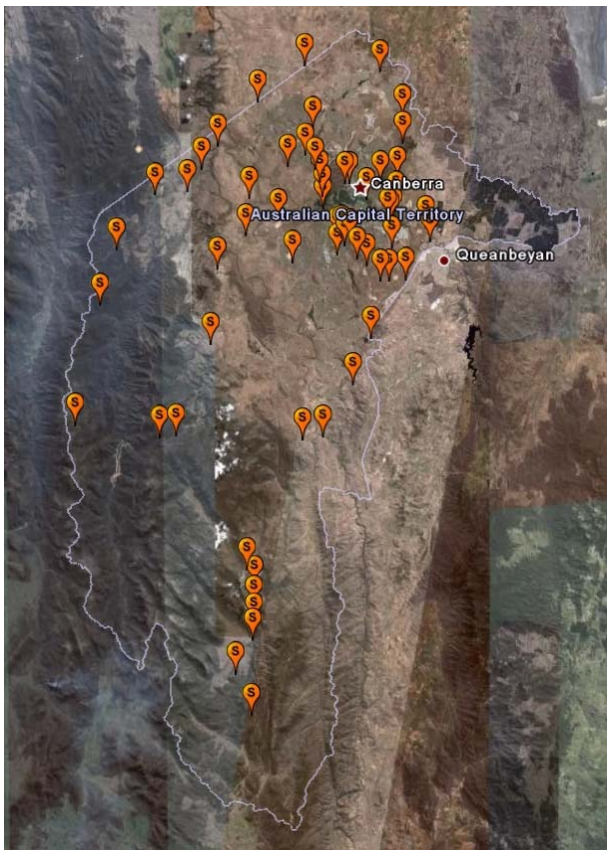

Figure 2. Coverage of the ACT during my Big Year in 2006. Each placemark indicates a survey site, visited at least once.

A ROYAL SPOONBILL BREEDING ATTEMPT AT KELLY'S SWAMP

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Abstract: *This article documents breeding attempts by several pairs of Royal spoonbill at Kelly's Swamp in the ACT*

To some extent this story is told in the order that events occurred to me, rather than strictly according to their chronological sequence. This approach has been adopted to rationalise some of my decisions, which might otherwise seem rather strange!

On 28 October 2008, while visiting Kelly's Swamp (35°19'S, 149°10'E) in Jerrabomberra Wetlands, I noticed a pair of Royal Spoonbills *Platalea regia* perched in a willow tree on the small island in front of Cygnus hide. The birds appeared to be courting, and I noticed one bird break a branch off the willow and appear to place it in a rudimentary nest. The location of this small island, and the location of some earlier events described below are shown in the below image, extracted from Google Earth.

On returning home I consulted the most recent Annual Bird Report (COG 2008), hereafter ABR, to determine the status of the species in the ACT. It is designated "Uncommon, Visitor" and no breeding information was shown.

I then consulted Blakers et al. (1984) and Barrett et al. (2003). The former showed this species as having been recorded breeding to the south-east of the ACT and the latter to the north of the ACT, but neither showed the

species as recorded breeding within the ACT. At a more local level, Taylor and COG (1992) only show the species as a Minor Species, noting it to be an uncommon, irruptive summer visitor.

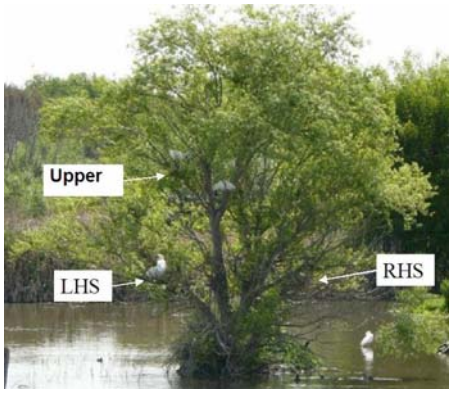
Wilson (1999), the book regarded by many as the authoritative source of recent information about the birds of the ACT, also describes the species as an irruptive summer visitor and makes no reference to breeding activity in the region.

It thus seemed that this might be the first breeding record for the ACT, if not for the COG Area of Interest (COGAOI) and I decided that some detail should be compiled on the breeding event. As I am not able to visit the site every day I placed a request on the COG chatline for observers to post on there any observations they might make of this event. I was very pleased with the response. Details of the postings are available through the archive of the chatline located at http://bioacoustics.cse.unsw.edu.au/archives/html/canberrabirds and I note the potential importance I attach to such a record of "eye of the beholder" detail, without filtering through a third party such as necessarily occurs in this summary.

In response to some adverse comments about the number of chatline postings about this event, I subsequently asked people to email me directly regarding their observations of the birds. Subsequently, I received only one email over two weeks, rather than the one posting per day on the chatline. Fortunately, I was able to visit the site approximately every fourth day ensuring some continuity.

Timetable of events at the nesting site

The image below illustrates the positions of the three nests referred in the following material.



What is reported here is my summary of what happened on the island and its vicinity. I have presented this according to the date of event (rather than when I became aware of it). This may give a sense of how complex breeding events can be.

Date	Event(s)	Observer(s)
25 Oct	(1) Birds in tree, but no breeding activity. (2) four birds seen nearby: two nests?	(1) Julian Robinson (2) Sue Lashko
26 Oct	Bird carrying stick to tree.	Alastair Smith and Geoff Duggan
28 Oct	(1) Birds pulling branches from tree for nesting material. (2) Bird carrying stick to tree.	(1) Martin Butterfield (2) Leo Berzins
29 Oct	(1) Possible copulation. (2) Stick carrying and courtship display.	(1) Robin Hide (2) Julian Robinson
2 Nov	Co-operative nest building.	Suzanne Gardiner
3 Nov	"Looks like a serious nest-building attempt".	Geoffrey Dabb
4 Nov	(1) A second nest appears to commence construction on the RHS of the tree. (2) Bird flies a circular route to RHS nest with a long stick in bill.	(1) Lindell Emerton (2) Martin Butterfield
6 Nov	Birds arranging sticks in their nest.	Marnix Zwankhuizen
8 Nov	Bird sitting on LHS nest – perhaps on eggs. One bird standing next to RHS nest.	Frank Antram
9 Nov	Three pairs. LHS on nest, RHS copulation and building, Upper nest in initial build.	Shaun Bagley
11 Nov	Bird sitting on LHS. Male standing in Upper nest, defending against birds from RHS.	Martin Butterfield
13 Nov	Birds sitting in LHS and RHS, each with another standing over them. Two birds standing in Upper nest, both adding twigs from nearby vegetation.	Martin Butterfield
18 Nov	(1) Birds sitting in all three nests. (2) Birds sitting in all three nests. Attempts to definitely spot eggs unsuccessful.	(1) Martin Butterfield (2) Steve Holliday

Further Research

Earlier records emerge

There are two earlier breeding records for this species in the COGAOI, one of which was in the same general area as this event. They are both recorded in the COG General Records database and there were notes in the ABRs as follows.

On 3 January 1999 dependent young were reported from Rose Lagoon (COG 2000). This may be the breeding record contained in the Barrett et al. (2003). However this ABR record also contains a cryptic reference to another breeding event in the previous year. In the ABR for the year ended 30 June 1998, a nest with young is recorded for this

species on 5 February 1998. It was noted that this is "the first breeding record for the species in the region and involved one nest".

(At this point, following my research into records of Black-chinned Honeyeaters (Butterfield 2007) I began to wonder if any research into "firsts for the ACT" was going to result in discovering little-publicised earlier records!)

Unfortunately the observer who reported the 1998 nest has passed away and no-one else appeared to remember the nest. Fortunately, the original hard copy record was able to be located and was accompanied by some further detail including a sketch map. This indicated the nest site was to the west of, but visible from, Fulica hide (this location is shown in the Google Earth extract above). The nest was close to that of a pair of Australian White Ibis *Threskiornis molucca*.

I have subsequently been advised that in 2007 a pair of Royal Spoonbills commenced construction of, but abandoned, a nest in that area (Rod Mackay, pers. comm.). This nest site was also close to ibis nests.

Review of HANZAB

The purposes of this section are (i) to attempt to pick out any unusual behaviours displayed by these birds; (ii) to describe any expected behaviours that were not observed; (iii) comment on questions raised by observations possibly resolved by the review; (iv) to make some suggestions for the future.

This section essentially reviews HANZAB, Volume 1B (Marchant and Higgins 1990), with page numbers from that volume cited.

(i) Unusual Behaviours: HANZAB notes that flying from place to place carrying a stick was reported "on one occasion" (p. 1100), which may well be represented by the circular flight on 4 November. HANZAB also notes that there is no information about laying: Frank Antram's observation of 8 November suggests that the first egg was laid 7 or 8 November, approximately two weeks after pair bonding (assuming my interpretation of Alastair Smith and Geoff Duggan's observation is correct).

(ii) Expected behaviours not observed: Customary behaviour appears to be for males to build a rudimentary nest at which it waits, initially driving off other birds of both sexes. This was either not observed (or not recognised) initially as my first sighting involved both birds at the nest site. However one example of this was observed at the third nest.

(iii) Questions raised by observations:

a. Several observers suspected that they observed copulation: as it is "frequent during pair bonding and laying" (p. 1101). It is likely that they did see it.

b. One observer questioned whether the stick gathering was nest building or display: HANZAB suggests that - for the LHS nest in particular - pair formation was complete by the time observations commenced.

(iv) There seem to be several messages for the future in this event.

a. Pair formation seems to require some persistence by the female and "not until male leaves to collect nest material c5-8 days after establishment of nest site can birds be considered paired" (p. 1100). Thus it seems that there may well have been over a week of preliminary activity at this site before the potential breeding event was noticed. Perhaps observers need to be particularly alert to bird-bird interactions as a likely indicator of potential breeding?

b. Although the species has been accepted as having bred at least once in the ACT and twice in the COGAOI there is no indication of this in its status as far as COG is concerned. Had it been noted, since 1999 as "occasional breeder" (or something similar - I am not wedded to those words), it is possible that observers may have been more alert to the possibility of behaviour leading to breeding. It is suggested that the designation of the species in the ACT should be revised to indicate that it breeds in the Territory.

c. Given the threat of development close to the swamp, breeding of such a species in the wetlands could be a crucial input to planning decisions.

d. Given the number of people birding in this area, and that the site of the earlier event which, while not easily seen from the bicycle path, was visible from Fulica hide, why was there only a single report - or at least a single formal record - of the 1998 event? Surely other observers must have spotted this?

