

Inside BOCA



John Barkla
President

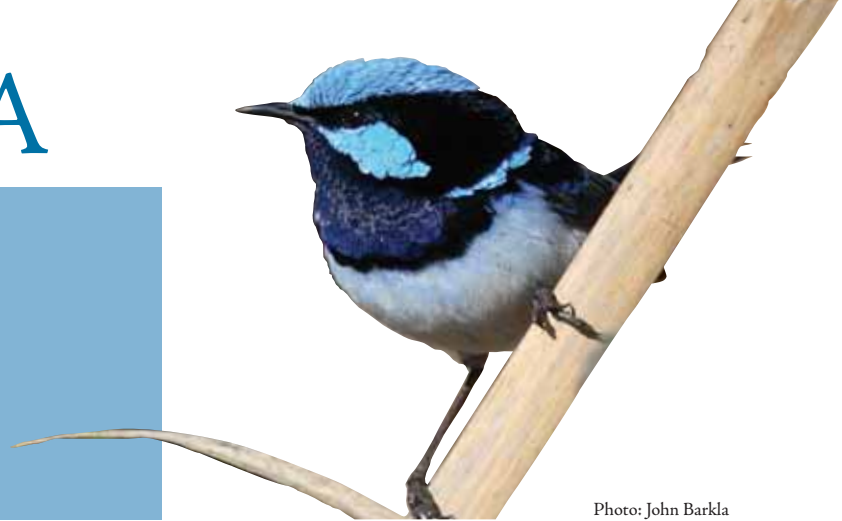


Photo: John Barkla

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

After a tremendous effort by many people, the merger of BOCA with Birds Australia (BA) was approved by members at the Annual General Meetings of the two organisations on 21 May 2011. I am very grateful for the work that was done and for the support shown by members for a new, truly national organisation – **BirdLife Australia**. Members responded magnificently to the Board's plea to cast a vote: where in the past only 100-200 members have voted at an AGM, this time over 50% of all BOCA members voted, with an unambiguous 93% supporting the merger.

Whilst BOCA will continue to 31 December, we have started to make the merger a reality and to make BirdLife Australia a loud and effective voice for birds.

We have:

- Appointed Graeme Hamilton CEO of BirdLife Australia and also of BOCA (to replace Richard Hunter who has worked tirelessly to make the merger a reality, after making his role a voluntary one in March 2010). On behalf of the Board I thank Richard once again for his considerable effort.
- Commenced the planning to bring the BOCA and BA staff together as soon as practicable.
- Appointed the 10-member BirdLife Board with five directors from BOCA and five from BA (full details are on the BOCA and BA websites).
- Appointed Gerard Early, retired Deputy Secretary of the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, as independent Chair of BirdLife Australia for two years. Gerard will also act as President during that time.
- Appointed myself and Barry Baker (the new President of BA who succeeded Alison Russell-French and who worked with her as the BA representatives on the merger working group) as Vice Presidents of BirdLife Australia.
- Set up two new BirdLife Australia Board Committees – Finance & Audit and Governance.
- Held a meeting on 24 June which was attended by

about 50 representatives from BOCA and BA branches, regional and special interest groups and observatories, staff members and BirdLife Australia directors. The purpose of the meeting was to provide a forum to seek views on the merger process, to consult on the best model for the future structure of the organisation and to raise any other matter of concern or requiring clarification. The discussion, which was chaired by Gerard Early (with Graeme Hamilton in support), was positive and constructive and identified many issues for further dialogue over coming months. Importantly, this meeting reconfirmed that the BOCA camps and outings, with a network of location based branches, would be retained and enhanced by the larger membership. The next stage in the consultation process is an online survey which will be sent to all groups and branches in July, before this issue of *The Bird Observer* is posted.

