Field Trip Reports

Brindabellas
Sunday 30 November 2003

The COG outing to Blundells Creek and Warks Roads in the Brindabellas has been an annual event for more than a decade. The area was a very special part of Namadgi National Park and is highlighted by Ian Fraser in his book "Above the Cotter".

As usual, we started with a good look at the dam at Uriarra Homestead, where we saw big groups of Eurasian Coots, Hardheads, Australian Wood Ducks and Welcome Swallows, a few Grey Teal, Masked Lapwings and Black-fronted Dotterels. Rufous Songlarks were in fine voice and a Sacred Kingfisher and both Pallid and Horsfield’s Bronze-Cuckoos were heard. In total we recorded 25 species on and around the dam.

All of us were a little apprehensive about what to expect in the once beautiful wet forest we knew so well, and now burnt. Some of the tall Brown Barrels and Ribbon Gums have survived and even a few Tree Ferns in places. The understorey has grown back vigorously but is now dominated by exotic grasses and weeds. However there were plenty of natives including trigger plants, bluebells and various daisies. In the past, the area was well known for uncommon / spectacular species such Pilobirds, Cicadabirds, Eastern Whipbirds, Rufous Fantails, Wonga Pigeons, Eastern Yellow Robins and Superb Lyrebirds. None of these were observed, whilst the numbers of more common species such as Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, Brown Thornbills and White-browed Scrubwrens, Rufous and Golden Whistlers were much lower than in earlier outings. However, we did find more birds as we moved down into the valley where the fire may not have been as intense. Notables included Fan-tailed Cuckoos and Shining Bronze-Cuckoos, Flame Robins (not recorded here in recent years) and a very sooty Sulphur-crested Cockatoo which emerged from an even sootier tree hollow.

Overall, a bit depressing, but not without hope for the future. Future surveys will be interesting. Does anyone have some spare Pilotbirds?

Bruce Lindenmayer

Rainbow Lorikeets

Shrieks of “Saps up”, “Feed here!”, churrs of “All’s well, Honey flows”, screech of “Hawk’s shadow! Watch out!” mute to the mating thrum Bill-and-Coo, Tickle-and-Tweek.

From poem by Mark O’Connor (poet, academic, environmentalist) www.lesmurraypoet.com/mark.htm
Letters to the editor

Dear Editor

Why do birds sharpen their beaks?
Wondering of Kambah (October 2003)

Dear Wondering of Kambah

I apologise for the delay in responding to your very interesting question. After a lot of digging I believe that I have now found an answer.

The behaviour that you describe as 'sharpening', is known in behavioural ecology circles as 'bill (or beak) wiping' and is when a bird rubs its bill on a branch or other such substrate in a characteristic manner. Bill wiping is an innate, rather than a learned, behaviour and is believed to have more than one function.

Bill-wiping is most often observed during or after feeding. Behavioural ecologists believe that it is performed by the bird to indicate to other birds that it has finished eating and is no longer a competitor for food. Aviculturists add that the action is simply to dislodge something stuck to the bill.

In one of the only published studies into the function of bill wiping, Cuthill et al. (1992) found that it also seems to be a means of keeping the beak trimmed to the right length. In the study, starlings given only smooth surfaces, such as perches wrapped in linen, engaged in bill-wiping more often than the birds given rough surfaces to wipe their beaks on. The birds with the smooth surfaces developed overgrown beaks, which the birds with the rough surfaces did not.

Bill-wiping has also been observed being performed in situations not linked to feeding. Sometimes animals in conflict situations show behaviours that seem totally irrelevant or inappropriate to any of the conflicting tendencies. These are known as displacement behaviours. Bill-wiping as a displacement behaviour is commonly observed in flushed birds immediately after they alight on a perch. It has also been observed in courtship situations.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the behaviour in question is (was) known as 'feaking'. The origin of "feak" (or "feek") is the German word "fegen," meaning "to cleanse or sweep." The term "feak" first appeared in English back around 1575 and has always been primarily associated with falconry, as illustrated by this quotation from a 1686 explanation of the proper falconry terms: "When she [your Hawk] hath Fed, say she Fenketh her Beak and not wipeth it."

