

Inside BOCA



John Barkla
President

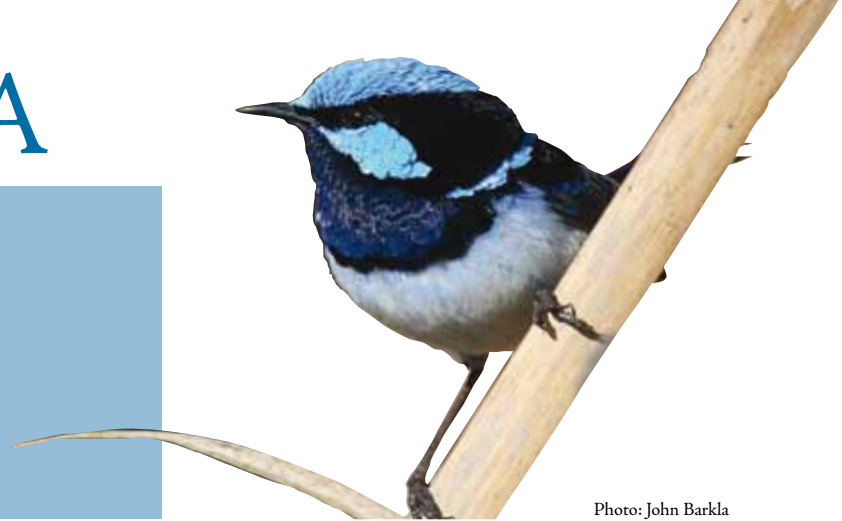


Photo: John Barkla

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

With long overdue drought-breaking rains falling across central Australia, I was fortunate in September to visit northern South Australia with my son David. It was wonderful to see many species of birds breeding, a reminder how quickly numbers can recover when conditions are favourable. We are confronted daily with the environmental challenges which follow human population growth, such as land clearance and global warming. We know that the population of the world has more than trebled in the past 90 years and this has had terrible consequences for the natural environment. But it is uplifting to see how quickly the birds can respond to small positive changes. It somehow gives me hope.

The BOCA Forum in September at the Yanco Agricultural College in Leeton NSW was a great success, with 15 of our 21 branches and eight affiliated groups, including Birding NSW, in attendance. At the Forum I gave a detailed update on the progress we are making towards a merger with Birds Australia. After my rather long presentation there was further constructive discussion on actions which could be taken by branches to better inform their members and to listen and respond to any concerns members may still have. What was most pleasing was that every attendee expressed strong support for the merger to proceed and undertook to ensure that as many members as possible exercised their right to vote at the Annual General Meeting in May 2011.

The progress I was able to report at Leeton was as follows:

- Because of the need to examine in detail all implications of the proposal, the merger working group has now employed Jess McVicar as Project Manager for the merger. Jess has directly relevant experience from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (known worldwide simply as the RSPB) and her main responsibilities will be to:
 - manage and facilitate the overall transition process;
 - consolidate the overall strategy and plans, and
 - support the working group and the sub-groups.

- To ensure no task is over-looked, we have set up four new sub-groups to pursue different aspects of the merger:
 - Communications;
 - Governance;
 - Operations, and
 - Finance.

These sub-groups have representatives from the BOCA Board and BA Council, our staff and members with expertise in particular areas. The sub-groups each have an agreed list of tasks and a tight timetable to adhere to until the member vote in May next year and beyond to the launch, hopefully, of the new entity.

- The constitution of the proposed new organisation, BirdLife Australia, has been drafted and has been forwarded to BOCA's honorary solicitors, Anderson Rice for vetting and finalisation, prior to the company being incorporated. Once it is available, the constitution can be put on the BOCA and BA websites for member comment.
- We have nominated representatives to the new Board and are looking for an independent Chair. A challenge both BOCA and BA have identified is that although we would strongly prefer the new Board to have a good gender balance and to be truly national, this presents difficulties for us.

As this will be my last report for the year, may I take this opportunity to thank our dedicated staff and volunteers for their ongoing commitment to our members and to the interests of birds. As there are many who have made great contributions, it is perhaps unfair to single out only one, but I would like to thank Richard Hunter for the gesture he made this year by resigning as CEO but continuing to work as a volunteer and for his support to me as President.

I wish you and your families good health and happiness for the festive season and exciting birding in 2011.

John Barkla
President



Richard Hunter
Chief Executive Officer

CEO'S REPORT

Life at National Office has been even more hectic than usual in the three months since our last magazine. The proposed merger continues to require a good deal of our time, particularly now that the finer details are being looked at and, of course, there is the on-going need to respond to issues being raised by members.

This time of the year seems to be filled with special events. During September, BOCA participated in the BIGnet meeting of NSW groups held on the central coast and the Australian Birdfair at Leeton. The latter was followed by the 2010 BOCA Forum for branches and affiliates. At the same time our Education Coordinator, with branches, was planning BOCA Bird Week 2010, an important opportunity for BOCA to interact with the wider community and bring important issues to the fore. All of these events are reported on more fully elsewhere in Inside BOCA and Education but I would like to acknowledge the work and enthusiasm of those staff and volunteers who made each of them so successful. In addition, the Forum was notable for the quality and commitment of the branch and affiliate representatives who attended.

By the time you receive this issue of *The Bird Observer* the fifth major event in two months will be concluded. PhotoBOCA's Digital Photography in the Bush 2010 at Gunbower is booked out and, if previous efforts are any guide, will be a great success.

Keep up to date on discussions about the proposed merger between BOCA and BA in advance of the vote at AGMs in May 2011 on our dedicated 'merger' webpage www.boca.org.au/merger. If you're not online call the BOCA National Office in Melbourne for the same information.

BIGNET

The most recent meeting of BIGnet (Bird Interest Groups Network of NSW and ACT) was hosted by Birding NSW at Wyong on the weekend of 11-12 September 2010. BOCA was represented by Don Saunders at the meeting.

The first morning involved a meeting of the Conservation Officers from the various groups. This was an opportunity to discuss the conservation issues, both present and future, of

concern to each of the groups. Arising from this, a number of common concerns were identified and these were submitted to, and subsequently endorsed by, the full BIGnet meeting.

Some of these issues were:

- Fire protection measures such as fuel reduction burning and roadside clearing being greatly expanded as a result of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission Recommendations which could flow on to NSW and ACT.
- Windfarm proliferation and their potential impact on bird life.
- Vegetation clearance – a nation-wide problem.
- Impact of Climate Change on birds and their habitat.

These topics will be considered in greater detail at future BIGnet meetings.

The meeting also had presentations relating to Threatened Species Management on the Central and Hunter Coast and Important Bird Area (IBA) monitoring in NSW. The proposal for a merger of BOCA and Birds Australia was a frequent topic throughout the meeting, having implications for many of the issues discussed.

BOCA AT THE BIRDFAIR

The Australian Birdfair 2010 was once again held at Yanco near Leeton in NSW. The major birding attractions to the area are two Ramsar listed wetlands – Fivebough and Tuckerbil. Birders also had the opportunity to see Plains-wanderer and Superb Parrots. This year was the fifth time the Birdfair has run and BOCA has been part of this every year. It is the first time it has been run in September rather than the very hot conditions of November. The theme for 2010 was *Birds of Prey*.

The BOCA tent was busy with visitors keen to collect information about birds and birding as well as purchase books and CDs. BOCA delivered programs to school groups on the Friday (more details in the education section). BOCA staff and volunteers had the opportunity to listen to several presentations relating to research and conservation of birds of prey. According to organisers, the attendance at the 2010 Australian Birdfair was approximately 400 and they are already planning for next year's event.

BOCA FORUM 2010 – BIODIVERSITY IS BOCA'S BUSINESS

At the same venue as the Birdfair, BOCA held its third Forum for Branches and Affiliated Groups. The theme this year reflected on the International Year of Biodiversity and the important role BOCA members play in protecting bird biodiversity in Australia.



Bill Ramsay, Rod Bloss, Dave Torr, Richard Hunter and John Barkla birding at Baileston Historic Reserve, Vic. Photo: Trevor Quested

The scene was set by Professor Andrew Bennett from Deakin University, Melbourne with his presentation entitled "Landscape Scale Conservation". He used several bird examples to explain the benefits of conserving large sections of habitat and linking these together with bird/wildlife-friendly corridors.

Participants also heard from Nicki Taws, who is involved in long term bird monitoring programs for Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG), and Peter Marsh, the NSW coordinator for monitoring Important Bird Areas (IBAs). Both speakers illustrated the importance of involving volunteers in these programs and the value of the data they collect.

BOCA Branch representatives from Bundaberg, Brisbane, PENBOC and Echuca spoke of their conservation and education programs, BOCA Education Coordinator, Annette Cook, summarised the current directions for BOCA Education activities. BOCA President, John Barkla presented an update on the progress of the proposed BOCA-BA merger discussions, providing plenty of time for questions and discussion.

The Forum was not all hard work, there were opportunities to view Superb Parrots, some even saw them nesting, Grey-crowned Babblers, a Collared Sparrowhawk and one excited Queenslander managed to photograph a Red-capped Robin. On Monday evening we were treated to a bird quiz by Tania Ireton, from BAYBOCA, which, along with plenty of laughs, tested our bird knowledge.

The BOCA Forum once again provided an opportunity for sharing of ideas and inspiration to its participants.

PHOTOBOCA

PhotoBOCA has undertaken to develop a draft proposal for submission to the Directors to establish a Digital Image Library covering all Australian bird species and their habitats. This will take several months and involve discussions with photographers and the expected users of the library. There will probably be a

need for 12 or more images of each species in order to cover males, females, juveniles, breeding plumage, non-breeding plumage, etc. Ian Boyd from Townsville is the co-ordinator for this activity.

Dave Torr has done a marvellous job in getting the web galleries up and running. There are now over 1000 images of over 400 species which have been submitted by 60 photographers in just a few months.

Images which are uploaded onto the BOCA Web Gallery, along with other images which BOCA already holds, such as the 35 mm slide library and numerous CDs of images which have been donated to BOCA, will form the basis for the selection of images for the new Digital Image Library. These images will be available to members and branches for inclusion in BOCA publications, newsletters, presentations, and education and conservation activities.

As impressive as our effort in exceeding 1000 images in such a short time appears, we do have 225 members in PhotoBOCA and there are many more members of BOCA and the affiliated groups who are not yet contributing to the Web Gallery. The 406 species which we have collectively submitted is still not halfway in covering all species, and the average of 2.5 images per species means that there are a lot of opportunities for members to submit images of even the most common species.

If you are interested in uploading images to the Web Gallery and are not a member of PhotoBOCA, or if you are interested in using any of our images, please contact Bob Young, photoboca@boca.org.au.

For information on PhotoBOCA, newsletters are available on the BOCA web site <http://boca.org.au/branches/130-photoboca>.

ABEF GRANTS

At their August meeting, the ABEF Trustees accepted the recommendations of BOCA's Conservation Committee for the 2010 round of external grants. From 14 very good quality applications the following were successful:

- Grant Palmer – Study of nest box occupancy at Clarkesdale Bird Sanctuary
- Point Cook College – Wetlands birds discovery project
- Rainforest Rescue – Daintree Cassowary project
- Footscray West Primary School – Nesting boxes and student learning
- Joanne Bennett – Changes in bird assemblage structure in central Victorian forests.

Applications are now open for the 2011 grants and grant criteria and application forms can be downloaded from the BOCA website or obtained from National Office.

BLUE WREN GIFT SHOP

Although we still have in place an in-principle decision to close the shop, results have turned around enough for it now to show a small profit for 2010 to date. A very generous donation of stock from the now, unfortunately, closed Birding Shop will give us a real boost, particularly as we head towards Christmas. Our thanks and best wishes to Charles Sandbrink and his family for their kindness.

ACTIVITIES CALENDAR NOW ONLINE

The activities calendar has now gone online. The calendar is searchable for activities according to state, location, branch and dates. You can print off a tailored calendar similar to the one in *The Bird Observer* and can register that you are interested in an activity, in which case (if we know your email address) we will endeavour to send you a reminder before the activity and also let you know about any changes. Activities are being regularly added so check back frequently.



Some of the challenges of protecting Little Penguins (pictured above) are looked at in the Conservation pages. Photo courtesy of Phillip Island Nature Park

THE END OF ANOTHER YEAR

With Christmas and the end of the year fast approaching, it's time to again say thank you to all the BOCA family, members, volunteers and staff, who contribute so much of their time, skill and, above all, enthusiasm to the cause of Australia's birds – a great cause!

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from all at BOCA

Richard Hunter

ceo@boca.org.au

WADER ROOSTS – AFO

A small high-tide roost on the mudflats at North Stradbroke Island, in Moreton Bay, Qld, is the focus of the main article in September's issue of *Australian Field Ornithology*. The data on abundance and diversity of waders here in the different seasons show how important even small roost-sites can be for both migratory and resident species. Disturbance of the birds at such sites can have profound effects on wader populations. If you can, do read this article in conjunction with the book reviewed in the same issue, which flags the importance for migratory waders along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway of refuelling stopovers in the Yellow Sea.

A paper on another first record for Australian territory – this time, the Lesser Coucal – shows how important Ashmore Reef is for migrant and vagrant birds in our area.

Shorter papers concern observations on the breeding behaviour of two different raptors; of a trio of Australian Pied Oystercatchers; and of Australasian Grebes on a flood-retarding basin. In addition, there is an interesting article on a cuckoo (Eastern Koel) being attacked and killed by potential host species in northern Australia. Please support BOCA by subscribing to *AFO* (\$32 pa, or \$40 pa overseas airmail).

Julia Hurley

REMINDER

Nominations for BOCA Distinguished Service Awards 2011 close on 31 December 2010. For further information and nomination form, please refer to the insert in this issue of *The Bird Observer* or contact National Office.

CHRISTMAS TRADING

BOCA National Office will close at midday on Friday, 24 December and reopen on Tuesday, 4 January 2011.