- Appointed the national accounting firm, RSM Bird Cameron, as BirdLife Australia's independent auditors.
- Agreed that BirdLife Australia will operate out of one National Office at 60 Leicester Street Carlton, where BA currently operates.
- Agreed that BOCA's National Office building will be retained and leased out to realise an opportunity arising from the redevelopment of the Nunawading shopping precinct.
- Agreed that BirdLife Australia will not operate a physical shop but will continue to make sales online and by mail order.

We are also working on:

- a new website which combines the best features of the existing BOCA and BA websites;
- a branding strategy for BirdLife Australia including a new logo;
- the publications we will have in the future to achieve a higher profile for the organisation and better public awareness of the plight of our birds;

- potentially different membership models and fee structures which make the organisation more attractive and accessible to members;
- new opportunities to attract donors and other supporters to BirdLife Australia;
- alignment of the BOCA and BA financial and administrative systems;
- alignment of our conservation policies and how we can advocate more effectively for birds; and
- a work plan for the commencement of operations for BirdLife Australia on 1 January 2012, with an official launch in or around March 2012.

The closing of the Blue Wren Gift Shop will no doubt disappoint some members for whom the shop is seen as an integral part of BOCA's identity. All I can do is to remind members that the BOCA Board decided in 2009 to close the shop, but a modest profit in December that year delayed this decision being put into effect. When we look closely at all of the costs involved in running the shop, it makes a loss and in its current form provides a benefit to only a small proportion of members.

The past month has seen the retirement of Ian Muir and Rod Bloss from the Board and Don Saunders from our staff. Ian has given 11 years of wonderful service, initially as our Treasurer and more recently as a member of our Finance & Audit Committee and as an ABEF Trustee (a role he will retain). Rod Bloss was the founder and President of the Brisbane Branch (BrisBOCA) and has been a role model for others in working with government in the protection of important bird areas. Don has worked many more hours than he has been paid over a very long time as our Conservation Coordinator and, more recently, in assisting with the production of *The Bird Observer*. The Board thanks them all for their huge contributions and we look forward to their continuing involvement in different capacities.

Finally, BOCA has wanted to do more for bird conservation and it is our hope that this can now be achieved with BirdLife Australia. The level of public debate in Australia on the major challenges facing our birds (global warming, population growth, land clearance, etc) is nowhere near a respectable level. Our politicians are polarising the debate and the public is confused and sceptical. We need to articulate our concerns (based on good science) and mobilise public opinion to achieve better outcomes than we have been able to in the past. My hope is that we now have the vehicle to do it with BirdLife Australia and the 10 million members in BirdLife International.

John Barkla
President



Graeme Hamilton
Chief Executive Officer

CEO'S REPORT

Hello from your new CEO. I have recently succeeded Richard Hunter as BOCA's CEO, a role which I have held at Birds Australia since 2004, and at BirdLife Australia since May. I was surprised when the BOCA Board approached me to see if I was interested in the role. I was also rather concerned that the additional workload might prove my undoing. On reflection it seems a logical move as it allows me to steer both BOCA and Birds Australia through the uncharted waters of the merger, and gives us the opportunity to use the best from both organisations to set up BirdLife Australia.

It was always Richard's intention to retire after the merger proposal was put to the vote. As John Barkla has mentioned, Richard has worked as a volunteer since March 2010 which has helped BOCA reduce the size of operating losses. I am working under the same arrangement. I have worked closely with Richard for the past six years and have valued his openness, wise counsel based on many years experience in the not-for-profit sector, and friendship. While from here on Richard will be spending more time doing the things he wants to do, he has offered to work with me to help in establishing BirdLife Australia. His generous offer is most welcome.

MERGING WITH BA

The merger is well covered by John Barkla and by Jess McVicar elsewhere in this issue of *The Bird Observer*. For my part, my highest priority for the next five months or so is to ensure an efficient and orderly transfer of staff and assets from BOCA and BA to BirdLife. This sort of change can be unsettling for staff and volunteers and it is my job to help reassure them that the world won't end on 31 December. As we found when BA left Hawthorn East, it is important to sift through all files and archives to make sure nothing important is lost, damaged or overlooked in moving the office.