Looking forwards

As the deadline for this edition of CBN arrived before the breeding event was complete it is intended to continue the observations for the near future. A brief follow-up article will be submitted for a later edition.

More generally, it is recommended that members of COG make efforts to write up details of 'first breeding' events as they would for a 'first occurrence' record. This article has been compiled to plug the gap evident from the first event.

Summary

This report covers the initial stages of observed breeding activity of a number of pairs of Royal Spoonbill at Kelly's Swamp. As well as recording the second breeding event of this species in the ACT (and the third in the COGAOI) it provides a detailed timeline for the development of the nests.

It was pleasing to note that nearly every posting on the chatline described an additional form of behaviour by the birds or a change in the structure of the site. I believe that having this type of on the spot

recording preserved in a general access archive (rather than hidden in a private data holding) provides a valuable resource for the future. The postings also give a considerable amount of qualitative information which is at best difficult to access through the conventional COG quantitative database system.

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SOME IMPACTS OF SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF GARDEN BIRD SURVEY SITES ACROSS SUBURBS OF CANBERRA

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Introduction

In the early years of the Garden Bird Survey (GBS), results were reported in the Canberra Ornithologists Group Annual Bird Report (ABR) with some spatial disaggregation over zones and regions of Canberra. The zones were very broad (North, Central and South) with the regions effectively equivalent to the "township" concept (Belconnen, North Canberra, Central, Woden, Weston Creek and Tuggeranong). As time has passed the use of these attributes of the sites has fallen into disuse, although Dobbie and Welch (undated) did use the Regions in their analysis.

More recently, it has been suggested that the developing areas of the ACT are under-represented in the sample of gardens reporting for the GBS. This paper commences with an investigation as to the validity of this suggestion and its significance in terms of the distribution of the sample. It will then investigate the impact of the differential spatial distribution on the abundance measures for two species.

It should be noted that this investigation is limited to the ACT elements of the GBS (including some sites that might be regarded as having largely a rural environment). It does not include sites, whether urban (e.g. Queanbeyan) or rural in nearby NSW. This reflects the availability of some of the supplementary metadata for the sites.

Representation across regions of the ACT

Although the sample for the GBS is self-selecting, by observers indicating a willingness to participate in the survey, it is not technically possible to attribute a probability of selection to any site. However if there were no biases in the self selection process it could be expected that the sample would reflect the distribution of potential sites (in theory at least, private dwellings) across the ACT. Although a number of people have reported "work sites" (notably in ANU) from time to time, these have contributed relatively few responses to the GBS and for this analysis will be considered as reflecting aspects of the avifauna in the areas where the sites are located in the same way as a domestic site might do. The author does not believe that this introduces any significant bias into the analysis.

The basic unit of aggregation of the site data could be the suburb: this is the basic planning unit for Canberra,

has well defined boundaries and is used as the basic aggregate for official statistics on the number of dwellings published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). However suburbs are relatively small units and while calculations can be carried out at that level, the distortions due to the impact of small numbers of sites and changes in the households contributing are likely to be significant. In addition, it is felt that if a suburb is deficient in sample it is possible that sample from its neighbouring suburbs may compensate for this when suburbs' values are combined to units resembling the Regions previously used in the ABR.

There are some differences in what follows to the list of Regions previously used in the GBS. At the most simple level, a new region "Gungahlin-Hall" is introduced to cover the new township of Gungahlin and nearby suburbs. Secondly, the previous "Central Region" is split with the suburbs to the north of Lake Burley Griffin being merged with those previously classified as the northern region and those to the south of the Lake becoming a new Region of South Canberra. These changes make the Regions consistent with the Statistical Sub-Divisions (SSD) used by the ABS (2002) to disseminate official statistics. Finally it was noticed that a very high proportion (approximately 56%) of the reports for Tuggeranong came from the suburb of Kambah (including Gleneagles). Thus, that SSD was split into Kambah and Other Tuggeranong. Despite this departure from the ABS set of SSDs, and the restriction of this paper to the more urban elements of the ACT, for convenience the Regions so defined will use the acronym SSD.

The initial parameters investigated were the number of occupied private dwellings in each suburb - taken as an indicator of the benchmark - and the number of sheets completed for the GBS (a site in for one year contributes one to this count, a site in for 20 years contributes 20, etc.).

The number of occupied dwellings came from publications of the ABS, mainly from the 2001 Census but supported by results from the 2006 Census for some suburbs in Gungahlin developed since 2001. As the number of occupied dwellings is fairly stable once a suburb is developed I do not believe this flexibility causes any significant bias to this exploratory analysis. An expected number of sheets was also calculated by assuming that the given total number (1596) was distributed in proportion to the number of private dwellings.

This analysis showed clearly that Gungahlin-Hall and Other Tuggeranong are seriously under represented in the sample (South Canberra to a lesser extent). The value of a chi-square statistic comparing the actual and expected values is significant at the 0.01% level. As this analysis is replaced, and improved upon, by the following

material the details are not included here, but can be provided if required.

There are different lengths of occupancy of the various suburbs so an indicator value was created as the product of:

- the number of years between 2008 and the date of first occupation of the suburb (or 1981 - Year 1 of the GBS - for the older suburbs); and
- the number of occupied private dwellings in each suburb.

This indicates the "site-years available" for reporting in each suburb; again these results are aggregated by SSD and presented in Table 1, together with information on sheets submitted.

SSD	Site-Years available	Prop Years available	Sheet ID		A-E
			Actual count	**E**xpected count	
BELCONNEN	799006	0.2624	477	419	58
GUNGHALIN-HALL	145706	0.0479	27	76	**-49**
NORTH CANBERRA	412182	0.1354	352	216	136
SOUTH CANBERRA	246726	0.0810	104	129	-25
KAMBAH	155628	0.0511	125	82	43
OTHER TUGGERANONG	704028	0.2312	100	369	**-269**
WESTON CREEK	237033	0.0778	149	124	25
WODEN	344700	0.1132	262	181	81
Total	3045009	1.0000	1596	1596	0

Table 1: Expected and Actual numbers of GBS Sheets by Statistical Sub-Division (SSD)

The value of chi-square is again significant at the 0.01% level, and the same suburbs are under-represented (although the amount of sites below standard is reduced reflecting the relative "newness" of the suburbs in most of the areas).

A further adjustment was considered in which the 'years available' measure described above was compared with the total number of active weeks for each SSD over the 26 year period. The results were very similar to those in Table 1 so are not further explored here.

The sketch map below, based on Map 3 in the Annual Bird Report for 2006-07, illustrates the location of the suburbs with nil or one charts over the 26 years of the GBS. It will be seen that these are concentrated in the Gungahlin-Hall and South Tuggeranong SSDs.

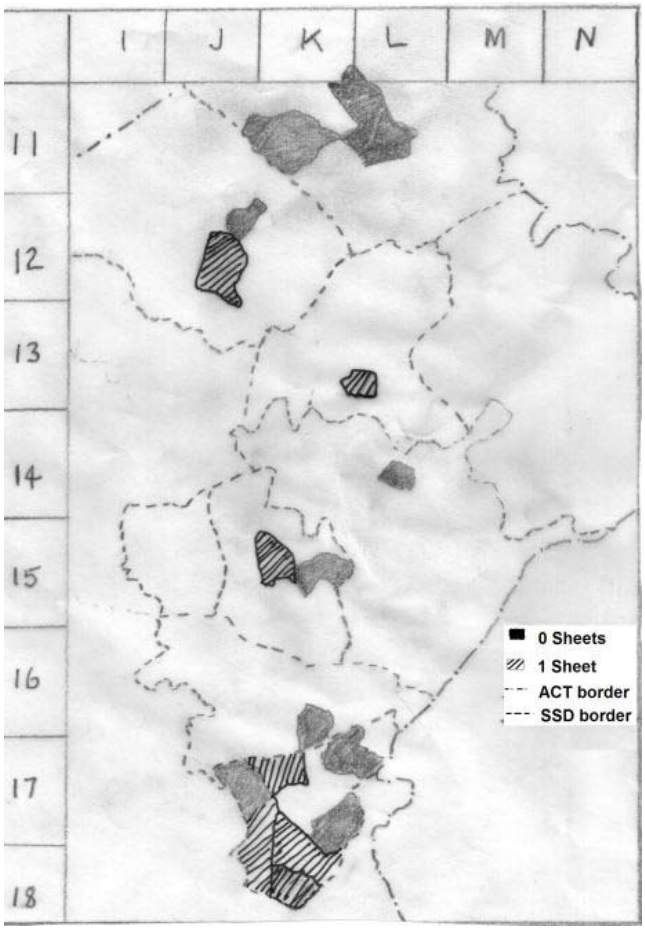

Figure 1. Location of suburbs with nil or one charts over the 26 years of the GBS.

Of the other suburbs with nil or one sheets, Philip (Woden Valley), Kingston (South Canberra), City (North Canberra) and Belconnen Town Centre/Emu Ridge (not surprisingly, in Belconnen) are all areas of very dense settlement. It might thus be considered that both in terms of habitat and type of resident they are somewhat similar to the under-represented areas in Gungahlin-Hall and Tuggeranong. It is more difficult to explain the total lack of observers in Mckellar (Belconnen) and O'Malley (Woden) and the author leaves that to others.

Does it Matter?

Whilst it is of technical interest that the sample is so unrepresentative, the key issue for use of the data in policy or research is what impact does this biased sample have on the data to be analysed? This section looks at a form of sensitivity analysis of the results, replacing the data for the small samples with alternative

imaginary (but hopefully reasonable) values.

As a first step in addressing this question the 26 year values of A, based upon the actual GBS dataset, were calculated for Australian Magpie *Cracticus tibicen* (a common bird across the whole of the ACT) and Noisy Friarbird *Philemon corniculatus* (suggested by Dobbie and Welch (unpubl.) as being more common in Tuggeranong than other areas in the ACT, and thus possibly more affected by the under-representation of that Region). As shown in Table 2 below, the values of A vary considerably across the SSDs.

