

OBJECT: To foster an interest in nature

July 2016
ISSN: 1836-2761



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CANBERRA ACT 2601

FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.

FIELD NATURALIST

MEETING—THURSDAY
7:30 pm Australian National University
Gould Seminar Room, Building 116, Daley Road, ANU, ACT
details back page

Mr Charles Weston's tree plantings in Nature Reserves around Canberra

Speaker: Graham Hirth

This talk is part of a project that has been going for about 10 years, mapping tree plantations in Nature Reserves around Canberra. It will include a briefing about the field trip, on the following Saturday going to Mt Majura Nature Reserve



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Currawongs' lessons

I know we shouldn't but our magpies are fed occasionally... if they serenade first. We have porridge oats on hand as our meat consumption is low.

It's fascinating watching the family, group and partnership dynamics. There's a dominant male, his current partner and juveniles of various ages and experience.

Presumably because they nest in the back neighbour's eucalypts, there's also a party of observant Currawongs that hangs around.

On 28th May I scattered some oats on the grass from the back door as a couple of young magpies had carolled from a popular perch on a misshapen Protea near the birdbath.

The magpies ate for a while and then went to forage from amongst the damp grass a few metres away. The currawongs seized their chance and came in to clear up. I covered most of the oats with the doormat. The currawongs poked their bills under the mat for a while.

I wondered whether they would develop team-work and try moving the mat. Not yet. But after feeding and then being frustrated for about 10 minutes one

did lift the mat it in its beak and grab a few grains from deeper under the mat.

If I could bear to really feed these, usually unloved, birds perhaps they would learn to move the mat effectively.

I've noticed that when the magpies bring their new brood to the backyard the youngsters have obviously been taught that it's their job to protect the oats and their patch from currawongs. They delight in showing their superiority. Three months later the young magpies are less insistent on their clans' territorial rights. Some of the currawongs are allowed to share the oats.

In *Bird Minds: Cognition and Behaviour of Australian Native Birds* CSIRO, 2015 Gisela Kaplan details fascinating research on birds' ability to learn. Some of the research is drawn from her own studies of birds at her home. I wonder if she'll explain her liking of Currawongs in a subsequent book. In 2004 Gisela wrote *Australian Magpie: Biology and Behaviour of an Unusual Songbird*. CSIRO & UNSW Press.

There's always something to learn about the birds that visit our gardens including, for me, pinpointing which magpie creates which musical phrases and which one carols which particular signature tune.

Rosemary Blemings

Bird feeding and watering survey

While Rosemary ponders the ethics of feeding birds, it seems that it is becoming accepted that this will happen and future research is looking at how this could be done in a more responsible way.

A team at Deakin University and Griffith University are conducting a study to investigate bird feeding in Australia. The study is called The Australian Bird Feeding and Watering Study (www.feedingbirds.org.au). The researchers say that over 57% of people in Australia are engaged in some kind of bird feeding but we know very little about the frequency, or even the types of species, involved in this activity. We also have a lack of information as to whether water is provided and whether feeders and birdbaths attract different kinds of birds. What we do know is that bird feeding is a very important human-wildlife activity that is unlikely to stop so we need to design guidelines for responsible bird feeding.

Our team is gathering support from organisations to help spread the word of the study through newsletters, e-news, twitter, Facebook posts and so on. People can register their interest in taking part in the study by visiting www.feedingbirds.org.au

COG have also recently released the following:

Although feeding native birds is not ideal there are some positives overall:

- as long as suitable 'food' is offered
- as long as minimal numbers of native birds are impacted and
- this is secondary to the provision of water
- it could be another way of introducing more people to nature and
- to their making a contribution to citizen science

I have personally registered my interest to participate in the study. I encourage you to visit the web site for more information and to also register your interest if you are so inclined.

The supporting document (not included here due to length, did state that you did not have to be pro-bird feeding.

Alison Milton

Native or not, it's time to cull noisy miners

The following extract from a recent radio interview calls for a culling of the noisy miner, despite the fact that it is protected as a native species.

Tuesday 17 May 2016 3:54 PM Sue Taylor

The noisy miner is an incredibly destructive species—but they're natives, protected by legislation. That doesn't matter, Sue Taylor argues. They should be culled.

One morning last year on my daily walk, I encountered two young mothers in the local park, each pushing a stroller. It was August and the noisy miners were nesting.

'Watch out!' said one young mum to the other. 'They usually attack me around here.'

There are simply too many miners. Something should be done.

She seemed quite nervous. 'They think you're invading their territory,' I said. 'Look. The nest is just there.'

I pointed to a nest above us in a gum tree.

'Just give the tree a wide berth,' I suggested helpfully.

The two young women looked at me doubtfully and hurried away. The miners bombed them and me indiscriminately.

This is the problem: these birds are becoming more and more aggressive, turning what should be an enjoyable walk in the park into a very uncomfortable battleground. There are simply too many miners. Something should be done.

What are noisy miners?

Australia has four species of miners, belonging to the genus *Manorina*, all of which are technically miners. There is quite a lot of variance between them: from the bell miners that live along creeks and have a pretty tinkling, to the rare black-eared miner, and the yellow-throated miner with it interbreeds.