BOCA'S FINANCIAL SITUATION

John Barkla has written and spoken many times recently about BOCA's difficult financial position. We have a good base of financial and property assets but poor cash flow which makes it difficult to pay our bills when they become due. This problem has become acute in the past few months and is beginning to strain relationships with a range of suppliers. With the help of the Board and the ABEF Trustees, we have arranged a loan

from ABEF which allows BOCA to continue to operate this year. The arrangement with the ABEF Trustees is that the loan will be repaid with interest when the assets of BA and BOCA are combined in BirdLife Australia.

AUSTRALIAN FIELD ORNITHOLOGY

The AFO Editorial Committee met recently to discuss the journal's future under BirdLife Australia. We all feel that *AFO* must continue, but that it should have many more subscribers than it does today. Personally, I believe *AFO* can be a great success and each issue should be eagerly anticipated by a broad cross-section of Members. *AFO* should bridge the large gap in published information between, on the one hand, international scientific journals like the *Emu*, and on the other magazines like *The Bird Observer* and *Wingspan*.

FAREWELL DON SAUNDERS

After 13 years of loyal service Don Saunders is retiring as BOCA's Conservation Coordinator. Don was presented with a Distinguished Service Award at the May AGM and his citation appears in this issue of *The Bird Observer*. Before coming to BOCA Don had a career in the Victorian Public Service and through ability, diligence and professionalism Don reached the high office of Director of National Parks. Don brought all of his experience, ability and gentlemanly charm to his work for BOCA and, in so doing, earned the respect of all. Don will continue to help us as a volunteer but will now allow himself more time to pursue his interests outside work.

VALE BERNIE SCOTT

We were all saddened to hear of the passing of Bernie Scott, President of Ballarat Branch. A few words about Bernie's dedicated life are written by Roger Thomas following this report.

Graeme Hamilton
ceo@boca.org.au

PHOTOBOCA IS PLANNING TO BECOME BIRDLIFE AUSTRALIA: PHOTOGRAPHY

Following the merger between Bird Observation & Conservation Australia and Birds Australia, PhotoBOCA has started the process of developing a new charter which will reflect the interests of photographers from both BOCA and BA. It is proposed that the new group would be a Special Interest Group under the auspices of BirdLife Australia.

To start this process, a sub-committee of three PhotoBOCA members and three BA members is being formed.

In line with the timeline established by BirdLife Australia, the new photography group will not legally come into existence until early 2012.

However, the PhotoBOCA committee feel that it is important that all BOCA and BA photographers should have the

opportunity to have input into the development of the new charter. This presents a technical problem as, under the PhotoBOCA Charter, membership is restricted to members of BOCA or its affiliated groups. To overcome this, we are inviting BA photographers to register their interest in the new group. These photographers will be added to the PhotoBOCA members to form a database of photographers who will receive emails updating them on the proposals of the sub-committee and inviting them to make suggestions and comments to the sub-committee. It is intended that communication between the sub-committee and members will only be by email.

If you wish to register your interest, please email Ian Mayo photoboca@boca.org.au with your name, email address and postcode. To help Ian, please insert "BirdLife Australia: Photography" in the Subject line of your email. The postcode may be required to evaluate the spread of members and their geographic location in respect of existing photography groups and the potential opportunity to establish future local or regional groups.

Bob Young
 President, PhotoBOCA

VALE BERNIE SCOTT, BALLARAT BOCA PRESIDENT



Ballarat Branch President, Bernie Scott, died on 28 June 2011, at the age of 76. Bernie was in the second year of his presidency after having joined the Ballarat group in 1996, following his appointment to St Patrick's College in Ballarat that year. He first joined BOCA in 1988, after having become seriously interested in birds in 1984.

Bernie had an excellent working knowledge of Australian birds, and had travelled across the nation with his bird watching friend Tony Smith as driver and Bernie the navigator. He had seen 636 Australian species.