SSD	Sum of weeks active	Number of birds		A values	
		Magpie	Friarbird	Magpie	Friarbird
BELCONNEN	20333	54197	16666	2.67	0.82
GUNGAHLIN-HALL	1103	2862	534	2.59	0.48
NORTH CANBERRA	14237	40070	15185	2.81	1.07
SOUTH CANBERRA	4102	10268	1639	2.50	0.40
KAMBAH	5127	17095	7944	3.33	1.55
OTHER TUGGERANONG	3918	12167	3843	3.11	0.98
WESTON CREEK	5994	13884	4172	2.32	0.70
WODEN	10455	34044	7446	3.26	0.71
TOTAL	65269	184587	57429	2.83	0.88

Table 2: Numbers of birds and A values by SSD, Australian Magpie *Cracticus tibicen* and Noisy Friarbird *Philemon corniculatus*.

The A value for Noisy Friarbird in Kambah is particularly interesting, but this author does not attempt to explain the observed value.

As a first step in data substitution, A values were weighted by the proportion of dwellings in that SSD and the resulting values summed to give a weighted A value for the ACT as a whole. This gave the following results:

- the adjusted A value for Australian Magpie was 2.84 - 0.6% higher than the raw value shown in table 2; and
- the adjusted A value for Noisy Friarbird was 0.86 - 2.75% lower than the raw value shown in table 2.

The relatively small percentage differences lead me to quote Manuel, from Fawlty Towers: “Que?”. Perhaps more helpfully, Professor Julius Sumner Miller used to ask “Why is it so?”. It appears that the regions most affected by under-representation include a region with, for these species at least, very low A

values (Gungahlin-Hall) and one with relatively high A values (Other Tuggeranong). These tend to balance out in the re-weighting.

A second line of investigation was to focus on Year 26, weighting the observed A values in each SSD by the proportion of years available. This became a little problematic as there were no sheets submitted for Gungahlin-Hall in that year. The first approach to overcoming that issue was to give an allowance in the total value as though Gungahlin-Hall contributed the mean value of A for other components of the ACT. However this seemed unrealistic given the information in Table 2. Thus the relationship between the 26 year A values for Gungahlin-Hall and the ACT was applied to the year 26 A values for the ACT as a whole. Using that estimate, the A values for the ACT as a whole given by weighting the SSD values by "years available" in each SSD showed:

- the adjusted A value for Australian Magpie was 3.081 - 6.02% lower than the raw value (3.279) for this species in all ACT sites (note that this is different to the values shown in the latest ABR which include a few sites in NSW); and
- the adjusted A value for Noisy Friarbird was 0.481 - 6.05% lower than the raw value (0.512) for this species in all ACT sites (with the same caveat as the previous species).

Conclusions

This paper demonstrates the current under-representation of the newer suburbs in the Garden Bird Survey and illustrates the level of variability in a measure of abundance that might result from that lack of representation. Given the range of other issues affecting the precise values of results from the GBS the levels of distortion in the measure of abundance are not currently such as to inhibit the use of the Survey.

The reasons for this under-representation are not clear. Possible reasons might include:

- there are few birds in the densely settled suburbs typical of the most under-represented parts of SSDs (and thus the occupiers of the dwellings mistakenly - repeat, mistakenly - feel that their data recording efforts would not be worthwhile); and
- the type of people who are interested in recording the number of birds they observe do not choose to live in such areas.

Both of the suggested explanations present great challenges in attempting to promote the uptake of the GBS in the afflicted areas (and probably also in promoting the general interests of birds).

The three areas particularly affected by under-representation are probably more typical of the type of settlement for future developments in the ACT. At present they account

for approximately 33% of the dwellings in the ACT. However by the time the development of Gungahlin is complete and the proposed areas along the Molonglo have been developed, the dense 'McMansions' and apartment complexes will account for closer to half the dwellings in the ACT. In plain language, the problem of lack of reliable data is going to get worse, and may begin to impair the usefulness of the GBS, unless "someone" works out a way of getting reports from such areas.

As a final note, since this paper was originally drafted a number of members of COG and other residents of Gungahlin, Kingston and Southern Tuggeranong have taken up GBS Charts for the 28th year of the Survey. I thank them for this action and encourage others to follow them for future years.

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ODD OBS

Rufous Whistler feeding on Yellow-rumped Thornbill

On Saturday 13 September 2008 we entered a patch of regrowth (*Eucalyptus* spp) off the western side of Drake-Brockman Drive, Holt that was some 20 metres long by eight metres, wide with saplings averaging around two metres in height.

Immediately, three or four Brown Thornbills *Acanthiza pusilla* flew about above our heads emitting 'tzzt' calls. Thinking we might be disturbing nesting activity we left the immediate area and entered the regrowth from another direction. My young companion walked into the scrub ahead of me then hurried back to say she'd seen a Rusty-fronted Butcherbird [sic] eating a Yellow-Rumped Thornbill *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*. I suspected she'd seen an immature Collared Sparrowhawk *Accipiter cirrocephalus*, investigated and saw a Rufous Whistler *Pachycephala rufventris* pecking at a dead Yellow-Rumped Thornbill laying prostrate on the ground.

We crept to within four metres before the whistler flew away, and I examined the thornbill. The breast was extensively lacerated, apparently caused by the whistler pecking it. The only other obvious injury was a deep wound at the base of the nape which probably damaged or broke the spine, but whether this was inflicted by the whistler is open to conjecture.

HANZAB (Higgins and Peter 2002) does not include birds in the list of food items of the Rufous Whistler, however Taws (2007) notes "occasionally small mammals and birds".

References

Higgins, P.J. and Peter, J.M. (Eds) (2002) *Handbook of Australian New Zealand and Antarctic Birds. Volume 6: Pardalotes to Shrike-thrushes*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne, pp. 1143-1144.

Taws, N. (2007) *Bringing Birds Back. A glovebox guide for bird identification & habitat restoration in the ACT & SE NSW*. Greening Australia Capital Region, Canberra, p. 22.

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A Little Button-quail in the ACT

On 10 October 2008 I was birding around the Uriarra Rd area in the north-west of the ACT. I had just turned onto Mountain Creek Rd when I noticed some birds on a farm dam about 80 metres from the road. I stopped and got out of the car to have a look. As I walked along the road verge a small quail erupted from near my feet. To my surprise it was a Little Button-quail *Turnix velox*. It rocketed low across the road and managed to crash straight into the chicken wire at the base of the fence on the other side of the road. It slid down the wire and disappeared into long

grass at the bottom of the fence. I went over to see if it was alright; it appeared to have recovered as it quickly jumped from the grass and zoomed off again, this time clearing the fence, and flew south into a paddock for some 100 metres before dropping to the ground behind a pile of logs.

The area around the site was mostly treeless grazing land. There was reasonable cover of low grass, although the surrounding paddocks looked quite heavily grazed. What was presumably the same bird was found again the following day in the same area by Frank Antram, Sue Lashko and Alastair Smith (COG email list). I am not aware of any other successful attempts to locate it. I have been lucky enough to have a reasonable number of field encounters with Little Button-quail, and consider them fairly straightforward to identify, even in flight, given a decent view. The small size, combined with the unstreaked underparts, the pale reddish-brown colour of the upperparts and the contrasting white flanks are distinctive and readily separate them from other local quail and button-quail.

Wilson (1999) noted very few ACT records of Little Button-quail, the last in 1988, and considered it to be a rare non-breeding summer visitor. There have been a couple of more recent records published in COG Annual Bird Reports; Gungahlin grasslands (January 2007) and Goorooyarroo Nature Reserve (January 2006). There were two further reports on the COG email list archive, at Amaroo (January 2005, Mark Clayton), and Goorooyarroo again (heard October 2006, Alastair Smith). This apparent increase in sightings could be due to drought pushing birds further east than usual, but it is impossible to know with any certainty. In any case, the species is likely to be significantly under-reported locally, as finding them is largely a matter of chance.

Reference

Wilson, S.J. (1999) *Birds of the ACT: Two Centuries of Change*. Canberra Ornithologists Group.

Steve Holliday
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Willie Wagtail 'sky surfing' a Little Eagle

On Sunday 9 November 2008 I witnessed an interesting interaction between a Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys* and a Little Eagle *Hieraaetus morphnoides* over the West Macgregor grasslands in the ACT.

At 0945 a Little Eagle was circling over the grasslands at a height of about 50 metres when a Willie Wagtail rose from the ground and climbed to meet the eagle. It approached the eagle from behind and proceeded to perch on the flying eagle's rump. The Willie Wagtail would then back off before making another approach and doing the same thing. This went on for about a minute and six approaches before the Willie Wagtail broke off the ‘sky surfing’ and returned to *terra firma*. While this could be explained as agonistic behaviour,

during the interactions the legs of the Willie wagtail were fully extended and the bird never made contact with the eagle with its bill.

HANZAB makes mention of this type of in-flight perching interaction between Willie Wagtails and two other raptors but not involving Little Eagles. There is a reference to a Willie Wagtail perching on the wing of a Whistling Kite *Haliastur sphenurus* and another perching on the back of a Brown Goshawk *Accipiter novaehollandiae*.

A series of photographs from the United States circulated around the internet in 2007 showed a Red-winged Blackbird *Agelaius phoeniceus* perched on the back of a Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis*. It would appear that this type of behaviour is not common, and this was certainly the first time I have observed such behaviour.

Reference

Higgins, P. (Ed) (2007) *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic birds. Volume 7 Part 1: Boatbills to Starlings*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

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Tawny Frogmouths breeding at Corroboree Park, Ainslie

A pair of Tawny Frogmouths *Podargus strigoides* have now bred successfully at Corroboree Park for at least two years in succession (2007-2008), using the same nest site.

In 2007, the pair was seen roosting together in a *Eucalyptus mannifera* at the edge of Corroboree Park between 15-20 August. Between 25 August and 19 October, only a single bird was roosting in this tree, and the nest was not seen. On 24 October, both adults and two well developed young were seen together on a neighbouring tree (the presumed nest site). One young spent part of the morning of 27 October across the street on a recycling bin that had fallen over – presumably marking fledging, as both young were back with the adults on the nest site branch later the same day. The family were present in the roosting tree throughout November, and were last seen there together on 2 December.

