

Inside BOCA



John Barkla
President



Photo: John Barkla

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

I am writing this in early April for the May issue of *The Bird Observer*, which members will receive a few days after the 21 May 2011 Annual General Meeting. By the time you read this, the outcome of the vote by members on the merger with Birds Australia will be known. As I write, I am optimistic that members will agree with the entire BOCA Board that a merged organisation will provide the best outcome for the conservation of Australia's birds and the interests of members. Whilst a small number of our members have concerns, the majority of members continue to support the merger.

In early April (last weekend as I write) I was in Sydney for a meeting of BIGnet (the Bird Interest Group network for NSW) with the CEO of Birds Australia. We both addressed the meeting and spoke candidly about the challenges faced by our individual organisations in working for the conservation of birds, where we have insufficient resources and governments at all levels do not do enough. I spoke also about the challenges presented to our birds by our increasing population and the resulting decline in natural environment values. BOCA, with only 2,487 members and no real profile, cannot make an impact on its own. A single national organisation with a louder voice is the only answer. It was extremely pleasing to hear at the end of our presentations that all of the groups represented supported the merger. Whilst they are not necessarily all BOCA members (many are BOCA affiliates), a response from the meeting was that once the merger was bedded down they would consider becoming branches of the new merged entity, BirdLife Australia, and thus boost the overall membership. What a great result that would be!

I have also been presenting to BOCA branches and have found support for the merger to be overwhelming. My only concern is that many members will assume that because the merger is supported so strongly, they do not need to vote. Typically, at an AGM, only 100 - 200 members make the effort to cast a vote. This was the case when BOCA changed its name and was also the case when BOCA changed its constitution. If this happens again, the wish of the members that the merger should proceed may be frustrated by the Corporations Act requirement that it be supported by a 75% majority of those members who vote. The message is "everyone must vote".

Without the merger, BOCA faces serious challenges. Income from members declined substantially following the global financial crisis in 2007/2008 and has not rebounded since. We have made difficult decisions to reduce our expenditure (reported in previous issues of *The Bird Observer*), but our losses, whilst reduced, still continue. Our CEO, Richard Hunter, who has been working as a volunteer since March 2010, has indicated his intention to step down. BOCA does not have the financial resources to pay a CEO and it is unlikely we would find someone who would fill this important role on an honorary basis. Our cash reserves have been depleted by our recent losses, but we have significant assets in our National Office building (value \$1.2 million), the investments in ABEF (value \$1.3 million) and our property at Clarkesdale (which the Board has confirmed we could not sell, but which costs BOCA over \$40,000 a year to maintain). To continue our work in the future as an independent organisation, we would need to consider how these assets could be used: further difficult choices would need to be made.

Immediately following the AGM the Board will meet to consider the outcome. There are three possibilities:

1. the merger is approved with a 75% or greater majority, in which case the merger will proceed;
2. the merger fails to get even a 50% majority, in which case the Board would conclude that the majority of members did not support the direction they set for BOCA and individual directors would have to decide on their future involvement; or
3. the merger achieves more than 50% majority support, but fails to achieve the 75% majority imposed by the Corporations Act 2001. This in some ways is the most problematic outcome. If the majority of members support a merger but it cannot be achieved, the Board would have to explore further options from there.

Together with all Board members, I hope that the merger is achieved: our birds need it to happen.

John Barkla
President



Richard Hunter
Chief Executive Officer

CEO'S REPORT

As John Barkla has already said, the proposal to merge BOCA and Birds Australia will have been decided by the time this issue of *The Bird Observer* is received by members. Whatever the outcome I expect this will be my last contribution to our magazine.

When we first discussed the possibility of creating a single new organisation to represent the interests of all those who care about Australia's birds, we did so because we believed that there is a community of those people which is much greater than the membership of our two existing organisations. We believed that it is time for the issues of the past to be left in the past in order to achieve something really worthwhile for the future. Support for this concept has been very encouraging and a negative result on 21 May will, I believe, not be the end of discussions. For us to provide the best outcomes for the environment and for recreational birders a single, strong, and truly national organisation will continue to be the only viable course.

The efforts of our Board members over the last year or two have been absolutely outstanding. John Barkla has provided the leadership vital through this time as well as working tirelessly on the merger proposal and the very lengthy consultation process. This has included many hours spent travelling to branches around the country to ensure as wide a discussion as possible. Pat Bingham has also been a very active member of the merger working group and her knowledge of BOCA and care for the needs of members being properly recognised has made for a very important contribution. Other members of the Board have contributed both to the development of the merger proposal and to the need to keep the normal working of our organisation ticking over. A number of Directors also contribute as "working" volunteers at National Office and at branches. I am grateful for their help and advice.

Ian Muir, for many years BOCA's Treasurer, is retiring from the Board at this AGM. Ian's efforts have often been behind the scenes and not recognised by the wider membership, but of great value nevertheless. His contribution to the running of National Office will be greatly missed.

At this time I would like to thank all those members, particularly at branches, who have been so welcoming and helpful to me and so forgiving of my very ordinary bird knowledge. Good luck for the future.

Richard Hunter
ceo@boca.org.au

WEBSITE NEWS

By the time you read this, the old BOCA website will have been turned off and all of its functions transferred to the new site at <http://boca.org.au>.

Recent developments on the site have included an online shopping facility (<http://boca.org.au/shop/online-catalogue>) and a map-based web page that allows users to search for Bird Clubs and places to go birding throughout Australia – <http://boca.org.au/come-birding/birding-locations>).

We now need your help to keep the site up to date and achieve our aim of being the best birding site in Australia! So how can you help?

- We are always eager to publish new bird images in our Photo Gallery. You don't have to be a member of PhotoBOCA to contribute (although if you are interested in bird photography you may well find that membership of this group helps to develop your skills) and we still lack images of more than 200 species of birds – although that number includes many "one-off" vagrants that are unlikely to appear again.
- We have a limited number of trip reports on the website. We welcome your contributions about any birding trips – whether branch outings or private holidays – that may be of interest to others.
- Is your Branch or Affiliate information up to date?
- And finally, the Birding Locations has great coverage of some areas of the country and blanks in other places. If you know of spots that should be included – or feel that the existing entries need amending – then please let me know.

I welcome your comments and if you have any issues using the site – or wish to contribute in any of the above areas – please let me know at webmaster@boca.org.au.

Dave Torr



Australasian Gannet and fish. Photo: Steb Fisher



Copy of poster produced by RSPCA.

DARK BIRDS – AFO

Some dark-coloured birds feature in the latest issue of *Australian Field Ornithology*: the Dark-sided Flycatcher, a first record in the Australian Territory of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands; Black Falcons breeding near Tamworth, NSW; White-throated Nightjars migrating diurnally off Cape York, Qld; and melanistic Kookaburras, also in North Queensland. Another article describes nesting of Brahminy Kites in Malaysia compared with in Australia, and short notes detail interesting behaviour of Whistling Kites in Gippsland, Vic; an unusual nest-site for a Swamp Harrier in Tasmania; and a Little Shrike-thrush apparently hunting a frog. Two book reviews complete the issue.

Please support BOCA by subscribing to our quarterly journal *Australian Field Ornithology* (\$32 pa or \$40 pa overseas airmail). We look forward to observations and documentation from our readers and contributors following the devastation of, hopefully, only once in a lifetime, floods and cyclones in eastern Australia and bushfires in Western Australia. Keep notes on any changes in bird populations and the occurrence of breeding events. Record as much detail as you can. AFO Editors can help you to write up your notes for publication.

Julia Hurley

Cassowaries play a vital role in maintaining rainforest biodiversity. They are the only animal big enough to eat many of the larger rainforest fruits, which have large seeds and are poisonous to other rainforest animals. By dispersing these seeds the cassowary helps new trees to grow. This means that the rainforest relies on the cassowary for survival as much as the cassowary needs the rainforest for survival.
– Rainforest Rescue



Last fruit. Photo: Liz Gallie