

# Inside BOCA



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Photo: John Barkla

## POPULATION GROWTH POLICY

Finally, we are starting to see some discussion of this important issue. For too long the inevitable effect of rapid population growth on our environment has been ignored.

There is still no proper debate as the policies of the major political parties seek a doubling of Australia's population within the lifetime of many of us. A cynic might say that politicians in general see rapid population growth a far easier path than trying to solve underlying economic problems.

Reliable immigration figures now available for 2008/2009 show the following:

• permanent migrant intake	171,318
• from New Zealand	47,780
• refugees	13,500
• temporary migrants*	657,124
• <b>Total</b>	<b>889,722</b>

\* These comprise "skilled" workers, students and long term holiday visa holders with work permits – many of whom have rights to apply for permanent residency. The issue of student visas is a topic in itself with many courses being selected not on the basis of educational interest, but for which best meet the requirements for permanent residency.

Our major cities are growing at a rate disproportionate to other parts of the country. This, of course, places further pressure on infrastructure and also adds to traffic congestion and pollution with still little thought given to public transport requirements.

Inevitably the urban sprawl pushes food production out to marginal areas and land degradation will follow.

Already we struggle to provide water for the existing community. Population increases must mean more water taken from scant environmental flows and more energy used in wasteful schemes such as desalination.

From BOCA's point of view, excessive population growth must place further unacceptable pressure on bird habitat. We already know that the single greatest impact on our birds is habitat reduction and this can only get worse as population increases.

The debate on population levels has started and will certainly not be one sided. Well resourced vested interests will push hard for what we would see as unsustainable levels of growth and all of us who have an interest in the environment will need to make

sure our views are known. We also need to ensure that the debate is about numbers, not country of origin. Members' views, both through *The Bird Observer* and direct to me are certainly welcome.

## BOCA BRANCHES



Male Barking Owl, Palmetum, Townsville (Qld) 2009. Photo: John Barkla

Since our last issue BOCA President, John Barkla, and I have visited branches in Queensland and NSW. While the journey took a full two weeks, it was of great value in providing an opportunity to meet a good number of members and exchange ideas on issues of importance both to BOCA and to local conservation.

The energy and enthusiasm of our branches in pursuing important local issues is very impressive, as is the amount of time put into arranging BOCA activities. When it is remembered that branch committees are entirely voluntary the results seen are even more striking.

John and I were very fortunate to be able to join branch members on a number of outings and saw some wonderful areas and birds.

Among issues raised by branches during discussions were:

- emailing of BOCA calendar to members
- relationship and benefits to members of affiliated groups
- better provision of promotional material, including *The Bird Observer*, and membership forms
- templates for BOCA branches involved in contracted survey work
- support (from non-subscribers) for the *AFO* becoming electronic
- closer working relationship and sharing of resources with Birds Australia; creation of a single national group
- inclusion of more regional material in *The Bird Observer*
- better communication with branches
- more information on the benefits of membership.

Some of these issues have already been addressed and others will be taken up over the next few months.

One issue which is very clear is that there is still a lot of work to do in bringing BOCA branches and National Office

together into one cohesive, fully national organisation rather than a collection of like-minded groups working separately to achieve what are really common objectives. We also need to do all we can to provide resources for our branches and to use the expertise available at National Office to help in local environmental issues.

## BIGNET

While in NSW we attended the two day meeting of BIGnet, hosted by Southern Highboca at Mittagong. BIGnet, which is an umbrella group comprising most of the NSW birding organisations, has a very valuable role in coordinating efforts and sharing knowledge. It provides a very good template for what could be done in other states, and even nationally.

## CENTENARY PLANTATION



Banyule Flats Reserve b'S fSfla' (Vic). Photo: Celia Browne

Members will recall that to mark BOCA's centenary year in 2005 a plantation was established at Banyule Flats Reserve, Heidelberg, Victoria. Volunteers planted 593 indigenous trees and shrubs on 1 May 2005 and four years later these are thriving.

At MELBOCA's August meeting Celia Browne presented the branch with copies of the booklet she and her husband, Dorey, produced about the centenary plantation. The booklet provides details of the planning and implementation of the project, before and after photographs, a listing of all sponsors, participants and plant species, and detailed, scaled maps showing the location of each of the trees and shrubs planted.

MELBOCA has provided four copies of the booklet for the BOCA library. The information provided in the booklet by Celia and Dorey will enable members to locate trees of particular interest. Our congratulations and thanks to Celia and Dorey for a job well done.

## MEMBERSHIP STRUCTURE

Over the next month or so we will be installing a new membership system to replace the long out-dated software currently being used. This will allow better keeping of member and donor records and branch information. It will also provide for a more efficient mail out of *The Bird Observer*, *Australian Field Ornithology* and other material for members. **Importantly, the new system will allow for monthly or quarterly direct debit of**

**membership fees for those members who opt for this.** Those who prefer an annual reminder will, of course, continue in this way.

The introduction of the new system has given the Board the opportunity to review the current membership structure. The current structure, which comprises some sixteen different rates, is unnecessarily complex and has been reduced to five. This has resulted in some minor changes to fees, with some categories being reduced and others increased. Any increases are below the rate of inflation and the overall result is a lowering of membership income by 1.9%. This will be made up by the continuing slight increase in member numbers and savings provided by the new system.