A pair of adults was again roosting together in the same *E. mannifera* by 6 March 2008. Although no observations were made between 18 March and 16 April (absent from Canberra), the pair were there between 18 April and 13 May. They were then not seen until 2 August when they were found in another *E. mannifera* about 80 metres away (and may have been unobserved in that one for some time). They returned to the earlier roosting tree on 19 August. On 10 September, only one bird was roosting there, and the following day it was still there, while the other was seen on a nest on the same branch of the same tree that young were first seen the previous year. This continued until 13 October when both birds were seen on the nest site branch. On 18 October, one small chick was first seen (and photographed) by Lindell Emerton. By

23 October (if not earlier) two young were in sight. The second adult remained in the nearby roosting tree until 26 October when both adults were again seen on the same nest site branch. Though they were separate again the following day, they were usually together with the young until 9 November. Fledging was presumably achieved on or just prior to 9 November (Michael Lenz noted that chicks looked well developed in the few days before that day), as I did not see any of the birds from 10 November until 17 November, when all four reappeared together in the original roosting tree. They remained there until 21 November.

Robin Hide
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Yellow-rumped Thornbill mimicry

On a sunny, warm Sunday afternoon (16/10/08) at 2pm I visited Mugga Mugga Cottage in Narrabundah Lane, Symonston and I drove to the carpark located at the Mugga-Mugga Memorial Educational Centre, which serves as the visitor centre for Mugga Mugga. The Centre has a few low native shrubs around it and is situated in an open paddock, with some mature pine trees behind the centre near the carpark.

I got out of the car and noticed a Yellow-rumped Thornbill *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa* calling from near the pine trees adjacent to the carpark. Almost immediately I was surprised to hear a White-throated Gerygone *Gerygone olivacea* suddenly call from the same location and interrupt the thornbill call. Perplexed, I stood and listened again. I heard a Yellow-rumped Thornbill call that quickly changed into a White-throated Gerygone call, and then morph back into a thornbill call at the end. I located the bird, a Yellow-rumped Thornbill, and watched it as it proceeded to repeat this call with the inserted gerygone song. The transition between calls was seamless, the quality of the mimicry was superb - or at any rate, good enough to fool me - and the thornbill devoted most of the call to the gerygone song, bookended with its own call.

Intrigued, I referred to Volume 6 of the Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds (Higgins and Peter, 2002). Yellow-rumped Thornbills are, like most other thornbills, very competent mimics and are known to reproduce the calls of Noisy Miners *Manorina melanocephala*, Speckled Warblers *Chthonicola sagittata* and White-throated Gerygones, according to studies published by Lord (1941) in *Emu* and Chisholm (1950) also in *Emu*.

Reference

Higgins, P. J. and Peter, J. M. (Eds) (2002) *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds, Vol. 6: Pardalotes to Shrike-thrushes*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

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COLUMNISTS' CORNER

On bird photography

Those huge, great big fancy cameras - unlike 'my teensy (quite normal) camera' that sometimes takes 'quite good shots'.

Now that four out of five birdwatchers are keen bird photographers (or so it seems), there is much more discussion among them of other people's photographic gear. Stentoreus has noticed that anyone carrying what looks like a former standard unit for bird photography is now regarded by owners of small digital cameras as having a 'HUGE' camera - maybe even a 'fancy' one.

Before the digital revolution, relatively few people pursued serious bird photography. You needed a relatively expensive lens, nothing less than 300mm (6x magnification in the old terms) and preferably 500mm (10x), together with a tripod as heavy as you could carry, the latter being a measure of your seriousness. If you had a camera designed for family and holiday snaps, you simply wouldn't expect to be able to photograph birds with it.

In these digital times, almost anyone can have a comparatively inexpensive, pocket-size camera that offers perhaps 6x or 10x or greater magnification. In fair conditions this will be able to take a passable photo of even a small bird. The great advantage of this is that observers can easily collect snaps of the birds they see, thus having a visual record of each sighting. In fact the main purpose of a bird trip now can be to collect such snaps. Such a tangible record of a sighting can be more satisfying than a tick on a sheet or an entry in a diary.

At the same time, digital editing offers the means to crop down those snaps to the actual bird. This has changed the way magnifying capacity is regarded. The role of the magnifying lens was to narrow the angle of the field captured. For example that bird photographer's 300mm outfit might capture about 7° of the horizontal plane, compared to about 40° for the standard 50mm lens.

Today, the extent of narrowing of the field depends largely on the size of the sensor that records the image. The angles given above apply to 35mm film, and equally to a digital camera with a sensor the same size as 35mm film (a so-called 'full-frame' digital camera). Small digital cameras have small sensors that even with their small fitted lenses can readily narrow your angle to 5° or less. In terms of angle this is the same result as if you cropped a 'full-frame' 50mm shot to one eighth of its original width.

You can probably see where this is going. Magnification as a problem for the bird photographer has, in crude terms, been solved. The problem remains one of obtaining an image of good quality, preferably one that will tolerate substantial cropping so that that little - or distant - subject fills the frame.

An initial point to consider is the 'megapixel' capability of the camera, the number of dots that will be needed to allow for trimming. At the present time each successive model of the current generation of small digicameras offers an ever-increasing quantity of pixels, so it will surely be only a matter of time before this ceases to be an issue.

Megapixels aside, you will not achieve a crop of reasonable quality unless your image is sharp and free of defects in ordinary photographic terms.

A small angle of view, however achieved, still requires elimination so far as possible of camera movement. Small-camera users rarely carry tripods, sometimes getting the benefit of an in-built stabiliser. That benefit is often countered by snappers who wave the camera at arms-length in front of them while using the display screen to frame the shot.

Birds are difficult subjects. Apart from their small size and wariness, they move, frequently inhabit shade and places of mottled or uneven light, and often present harsh reflective surfaces. Slight wisps of vegetation can impede the autofocus. In more difficult situations birds present problems even for the experienced photographer, who, moreover, is usually seeking a shot of a rarity or of interesting or dramatic behaviour - in view of the abundance of routine snaps of the easier targets.

Today, the serious bird photographer is likely to use the same-looking gear as has been used for the last 30 years - an SLR (single-lens reflex) camera fitted with a detachable telephoto lens of between 300mm and 600mm focal length. One difference is that today's camera, instead of using film, will have a digital sensor. In most popular digital SLR models, the size of the sensor will further narrow the angle of view so the focal length of the lens will be increased by 1.6x.

This means that a 400mm lens will 'magnify' the subject about 13x compared to a 50mm film camera. This is comparable with some small fixed-lens digitals, although the specified maximum zoom of the latter, e.g. '12x', probably represents the degree of field-narrowing from the widest angle possible with the same camera.

At present, with those abundant megapixels, differences in results are likely to come back to the capacity of the lens. Higher-end detachable lenses are of very good optical quality, as they always have been. Furthermore a large lens admits more light, which means not only better performance in low-light conditions but a faster speed for the shot, which helps freeze subject-movement and also helps counter camera-shake. A digital camera attached to a cheap telescope will produce a large image but not usually one of good quality.

As a general rule, for a telephoto lens the cost escalates more sharply with its speed (reflected in its bulk and weight) than with its reach or focal length (reflected in its physical length). In that

respect not a great deal has changed for the large-lens enthusiast.

Several other things have changed, such as the possibility of self-processing. Moreover, sensor-related field-narrowing has an advantage in depth of focus, and 'fast' film carried a penalty in quality, something not so evident with 'fast' digital settings. However, one consideration is by far the most important. The costless nature of digital recording compared to expensive film enables speculative machine-gun-snapping to the point where field technique is usually quite different, particularly in that pursuit of interesting or dramatic behaviour.

So those persons carrying the 'huge great big fancy cameras' should not, in fact, look much different from their pre-digital counterparts of 30 years ago. Because of greatly reduced operating cost and the fact that it's got a whole lot easier there are now a lot more of them - for the time being.

However, it is those growing numbers now toting their tiny digitals who have the truly 'fancy' cameras. For their size, the capability of those traveller-friendly units is astonishing, and is being increased and enhanced month by month. Improvements are so regular that one suspects they depend only on the nod of the marketing strategists.

Much of the challenge of bird photography arises from an equation in which the competing elements are light, distance and speed. A large lens offers the best means of dealing with those, at a cost in portability - and money.

Small digi-cameras are relatively inexpensive and incredibly convenient, and have largely overcome the distance problem. It is inevitable, surely, that these pocket wonders will overcome the problems of difficult light, camera-shake and subject-movement. As for processing, any kind of desired image-enhancement will probably be achievable at will.

Then those people lugging around all that glass in their 'great big cameras' will seem not so fancy, in fact they will seem prehistoric - if there are any of them left. Perhaps there will be a few. We do have enthusiasts for steam trains.

A. stentoreus

Birding in cyberspace, Canberra-style

Some strange words are used in birding, as illustrated in the thought-provoking contribution from my fellow columnist, *A. stentoreus*, in the September 2008 issue of Canberra Bird Notes. There he drew attention to the challenges that we face in characterising bird calls. The 'pripping' call of fairy-wrens was instanced, as it is a word which apparently has yet to find its way into any dictionary. Recently, on the national birding announcement and discussion list Birding-Aus, a contributor pointed out that 'Referring to the foraging techniques of Welcome Swallows, HANZAB says: "Forage aerially, taking prey by sallying or screening ..."'. He continued, 'I can't find the term "screening" in the

glossary, and none of the dictionary definitions seem to fit. Can someone explain what "screening" means in this context?' Another subscriber added 'and "sallying" too, please, while you're at it'.

A useful reply was proffered by Merrilyn Serong:

> There's a very interesting paper by Remsen and Robinson in Studies in Avian Biology No.13, entitled 'A classification scheme for foraging behavior of birds in terrestrial habitats'. Sally and screen are both attack behaviours categorized as wing-powered aerial manoeuvres. According to R and R, to sally is to fly from a perch and attack a food item that is either in the air or on a hard substrate like a branch. There are several subcategories of sallying, like sally-strike, sally-hover, etc. In contrast, to screen is to attack in continuous flight. Screening is both a method of searching and a method of attacking prey. Different authors use different terminology. For example, hawking can mean sallying to some people and screening to others. The valuable thing about R and R's article is that they explain their classification scheme in great detail and also indicate how other researchers use the terminology.

A quick visit to SORA, the **Searchable Ornithological Research Archive** http://elibrary.unm.edu/sora/ reveals that the article is available in full text at http://elibrary.unm.edu/sora/Condor/cooper/sab_013.pdf but beware, it is a 42MB pdf file.

Nesting boxes for birds is always a topic of interest, with some birders skilled with hammer and nails, able to build their own, while others prefer something pre-fabricated. The Melbourne Wildlife Sanctuary, part of La Trobe University, has a web site on **Nesting Boxes for Australian Animals** http://www.latrobe.edu.au/wildlife/nboxes.html. The topics covered are natural nest hollows, native species that use nest boxes, looking after your nest box, feral species, research, and nest box prices. Apparently the boxes, designed specifically for particular types of birds and other animals, can be ordered via the web site.

