

# Canberra Indian Myna Action Group Inc

Patron: Professor Tony Peacock

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



**Myna Matters Bulletin # 38 (Summer 2021)**

**Happy New Year to all. Let's hope 2021 is a much better year – for us and the environment.**

Dear CIMAG Members and Friends: the following provides an update on CIMAG activities.

## **AGM – a very different night**

Usually we have a good-ish crowd of dedicated CIMAG members join us at the Southern Cross Club, Jamison for our AGM and Public Information Night. But with COVID still interrupting such activities, for the 2020 AGM late last year we held it “virtually”. Thanks Ray for organizing the zoom AGM. As it turned out, we couldn't attract too many people to log on – in fact none other than the committee.

So it was a very short AGM – just the essentials done and then a chat. The Committee stays the same: we are still short of someone to be the Secretary and could always do with another Committee member or two. So if you would like to join us and give us the benefit of your skills, we would very much appreciate it.

The 2020 year was quite disrupted for various reasons. So much of our usual anti-myna activities fell by the wayside – including as you well know, the regularity of the Myna Matters Bulletin. For that we apologise. Hopefully 2021 will see the energy and enthusiasm return.

## **It is all in the numbers: but what are they saying?**

The Canberra Ornithologists Group's weekly Garden Bird Survey (COG GBS) has been our source of measurement as to the relative position of mynas in the hierarchy of local bird abundance. You will recall that when we started, mynas were the 3<sup>rd</sup> most common bird around Canberra. The COG GBS results for 2019-2020 were released early in 2020. It reports that mynas have now dropped down to the 24<sup>th</sup> most common bird. Great stuff. However, before we revel in the collective clap on the back, the survey data is also telling us that in absolute numbers observed, there has been a slight rebound from the lowest point that we had them. So encouragement for a good job done, but also encouragement to do more of the same.

While the survey is based on COG member reports and does not cover all suburbs evenly (eg, newer suburbs are not well represented) – it still provides an invaluable time series of the changing face of Canberra's birds.

This has been a very good breeding season and there are plenty of mynas – and especially juveniles - about. So now is a good time to get the traps hosed down, scrubbed up and out in the yard with some nice alluring bait to catch them before they become too smart.

## **CIMAG Facebook Group Booming**

Dan and Heather Buchler mention that the CIMAG Facebook Group numbers are growing strongly: it is an excellent way for people to hear of the experiences of myna trappers all over the place, to get suggestions relating to myna control and native bird protection/support, and even to help new trappers with their advice. Facebook users are reporting seeing lots of mynas around. To join the group follow the link <https://m.facebook.com/groups/1965719250400803/> : alternatively just google CIMAG Facebook Group. If you are (rightly) wary of Facebook, privacy settings can be used to restrict public access to your personal information.

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## Inspired by Banjo

I had a few quiet moments over Xmas: the result is below:

### *The Battle of the Indian Myna*

I had a vision splendid  
Of a place that was transcended  
Where no mynas walked or flew across the land.  
But that dream – it will be rendered  
Kaput and not extended  
Unless more Aussies help to take a stand.

The myna is rapacious  
Its behaviour is outrageous  
Our birds and skinks and bugs may all be lost.  
The noise at roosts is deafening  
Their droppings - they are threatening  
If left alone there will be such a cost.

Here, we've done a job of wonder  
74,000 have gone under  
But in other spots they are still a major pest.  
Their range has now expanded  
Control is now demanded  
To save our wondrous woodland birds out West.

In the year of 2020  
I had thought there would be plenty  
Of anti-myna trapping going on  
With people shut in lockdown  
At home and not in downtown  
It was a perfect time to see them gone.

I had often envied Clancy  
To travel West just took my fancy  
- the Overflow and native birds galore.  
But word has now just reached me  
Of a horror that upsets me -  
Flocks of mynas have gotten there before.



Banjo Paterson  
1864 - 1941

I had hoped the covid virus  
Would mutate and help to save us  
From the ravages of this birdy pain  
But come the Xmas cheer  
The mynas were still here  
So this year t'will be the bloody same.

By now you would have thought  
All governments had ought  
To have declared this a "pest non grata"  
The grounds are overwhelming  
The case world-wide outstanding  
MPs just need to be a little smarter.

So we will struggle on together  
Coz it's a task that takes forever  
To ensure our native fauna will exist  
Community-action is our way  
To keep such pest animals at bay  
A big job but we really must persist.

*Bill Handke, Dec 2020*

## Unwanted Emails - !@#\$\$%^&&\*

Our internet host, the Canberra Ornithologists Group, last year changed their internet provider – and unfortunately ever since there has been some unwanted email traffic coming to CIMAG members. Most annoyingly, the emails purport to come from the CIMAG email address. But you will know straight off that they are bogus as the subject matter tends to be in Chinese characters. Our sincere apologies for this nuisance. COG have been working to get this resolved, but as of last week it is still happening.



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## The race to 100 is on !