Kind regards, Tanya (aka the Editor)

References


Please send letters, snippets etcetera intended for this column to the editor. Contact details are on page 16 of this Gang-gang. As with all sections of the Gang-gang, space allocated to this section each month will be limited. Therefore entries are more likely to be published if they are kept to a minimum length.

Mulligan's Flat Survey
Sunday 30 November

The summer survey was in fine weather after a couple of inches of rain the week before. 55 species of birds were recorded. The most interesting sighting was a pair of Superb Parrots seen near the car park on Gundaroo Road as I arrived; later when we left the reserve, one Superb Parrot was seen flying, from possibly the Hall area, over the western ridge of Mulligan's - maybe on a feeding run. This species is not a regular in the reserve although the habitat seems to be quite suitable; we have had a few records over the years including breeding near the large dam several years ago.

Other good sightings were numerous pairs of Scarlet Robin, Varied Sittella and Dusky Woodswallow, all locally declining species, a Brush Cuckoo near site 5, 3 Hoary-headed Grebes on the large dam, a Little Corella near the large dam, and a Skylark on the western edge. Interestingly, we recorded no White-winged Trillers in the reserve, although I recorded several pairs in the new Gooroo reserve the day before. One Rufous Songlark only was recorded - numbers seem down again this year.

Wildflowers and native grasses were in abundance. Thanks to the volunteers who assisted with the survey.

Jenny Bounds

TSR 60, Mountain Creek Road Sunday 7 December 2003

A keen, albeit small, group met David McDonald at the Uriarra Homestead dam and quickly totted up 29 species. Nice to see a Musk Duck and Latham's Snipe lurking in the grassy bank. Hoary-headed Grebes predominated and, with a couple of Dotterel, we mainly saw bush birds.

A short drive along Mountain Creek Road took us to the open woodland.
of this travelling stock route. This patch is adjacent to The Mullion community centre, spreading over a ridge and down to the Mullion Creek. Quiet strolling gained us 33 species of birds you would expect.

We backtracked to Tinkers Creek and were grateful for the deep shade afforded by this protected remnant. While it could be circumnavigated in 10 minutes, we found 21 species, with a good sighting of a Brown Goshawk and heard a Rufous Songlark. David pointed out that this small area had been surveyed into small blocks according to his map. With the creek bordered by a line of mature pine trees, a rough stone road bisecting the forest and various long mounds, we came to the conclusion that there might have been a bit of gold prospecting in this area last century. There were also lots of wild flowers for the botanists amongst us to query. This is a delightful spot to be remembered and re-visited and morning tea never tasted so good.

Shirley Kral

Newline Survey
Sunday 14 December 2003

I did the seasonal survey of this woodland site on my own this time, and spent a rather pleasant three hours very early in the morning in overcast conditions walking the length of the site. Weeds and exotic grasses were well grown from the recent rains, although nowhere near the four feet high growth I experienced at this site in December several years ago - nevertheless gaiters are the order of the day at Newline at this time of year due to the grass seeds. I recorded 43 species on this visit. The regular pair of Brown Treecreepers were active in the front paddock. Highlights were one Diamond Firetail near site 4, a pair of Double-barred Finches and a Speckled Warbler near the dump, a Grey Butcherbird with two immatures at site 7 at the quarry end of the area, several pairs of White-winged Trillers and a couple of Dollarbirds. As at Mulligan's Flat, one Rufous Songlark only was recorded.

