

## NOTES

### ARE SOUTHERN BOOBOOKS DECLINING?

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The most recent BirdLife Australia State of Australia's Birds reported that Southern Boobooks *Ninox novaeseelandiae* had declined throughout most of BirdLife's reporting period. Despite high variability year to year, by 2013 Boobooks had decreased to low levels, with average reporting rates of only between 1 and 3 per cent. They were declining across all but one of the regions in Australia (BirdLife Australia 2015).

Assessments of changes in owl numbers can be tricky because most observers are not seeing, watching and counting the owls; they are listening to owls calling at night. A number of variables such as weather, new owls coming into an area, or breeding status of a pair can determine whether owls call or stay silent (Olsen *et al.* 2002). The owls might be on a territory but not calling, so they are invisible to the person doing the bird survey. However researchers can check the numbers of owls heard calling in surveys against another measure of abundance: the number of breeding pairs they actually find and see in an area. Since 1993 we have been checking Southern Boobook territories in an area comprising the Aranda Bushland, Black Mountain, and Bruce Ridge. There were, on average, about 9 pairs breeding in this area each year. We haven't been able to check these territories carefully in the past few years but we did carefully search the area in December 2014-January 2015, a good time to find adults with nestlings or fledged young. We found only one breeding pair. So our results mirror what BirdLife Australia found. Our Canberra Boobook numbers had collapsed, at least in the 2014-2015 breeding season compared to the average number of pairs 1993 to about 2010. We will search these territories again in the 2015-2016 season to see if this is a real trend or just a blip, but we would be interested in any ideas COG members have about the reason for the possible decline of Boobooks in the ACT and across Australia.

#### References

- BirdLife Australia (2015) *The State of Australia's Birds 2015: Headline Trends for Terrestrial Birds*.
- Olsen, J., Trost, S. and Hayes, G. (2002) Vocalisations used by Southern Boobooks *Ninox novaeseelandiae* in and adjoining Aranda Bushland, Canberra, Australia. In. Newton, I. Kavanagh, R., Olsen, J. and Taylor, I. (Eds.) *The Ecology and Conservation of Owls*. Melbourne: CSIRO.

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**This Southern Boobook territory on Black Mountain was abandoned in the 2014-2015 season (*Jerry Olsen*).**