In the past, this column has drawn attention to the many rural communities of Australia that have established bird routes and published their bird routes information online. People from the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists advise that they have recently released **bird route brochures for Leeton and Narrandera**. These are in addition to the Bird Routes of Griffith brochure published earlier this year. Disappointingly, these bird routes resources do not appear to be available online. Instead, the **Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists** have a section on their website http://www.mfn.org.au/ 'Places to visit' that presumably has some of the material found in the bird routes brochures. It covers such favourites as the River Red Gum forests at the Narrandera 5 Mile Reserve and Narrandera Wetlands, the dry area reserves Gillenbah mixed woodlands, Pulletop Nature Reserve, Stackpoole State Forest and the Round Hill/Yathong/Nombinnie Nature Reserves.

In previous columns I have drawn attention to the availability of ornithology journals online, pointing out that some are available in full text free of charge, while others need a subscription or, alternatively, readers need to purchase articles online. Pleasingly, an announcement was recently made on Birding-Aus, by the British publisher Wiley-Blackwell, about a **free journal offering**:

> To read the Special Issue on Ornithology Methods from the Journal of Field Ornithology for free, visit
> http://dmmsclick.wiley.com/click.asp?p=6642293&m=13526&u=194782
>
> The Journal of Field Ornithology's Special Issue on Ornithology Methods is of interest to researchers in Ecology, Conservation and Ornithology and emphasizes the descriptive or experimental study of birds in their natural habitats with a specific focus on conservation.

The articles contained in the special issue cover the following topics:

- an economical wireless cavity-nest viewer;
- a comparison of plucked feathers versus blood samples as DNA sources for molecular sexing;
- a novel use of Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tags as nest markers;
- remote monitoring of nests using digital camera technology;
- a solar-powered transmitting video camera for monitoring cliff-nesting raptors;
- validating the use of temperature data loggers to measure survival of songbird nests;
- a non-damaging blood sampling technique for waterfowl embryos;
- using egg flotation and eggshell evidence to determine age and fate of Arctic shorebird nests;
- measuring egg size using digital photography: testing Hoyt's method using Florida Scrub-Jay eggs;
- Ipecac: an improved emetic for wild birds;
- a non-destructive method for extracting maternally derived egg yolk carotenoids;
- a portable system for continuous monitoring of bird nests using digital video recorders;
- sex determination of Red-tailed Hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis calurus*) using DNA analysis and morphometrics;
- an inexpensive method for remotely monitoring nest activity; and
- comparison of survey methods for wintering grassland birds

I found particularly interesting that, among this list of articles, there is a great emphasis on the use of technology rather than on methods as such. And what is the inexpensive method for remotely monitoring nest activity? It entails installing in nests tiny data loggers that are programmed to record temperature at regular intervals throughout the nesting cycle. All the researcher needs to do is retrieve the loggers after nesting has finished and download the data for analysis. This removed the need for repeated visits to the nests with potential negative impacts on the nesting birds.

Have we mentioned before, in this column, **The Biggest Twitch**? Details are online at http://www.thebiggesttwitch.com/. The twitching couple are Alan Davies and Ruth Miller who hail from North Wales. They advise that their goal is 'To see more bird species in a calendar year than anyone has ever done before'.

> We have set ourselves the target of seeing over 3,662 different species of birds in twelve months, from 1st January to 31st December 2008. We have given up our jobs [at the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds] and are dedicating a whole year to travelling around the world to set a new world record by seeing more birds in a single year than ever achieved before. We will be visiting every type of habitat on earth: desert, rainforest, high altitude, open seas, and sweeping savannah.

The global bird lists for 2008 is at the Surfbirds web site reviewed in the previous issue of CBN: http://tinyurl.com/5nr2a8. Davies and Miller cracked the world record here in Australia. Where, exactly? The Griffith Golf Course, on 31 October:

> As we walked out onto the edge of the fairway, we saw six parrots feeding in the rough. Frantically focusing binoculars, we saw Blue Bonnet parrots, bird number 3663 for the year, a new world record!'

The last time I checked they were frantically ticking the birds of Malaysia, having attained a score of 3,904 species. The famous American birder Phoebe Snetsinger, who was killed in a motor vehicle rollover while on a birding trip in Madagascar in 1999, ticked over 8,500 species—but that was over her lifetime, not in a single year!

In 1988 the Australian National Dictionary Centre, a joint initiative of the Australian National University and Oxford University Press, published ***The Australian National Dictionary: A Dictionary of Australianisms on Historical Principles***. Although 20 years has passed since the date of publication, the Dictionary (known as the AND) remains an invaluable resource. Like the giant Oxford English Dictionary, it is not intended to be prescriptive but rather to illustrate the way Australian English is actually used now and how it has been used in the past. Although a second edition of the AND is currently being prepared, the wonderful news is that the first edition has been made available online, free of charge, by the Oxford University Press, as a gift to Australia to celebrate 100 years of the operation of OUP: www.oup.com.au/and.

Fine, you may be saying, but what has that got to do with birds and birding? In fact, the dictionary has much to interest birders. After all, many Australian birds have peculiarly Australian names, in contrast to others that have been named, often in a quite silly way, after totally unrelated European species. Consider, for example, the Galah. The first two written records are reproduced in the dictionary thus: 1862 J. McKinlay *Jrnl. Exploration Interior* 6 May 88 'A vast number of gulahs, curellas, macaws … here'. 1867 F.J. Byerley *Narr. Overland Exped*. Northern Qld. 3 'The creek received the name of Galaa Creek, in

allusion to the galaa or rose cockatoo (*Cacatua Rosea*).'

What about Rosella, named after Rose Hill, the original European name for Parramatta: 1789 A. Phillip *Voyage to Botany Bay* 130 'This spot is very pleasant, and has been named by the Governor, *Rose-Hill*'. 1810 E. BentLett. 27 July 187, 'I have now … two Rose Hill Parrots.'

Or the delightful Wonga Pigeon: 1821 L. Macquarie *Jrnls. of Tours* 20 Nov. (1956) 223 'Major Morisett has most kindly sent his young friend Lachlan the following very handsome present of pets; vizt. four black swans … and one wanga-wanga pigeon.' (Wonga is a word from the Dharuk (Sydney area) Aboriginal language.)

Meanwhile, back at images of birds on the web. Readers of CBN will know, make heaps of use of, and wonder at the excellence of the photos in **CanberraBird's online gallery** of bird photos http://photogallery.canberrabirds.org.au/. We acknowledge the fantastic work of David Cook, the web site manager, and the photographers who provide the images.

So what about Bird Cinema http://birdcinema.com/? It is described by Doug Myers, who launched it in July last year, as '… a video website for bird enthusiasts to watch and share original bird videos worldwide, through the web - it's simply a website for user-submitted videos of birds, combined with a sharp and well-working real-time onscreen interface (i.e. just like YouTube)'. At this site people can:

- upload, tags and share videos worldwide;
- browse hundreds of original videos and pictures uploaded by a community of members growing daily;
- find, join and create video groups to connect with people who have similar interests;
- customize the experience by subscribing to member videos, saving favorites (sic), and creating playlists;
- integrate videos on websites using video embeds or APIs; and
- make videos public or private so users can elect to broadcast their videos publicly or share them privately with friends and family upon upload.

I know that this will excite some readers and bemuse others. So what about clicking on the 'Most viewed' section of the site at http://birdcinema.com/video.php?category=mv&viewtype and see what's there? In the search box you can enter 'Australia' (if that's what you are interested in) and see what bird videos have been submitted from this austral continent. With increasing numbers of bird photographers using video, it could be that this will become an especially popular birding web site in the future.

Let's conclude with another ambitious venture, one focussing on **Birds and People** http://www.birdsandpeople.org/. We are now venturing into the next stage of development of the internet, known as Web 2.0

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0. This site is described as a 'Collaboration between British author Mark Cocker and acclaimed wildlife photographer David Tipling. They are supported by the eminent author and research fellow Jonathan Elphick.' It is 'A global celebration of birds in human culture':

> If you love birds and they are an important part of your daily experience then read on. This website and blog are dedicated to an exciting and important new book project. Birds and People is a radically different book about birds, exploring not just their natural history, but their cultural significance to human societies.
>
> Birds and People is a unique kind of book because it solicits contributions from anyone. So far over 200 people from 35 countries around the world have submitted stories and reflections. On its completion Birds and People will be a major record on the innumerable connections between humankind and birds. In total it will tell the story of a singular and universal relationship.

Interestingly, this web presence and work towards a book is a joint venture with **Birdlife International** http://www.birdlife.org/. The project seems to be commencing slowly, but has lots of potential. I suggest you visit http://www.birdsandpeople.org/ and consider making a contribution. Australian birders have much to contribute to something focussing on Birds and People. What say we get behind this project?

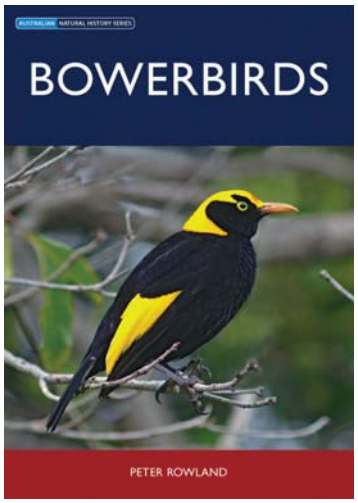
T. javanica

This column is available online at http://cbn.canberrabirds.org.au/cbnInfo.htm

Details on how to subscribe to *Birding-Aus*, the Australian birding email discussion list, are on the web at www.birding-aus.org/. A comprehensive searchable archive of the messages that have been posted to the list is at bioacoustics.cse.unsw.edu.au/archives/html/birding-aus.

To join the *CanberraBirds* email discussion list, send an email message with the word 'subscribe' in the subject line to canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au. The list's searchable archive is at bioacoustics.cse.unsw.edu.au/archives/html/canberrabirds.