The bad guy of our story is the fourth member of the family: the noisy miner, *Manorina melanocephala*, now found regularly in urban Sydney and Melbourne.

Often confused for the introduced Indian mynah bird, the noisy miner is increasing its range and its density.

Here's the problem: noisy miners are unpleasantly aggressive to all other creatures: other miners, other birds, other animals and people.

How dangerous is the noisy miner?

Noisy miners mob birds of all sizes, not just potential predators. They mob waterbirds—fish

eaters that are not competing for the miners' food; seed-eating crested pigeons. Small birds that do not take the hint quickly and leave the area are killed.

Such constant violent behaviour between species is very rare in birds. Not far from where I live, in a nearby suburb, there is a beautiful native garden. It is an oasis of flowering plants within suburbia, a retreat from the hurly burly of city life.

In the past I used to see superb fairy-wrens, New Holland honeyeaters, eastern spinebills and silvereyes. Not any more. Noisy miners have taken over. There are no small birds at all.

The ecological impact of the noisy miner

Small insectivorous birds play an important role in the environment, consuming insects that otherwise defoliate trees. When noisy miners cause the eradication of these small birds, trees suffer more leaf damage. In this way, noisy miners assist dieback.

Small insectivorous birds are already endangered because of habitat loss.

Climate change isn't helping. The last thing they need is to be evicted from suitable habitat by a despotic bully.

Overabundant native species can be just as damaging as their exotic counterparts when it comes to upsetting the natural balance.

So what can be done?

The facts are these: noisy miners have proliferated. They dominate the environment. Their aggression leads to the eradication of small birds.

They can change species composition, spread infectious diseases, reduce natural diversity and cause local extinctions.

Experiments have demonstrated that when noisy miners are removed from an area, the number of species of birds can increase tenfold, and the number of individual birds can increase 40 times.

Noisy miners are an irritant in city parks. However, a far bigger problem is what noisy miners are doing in bushland.

In southern Queensland, noisy miners are abundant in areas of hundreds of thousands of hectares which should be providing habitat for small birds.

In Wimmera, restoration of degraded buloke woodlands by planting fast-growing eucalypts has encouraged noisy miners and not provided the desired protection for small birds.

Up to 90 per cent of Victoria's box-ironbark woodland has been cleared, providing the habitat that noisy miners enjoy.

In summary, noisy miners are increasing in abundance and extending their range. They are extremely aggressive to all other creatures.

They eradicate small insectivorous birds. This results in a monoculture and is detrimental to the environment.

Noisy miners should be removed, and dense, complex understoreys should be planted to encourage the re-establishment of small insectivorous birds.

Bird watching

Since we are talking about feeding birds, as I have admitted in the past I do indulge in feeding birds, partially because I like to entice the birds into my yards, and more recently, for the purpose of photo graphing them. To this pursuit I have a bird feeder that I fill with wild bird seed, and a nearby bird bath. The bird bath is kept full but I don't fill the bird feeder every day.

Over recent years I've noticed a distinct change in the visiting bird life. There are far fewer parrots: King parrots; crimson rosellas and particularly Eastern rosellas. Is this because I no longer hang seed blocks on my clothes line but instead have moved the bird feeder to the front driveway (due to my current dogs who are less tolerant of aerial 'invaders'), which is less visible from the air? I have however, noticed a greater influx of crested pigeons.

Nevertheless, over the last few months I have become more aware of the vast diversity of smaller birds visiting my yard. This may be due to my increased interest in photography and in particular bird photography, but it is still interesting.

The list of recent visitors is amazing, at least for me. More recently, rosellas have been seen flying overhead and their numbers seem to be increasing, with a flock of about 10 seen this last weekend. Also this weekend, was the first time that I had a visit

from corellas (two) though they are very common in the Woden area.

Over the previous weekend I also saw a flock of yellow-tailed black cockatoos near Straithnain: the first time since just after the 2003 bushfires.

The following is the list of birds I have seen in my yard in recent years, including the common visitors.

Silver eyes; striated pardalote; yellow-faced honey eater; eastern yellow robin; superb fairy wren; brown thornbill; crested pigeon; sulphur-crested cockatoo; galah; corella; eastern spinebill; magpie; crimson rosella; eastern rosella; grey fantail; black honeyeater; sparrows; Indian miners; currawongs; red wattlebirds; blackbird; peewee (magpie lark); black faced cuckoo shrike; sacred kingfisher; sparrow hawk; flame robin; Rufus fantail.

Perhaps I've missed some and there have no doubt been some that I haven't identified, but I sometimes wonder at the sheer diversity of birds that visit my yard.

I've registered many of these on the Canberra Nature Map and hope to continue adding to the list.

Alison Milton

Philip Bell rest in peace, 19.07.1938 - 26.05.2016

In 1981 Philip Bell helped establish the Field Naturalist Association of Canberra, having seen the enormous benefit his children gained from involvement in the Victorian Junior Field Naturalists Association.

