



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES

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Submission Cover Sheet

Nature in Our City

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The Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services
Legislative Assembly for the ACT
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Dear Committee Secretary

Nature in our City – Legislative Assembly ACT Committee Inquiry

The Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG) wishes to provide information to the Inquiry which is looking into the value of the natural environment and urbanising Canberra.

COG is a volunteer-based community group with around 350 members whose mission includes the conservation of native birds and their habitats. COG plays an active role in advocating for the protection of native vegetation/bird habitats and for the mitigation of threats to and impacts on native birds. COG has a special interest in woodlands and the conservation of threatened woodland birds, a group which is in decline in our region.

COG recommends that the ACT should adopt more sustainable, whole-of-landscape planning and environmental conservation policies. There is a need for a whole-of-landscape plan into the future, say for the next 30 years, which will deliver more sustainable outcomes for biodiversity than is being achieved under current systems (eg largely conserving habitats under site by site and offsets arrangements), and at the same time cater for a growing city. This needs to be underpinned by comprehensive, scientific evidence which includes patterns of landscape use by species of birds and other animals. The retention of remaining habitats/trees and functional connectivity (movement) corridors is critical.

There are two particular issues of concern to COG in relation to impacts on birds:

1. Loss of large numbers of scattered, mature eucalypt trees across the landscape for urban expansion and infrastructure developments. The cumulative loss of these trees which are a significant element of the grassy woodlands, and concurrent impacts on biodiversity, including birds, is not being taken into proper account. Connectivity between remaining woodland patches is being compromised and without more consideration of these impacts, we are likely to see further declines in not only our threatened birds, but also common species of birds (mostly small insectivores) which are also showing signs of declines in abundance. Species such as the ACT threatened Brown Treecreeper have disappeared from the peri-urban and are further impacted by loss of scattered trees in the landscape.

There are many examples of ongoing tree loss, a couple to mention are: more than 100 mature eucalypts destroyed in recent years for the Williamsdale Solar Farm when alternative sites on already cleared and degraded land could have been considered/available; loss of potential nesting trees in Throsby for threatened Superb Parrots; tree clearing associated with the Molonglo Valley development.

There is contemporary research which COG wishes to draw the Committee's attention to, which provides sound, whole-of-landscape scientific evidence on which to base planning, management and conservation priorities. Of particular note is research from the Fenner School, Australian National University; one study has made recommendations concerning conservation planning, including preserving large, scattered trees throughout the remainder of the landscape [Karin Ikin (2012), Conservation Planning and management of habitat for a diverse bird community and future urban areas, PhD thesis, Fenner School ANU]. Also work by researchers such as P Gibbons, D Lindenmayer and D Le Roux concerning the value of mature trees and hollows.

The Committee might note that a nomination has been made to the ACT's Scientific Committee (by several environmental community groups including COG), for the loss of scattered, mature (hollow-bearing) eucalypts to be declared a threatening process in the ACT.

2. Inadequate urban edge buffers and poor interface management, particularly in cases involving sensitive, threatened ecological communities such as grassy woodlands, and riparian areas. Buffer areas and how they are managed need to be based on sound evidence, such as urban edge effects on particular species, not simply be arbitrary lines on maps or only based on minimal, required fire management protection zones.

The Molonglo Valley urban development, which includes the Molonglo River riparian area, is regarded by some experts as having inadequate buffers from the river which compromises the habitat and connectivity values of the river corridor. Of particular concern to COG is the yet undetermined urban edge buffer for the Kama Nature Reserve in Molonglo, a narrow reserve with little core resilience which will be significantly impacted by urban edge effects (invasion of urban tolerant species which compete with more sensitive birds, significantly increased use and disturbance by people, habitat degradation, impacts on sensitive (threatened) birds which do not tolerate close human presence).

The urban edge buffer in Throsby of only 100 metres from an important Superb Parrot nesting site is of concern for the long term-survival of this breeding colony, one of only two known breeding colonies in the ACT. COG recommended, based on surveys of Superb Parrots and other urban tolerant species which compete for nesting hollows, that this buffer needed to be much wider to minimise the urban edge effects and potential disturbance.

Finally, COG would like to see measures as part of a holistic approach to maximise biodiversity outcomes, for example, cat containment extended more broadly across Canberra in a phased manner, more resources allocated to domestic animals monitoring and enforcement in reserve areas and suburbs abutting reserves (eg dogs), more resources allocated to invasive weeds management. These measures, along with whole-of-landscape planning, are likely to provide more enduring benefits for biodiversity across the city.

COG would be happy to provide more detailed information on the impacts on birds due to Canberra's urban expansion and other factors. (email: cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au)

Yours sincerely



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