BOOK REVIEW



Bowerbirds
by
Peter Rowland

Colour photographs, illustrations; 144 pp
Publisher: CSIRO PUBLISHING
Publication date: May 2008
ISBN 9780643094208

Reviewed by Beth Mantle

Australia is home to some of the great construction crews of the bird world: Wedge-tailed Eagles *Aquila audax* build towering nests of sticks that are the product of years of labour, while the mound-builders, such as the Malleefowl *Leipoa ocellata* and Australian Brush-turkey *Alectura lathami*, move tons of earth and leaf litter in order to provide their eggs with exactly the right temperature and moisture. The bowerbirds, however, are the great architects of the Australian avifauna, and their bowers are fascinating from both a construction and behavioural viewpoint. At a local level, the residents of many Canberra suburbs are delighted to share their gardens with the Satin Bowerbird *Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*, a particularly vocal and charismatic species.

As the latest offering from the enormously popular Australian Natural History Series, and with such a fascinating subject, "Bowerbirds" was highly anticipated. The book consists of six chapters, two of which deliver species accounts for both Australian and New Guinean bowerbirds, while the first four chapters focus on the classification, distribution, anatomy, evolution, and behaviour of the bowerbird group.

As I finished reading the Introduction, I realised that I was a little disappointed with Rowland's composition. I expected to read a broad and interesting summary of the

bowerbird group, their origins, what makes them such a unique and diverse avian family, and their place in scientific and cultural history. Instead, the Introduction is slightly bland and one gets the feeling that the author was not particularly inspired to write about these beautiful creatures. Furthermore, the Introduction seems to lack focus and direction, so instead of creating an opening pallet upon which to paint the biological narrative of the bowerbirds, the reader is provided with segmented scoops of information taken from the other book chapters. For example, the opening paragraph in the Introduction describes the geographic distribution of the 20 species of bowerbirds (including the catbirds), which is then repeated almost verbatim in the opening paragraph of Chapter 2 (Classification & Morphology). Much of the introductory text is given over to the description of bowers, and how their structure and composition varies amongst species, but once again, this information is repeated in Chapter 4 (Bower Evolution & Sexual Behaviour). There is a lovely reference to early zoologists' reactions when they first observed bowers in the New Guinean rainforest, and I would have enjoyed reading more anecdotes like this.

The second chapter (Classification & Morphology) describes the relationship between the bowerbirds and catbirds, and discusses the role of polygyny and monogamy in bird social groups. I felt that this discussion was slightly out of place in this chapter, particularly when there is a whole chapter dedicated to Sexual Behaviour in bowerbirds (Chapter 4). I was interested to read the author's thoughts on the size distribution of bowerbird species and how this might be related to Bergmann's Rule, an eco-geographical hypothesis stating that, amongst closely related birds and mammals, the largest forms occur at higher altitudes and latitudes. However, as Rowland goes on to state, the evidence to support this rule in bowerbirds is weak, and I was left wondering why the author had decided to discuss it at all. Some quick and dirty research of my own has revealed that Bergmann's Rule is now considered by many ecologists to be controversial, with its validity being questionable, at best. I suspect that Rowland was seeking a hypothesis or theory to underpin this book, rather than being satisfied with producing a comprehensive and carefully researched overview of the bowerbird family. Unfortunately, Rowland's critical writing appears weak and was emphasised by a lack of referencing throughout the text. Although there is a comprehensive bibliography, it is not possible to match statements in the text with the appropriate reference, which can be frustrating for a reader who wishes to follow up on a particular point.

I expected that the third chapter (Habitat, Distribution & Conservation) would summarise the preferred habitats of each species, whilst highlighting current threats to their conservation in the wild. Early in the chapter, the author discusses the potential impact of climate change in very general terms, which is interesting, but Rowland fails to link

these impacts to the bowerbird family, or even birds in general. This is followed by several paragraphs illustrating where there are significant gaps in the understanding of bowerbird habitat requirements and threats, and includes a strategy for approaching bowerbird conservation. For example, Rowland points out that once key threats are known then "conservation strategies can be assigned a high, medium or low priority". This is commonly known as "ecological triage", and is now a well-established procedure for managing threats to animal populations. The remainder of this chapter discusses the challenges associated with managing bowerbird populations in New Guinea, but I felt that it lacked depth and detail. Overall, this was an interesting chapter and it touched on some very important issues for bowerbird conservation, but I would have enjoyed reading more on bowerbird distribution and habitats.

I particularly enjoyed the chapter on the evolution of bowers and sexual behaviour (Chapter 4). Bowerbirds feature very heavily in this chapter since catbirds do not build bowers or engage in sexual displays. Rowland capitalises on the array of fascinating literature on the behaviour of bowerbirds, and does a wonderful job of summarising some of the most interesting findings from recent studies. This chapter details the characteristics of different bower types (e.g. stage, mat and avenue bowers) and the species that build them. Rowland's passion for this family of birds is evident in this chapter, and he paints a wonderful picture of each species' behaviour when displaying. I thoroughly enjoyed the mental image of a displaying Tooth-billed Bowerbird *Scenopoeetes dentirostris* peeking out from behind a small tree, and was fascinated by the theories on bower "painting" and how this might affect male sexual behaviour.

The remaining two chapters of the book provide species accounts of all twenty Australian and New Guinean species of bowerbird, and a dichotomous key to all species, which is probably a bit extraneous given that very few bowerbirds have overlapping distributions and those that do (e.g. Satin Bowerbird and Regent Bowerbird *Sericulus chrysocephalus*, or Tooth-billed Bowerbird and Golden Bowerbird *Amblyornis newtonianus*) are quite easy to distinguish in the field. However, it is a useful section for learning the distinguishing characteristics of each species. The species accounts include Australian distribution maps, descriptions of adults, immatures, juveniles, and nestlings, courtship behaviour, vocalisations, and feeding.

Overall, this book provides a good overview of the bowerbird family and summarises the latest research findings in a format that is easy to read and understand. I felt that parts of the book could have been expanded upon, particularly some of the more interesting aspects of bowerbird behaviour. However, I genuinely enjoyed reading "Bowerbirds" and it will make a valuable addition to my anyone's bookshelf.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

It is with pleasure that I present my first President's Report covering the period October 2007 to September 2008. This past year has been a major learning curve for me as I slowly get to know the membership better and as I get to know Canberra Ornithologists Group's (COG's) many areas of interest.

First, I would like to thank Jack Holland for all that he has done. Jack took on the role of President for three years and then, as no one stepped forward to take his place, he accepted the position for another year whilst I as Vice-president learned the ropes. In October last year we swapped roles and for the past year his guidance and experience has been invaluable. Throughout this period Jack had to rebuild his home and garden yet business at COG has continued without missing a beat. Jack will now stand down from the Committee but like the old trooper that he is I am glad to say he will, for a while, continue to find speakers for our monthly meetings and continue to write his monthly contribution to Gang-gang.

Forward Plan

The Committee's activities are guided by the Forward Plan that was agreed to last year and published in the May 2007 Gang-gang. As I am sure the Plan has been avidly read and digested by all members I do not need to remind you that it, taking into account core COG objectives, recognised two categories of tasks; major and minor.

Of the major tasks, progress has occurred on various fronts:

1) Review of the first 25 years of the Garden Bird Survey. This has been completed. I would like to thank Martin Butterfield, Michael Lenz and Nick Nicholls for all their hard work on this project. The major items to come from the review were that the survey was well supported by the membership although sites are not evenly distributed over the urban area, with Gungahlin and Tuggeranong in particular requiring participants. Professional statistical expertise will be required to examine the dataset and that will need to be paid for. The survey is now in its 28th year and the report recommends that appropriate expertise be sought with the view to analyse a representative set of species after year 30; the final product being suitable for a peer reviewed scientific publication. In addition, there was a recommendation that the GBS database be redesigned with appropriate documentation. Again, this will require professional, paid expertise. Finally, it was recommended that a new edition of the publication 'Birds of Canberra Gardens' be produced with the additional 9 years of GBS data. The production of this new edition is now in hand with the formation of a steering group consisting of Paul

Fennell (Database Manager), Kathy Walters (design), David Cook (photographs), Martin Butterfield (GBS Coordinator) and Chris Davey.

2) Develop sets of display material. Julian Robinson has kindly offered to examine ways to improve and expand on the COG display material and he will report back to the Committee with recommendations on what needs to be done.

3) COG database update. It is intended that whilst a consultant examines the possibility of redesigning the GBS database, consideration will also be given to examine the General Observations database in particular with the aim of improving the documentation.

4) Support for the Mulligans Flat/Goorooyarroo Ecological Community research project. Members of COG continue to participate in the project's bird survey and financial assistance has been provided to support the research project that aims to re-establish a viable Brown Treecreeper population in the area.

5) Support for the Common Myna research project. The Committee is pleased that a Ph.D. student has now been appointed and looks forward to supporting any research into the impacts of the Common Myna on native birds in the local region.

6) ACT Bird Atlas- an update. To date there has been no scoping study conducted to examine the feasibility of updating the ACT Bird Atlas. It has now been 19 years since the end of the survey period that culminated in the publication of the Atlas. This project desperately needs someone who would be prepared to lead the scoping study. The study would determine whether coverage over the past 19 years has been extensive enough to provide meaningful supplementary data.

Of the minor tasks:

1) Updating the COG pamphlet on bird-attracting garden plants is still required and again I would urge anyone with an interest in this area to come forward to help with this project.

2) The CD 'Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT' continues to sell well but there is a need for a second CD that will complete the series. Funds have been made available and recording equipment purchased to progress this project. Peter Fullagar has compiled a list of recordings that need to be made and all equipment is now available to be lent to anyone with the appropriate expertise who wishes to collect some of the required material. I urge anyone who may be willing to participate in this project to contact any Committee member.

3) New members/ visitors packs are available at the Sales Desk but the idea of members wearing name tags at meetings still needs to be encouraged.

4) The first of the Bird Route brochures has been developed and is now available on the Web. I would like to thank Sue Lashko and Geoffrey Dabb for making this brochure available. There are now an additional two brochures in the pipe-line.

Committee

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the 2007-08 Committee. This year two Executive positions become available. The Treasurer, Lia Batterson, will stand down, having filled the position for the last three years. Lia has brought great professionalism to the job with her dedication and an eye for detail. I am pleased to say that she leaves the books in a healthy state. The Vice-president, Jack Holland, will also stand down this year but as already mentioned I am delighted that Jack will continue to support the Group in other ways. I am pleased to say that Sandra Henderson, Jenny Bounds, Anthony Overs, David Cook, Sue Lashko and Tony Lawson have all agreed to remain for another year.

