

Canberra Indian Myna Action Group Inc

Patron: Prof Tony Peacock

*National 2013 “Keep Australia Beautiful” Award Winner
for
Environmental Innovation & Protection*



President's 2018-19 Report

The following is the 2018-19 President's Report for the Canberra Indian Myna Action Group Inc (CIMAG).

2018-19 was a year where myna control activities in the Canberra region again kept a steady pace, albeit with some challenges. It is probably reasonable to say that the overall myna control program effort across eastern Australia is facing challenges – and is not winning.

Before going into that, I would like to first recognize the work of the CIMAG Committee: Ray Barge, Ross Dalton, Dan Buchler, Andy Fuller, Bruce Lindenmayer, Greg Flowers, and Martin Hanson for their work on behalf of the group over the past year. I also wish to record our appreciation for the support of our Patron, Prof Tony Peacock. I must also acknowledge Graham Gliddon for the many hours of work he continues to do each month in collating the capture data, and David Cook for maintaining the CIMAG website. Graham's effort especially needs to be acknowledged: the data that Graham collates is most valuable – including for researchers.

It is particularly fitting that I specially acknowledge Andy Fuller, a former long term Treasurer, for his work over many years. Andy will not stand for re-election to the Committee and will be greatly missed. I also wish to make special mention of the support of Ross Dalton who is giving up the position of CIMAG Secretary after many pleasurable years!

Also a very big “thankyou” to all those members who so generously responded to our call last year for funds to lift us out of a precarious financial position (because of difficulty in obtaining a regular supply of traps we were not able to provide traps to as many people as usual with the result that our source of income, ie donations from new trap owners, was much reduced). All that is now a thing of the past, as members were overwhelmingly generous: nearly \$14,000 was received as a result of that appeal, so we are able to continue this work.

This past year has seen the continuation of the effort by committed CIMAG members. That effort has seen, at a minimum, some 3650 mynas and 460 starlings removed from the local environment. It is the efforts of our concerned members in spreading the message about the threats posed by mynas and in trapping that has been the basis for the Group's collective success. So a big “thankyou” to you all. While this trapping effort over the past year is appreciated, it is nonetheless much below the figures for captured mynas and starlings reported in previous years.

The continuing activity by CIMAG trappers has resulted in mynas now being the 17th most common bird in the Canberra region – remember that when we all started this activity way back in 2006, mynas were the 3rd most common according to the Canberra Ornithologists Group surveys. But the danger signs of slippage are evident: some years ago we had them down to the 20th most common bird.

Our activities are set against the backdrop of increasing reports of large infestations of mynas in parts of the ACT and surrounding region. Gungahlin, in particular, is a hotspot: this is serious as it borders the ACT's iconic Mulligans Flat, Gorooyaroo and Kinleyside Nature Reserves which are havens for wildlife, including breeding pairs of the uncommon Superb Parrot. Shopping Centres, the industrial estates and schools continue to be places with lots of mynas – as do the horse paddocks. If members have friends living adjacent to schools, shopping centres and along

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the fence line of Canberra's nature reserves, please have a word to them about the important contribution they can make to the protection of our wildlife - and their own peace and quiet - by participating in the trapping program. Also, if you know of people who have businesses in the industrial estates where a trap could be placed out of public view (or interference) it would be most valuable if they can be encouraged to host a trap.

More than 2200 traps have been provided to Canberrans / Queanbeyanites over the past 13 years, but only a fraction of this number are in use throughout the year. Getting people with traps to become active again is a challenge - one we need to work on collectively.

The temporary difficulty in getting a regular supply of well-made traps is largely behind us. The Community Services division of the ACT Government is cranking up their trap building efforts with the people undertaking Community Service Orders now providing us with a more regular supply. This is most appreciated as some neighbouring programs are not so fortunate and have had to resort to commercial suppliers at high cost.

Moreover, to increase our supply of traps we are "re-homeing" good quality traps no longer being utilized - but we only want traps that are in good condition: it takes us way too long to repair damaged and filthy traps. We would rather people use their traps than give them back - but if people are leaving the area, have removed all mynas in their vicinity or are unable physically to continue with trapping, then recycling good clean traps is appreciated.