In reducing the number of categories, the Board saw it as essential to retain the existing adult, family and pensioner categories and to take the wider interpretation of pensioner to ensure that holders of benefit cards receive the discounted rate. The issue of senior's card holders presented a more difficult question as the cards are not means tested and are available to anyone over a certain age. The conditions for these cards vary from state to state and they are not universally recognised. Our enquiries show that senior's cards do not normally attract discounted membership fees from similar organisations. The Board's decision is to amalgamate the adult member and senior's cards into a new category, individual member, at a slightly lower rate.

The new categories and rates which will apply from 1 January 2010 are:

Individual member	\$73.00
Family/household	\$110.00
Pensioner/concession card	\$55.00
Pensioner/household	\$82.00
Full time student single	\$20.00

The category of Honorary Life Member recognised in our Constitution will, of course, continue unchanged.

## AFFILIATED GROUPS

BOCA has some 24 affiliated groups. These are independent, like-minded organisations which have been given BOCA affiliate status by the Board. Some are large, environmentally active groups, while others are small local groups conducting outings. Benefits for affiliated groups include coverage by BOCA's insurances and reciprocal access to activities. We also seek a ready exchange of information and resources when dealing with environmental issues.

Affiliated group membership varies from as low as ten to several hundred.

For some time BOCA branches have expressed concern that members of affiliated groups, often with lower membership fees, get benefits from BOCA for which our own members pay through their fees. In addition, insurance becomes increasingly costly and our exposure to claims is certainly increased by the additional numbers covered.

In order to address these issues, the Board has made an “in principle” decision to impose an affiliation fee and this has been relayed to affiliated groups for comment. The proposal is that affiliated groups pay an annual fee of \$10.00 per member for those who are not separately members of BOCA and that this fee be capped at a maximum of \$1,500 per annum.

## THE BIRD OBSERVER

As discussed in the last issue, *The Bird Observer* will move to a quarterly publication from the new year. The publication dates will be the third week in February, May, August and November.

As part of the change we need to be able to bring news between issues to as many members as possible cheaply and quickly. In this regard we are still keen to get as many members’ email addresses as we can, so please advise us of any new email address.

## AUSTRALIAN FIELD ORNITHOLOGY

We have had a very good response to the questionnaire included with the October issue of *The Bird Observer* but if you haven’t yet returned the form please do so as the Board needs as much indication of members’ views as possible before making any decision on the publication issues of *Australian Field Ornithology* (AFO).

The December issue of the AFO will be out shortly and contains a number of very interesting articles. A contents list for this issue is below:

- Species review – Black-necked Stork
- Grey Nightjar, Ashmore Reef
- Asian Brown Flycatcher, Ashmore Reef
- Grasswren eggs, Len Harvey’s collection
- Wedge-tailed Eagle breeding behaviour
- Red Goshawk biology
- Magpie Goose breeding, Northern Tablelands, NSW

## NSW GAME MANAGEMENT BILL

At the time of writing, this unacceptable piece of legislation put forward by the Shooters Party is back before the NSW Parliament. While we had received assurance from the State Government that they will not support the Bill, which seeks to allow hunting in national parks and reintroduce recreational duck hunting, the indications are that at least some of the Bill’s aspects will receive Government support.

BOCA, with its branches and many other organisations, has made its opposition known and will continue to put its view to both Government and Opposition in NSW.

## DUCK SEASON 2010

Decisions about the 2010 recreational duck hunting season in Tasmania, South Australia and Victoria will be made by their State Governments shortly. BOCA will, of course, once more seek to have this so-called sport banned. Despite rain in some

areas we are now facing a very early start to hot weather and those wetlands with water are rapidly drying. An informed and reasonable view is that, even if duck hunting is not permanently banned there is no justification to allowing shooting under existing conditions. Reason, however, does not usually prevail in this debate.

## EAGLEBY WETLANDS

Following discussions during our visit to BrisBOCA I returned to Beenleigh to attend a meeting to discuss protection for Eagleby and other wetlands in the area and the possible inclusion of this valuable habitat with the Moreton Bay Ramsar site.

The meeting involved BrisBOCA, the local State Member of Parliament, Logan City Council and the State Department of Environment and Resource Management and it was very pleasing to see these agencies working together positively to find the best way of protecting areas which BrisBOCA has done so much to establish and maintain.

The next step is for BrisBOCA to prepare a report which will clearly identify all the areas in question, their habitat types and bird species, what their current status is and the preferred form of protection. This will take some effort but I am sure Rod Bloss and his very active branch are more than equal to the task.

## BOCA CONSTITUTION

Following discussions at the 2009 Annual General Meeting, the Board, with help from several members, has reviewed the Constitution. This has resulted in a number of mostly minor amendments which will be put before the AGM to be held in May 2010. The date of the AGM will be advertised in the February edition of *The Bird Observer* and details of recommended changes to the Constitution notified to members in April.

## ADMINISTRATION

Members will be aware that we are currently developing a new website. Work to date has been slow and a change of web designer should now see the project progress more rapidly. The new website will focus on BOCA’s two responsibilities – birding interests and the environment. Particular emphasis is being placed on ease of maintenance so National Office staff and branch representatives will be able to update their own areas of the site.

Improvements to the National Office computer system, which I expect will be completed prior to publication, will allow us to provide email addresses for all of our branches and make contact for members considerably easier. Our email address has also changed to the simpler “boca” rather than “birdobservers” – for example, [membership@boca.org.au](mailto:membership@boca.org.au) and our web address changes to [www.boca.org.au](http://www.boca.org.au). Both addresses will operate for the short term.

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