Jenny Bounds

I did a walk through the full length of the proposed reserve on 29 November 9 (with permission from Environment ACT and the lessees). We spent some time at this spot on the southern boundary trying to see if there was a pair breeding, and there certainly was one bird in and around a hollow in a large tree near a small dam; but we did not manage to see two birds at the same time - from the behaviour of the bird seen, I strongly suspect there was another bird on a nest. As I described in the last Gang-gang
report, this bird is utilising an area of degraded woodland with many dead and fallen trees. Several hectares, in fact half of the area, is outside the reserve boundary where houses are proposed; this seems to be the most suitable Brown Treecreeper habitat in this huge reserve, as elsewhere there is very little dead and fallen timber which this species relies on. We also recorded a Diamond Firetail and Southern Whiteface at the Brown Treecreeper site. A male Hooded Robin carrying food near one of the COG monitoring sites and three pairs of White-winged Trillers were other highlights. Finally, I was delighted to see some Drooping Casuarina on the hills at Gooroo (I had not seen this on the earlier visit) - more specifically its Allocasuarina verticillata. There are several isolated mature trees, plus at least two patches of trees, some with younger plants - it occurs to me that it would be ideal to encourage more regeneration of these trees as part of the management of the new reserve. What a headline in 15-20 years - Glossies at Gooroo!

Jenny Bounds

Black Mountain / Aranda Bushland—Owling with Jerry Olsen Saturday 17 January 2004

In a strictly limited, first in best-dressed outing, ten select COGites met at Aranda at 7:30pm on a somewhat balmy, windy Saturday for an evening’s owling with well-known Canberra owl expert Jerry Olsen and his colleague Sue Trost. Not really knowing what to expect given the weather conditions, we were pleasantly surprised with both the fairly benign conditions at the foot of Black Mountain, and the fabulous array of Southern Boobooks Ninox novaeseelandiae that Jerry and Sue showed us.

Within their study area, comprising the Black Mountain Nature Reserve / Aranda Bushland, Jerry and Sue have identified six Southern Boobook territories, and over a period of more than 10 years have come to know these extremely territorial owls and their habits intimately. Each territory is approx. 1 sq. km, with boundaries clearly defined by agonistic interactions between adult males in adjoining territories, where the protagonists take up defensive positions for vociferous, and sometimes physical, onslaughts. Males maintain their territories year-round, whilst females have separate, distinct territories, only returning to the male’s territory to commence breeding. Nesting hollows can be reused, or several may be used within a territory over successive years, but can be subject to competition from Sulphur-crested Cockatoos and Brush-tailed Possums.

In our search for roosting boobooks preparing for their night-time activities, we visited the territories of “White”, “Orange” and “V5” (identified by the colour bands of the breeding males, with the latter apparently named after a large sign painted on a tree), all within easy walking distance for us, aided by the propensity of the boobook families within each to cluster on the boundaries. Here adults can alternatively engage in foraging activities to feed the juveniles, and giving their neighbours a good verbal going over.

Boobook diet varies from insects, such as cicadas and centipedes, mostly taken on warm nights, to birds, such as Eastern Rosellas, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters and pardalotes. Jerry informed us that insect prey is often taken on the wing and caught using the feet, making boobooks the only owl species in the world known to utilise this method. Whilst nesting and roosting occurs predominantly within woodlands, boobooks appear to prefer more open areas to forage, and are often found within school grounds.

Southern Boobook (Ninox novaeseelandiae) “White” Juveniles.

Photo courtesy David Cook

After a short walk, we located the “White” male with two 10-week old juveniles in the top of a smallish eucalypt. Apparently the female hasn’t been seen for about 2 weeks, and Jerry thinks she may either be dead or has moved back to her winter territory early. We then found the female and 2 juveniles belonging to Orange, however, this male too has disappeared and is more than likely dead. Adding to the mix, a “floater” (a male without a territory or mate) has turned up in Orange’s territory, apparently with the intent of taking over from Orange, but appears to be reluctant to go near the female because of her aggression. Jerry and Sue have colour-banded this bird (now known as “Lime”) and attached a radio harness so that they can keep tabs on him.

We then located the family of 5 in “V5”. These three youngsters are
about 11 weeks old, and each showed characteristic circular head movements not displayed by adults, making them easy to identify when in silhouette. In total we saw 11 boobook (4 adults and 7 juveniles), and all birds, with the exception of the adult “V5” female, which flew away to a nearby tree, tolerated our intrusion upon their territories. As darkness took over, we returned to “Orange” where we witnessed the male hunting and feeding insects to his 2 offspring, which made cricket-like chirring begging noises, before heading off across Caswell Drive into Aranda, causing a moment’s concern to Jerry as one youngster narrowly avoided becoming another statistic on our nation’s roads.