After a short battle with cancer Philip passed away on 26 May 2016. He was laid to rest in Gungahlin cemetery on a clear Canberra day with wintry sun breaking through cloud. The ceremony, simple and

dignified, was attended by his extended family. His coffin, covered in a damask linen cloth with a candle lantern and ribbon-tied bunch of eucalypt leaves on top, was carried along a winding gravel path to a grove of eucalypts - *E. mannifera* and *E. meliodora*. It was a setting that could not have fitted better with Philip's life's work in caring for nature.

More information on Philip's life can be found on the blog site: <http://philipbulletin.blogspot.com.au/>

Activities

Mt Majura tree plantings field survey: Saturday 9 July, 12:30 pm to ~4:30 pm

Meet at the park pedestrian entry gate, in the unnamed carpark lane between Tay St & Ian McNicol Street, Watson. We will travel in a convoy of private cars to the summit of Mt Majura on the private road (I have a key and permission). We will check the mapped areas for evidence of tree plantings on the old Mount Ginn motor bike circuit and evidence around the Mt Majura summit 1918–20 Kurrajong plantings by C. Weston. The walking on Mt Majura summit is steep and off track.

Friends of Mount Majura: guided walk Sunday 24 July, 2:00–4:00 pm

Meet at Mount Majura Nature Reserve entrance, Mackenzie Street car park, near Grayson Street, Hackett. Enjoy a medium grade informative walk on the Mount Majura Casuarina Trail and up to the snow gums with local ecologist Michael Doherty. Learn how to identify local woodland and forest trees, see where they occur and hear how they survive fire and drought. Wear sturdy lace-up shoes and bring water. Cost: Gold coin donation for a tree guide. No bookings required. Enquiries: <http://majura.org> or 0408 429 214

The National Rock Garden: Saturday 30 July 2016 at 9:30 am – Joint outing with NPA

We will follow the tour of the rock garden with a walk around the lake shore to a limestone outcrop near the Museum of Australia on the Limestone plains and then adjourn to a nearby cafe for late morning tea and return to the rock garden to collect cars. Alternatively we could do a car shuffle or people could just meet us at the other end to share coffee and treats.

Black Mountain Spring Wildflower Ramble: Saturday 8 October 2016

Field Nats has been involved with sponsoring this traditional Burbidge/Chippendale spring ramble since soon after 2005. Hopefully some Field Nats will be able to help as guides or helpers, as in previous years. **Organiser: Linda Beveridge.**

June field outing report

At 5:00 in the afternoon of 13 June we met Jenni at the appointed meeting place. The weather was clear and mild when we set off on the 1.6 km walk to the nesting site of a group of Sugar Gliders

As we arrived at the tree we saw one glide away, then two more appeared, one gliding right over our heads for a good view.

We waited but no more appeared. Jenni knew there were more than three gliders using the hollow on this tree so we set off to look for them feeding. Jenny took us to the right place as we spotted a few feeding in the Acacias and Allocasuarinas.

Then while watching one glider feeding another one landed in the same tree. The second arrival was not welcome and was chased to within a metre of the ground before it escaped to another tree. The victor then ran back up the acacia to where it had bitten the bark of a branch and continued licking the sap.

All this happened right in front of the whole group. Very exciting!

All together gliders were sighted 10 times.

We decided to return to our meeting point. Jenni kept spot lighting to see what else may be about that night and on the return walk, which was a different route. We saw 2 Ringtail Possums, 2 Brush tail Possums and possibly a third, which hid in a dense mistletoe with only its eyes revealing its presence.

We also saw a Boobook Owl. It kept calling while in the spotlight and a Tawny Frogmouth pretending to be a broken branch.

The six who attended all had a good evening. Thank you Jenni for guiding us and sharing your knowledge.

P.S. A great night, all good luck on a Friday the 13th.

Bill

Month	Speaker	Topic
2 July	Graham Hirth	Mr Charles Weston's tree plantings in nature reserves around Canberra
6 August		AGM
3 September	TBA	
1 October	TBA	
5 November	Roger Farrow	Insects - his new book



Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra Inc.

Who are the Field Naturalists?

The Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra (FNAC) was formed in 1981. Our aim is to foster interest in natural history by means of meetings and regular field outings. Meetings are usually held on the first Thursday of each month. Outings range from weekend rambles to long weekends away. Activities are advertised in our monthly newsletter. We emphasise informality and the enjoyment of nature. New members are always welcome. If you wish to join FNAC, please fill in the member application below and send it in with your subscription to the FNAC Treasurer at the address below.

President: Rosemary von Behrens **Phone:** 6254 1763

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All newsletter contributions welcome.

Email: alison.milton@health.gov.au

Editor



Monthly meeting venue: Division of Botany and Zoology, Building 116, Daley Rd, Australian National University. (The Xmas meeting is at the adjacent building 44 and will start at the earlier time of 6:30 pm.)

Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra
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Canberra ACT 2601



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION OR RENEWAL

Family name: First name:

If a family membership, please include the first names of other members of the family:

.....

Postal address:

Suburb: State: Postcode: Home phone:

Work phone: Email address:

Subscription enclosed: \$.....(Single/Family \$25) Donation: \$.....

How did you hear about FNAC? Please circle: FRIEND? OTHER? Please specify: