

Annual General Meeting

Richard Hunter



BOCA members attend the 2010 AGM. Photo: Bob Young

The Thirty-seventh Annual General Meeting of Bird Observation & Conservation Australia was held at National Office and Education Centre on 15 May 2010. Sixty-four members attended the meeting and a further 113 were represented by proxies lodged prior to the meeting.

The report of the Board was presented by President, John Barkla, and the audited financial statements for 2009 by Brian Snape, Chair of the Finance & Audit Committee of the Board.

The full report of the Directors and summarised financial statements can be found in the Annual Report posted to members in May. Copies and the complete statements can be obtained from National Office.

The President thanked Tania Ireton who retired from the Board during the year after two lengthy stints as a Director.

ELECTION

At the close of nominations only those of the three retiring Directors had been received and thus Graeme Hosken, Brian Snape and Dave Torr were declared elected for a further term.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

The meeting considered a number of amendments to the Constitution. These had been advised to members with the AGM notification. The amendments were passed unanimously.

PROPOSED MERGER WITH BIRDS AUSTRALIA

The President reported on the work of the group considering this issue and developments to date. There was considerable discussion and a number of issues raised for consideration by the Working Group.

A report on the progress of discussions since the AGM can be found in **Inside BOCA** on page 3.

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARDS

Once again, a really rewarding task for the AGM was the presentation of BOCA Distinguished Service Awards to people who have contributed a great deal to our organisation over many years.

This year the Board recognised four very worthy recipients: Shirley Cameron, Keith Stockwell, Trish Teesdale and Barb Williams. Keith and Barb were able to attend the AGM to receive their Awards and Shirley and Trish will receive theirs locally. Citations for this year's recipients are:

Shirley Cameron:

Shirley has been leader of the 'Werribee Wagtails' for the last 12 years, inducting many new birders, visitors and BOCA members to the delights of birding at sites to the west of Melbourne. She also collates and prints the group's monthly newsletter *Werribee Wag-tales* which encourages members to contribute bird photography, reporting and bird counts. Shirley is a volunteer guide to many visitors to the wetlands at the Western Treatment Plant at Werribee, has been Community Representative on the Western Treatment Plant Community Liaison Committee, and is a member of Birdline and Australian Birding. Her terrific knowledge of the movement of migratory birds at the Treatment Plant is shared with all her contacts in her inimitable style.

Keith Stockwell:

Keith joined the Echuca & District Branch of BOCA at its inception in the 1990s and has made a very significant contribution to bird knowledge and conservation in northern Victoria and Southern Riverina since that time. He has acted as Secretary to the Echuca Branch for 12 years, organised many camps and outings, including the very successful '3-day events' each May. He manages two websites detailing the activities of the branch, publishes the bi-monthly newsletter *The Plains*

Wanderer and has overseen the publication of several *Guides to Birding* pamphlets, all of which act as important resources for visitors to the area. Keith represents birding interests on several local conservation advisory bodies and has made many presentations on conservation issues in the region.

Trish Teesdale:

A keen, active member of BOCA for a number of years, Trish joined the staff and volunteers in the National Office in 1998 and quickly became the friendly voice that members recognised when they contacted National Office for help. For eleven years until her retirement in 2009, Trish was at the centre of National Office activities, working countless extra hours to ensure members got the best from their organisation.

Trish took over the responsibility for organising the ‘Flyaways’: finding many new and isolated places to visit in New South Wales, South Australia, Tasmania and, of course - Lake Eyre.

She acted as Secretary to ABEF doing enormous work for the Trustees, tirelessly working with ABEF grant applicants in honing their applications and getting their grants to them when they were successful.

Trish’s efforts in keeping the office running when people were sick, on holidays, and off doing other things – filling in for everyone – with care, attention to detail and willingness to serve all hours of the day and night to support members, volunteers, staff, committee members, Board members, branches and the public, are well known to BOCA people everywhere.

Barb Williams:

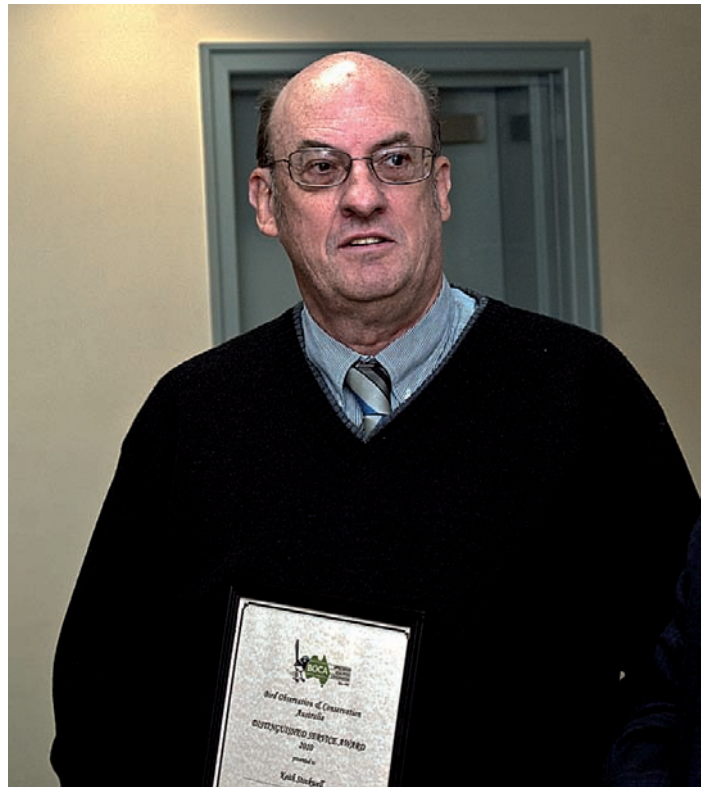
Barb joined BOCA in 1983 and then the Ballarat Branch in 1989 on moving to Talbot. Barb has willingly and capably served as Vice-President of Ballarat BOCA (three terms), President (three terms) and Newsletter Editor (ongoing since 2003). A well-travelled birder, Barb is a regular and entertaining speaker at Ballarat Branch meetings and has spoken about birds and their habitat to other organisations. She is involved in several ongoing bird surveys. Barb has hosted regular outings to her bird-rich property near Talbot, Victoria, and has contributed in many other ways to the well-being and success of the Ballarat BOCA Branch.

GUEST SPEAKER

We were very pleased to have as Guest Speaker this year Kelvin Thomson MP, Member for Wills in the Federal Parliament. Kelvin has been a member of BOCA for many years and is well known and admired for his works over a long time on environmental issues and, more recently, on the very important issue of population policy.

The text of Kelvin’s talk is reproduced below.

“Rapid human population growth, both in Australia and worldwide, has had a dramatic and adverse impact on Australia’s native bird species.



Top: Barb Williams receives her BDSA. Bottom: Keith Stockwell receives his BDSA. Photos: Bob Young

Let me briefly refer to four examples of this impact – ocean-going birds, migratory shorebirds, resident waterbirds, and woodland birds.

First, ocean-going seabirds such as albatrosses have suffered greatly from the impact of long-line fishing – they get caught on the hooks and drown – and, it would appear, also from trawling. The Humane

Society International has asked Parliament's Treaties Committee, which I chair, to examine the impact of trawling on albatrosses and other seabirds, citing evidence in a study by the Bureau of Rural Sciences that the rate of albatross bycatch in the Commonwealth Trawl Sector is alarming.

Of course the increase in long-line fishing and trawling is a consequence of the world's growing population.

Second, growing population has led to the reclamation of mud flats in South Korea and the Yellow Sea. This has had a huge impact on populations of migratory shorebirds, which use places like the Yellow Sea to stop and refuel and recharge the batteries as they wing their way on their epic journeys between Siberia and Australia. The loss of these staging sites is the cause of enormous decreases in the global population of many species.

Third, in Australia, population growth has driven the over-allocation of water from the Murray-Darling Basin, which has had very adverse impacts on wetlands like the Macquarie Marshes and the Coorong, and therefore on populations of resident waterbirds. A large scale aerial survey study covering a third of the continent by researchers at the University of New South Wales identified that migratory shorebirds populations plunged by 73% between 1983 and 2006, while Australia's 15 species of resident shorebirds – such as avocets and stilts – declined by 81%.

And fourth there is the impact of population on woodland birds. Tree clearing, loss of habitat, loss of corridors through which to safely travel, and climate change – driven drought have caused a collapse in Victoria's woodland bird numbers.

The Victoria Naturally Alliance has produced a fact sheet using research by Professor Ralph MacNally, Professor Andrew Bennett and Dr Jim Radford carried out for the past 15 years across northern and central Victoria. It shows that about two-thirds of bird species, including lorikeets, pardalotes, thornbills and honeyeaters, have declined dramatically, essentially from a shortage of habitat and food.

Given all these impacts it is not that surprising, though quite distressing, that over 200 species of Australia's 760 bird species are listed as threatened. Over 200 species!

I want to return to that study of declining woodland birds, which mirrors work done in the Mount Lofty Ranges outside Adelaide by David Paton and others, to make two points about the future direction of bird conservation in Australia.



Top: Kelvin Thomson MP, guest speaker.
Bottom: Brian Snape delivers the Financial Report. Photos: Bob Young

First, the research shows serious declines for threatened species like the Black-chinned Honeyeater – a decline of over 60% between 2002 and 2007 – just five years. But it also shows big declines for other species which are regarded as common and much better known to ordinary Australians, such as the Kookaburra and the Grey Thrush. Kookaburras declined by 30% during that five-year period.

I think that in galvanizing public opinion about bird conservation we need to talk about what is happening to Australia's iconic species – Emus, Kookaburras, Lyrebirds – because people know and love these species, and will be concerned about the dramatic decline in their

numbers. This week there was a TV report about the re-introduction of a couple of dozen Regent Honeyeaters and I applaud it, but you know the Honeyeaters were all being fitted with radio transmitters. The same thing happens with other species like Orange-bellied Parrots, and it is now being said that it's too late to save the Orange-bellied Parrot in the wild. It seems to me that once we reach the point where individual birds are being fitted with radio transmitters, then their existence is not very meaningful to most Australians, who will probably never see one in the wild, and for whom saving them feels like hard work. Of course for a species such as the Orange-bellied Parrot to become extinct would be a disgrace, and we should fight that. But I think we will have more success if we sound the alarm well before individual species get down to their last two or three hundred, and do it about our iconic wildlife – koalas and platypus and lyrebirds and emus and kookaburras.

Secondly, as the Victoria Naturally Alliance points out, National Parks are not enough. When I was young and

first getting interested and involved in environmental causes, National Parks were the holy grail of the conservation movement. But the woodlands survey shows bird species declining within National Parks as well. National Parks are being hit hard by drought and climate change. So we need action to restore habitat in more fertile areas, and adjacent to existing remnant vegetation. Large scale restoration of habitat is required to reconnect isolated bushland remnants.

Protecting and restoring habitat for wildlife on private land now needs to be a policy priority for both State and Federal Government.”

The meeting concluded with some general discussion and afternoon tea. Our thanks go to Barb Longmuir and Janet Hand for again providing a much appreciated spread for all those attending the AGM.

We are now well into the 2011 year, one that will see a number of very important issues up for decision but also the continuing need for BOCA to provide for member interests as well as being alert to issues impacting on our birds and their habitat.



Glossy Black Cockatoo

MT BARNEY LODGE BIRDWEEK

8-12 SEPTEMBER 2010

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Mt Barney – Photo courtesy of Tourism Queensland