We ended a fantastic evening there, and greatly appreciated Jerry and Sue sharing their world with us.

David Cook

From your Committee

The COG Committee met for the first time this year on 21 January 2004 and considered, amongst other more routine business matters, the following items. If any COG member would like more information on any of the issues outlined, please contact the nominated Committee member.

Environment ACT’s Integrated Nature Conservation Plan website: COG will discuss with EACT the possibility of including COG information on threatened species.

A Birds Australia proposal for a pocket guide to the birds of the ACT: in principle support, but further information and costings required.

Request for assistance from consultants working on a revised Plan of Management for Jerrabomberra Wetlands.

Results of our nominations of threatened birds to the ACT Flora and Fauna Committee: of the eight species COG nominated, two – White-winged Triller and Varied Sittella – were deemed to satisfy the criteria for declaration as vulnerable. Action Plans for these species will be incorporated into the Woodland Conservation Strategy currently being prepared by Environment ACT. Four other species - Diamond Firetail, Flame Robin, Dusky Woodswallow and Crested Shrike-tit – have been allocated to a watching brief. In view of the importance of building up more comprehensive data on these species, COG urges all members to report all sightings of them, on the relevant datasheets.

COG will be running a special raffle at the February and March meetings. Tickets will be $2 each and the prize will be The New Atlas of Australian Birds, kindly donated by Malcolm Fyfe. There will be a draw for other book prizes at the February meeting, but all tickets will be re-entered into the main draw. So here’s your chance to win your copy of this very valuable book which contains the latest distribution maps (4,000 for over 650 bird species, including seasonal changes and breeding range). Change maps are also presented for 250 species that were more or less common since the first Atlas of Australian Birds was completed 20 years ago.

On the conservation front, see Conservation Matters later in this Gang-gang.

COG is exploring the development of an Internet-based information management system for COG data, including online entry and retrieval. For comment or further information, contact David McDonald.

Garden Bird Survey news: Mark Clayton has had to step down as GBS coordinator, due to pressure of work. Martin Butterfield has been appointed to the position and will be available to assist aspiring surveyors or to discuss issues with long-term contributors. As with other COG officeholders with access to COG data, Martin has agreed in writing to COG’s terms and conditions for its use.

Barbara Allan, secretary

Future Field Trips

COG Field Trips Program 2004

The final version of the above is included as a separate leaflet in this Gang-gang.

I had little feedback or comment on the draft published in the November Gang-gang. As advised then the formal program is basically arranged around two outings per month, the first a local one and the second a longer day/overnight trip a bit further afield, plus the usual events on long weekends. This leaves the flexibility for the organisation of some opportunistic outings, as occurred during 2003.

Many thanks to Noel Luff for offering to organise and lead the COG Easter long weekend event at Yathong Nature Reserve, preliminary details of which are contained in this issue of Gang-gang.

As indicated, leaders are still needed for several outings. If you can help with these or have any other offers of places to go and/or lead, please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH...
Note that David Rees will be helping to manage the field trips program in 2004.

Jack Holland, president

Jerrabomberra Wetlands; Sunday 8 February – morning waterbirds

This outing to one of the most popular and best birding spots in Canberra is timed to coincide with the end of World Wetlands Week. With the lingering drought a number of very interesting species such as crakes, Red-kneed Dotterel, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Red-necked Stint, Latham’s Snipe and the rarer ducks have been seen here recently. Who knows what will turn up on the day. We will be visiting both Kelly’s Swamp and the adjacent Fyshwick sewerage ponds. The latter in particular is very open, so if it is going to be hot don’t forget to bring a hat, sunscreen and plenty of water to drink (plus morning tea).

Meet Tom Green (6247 0630) at the carpark off Dairy Road at 7.30 am for the morning’s outing.

Croajingalong National Park; 13-16 February - Extended weekend camp-out

COG is venturing south of the border for a quiet late summer camp-out after the main holiday period. Thurra River campsite is about 320 km easy drive south of Canberra via Cooma, Bombala and Cann River. This is a wonderfully wild area with a variety of habitats and hopefully we’ll find many of the 306 species seen in the Park. Places are still available and new members and beginners are particularly welcome as there are plenty of lovely walks, vistas, coastal history etc if you or yours do not want to peer through binoculars all weekend. There is also the option to...
return via Errinundra National Park. For the information kit please contact Joan & Trevor Lipscombe on 6262 7975 or TrevorLipscombe@bigpond.com.au

Waterbirds at Kelly’s Swamp
Photo courtesy Geoffrey Dabb

Pejar Dam and associated woodlands/Roses Lagoon; Sunday 22 February – Day mini-bus trip for a mix of water and woodland birds

The cancellation of the trip proposed for this date has allowed the opportunity to organise a visit to this spot which was on the 2003 COG Field Trips Program but was cancelled due to the drought. The Pejar Dam is situated about halfway between Goulburn and Crookwell and is probably the most reliable spot near Canberra for observing the Great Crested Grebe. A number of members have visited there recently and reported these as well as Musk and Freckled Duck, Red-capped Plovers; Black-winged Stilts; Red-kneed Dotterels; Australian Shelduck and White-fronted Chat, all of which are not reliably found in the ACT.

A 12 seater mini-bus (11 passengers plus driver) has been hired and besides visiting the Pejar Dam for the birds described above we’ll also visit some local woodlands such as the Alison Hone Reserve with Crookwell COG member Peter McCrorey. In addition we’re anticipating a visit to Roses Lagoon on the return trip, and we are also trying to arrange a call in at the Goulburn Sewerage Works.

Costs will be round $25-30 depending on number of participants and will include a $2 COG administration fee. This will be advised and will be payable on the bus on boarding. Due to the short notice this trip has been given some pre-publicity on the COG E-mail chat line. As the response has been pretty good (over half the seats taken up already) we will consider hiring a second bus or allowing some tag-a-long vehicles.

Please register your interest with Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au) as soon as possible. Meet at the Griffin Centre at 7.15 am sharp. We will return here by 4.30 pm.

Bibaringa; Sunday 7 March – Morning walk

'Bibaringa' (a place of springs) is a horse agistment property adjoining Mt Stromlo to the west and bordered by the Cotter Road. Stuart Harris has been surveying a particular 10 ha remnant there since 1998 with a list of over 105 species compiled so far. Totally consumed by the January 2003 fires, Bibaringa is now in a state of regeneration as its regal Red Stringybarks and Yellow Box offer their epicormic growth to the returning insect and birds. It remains to be seen what summer migrants will still be present as we roam the hills and gullies of Bibaringa (please bring sturdy footwear, water and hat) and take in the wonderful scenery and birdlife it has to offer.

Meet Stuart (6232 4998 or sih@cea.com.au) at 08:30 am at the front entrance to Bibaringa, which is 1 km further west from the Mt Stromlo Observatory turnoff on the right hand side. Look for the pink gates. The walk will conclude around midday.

Thredbo; Canberra Day Long Weekend; 13-15 March - accommodation

This visit to Thredbo will allow members to enjoy the early autumn atmosphere in Australia’s highest country and also to see the birds that occur there. In particular it’s one of the more accessible places close to Canberra where Pink Robins and Olive Whistlers can be reliably seen (the latter in particular was readily seen during the Kosciiblitz surveys on 17-18 January 2004). There are also a number of walks of varying difficulty for members to enjoy.

Ten double/twin share rooms have been booked at Boali Ski Lodge where we will enjoy Michelle’s legendary hospitality, with the option of full board or bed and breakfast. The cost for the former is $90 for the first night reducing to $75 for the second ($165 for 2 nights), and for the latter is $105 for 2 nights ($60/45 per night). A $6 COG admin fee will need to be added to each. A number of participants have indicated they will also stay on Friday night 12 March, which is a further option. Michelle has also indicated that she’s happy to entertain a mix of full board, and B&B, which allows the option of the group having dinner out on one or more nights, eg Friday or Sunday night.
There are still some places available and if you’re interested please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au) as soon as possible indicating your preference for the number of nights and for full board (recommended) or B/B only. Final numbers staying need to be provided to Boali by mid February, and the meal options by early March, when an information package will also be available.