The program continues to receive widespread public support in the region and support from the ACT Government. Access Canberra / Canberra Connect and the RSPCA continue to refer people to us to get information and traps. The number of new trappers for the past year has climbed back up to around 100, after a drop in the previous year because of the unavailability of traps. But again, this is still way below the number of recruits of a couple of years ago.

Part of the reason for low recruitment and distribution of traps is that so many Committee members are spending time away from Canberra - particularly over winter. Somehow, walking in Europe or up at the Sunshine Coast seems to be more attractive than the wintry blasts of the ACT region. It would be excellent if this gap in volunteer support could be filled by the general membership. So if you can help in distributing traps and in explaining to new recruits the techniques for trapping and the requirements on animal welfare, we would be delighted to hear from you.

A major success in the last year has been the development of the CIMAG FaceBook Group. Dan and Heather Buchler are to be congratulated for their work in getting this initiative up and running and to the stage where we can regard it as being a great success. The FaceBook Group comprises contributors from overseas and along the east coast of Australia. It allows people to interact and share knowledge about approaches to myna control: it is an excellent resource - the posts to the site demonstrate that there is no end to the ingenuity of people in trapping mynas.

During the course of the last year, ACT Government released a draft of their Declaration on Pest Animals, which now includes Indian Mynas. We still await the formal Declaration, which we see as the trigger for the Committee to advocate for actions within a specific Myna Management Action Plan that would require authorities, business and the community to tackle the myna problem.

Our much vaunted Nest Removal Program in nature reserves has effectively come to an end. While the ACT Government were both financially and administratively supportive, the logistics of this project involving monitoring the interface between the suburbs and the reserves proved particularly challenging. Specifically the lack of CIMAG / COG volunteers participating in monitoring nestboxes and tree hollows and the difficulty and expense of removing nests from trees has meant the program has come to nought. We are most concerned at what this will mean

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for the breeding Superb Parrots and other wildlife in the reserves: mynas are now being observed in the Superb Parrot breeding zone.

While our activities are having some impact on myna numbers in the Canberra – Queanbeyan region, mynas are expanding in areas elsewhere across eastern Australia. This is quite disheartening. Mynas were a regular sight along roads and in small towns during recent travel through rural mid-west NSW and south east Queensland: in places not seen before. I fear this means that with few people in these areas, the battle to control them in these areas is lost. Accordingly, they are a major threat to native birds throughout western NSW and Queensland.

A number of activities of the past year are worth specifically mentioning.

We continued the **public education and awareness raising** effort during 2018-19. CIMAG does this in a number of ways:

- through media coverage – radio interviews and press articles
- presentations to community groups, and at “community festivals”
- through distribution of brochures and pamphlets
- through the CIMAG website (www.indianmynaaction.org.au)
- through our Facebook Group
- through the Myna Matters Bulletin.

Providing support for myna control activities elsewhere. Our success has been an inspiration to other groups and individuals across NSW and now to a greater extent in Victoria and Queensland. We continue to get requests for advice from people / local councils in these states, and now increasingly from overseas agencies and individuals.

The **trapping effort** continues across the Canberra district. Aspects worth mentioning are:

- our monthly reported captures have reached 72,200 Mynas and 9,560 Starlings since we started: what a great success story.
- as at end June 2019, Graham Gliddon had records of 3652 mynas and 457 starlings removed (compared to 4081 mynas and 492 starlings removed in 2017-18)
- the Canberra Ornithologists Group Garden Bird Survey indicates that mynas are still down to the 17th most common bird in Canberra (from the 3rd when we started in 2006).
- people doing community service work under judicial orders have been making traps. So thanks go to the people at Corrective Services for doing this for us.

The **membership of CIMAG continues to grow**: but at a slower rate than previously, indicating that we need to re-invigorate our efforts to “spread the word.”

The increase in numbers of mynas is a reminder that we must not get complacent. While trapping will never eradicate mynas, a sustained culling effort will keep their numbers in check and provide space for native birds, small reptiles (eg skinks) and insects. Also, while new recruits are needed, we also need the existing members to continue their efforts. If we don't, we can anticipate a rapid rise in myna numbers and greater impact on our wildlife and urban amenity.

In conclusion I would like to thank all our members for their support. We look forward to your further efforts in tackling this significant pest.

Bill Handke
President
25 Nov 2019