

Inside BOCA



John Barkla
President

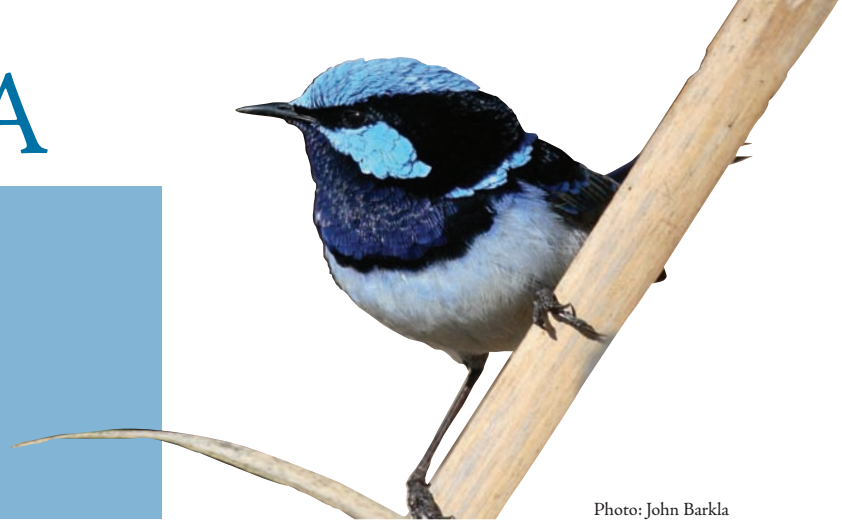


Photo: John Barkla

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

We have been extremely busy with the installation of our new computer server and membership software, ongoing updates to our website, making submissions on various conservation issues (covered in more detail in the conservation section), making arrangements for a BOCA forum in September and many other day-to-day matters such as production of *The Bird Observer*. Amongst the things I have to do, two concerns have occupied most of my time. The first is our ongoing trading position and the second is the activities of the Joint Working Group set up to consider a possible merger with Birds Australia. These things are completely unrelated and my principal focus is to ensure that BOCA is in a sound financial position for its future, with or without a merger.

The 2009 financial accounts should be in your hands by the time you are reading this. As I have indicated previously, 2009 was a particularly difficult year for BOCA, with the accounts confirming we incurred an operating loss from our ordinary activities of \$174,520. Fortunately, the investment markets recovered some of the 2008 year's fall, which helped reduce the overall loss to \$33,696.

Whilst we are by no means financially threatened (we have an unencumbered building worth \$1.1 million and net assets of almost \$2.5 million), how does BOCA find itself in a loss position?

When I took over as President last year, we estimated that BOCA was spending around \$8,000 per month more on its conservation, education and member activities than we were earning (excluding ABEF). We made some difficult decisions to address this (refer my comments in the August 2009 issue of *The Bird Observer*), but the results of most of those decisions will not impact until 2010. I can now report as follows:

- Overall, our income in 2009 was \$178,000 lower than the year before. We maintained our costs, but lost income in almost every category – our income from member activities, advertising revenue, donations, fundraising, shop sales, and membership subscriptions were all down. This was presumably as a result of the global situation and we were unable to adjust our circumstances quickly enough to avoid incurring a loss.

- The Blue Wren Gift Shop achieved very good profits in the months of November and December, which were sufficient for it to recoup the previous 10 months' losses and achieve a modest overall profit for the full year. The Board has therefore decided it should not close the shop while it continues to receive profitable member support, but will monitor its performance.
- The May issue of *The Bird Observer* will be the second in its now quarterly format, with the remaining issues to be in August and November.
- We are exploring ways we might increase the circulation of the Journal of *Australian Field Ornithology (AFO)* to avoid the need to make it electronic only. One very positive step towards this has been the agreement by Birds Australia to market *AFO* to its members. In turn, we will market their journal, *Emu – Austral Ornithology*, to our members.
- With the Clare Miller Education Centre now complete, we are exploring ways to generate income from this magnificent asset to offset the not insignificant costs of maintaining the Clarksdale Bird Sanctuary.
- And finally, in a very difficult discussion concerning our need to further reduce our administration costs, our CEO, Richard Hunter, offered to resign as an employee, but continue to work as a volunteer. This most generous gesture was accepted by the Board and Richard ceased to be a paid employee from 17 March 2010.