Wednesday walk – 18 February "Mount Ainslie" woodland.
Meet at the car park on the LHS of Mt Ainslie Drive 100 metres from Fairbairn Ave at 9 am. Lots of birds were seen here in January, including a Regent Honeyeater, which may still be present. Bring morning tea and defence against grass seeds.

Regent Honeyeater (Xanthomyza phrygia)  
Photo courtesy Geoffrey Dabb

Conservation Matters
Dr Chris Tidemann, the ANU zoologist who is running the ‘Minimising Mynas’ research project in conjunction with COG and Environment ACT, has now received funding and will be ready to commence the project in the next month or so. The Minimising Mynas project involves positioning Myna traps in a small number of backyards in northern Canberra, with monitoring of bird numbers and roosts before and after the trapping period. If any COG members wish to be involved with monitoring please contact Julie McGuiness at julie.mcguiness@bigpond.com or 6231 9882 (h) (those who put their names forward last year need not do so again – we will be contacting you soon).

COG has submitted input into the Draft Variation to the Territory Plan No 209 ‘Extension of Mount Mugga Mugga Nature Reserve’. The variation will allow 66 ha of woodland to be incorporated into the Reserve. This is the last official opportunity to convey our opinion that all of the O’Malley woodland should be protected for conservation reasons.

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A focus of COG’s conservation work remains North Gungahlin. The exact borders of the new Gooroo Nature Reserve are still to be determined. We are working with the Conservation Council to ensure that the new Nature Reserve has the most ecologically-sound borders, that buffer areas around the reserve are adequate and that known threatened species habitat is incorporated into the Reserve. COG members will have seen in the Canberra Times or heard on radio before Xmas the public release of the discussion paper ‘Options for the Protection of Sensitive Fauna in Mulligans Flat and Gooroo Nature Reserves from the Impacts of Domestic Cats’. We had hoped to influence the Government to provide adequate buffer areas between any new suburban development and the reserves, but this is unlikely to happen to our satisfaction. In view of these extraordinary circumstances, the Committee has recently written to Jon Stanhope expressing support for the Conservation Council’s position advocating that the soon to be developed suburbs of Forde and Bonner be designated a cat-free zone.

The draft ‘Management Plan for Mt Jerrabomberra’ near Queanbeyan is on public exhibition till early February. COG has put in a submission outlining the known bird species that have been found in the area and their habitat requirements, and requested that this information be taken into consideration in developing the final Plan.

COG has also made a short submission to the Federal Environment Minister regarding planned industrial development proposals for the Kooragang Island area in Newcastle. This is an internationally-important wader site, and we are supporting the work of the Hunter Bird Observers to have the
environmental attributes of the Hunter estuary adequately recognised and the proposed development moved from this site.

COG has been contacted by consultants working on cultural, community planning and community values for the new Kingston Foreshores development. They are seeking comments or anecdotes, from people who have used the Foreshore area for recreation, about the values to individuals that need to be preserved or augmented. COG will provide information about the avifaunal values of the Lake in the Kingston area, as well as Molonglo Reach and Jerrebomberra Wetlands Nature Reserve that abut the Foreshore. In addition, any COG member who has personal knowledge of the Foreshore area that they might like to impart to the consultants should contact Julie McGuinness. A focus group meeting has been convened for February 17th.

**Spotted Turtle-doves in the ACT.** Environment ACT and COG agreed about 18 months ago to monitor the occurrence of STDs, particularly breeding events, with a view to developing a management plan, if required, to halt their establishment in the ACT. We are about to evaluate the data from the last few years, and this is a reminder to those members who have any unreported records of STDs to please submit them now on a regular COG record sheet.

*Julie McGuinness, Jenny Bounds*
Conservation Officers

**NOTICES**

**THANK YOU - Early morning walks during Australian Ornithological Conference**
A big thanks to Mike Double, Golo Maurer, Michael Lenz, Harvey Perkins, Rick Kuhn, Tom Green, Janet Gardner, Malcolm Fyfe and Louise Muir for offering to help with these walks.

Unfortunately, except for the Saturday these were relatively poorly attended. However, any disappointment was more than made up for by the discovery of a Satin Bowerbird feeding young in a nest in the Botanic Gardens.

*Jack Holland*

**Found Jacket Found Jacket**
A very light dark navy blue jacket (size M) was left on the early boat trip up the Molonglo River on Sunday 14 December. If you have lost this please contact Jack Holland (6288 7840 AH or by E-mail on jack.holland@deh.gov.au) so that arrangements can be made to return it to you.

**Two Birds Australia Conferences in early 2004**

**BIRDS AUSTRALIA – SOUTHERN NSW & ACT BRANCH**

Scientific Day and Annual General Meeting

**Saturday 3 April 2004 1.30-5 pm**

“THREATENED NEW SOUTH WALES PARROTS & COCKATOOS”

Norman Nock Theatre, Royal North Shore Hospital, St Leonards, Sydney

Registration: Members $25, students/concessions $20, non members $30

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**BIRDS AUSTRALIA**

**Members Day and Annual General Meeting**

Saturday 29 May 2004
9 am to 5.30 pm

General purpose Building, Callaghan Campus, University of Newcastle, Jesmond

Conferences Themes: “Managing the lower Hunter Valley Wetlands for Waterbirds” and “Birds Australia: Achievements & Future Directions”

Conference Dinner University at 7 pm

Registration: Members $50, Students/Concessions $40, Non-members $60

Dinner $40

Estuary Boat Tours, Swansea Pelagic Trip & Bus Tours to Important Wetlands Planned

Jointly organised & sponsored by SNAG & the Hunter Bird Observers Club

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For further information contact Lise Hobcroft, Birds Australia (SNAG)

Phone: 02 9436 0388
Fax: 029436 0466
Email: roSELLA63@bigpond.com

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**Parrots and Cockatoos are among Australia’s iconic species and yet while some populations increase others are threatened with extinction. This seminar will look at some of the issues affecting the parrots and cockatoos of NSW.**

Discussion will include:

- population trends and their meaning
- case studies: Superb, Swift and Night Parrots
- management strategies and the role of the volunteer
- the integration of conservation with production in our landscapes.

**SPEAKERS:**

- Dr Walter Boles
  - Australian Museum
- Dr Jim Hone
  - University of Canberra
- Matt Cameron
  - NSW Dept of Environment and Conservation
- Debbie Saunders
  - NSW Dept of Environment and Conservation
- Adrian Manning
  - Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, ANU
- John Huxley
  - Associate Editor of the Sydney Morning Herald

**CONCLUDING SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION:**

Chair: Professor Henry Nix
- National President, Birds Australia.

WHERE: Norman Nock Lecture Theatre, Royal North Shore Hospital, Pacific Highway, St Leonards, 2065

WHEN: Saturday 3rd April, 2004 commencing at 1.30 p.m.
COST: Birds Australia Members: $25, Non-members $30, Students/concessions $20

CONTACT: Birds Australia Sydney Office:
email: rosella63@bigpond.com
Ph: 02 9436 0388, Fax: 02 9436 0466
PO Box 1322, Crows Nest, 1585

Registrations and payment must be received by the 29th March, 2004.

Receipts will be issued at the seminar.

Sketch of Superb Parrot reproduced with thanks to the Birds Australia New Atlas of Australian Birds

Proudly sponsored by the Wildlife Preservation Society.

AvIan Whimsy # 17

Snipe’s Latham

I was ruminating recently, as I am wont to do, in a hide at Kelly’s Swamp. (And it’s OK, I’d stop doing it if you entered the hide!) Of course I always wonder at the extraordinary concept of this 200 gram bird flying and navigating some 10,000km every year, changing habitat entirely from the sub-Arctic meadows and fir forests of its breeding grounds to the swamps of eastern Australia. But that’s a story whose wonder I’m sure we all share and I know you’re familiar with it. I was thinking more about the connection of this remarkable bird with the energetic English ornithologist, John Latham, whose name the bird unwittingly and unwillingly bears.