Conservation

Conservation concerns within our area continue to increase and during the past year COG has had an input into many of the issues. Jenny Bounds has been extremely busy in her role as Conservation officer and also as President of the Conservation Council of the ACT Region. COG has had an input into many issues including the following:

- submission and subsequent provision of evidence to the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment on the Draft to Variation to Territory Plan # 281, Molonglo and North Weston;
- successful nomination of the Little Eagle as a vulnerable species in the ACT;
- location of the proposed gas power station and data storage hub off Mugga Lane;
- concerns about the proposed selling of Defence land at Newline Quarry;
- concerns about willow clearing and nesting cormorants along Molonglo Reach;
- successful listing of Lake Bathurst as an 'Important Bird Area (IBA) and input into the management plan for the area;
- input into the management of White-fronted Chats at Stromlo Forest Park; and
- submission to the Googong Foreshore Management Plan.

In addition, COG has had an input to the ACT National Resource Management Council, is a member of the Stakeholders Forum, ACT Parks, Conservation and Lands and is associated with the 'Bush on the Boundary' project run by the Ginninderra Catchment Group. A Memorandum of Understanding between COG and the Department of Territories and Municipal Services has been updated and renewed. COG was represented on a committee set up to provide advice to Conservation Volunteers Australia and the

Sanctuary Project at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve.

Outings

Once again COG has been able to run a very comprehensive outings program with Anthony Overs managing the trips program. In addition, the ad hoc group of 'Wednesday Walkers' with a life of their own, have been most successful in providing outings for those fortunate enough to not be working. Overall, since October last year there have been 40 outings. Of these, 10 have been outside the local region ranging as far as Green Cape, West Wylong, Ulladulla, Lady Elliot Island, Chiltern Forest, Jervis Bay, Round Hill Nature Reserve and Bungonia State Park. There have been six specific purpose outings including the Blitz, Nest workshop, Bush Birds for beginners, Waterbirds for Beginners and the Robin and Raptor twitchathons. There have been outings to seven of the local nature reserves with the remainder of the outings to local hot spots. I would like to thank the many organisers and leaders and those who write up the trip reports for Gang-gang.

Communications and Publications

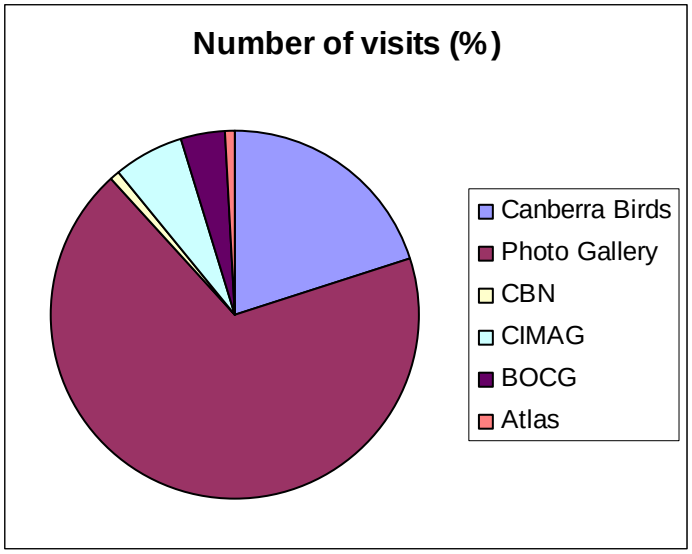
Gang-gang. Greg Ramsey and Sue Lashko have continued with editing and publishing our newsletter. On occasions Tanya Rough has stood in for Greg when he was away. Also, I would like to thank Judy Collett and helpers for the preparation and mailing of the Newsletter. I would particularly like to thank Jack Holland, Ian Fraser, *Tyto alba* and *Acrocephalus stentoreus* for their regular contributions over the past year. I note that under the new Christidis and Boles taxonomy both latter contributors will need a name change and that one has already done so!

Canberra Bird Notes. There have been three editions of CBN produced by Anthony Overs as Editor. Major publication items include the 2006-07 Annual Bird Report and articles on the Black-chinned Honeyeater, Pied Currawong, Whistling Kite, Little Eagle and the 2007 Canberra Bird Blitz.

Annual Bird Report. I would like to thank Paul Fennell for being responsible for the 2006-07 ABR published in Volume 33, March 2008 Canberra Bird Notes. Thanks to the ABR compilers Barbara Allan, Con Boekel, Grahame Clark, Paul Fennell, David McDonald, Ian McMahon, Harvey Perkins, David Purchase and Nicki Taws with each contributor, as usual, responsible for a group or groups of species. The 2007-08 ABR will need to reflect the name changes that have resulted in COG's adoption of the Birds Australia recommended names.

Website. David Cook continues to provide an excellent website. Over the year there have been 169,224 visits to the site and 115,474 visits to the very popular photo gallery. Additions to the site over the past year include a link to the Canberra Bird Conservation Fund as

appropriately highlighted by a Dollarbird. Thanks to Alastair Smith, volumes 1 to 4, 8 to 16 and 32 to 33 are now available on the Web. I would like to acknowledge the considerable effort that Alastair has put into this project. The volumes are text searchable and it is intended that all will be made available in this way. Due to the efforts of Harvey Perkins we now have available on the web indices covering CBN volumes 21 to 28 and partial coverage of volumes 29 to 32. Past indices have been made available through CBN. COG continues to support the Canberra Indian Myna Action Group website. They have received 10,521 visits to date and I now understand that their membership is approaching 450.



Discussion list and email announcements. COG's chat-line 'Canberrabirds' continues to be managed by David McDonald. The membership to the list stands at 232, an increase of 12 from the previous year. The chat-line is an excellent forum for the latest sightings, points of interest and provides an invaluable starting point for those wishing to discuss their unusual sightings.

Other communication issues. COG continues to be an active participant in BIGnet, the network of bird clubs in NSW. Meeting are held every six months to discuss issues of concern and it is a particularly important venue through which the various clubs are able to learn from each other and if necessary act jointly on particular issues. COG held a most successful meeting at the Botanic Gardens in April and it was pleasing to see the Chief Minister join us for our outing to Mulligans Flat. Since

then COG has been represented by Jenny Bounds and me at the September meeting run by the Blue Mountains Bird Observers.

A progress report on the Woodland surveys has been provided to the State of Australian Birds Report produced by Birds Australia which I understand will be found in the next edition of Wingspan. Also to be found in the forthcoming issue will be a report by Michael Lenz on some aspects of the waterbird surveys at Lake Bathurst.

The President attended the opening of the BASNA Discovery Centre at Olympic Park in Sydney during May and was able to take the opportunity to make arrangements for back issues of CBN to be sent to the BASNA library. These additions have now completed their holdings of CBN.

Surveys and record management

COG continues to be active in the important area of collecting and recording data on the birds within our area of concern. In the ACT State of Environment Report (2007) it was recommended that "ACT Government agencies work with qualified community groups (such as the Canberra Ornithologists Group) to ensure data collected are made available for use in planning and managing the Territory's natural resources".

Fifteen woodland sites continue to be surveyed once a season to document the species in the threatened Yellow Box/Red Gum grassy woodlands. Data on threatened species have been provided to the ACT Government. This coming year we will be seeking funds for a major analysis of the data as most sites have now been surveyed for 10 years. I would like to acknowledge the hard work of all the site coordinators and participants and to Jenny Bounds and Alison Rowell for administrating the project. I would also like to welcome Helen Mason to the project. Helen is responsible for data entry.

The GBS is now in its 28th year under the enthusiastic leadership of Martin Butterfield. I particularly commend his regular input to Gang-gang on interesting aspects of the data. I would also like to thank Kay Hahne and Anne Hall for their help in entering the GBS data. Kay really deserves a medal as she has now put her hand up for this job for over a decade.

The COG database continues to expand with 461,551 observations from 30,110 datasheets in the General Observations database and 1.25 million records in the GBS database. The databases continue to be managed by Paul Fennell and Martin Butterfield. The on-line data entry system is now up and running and I urge more members to enter their observation in this way. With the inbuilt checks and balances the system greatly reduces the amount of checking required to ensure records are correct. Essential support for the COG database is provided through the Records Management Team and the Rarities Panel. I would like to

acknowledge the contributions provided by Nicki Taws as Records Officer, Harvey Perkins for his role on the Records Management Team, Tony Harding and many others for data entry and to the members of the Rarities Panel consisting of Richard Allan, Jenny Bounds, Grahame Clark, Dick Schodde, Nicki Taws and Barbara Allan (Secretary).

New technologies always throw up particular challenges and we still struggle to get many of the interesting observations recorded on the chat-line into the database.

One area that I am afraid we are all going to have to face this coming year concerns scientific and common name changes. Tony Lawson has been assessing the problems COG has in adopting the name changes which have now been accepted by Birds Australia. Although there are not many common names that will need to be changed, the ordering and changes to scientific names are more significant. COG has already adopted the changes and you may well have noticed the changes as you read Gang-gang and Canberra Bird Notes. Changes will need to be made to GBS charts, General Observations datasheets and in the database, all of which will take some time. I ask for your patience as the next Committee slowly works through these issues.

Monthly meetings

Jack Holland has once again been responsible for a most interesting and varied program of speakers. Presentations have varied from those that concern our local species such as Melithriptis honeyeaters, Robins and Quail, Cormorants, Swift Parrots, Fairy-wrens and Regent Honeyeaters to those found or used to be found further afield such as the Beautiful Parrakeet, Hooded Parrot and the birds of Oolambeyan, birds of Jervis Bay, birds of Glue Pot Reserve and the Birds in Backyards.

In addition there have been presentations of a more general nature such as Evolution in Birds, Habitat Productivity and Conservation and Birds of Ecuador, the BIG ACT Twitch and Birds of Japan whilst Paul Fennell has reminded us about the on-line data entry system and Martin Butterfield provided a presentation on the GBS.

A feature of the monthly meeting continues to be the Sales Desk. Due to other commitments Bruce Ramsey and Esme Barker had to unfortunately relinquish the marvellous job they had done with the Desk after taking over from Carol Macleay. I would like to thanks them for all their efforts and also to thank Roy Harvey who managed to step into the breech for a short while. The Desk is now being managed by Beth Mantle who has taken on the position with great enthusiasm.

A critical part of the monthly meetings is the raffle and the tea/coffee get together after the meeting. Many thanks to Julienne Kampad and Margaret Ashton who work quietly behind the scenes to provide the refreshments and to

Sandra Henderson, helped by Jane Green, for taking on the responsibility of providing the raffle prizes and selling the tickets.