It is always good for the soul to hear of an inspiring story about our CIMAG members.

Over the years we have had quite elderly members – in their late 80s and 90s - take up the cause of reducing mynas from their neighbourhood. They have been remarkable people and have achieved great success.



19 yr old pilot

The story of Ted Fleming is a stand-out. A WWII Bomber Command Lancaster pilot with an all-Australian crew attached to 550 Squadron RAF, an avid bush walker, environmentalist, surgeon and author, Ted has been trapping mynas for a lot of years: in fact since the year we started way back in 2006. He successfully removed mynas from his area in O'Malley and then Deakin – and had a reprieve from their raucous calls and strutting behaviour for quite some time. His tally stood at 69. But these past months they made a return – and Ted at 96 years of age sprang (?) back into action.

In no time at all, he caught another 20 bringing his total closer to his age.

An urbane and charming man, Ted is distinguished in many ways, including being both the oldest and amongst our longest trappers.

The Aust War Memorial has a blog of his exploits (<https://www.awm.gov.au/second-world-war-veteran-edward-fleming>). Indeed, a remarkable man and a remarkable life.

So the race is now on as to whether Ted or his capture tally will get to 100 first. A tie would be a good result.



Dr Ted Fleming



Surgeon, aviator, author, environmentalist, bush-walker, trapper: an extraordinary man

## Now for the news we didn't want to hear

A friend in Darwin tells me that mynas have landed there: this is bad news. It is not known whether these are Common (Indian) Mynas like those here or the more aggressive and more damaging Javan Myna or even Jungle Myna. Fingers crossed they can eliminate them promptly – whichever they are.



The Javan Myna – more aggressive and hence more of a danger to wildlife than the Indian Myna of eastern Australia. Note the tuft of feathers above its beak.



The Jungle Myna – very similar looks to the Javan Myna (but note partial black beak)

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## The Call is out for a new Web Manager.

David Cook has been our solid support in managing the CIMAG website since we started in 2006. In fact the structure and look of our website is David's work – and from the comments we receive constantly from people here in Australia and overseas, it is greatly appreciated. But alas, after all these years, David has indicated that he would like to pass the task on. So thanks very much David for your contribution for so many years.

The task is no longer an onerous one – David has created the look and structure that seems to work well, so the job is to enter new material (and update stuff) that the Committee provides. If you have the skills and an interest in doing this for us, we would like to hear from you.



## Peanut Butter Suet – yummy, just delightful

The value of the CIMAG Facebook Group site is the useful information that trappers elsewhere pass on. Here is a snippet of a post a while back:

“We live on 15 acres on the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria. Our place is very open with not many houses nearby. We started off by using dog food but we weren't having much luck with it, only catching 3 in a month. I believe this is because they eat the insects and bugs off our tennis court and from the ground, as we don't have any dog food lying around. I found a video on YouTube that showed what a guy uses to attract starlings to be trapped and we thought we would give it a crack. We started 3 days ago and on the first day we trapped a collection of mynas and starlings with a total of 18. We thought that would be hard to beat! Next day we had 27 and today another 20. This stuff works extremely well and we highly recommend giving it a go. It is called peanut butter suet.”

The Youtube video on how to make this irresistible tucker is at <https://youtube/ZEw8f8r7CNQ>

## Mynas holding a Meeting

We know that mynas are quite a smart bird – the research by Dr Andrea Griffin from the University of Newcastle indicates that they are highly intelligent problem solvers and adapters. But who would have thought that this intelligence goes so far as to call, organise and hold a meeting. Agenda not seen.



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## **The Move to Declare Mynas a Pest Animal in the ACT – we are still Waiting, Waiting, Waiting**

You might recall this saga. Despite releasing a draft of their Declaration on Pest Animals (which includes Indian Mynas), back in 2019 the ACT Government has yet to get on with the job. The delay is, frankly, difficult to excuse, COVID-19, an election and new Minister notwithstanding. What we need are Ministers who have a commitment to our local natural environment. No point in having the country's best climate change policy if all we have around are pest animals, weeds and graffiti. The concept of Canberra as a "liveable city" is so far from reality. So to the ACT Government and new Minister for the Environment we say – please get the job done. And when it is done, then get on with the follow-up action: a specific Myna Management Action Plan that would require authorities, businesses and the community to tackle the myna problem. For example, restaurants and cafes to keep skips covered and to promptly wipe down outside tables to stop mynas getting an easy feed; for schools and other public institutions to be active in managing their environment and to trap in certain circumstances – eg in schoolyards during holidays. Mynas pose a health hazard at schools as their fecal dust and droppings can harbour a number of dangerous pathogens which can affect the school kids and teachers.

We have offered assistance in preparing a Management Plan. They just need them to do their bit first!