He was a successful doctor whose passion was natural history and especially birds. He died in 1837 at the age of 96. He is sometimes described as the greatest ornithologist of his time, but he was probably not that. He was however assiduous and dedicated, and lived at just the right time to make the first significant contribution to Australian ornithology. He was at the height of his career when Cook was making his voyages of discovery and when the first specimens and illustrations were being sent back from the fledgling colony. Banks lent him drawings from all the Cook expeditions, which he then copied! He also had access to works by early colonial artists including Thomas Watling, via the collection of botanist Aylmer Lambert.

He was elected a fellow of the Royal Society in 1775, even before his major publications, and in 1788 was a moving force behind the formation of the influential Linnaean Society. The latter was a bit ironic, because it was his reluctance to embrace the Linnaean system of binomial nomenclature that represented the major weakness in his earlier works. In his great General Synopsis of Birds (1781-85), which he also illustrated, he opted for the old non-system of arbitrary common names; he basically disapproved of Latin and couldn’t see the point of the new consistency. As a result the honour of describing those species fell to later workers, using his work but assigning scientific names. In his later works, Index Ornithologicus (1791, plus later supplement) and A General History of Birds (1821-28), he did fall into line with modern requirements and described a number of well-known Australian species, including the Emu, Cape Barren and Magpie Geese, Black Swan, White-necked Heron, Wedgie, Common Bronzewing, Suphur-crested Cocky, Tawny Frogmouth, Superb Lyrebird, Noisy Friarbird, Noisy Miner, Eastern Spinebill, Willie Wagtail, Magpie-Lark, Magpie – and some 45 others!

In turn he was honoured with a single-species genus (Lathamus, the Swift Parrot) and two impressive species – the Australian Brush Turkey Alectura lathami, and the Glossy Black-Cockatoo Calyptorhynchus lathami.

However, Latham’s Snipe was not one of them; as far as I can determine it was never lathami. It is Gallinago hardwickii – basically, Hardwick’s chook… Hardwick, I am told, was the Tasmanian collector who provided the first specimen, but I can find nothing else about him. In searching for him I came across the tracks of Bob Forsyth of Mt Isa who had also apparently failed in the attempt last year, so I’ve put that quest aside. I have no idea how or why Latham scored the common name; why not Hardwick’s Snipe? Not that the snipe care – they’ve got plenty of problems of their own. Did you know that a sniper was originally a courageous fellow who shot snipe on the wing, for entertainment?

So, you’ve read all the way to here in the hope of finding enlightenment – and there is none. Life’s like that; better get back out to Kelly’s and just enjoy the birds…

[Reminder – any suggestions for a Whimsy topic are welcomed.]

Ian Fraser ianf@pcug.org.au

Latham’s Snipe
(Gallinago hardwickii)

Photo courtesy Ian Fraser
Welcome
New Members

Rebecca Clark, Garran
David and Judith Harvey, Hawker
Sandy Gilmore, O'Connor
Penny Hebbard, Hughes
Fiona MacDonald-Brand, Lyneham
Simon Buckpitt, Queanbeyan
Janene Luff, Avalon Beach

Mistletoebird (Male)
(*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*)

Photo courtesy Geoffrey Dabb

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Next newsletter
MARCH deadline
Wednesday 25 February 2004

Send updates to
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Editor Gang-gang
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Tanya.Rough@ea.gov.au
Ph: 6161 0151 (ah)

Articles should be less than 500 words (300 for reports of 1-day field trips; 150 for Atlassing Snapshots), except by prior arrangement with the editor. Print photographs with articles encouraged.

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Stephen: you are gang gang for that omniscient flowboy cheddar, you fine fiend nigger. That mad shit bout to get dat rekt boi fire fuse lit and poppin', foo! Crack on dat, my Cat-in-da-hat Commizerat!! #based #flow #grip #low. gang2 TYLOO vs AUGUST67 lebron10 USA come here13 18+ Rate my new gf41 182 cm 61 kg117 Envy vs Singularity149 Project Major vs AVANGAR16 Are you a boy or a girl? 141 G2, North qualify for ESL Pro League Season 10 Finals55 envy6 Illuminar vs Sprout149 How are the mens90.