In relation to my other principal focus, the merger Joint Working Group, you should now have received the second joint letter from the President of Birds Australia and me. This letter advises on the progress we have made to date and the considerable work still to be done before any proposal can be put to members. If it does proceed to a vote by members, this will not occur before the Annual General Meeting in 2011. In the meantime, please continue to give us your comments of support or otherwise. We are anxious to ensure this matter is given the fullest consideration.

John Barkla
President



Richard Hunter
Chief Executive Officer

AGM

Between the time of writing and publication, the AGM will have been held. Nominations for election to the Board closed on 16 April and the only nominations received were those from the three retiring directors, Graeme Hosken, Brian Snape and Dave Torr who have been returned unopposed. Also, at the close of the agenda no extra items had been received from members although, of course, it is normal to have a general discussion at the completion of formal business.

A full report on the AGM will appear in the August issue of *The Bird Observer*.

BOCA/BA PROJECT

There has been a great response to the letter to members of both BOCA and Birds Australia with something like 600 replies received from BOCA people to date. The responses are being summarised and, while the task is taking some time, I expect we will be able to report on them soon and certainly for the AGM.

REQUEST FOR VOLUNTEERS

Our urgent need for volunteers, particularly in the administrative and clerical area, continues.

We have been successful in obtaining some help at National Office from non-members but, while this is most welcome, we have a real need for people with birding or general conservation knowledge to answer telephone enquiries. Members who have some time available to help at National Office, please contact Leanne Curnow on 03 9877 5342.

CHANGES TO ACCESS TO IMPORTANT BIRDWATCHING SITES

- **Western Treatment Plant, Victoria**
Melbourne Water has advised that Metropolitan Farm Road and 160 South Road have been closed to allow for major upgrade works "over the next couple of years". The main access roads for birdwatching at the plant are unchanged and birdwatching permits are still required. More details and a map can be found on Melbourne Water's website: melbournewater.com.au/wtp (Bird Watching and Fishing).
- **Cheetham Salt sites at Dry Creek and Price, South Australia**
Access to these Cheetham Salt sites for birdwatching requires pre planning and completion of formalities in accordance with Cheetham's requirements.

The process is administered by the South Australian Ornithological Association Inc (SAOA/Birds SA) and includes completing a ten-minute visitor induction program. Visitors who are not members of SAOA/Birds SA must have proof of current membership of a birding organisation – BOCA members need to show their current membership card and must be accompanied on site by a guide authorised by SAOA/Birds SA.

The conditions of entry, entry application form and request for induction form can be downloaded from www.birdssa.asn.au or www.birdpedia.com. Enquiries can be directed to Trevor Cowie, Field Program Coordinator Birds SA, email birdos_sa@bigpond.com or Tel: 08 8263 2531.

ABEF SUPPORT

After the setbacks of last year, the Australian Bird Environment Foundation's invested funds have returned to a satisfactory level of earning. This has allowed the ABEF Trustees to provide very valuable income to BOCA in support of our conservation and education efforts.

While still able to approve some external grants, ABEF's main responsibility is BOCA's own programs and it is very pleasing to see ABEF in the position of being able to protect its capital value while providing support for BOCA.

The generosity of those who have contributed to ABEF over the years, either by donation or bequest, has provided a valuable resource for the organisation as a whole and the basis for our ongoing work.

Richard Hunter
ceo@boca.org.au

URBAN BIRDS AND MORE – AFO

Have you ever wondered why some birds readily adapt to urban settings? The lead article in the March issue of *Australian Field Ornithology* provides some insight into this intriguing question for one of the native urban adapters in Melbourne.

Other topics in this issue of our quarterly journal of field ornithology include extension of range of two species (the Painted Finch in NSW; and, possibly, the Pied Harrier in Indonesia – ie into the Southern Hemisphere), documentation of all breeding sites of the Pelican in Victoria, and short notes on various aspects of diet (Nankeen Kestrel, Southern Boobook and Eastern Whipbird, with some comments on 'handedness' of passerines) and breeding (Rainbow Lorikeet). Finally, two books that sound fascinating are reviewed.

Please support BOCA and subscribe to *AFO* (\$32 pa posted, or \$40 pa airmail overseas).

Julia Hurley