## **Need a Second Hand or Two to Euthanise Trapped Mynas – Call a Friend**

From time-to-time new trappers can't bring themselves to dispose of their trapped birds. We have a number of people scattered around the ACT who are willing to assist. So if this is putting you off from helping control this pest bird, get in touch by email or go onto the Facebook Group site and we will line somebody up close to you to help out. For those out of the Canberra region, a post on our Facebook Group site might get you in touch with someone nearby to you who is willing and able to help out.

## **Trap Shyness – Let's avoid this happening further**

As mynas are highly intelligent, they are very wary of danger. If they are accidentally (or heaven-forbid deliberately) released from a trap they are likely not to ever be caught again and will pass knowledge of the danger on to other mynas by giving alarm calls. Accordingly, it is critical that mynas are never able to escape, and certainly not released from the trap. So if you are wanting to transfer a trapped myna into another trap for it to be used as a decoy / judas bird, make sure you place an old rag / t-shirt completely over the door opening and put your hand underneath that to catch the bird. If you don't do this, there is a real chance trapped mynas will whizz past your hand before you can stop them. Also another way to stop mynas learning that the trap is bad, is for people to not approach the trap during daytime if there is a myna in it: it may give an alarm call and warn other free-flying mynas that you and the trap are bad news. So do the disposing after dusk (but make sure the engine is cold) – and similarly re-stock the trap after dusk if there is a myna in it.

## **Around the Traps**

Some news of happenings elsewhere.

**Bendigo, Vic:** Jenni Heinrich of the Landcare Versus Mynas Group (under the umbrella of the Northern Bendigo Landcare) reported back in early 2020 of activity there in getting a program up and running. Jenni, Sally Dearth and Jodie Kirkby arranged publicity via a local market, the local news and newspaper, through Landcare's Facebook page and were distributing posters and fliers around town and electronically to their contacts to distribute as they saw fit. A person from council was very much on board: they started with a council grant for the first traps. Things have moved a long way. Jenni now advises that they have distributed around 250 traps which they get from the Sale Gaol. They are aiming to get 600 traps distributed – a number that Ron Fink of the Macedon Indian Myna Action Group considers is necessary to get on top of the myna numbers in Bendigo.

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## **Mackay, Qld**

Rex Singline from Mackay reports that there are 3 distinct locations of mynas in the Mackay area with flocks of 50-100 birds. Interestingly the birds have remained outside the urban areas of Mackay during the day - so local public awareness of the birds and the threats they pose is low. But the birds are on the radar of the Mackay Regional Pest Management Group (MRPMG), overseen by Mackay Regional Council, and comprised of representatives of State & Local government agencies, Reef Catchments – the regional NRM group, and Birdlife Australia (Mackay). The birds accompany grazing cattle: just like Cattle Egrets



**Mynas acting as Cattle Egrets**

and the backs of cattle provide a smorgasbord of tasty treats, not to mention the critters unearthed by the actual grazing habits of the stock. The real Cattle Egrets on the other hand have moved into town and accompany the council mowers: more salubrious company.

At one spot, the mynas roost in a line of palm trees at the back of the local pub. They fly in at dusk. Knowledge of them only come to light since the onset of the Coronavirus lockdown. The other 2 flocks fly in at different times of the day to meet up with their cow friends.

Rex says they have tried to trap birds, with and without a judas bird, but without success. Perhaps the tasty morsels disturbed by the grazing cattle are more appealing than the food in the trap. Also Rex thinks that the plentiful numbers and variety of native birds in town might also have managed to hold them off: they have a lot of feisty, medium-size birds – lorikeets, corellas, blue faced honeyeaters, other honeyeaters, magpies, peewees and of course crows.

He thinks that part of their strategy must be to encourage Mackay residents to establish native bird-attracting gardens. The local Council has a program of giving away natives plants in big numbers once or twice a year which is a great initiative.

## **Myrtleford, Vic**

Gayle South and Sally McDonald organized a zoom hook-up mid year with a group of interested locals – during which I gave the standard presentation. There was a good response by the participants to the initiative. Gayle advises that they are still in the community awareness-raising phase, and are to hold their first meeting in Feb – hopefully the trapping will start soon after that as they are seeing more and more of these pests in the area.

## **In this hot weather, think “animal welfare”**

If you are looking to get away from Canberra / Queanbeyan’s for the next few weeks, please remember to dismantle your trap to avoid any unpleasant surprises when you get home. Also, if you have your trap set, please make sure that there is always a good supply of clean water, food and shade for trapped birds. We want them happy and comfortable so they entice others to the trap.

## **Trapping numbers for the last few months**

Graham Gliddon’s records for captures for the past few months are below.

	<b>Jun</b>	<b>July</b>	<b>Aug</b>	<b>Sept</b>	<b>Oct</b>	<b>Nov</b>	<b>Dec – reported so far</b>
Mynas	236	127	149	67	133	139	85
Starlings	108	4	19	25	36	68	24

The *reported* capture total is 74,312 mynas and 11,781 starlings since we started in 2006.

Bill Handke

President  
CIMAG

26 Jan 2021

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