Canberra Birds Conservation Fund

There had been problems this financial year spending money from the Fund. Despite repeated contacts with universities and conservation groups and despite a couple of initial expressions of interest there were no applications for the financial period 2007-08. I am please to say that since the start of the present financial year the CBCF has been able to provide a considerable grant to the Brown Treecreeper reintroduction project. As previously mentioned there is now a link on the COG website that provides details about the Fund and how to apply. It is hoped that this will encourage applications from individuals and organisations with project aimed at supporting COG's objectives.

So, where are we heading in the forthcoming year?

- The Forward Plan will need to be updated with outstanding tasks to be completed.
- We intend to make progress with a new edition of the publication 'Birds of Canberra Gardens'.
- We aim to seek ways to update and improve the COG database.
- An area of concern involves the COG publication Canberra Bird Notes. The publication has been reduced from four editions to three yet it is increasingly difficult to find articles that will fill each edition despite the first edition containing the Annual Bird Report. There may be reasons for this with Gang-gang and the chat-line's coverage of field outings, interesting observations and the general discussions on subjects of interest. I would appreciate the membership's thoughts on where COG should be heading with CBN and how best to capture the chat-line observations for inclusion in CBN.
- We will continue to play a role to ensure that the environment is not forgotten when planners and developers consider the triple bottom line.
- We will continue to provide support to those activities that are important to the membership

Conclusion

I would once again like to thank the 2007-08 Committee for all their hard work. I look forward to my second term as President and finally I would like to thank you all for your support over the past year.

Chris Davey
8 October 2008

RARITIES PANEL NEWS

In the course of the year the Rarities Panel exposed for comment its revised list of "unusual" birds for the ACT and COG area of interest. That list was formally adopted at the Panel's September meeting and can be found on the COG website www.canberrabirds.org.au. The Panel had considered the viability of separate lists for the ACT proper, and for the wider area of interest, but decided in the end on the advantage of simplicity of a single list. That list contains only those species for which there have been fewer than ten endorsed records of presumably distinct individual birds (or groups of birds) in the last 25 years. So the White-fronted Honeyeater, for example, so widely viewed in Kambah last winter, counted as one record. Birds which have not been reliably reported in the past 25 years have been dropped from the list as well. The resulting list is heavily weighted towards waders, whose presence or absence on Lakes Bathurst and George is dependent on the water levels of those lakes. Some observers have been surprised at the omission from the list of birds they consider unusual. And indeed, of the endorsed list published below, only two species, the Musk Lorikeet and the Lewin's Honeyeater, still feature on the "unusuals" list.

The Panel stresses that, in addition to reports on the listed birds, it welcomes unusual bird reports of ANY species which the observer believes to be unusual, or in an unusual location, or present in unusual numbers. The additional information afforded by a detailed description or photograph adds weight to the value of the record. And the Panel welcomes descriptions of species which the observer has been unable to identify. While it may not be able to offer a positive identification, it is prepared to offer possibilities.

Self-evidently, the revised "unusuals" list does not include species which have not been recorded previously in the ACT or COG's area of interest. Neither does it include species for which reports have been received but which have not been endorsed. The Panel acknowledges that some of these reports may have been correct; the standard of proof required for a "first" for the region is high, and frequently the Panel has been unable to endorse a record simply because the observer did not obtain a good enough view of the species, despite pleas of "what else could it have been?". A detailed unusual bird report, supported by a photograph or sound recording if possible, is required for any such species.

It is further worth noting that the species which feature on the COG unusual birds list are, largely speaking, not unusual at all in the broader Australian context. Exceptions in the past 25 years have been the Buff-breasted Sandpiper, the reports of which were submitted to and endorsed by Birds Australia's Rarities Committee; and the Painted Snipe.

The avifauna of the ACT region is constantly evolving, so undoubtedly the 2008 "unusuals" list will need to be revised in the light of expected changes. The more frequently COG members get out and explore the less frequented parts of our area of interest, and record the bird species they encounter there, the more complete picture we will have of our local birds and their status.

Since its September meeting, the Panel has received seven more unusual bird reports, which it will consider at its December meeting.

ENDORSED LIST 73, September 2008

White-headed Pigeon *Columba leucomela*
1; 23, 28 Jun 08; I. Baird; Fairfax St, O'Connor GrK13
Fork-tailed Swift *Apus pacificus*
20; 11 Mar 08; J. Layton; Beach Place, Holt GrI12
Black Falcon *Falco subniger*
1; 7 Feb 08; S. Holliday; Goorooyarroo NR GrM11
Spotless Crake *Porzana tabuensis*
3; 20 Jul 08; J. Bounds; Namadgi Visitors Centre GrJ19
Musk Lorikeet *Glossopsitta concinna*
2; 4 Mar 08; D. Parker; Antill St, Queanbeyan GrN15
Swift Parrot *Lathamus discolor*
1; 6 Jul 08; J. Bounds; Newline Quarry GrM14
1; 7 Jul 08; J. Bounds; Campbell Park GrM13
Turquoise Parrot *Neophema pulchella*
1; 8 Feb 08; S. Holliday; Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve GrF18
Lewin's Honeyeater *Meliphaga lewinii*
1; 23 Jul – 19 Aug 08; R. Lawrence & L. Berzins; Stuart St, Queanbeyan GrN15
Little Friarbird *Philemon citreogularis*
1; 1 Jun 08; K. Walter & J. Goldie; Irvine St, Watson GrL12
Pied Butcherbird *Cracticus nigrogularis*
1; 17 Jan 08; S. Holliday; Mulligans Flat NR GrM10

REVISED LIST OF 'UNUSUAL' BIRDS IN THE CANBERRA REGION, SEPTEMBER 2008

Notes. This list was devised, after consultation with the membership of COG, by COG's Rarities Panel and applies from September 2008. It comprises species for which there have been fewer than 10 endorsed records of probably distinct individuals or groups since the formation of the Rarities Panel in 1984. Species which were formerly listed as unusual but which have not been recorded since 1984 have been dropped from the list, as have species recorded ten or more times. Records of any of the species listed or of any species new to the COG area of interest (CAI) or of any species which is not listed on a revised COG datasheet will not be published as an official COG record unless endorsed by the Panel. If in doubt about the status of a given species, please contact rarities@canberrabirds.org.au for clarification. Unusual bird report forms are available at COG's monthly meetings or may be downloaded from the COG website; they should be returned either to the "red box" at meetings, to the rarities email address above, or mailed to Rarities Panel, COG, PO Box 301 Civic Square ACT 2608.

Species	**Most recent date seen**	**Comments**
Magpie Goose *Anseranas semipalmata*	2003	Excludes birds at Tidbinbilla NR. Status of 2003Brindabella Stn bird unclear – may have been from Tid
Plumed Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna eytoni*	1998	2 records only from ACT
Bar-shouldered Dove *Geopelia humeralis*	1992	1 ACT
Superb Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus superbus*	1987	
White-throated Nightjar *Eurostopodus mystacalis*	2007	ACT & CAI
Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*	1989	1 record only nr Murrumbateman
Australasian Bittern *Botaurus poiciloptilus*	2002	Never ACT; Rose Lagoon, primarily
Black-tailed Native–hen *Tribonyx ventralis*	2007	ACT & CAI
Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*	1991	Only LBath
Banded Lapwing *Vanellus tricolor*	2007	Only CAI
Australian Painted Snipe *Rostratula australis*	2007	ACT only

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*	1987	CAI only (LBath)
Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*	2007	ACT rare; prev not uncommon LBath
Little Curlew *Numenius minutus*	1997	only LBath
Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*	1991	2 ACT, 6 LBath
Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*	1994	
Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*	1993?	Mainly CAI; 1 record only ACT
Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*	1995	1 only LBath
Red Knot *Calidris canutus*	1999	1 ACT; a few LBath
Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta*	2002	ACT only
Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*	2002	ACT & more often CAI
Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis*	1997	CAI only
Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*	1996	
Little Button-quail *Turnix velox*	2006	ACT only
Australian Pratincole *Stiltia isabella*	1991	Only CAI - LBath
Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*	2002	1 ACT; 5 CAI - LBath
Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*	2005	3 ACT; 1 CAI
White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*	1990	2 CAI - LBath
Musk Lorikeet *Glossopsitta concinna*	2008	ACT only – nearly off list
Black-eared Cuckoo *Chalcites osculans*	2007	ACT only
Barking Owl *Ninox connivens*	1998	ACT only
Azure Kingfisher *Ceyx azureus*	2001	2 ACT; 2 CAI
Red-backed Kingfisher *Todiramphus pyrrhopygius*	2002	ACT only

Variegated Fairy-wren *Malurus lamberti*	1991	none since 1991
Brown Gerygone *Gerygone mouki*	2006	mainly ACT; 1 CAI
Chestnut-rumped Thornbill *Acanthiza uropygialis*	2007	1 CAI; 1 historic ACT
Pied Honeyeater *Certhionyx variegatus*	2002	1 CAI
Lewin's Honeyeater *Meliphaga lewinii*	2008	ACT & CAI (Tallaganda)
Singing Honeyeater *Lichenostomus virescens*	2006	ACT & CAI
White-fronted Honeyeater *Purnella albifrons*	2007	ACT only
Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater *Acanthagenys rufogularis*	2004	ACT & CAI
Little Wattlebird *Anthochaera chrysoptera*	2007	ACT only and nearly off list
Crimson Chat *Epthianura tricolor*	2003	1 ACT
Black Honeyeater *Sugomel niger*	2007	seen 1991 and again 2007
Tawny-crowned Honeyeater *Glyciphila melanops*	2000	ACT & 1 CAI
Black-chinned Honeyeater *Melithreptus gularis*	2007	ACT only
Blue-faced Honeyeater *Entomyzon cyanotis*	2006	ACT only
Striped Honeyeater *Plectorhyncha lanceolata*	2006	1 ACT
Grey-crowned Babbler *Pomatostomus temporalis*	2004+	ACT
White-browed Babbler *Pomatostomus superciliosus*	2006	1 ACT
Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus bracteatus*	2007	ACT only

Canberra Bird Notes is published quarterly by the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc, and is edited by Anthony Overs. Major articles of up to 5000 words are welcomed on matters relating to the distribution, identification or behaviour of birds in the Australian Capital Territory and surrounding region. Please discuss any proposed major contribution in advance. Shorter notes, book reviews or correspondence are also encouraged. All contributions should be sent to cbn@canberrabirds.org.au.

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