He contributed to the Branch in many ways, including finding the group a meeting place at his school for more than a year when the usual meeting room was being refurbished.

As well as a keen bird observer, Bernie had strong interests in astronomy, gardening and numerous sports, especially gymnastics. He coached gymnastics and other sports during his teaching life. For his contributions to sport he was awarded an Australia Medal in 2000.

In May this year he was awarded the Holy Cross, which is the highest given by the Pope to a layman, including a Christian Brother. This was awarded for his services to the church, education and the wider community.

His life as a Christian Brother carried through into his service to BOCA, where he was always dutiful, helpful and encouraging.

Roger Thomas



Jess McVicar
Merger Manager

MERGER REPORT

Jess has been working with Birds Australia and BOCA for the last year and now takes on the responsibility of supporting the two organisations through amalgamation into BirdLife Australia. Jess has previously worked for the RSPB in the UK and has also been involved in planning and implementing other successful mergers.

As outlined in the President's report, much progress on the merger has been made since the vote on 21 May.

The BirdLife Board holds monthly meetings and has already made the formal appointments and established the Board Committees necessary to undertake their business.

In July, the Board made the decision that the location of BirdLife Australia's National Office will be at 60 Leicester Street in Melbourne: Birds Australia's current National Office.

60 Leicester Street, known as 'The Green Building' because of its sustainable design and environmental performance, is in a central location in Melbourne's Carlton. The location provides public transport access and parking nearby; it's accessible for staff, volunteers and members. The building provides sufficient office, meeting and storage space for BirdLife Australia's staff and operations. Importantly, the building also houses other environmental organisations and provides opportunities for beneficial partnerships, collaborations and support.

The National Office in Carlton will house BirdLife Australia staff, the merged library, collections and files. The move by BOCA staff to Carlton is planned for the final quarter of 2011. Some activities, including volunteer support for education programs, could still be conducted in the eastern suburbs; Graeme and the BOCA staff are working on how this might support BirdLife Australia's operations in the future.

The BirdLife Board decided that BOCA's Springvale Road property, owned by BOCA, will not be sold. The building is a significant asset and in an area where current trends and commercial development point to the benefits of retaining the property. The property will be leased from early 2012.

The leasing of the Springvale Road building means that the Blue Wren Gift Shop based there will be closed. This implements a decision to close the shop which was made by the BOCA Board in 2009.

Meanwhile other work towards amalgamation continues.

This includes:

- bringing together staff operationally and aligning work between the two organisations;
- preparing for amalgamating membership systems and services;
- preparing for amalgamating administrative and financial systems and processes;
- meeting with the extensive BA and BOCA network of groups, branches, observatories and reserves. The next stage in the consultation process is currently underway in the form of an online survey to groups and branches;
- developing the new BirdLife identity and communications tools including the website, publications, logo/identity and member and supporter materials.

What next?

- the BirdLife Board will decide on the arrangements for the BirdLife group and branch network;
- the BirdLife Board will decide on the visual identity and logo for BirdLife Australia;
- we'll be merging membership, administrative and financial systems;
- we'll be planning for bringing both organisations in to one National Office by the end of 2011;
- we'll continue to plan for an official launch of BirdLife in or around March 2012.

If you have any questions, feedback or comments, please contact Jess at j.mcvicar@birdsaustralia.com.au.

Jess McVicar
Merger Manager

THE MERGER AND ME

The staff at BOCA and Birds Australia are not strangers to one another. We've been working together 'behind the scenes' for many years, particularly in the area of conservation.

So when the results of the vote came through, Julie Kirkwood, Samantha Vine (my conservation colleagues at Birds Australia) and I couldn't have been more pleased. Fantastic! We get to work together as a team to build a strong voice for Australia's birds. Old barriers have dropped away as we've been given license to work together. Since the merger was announced we've made a joint submission on the review of the Caring for our Country program, drafted a policy on wind farms and made a joint media release on the impacts of illegal mouse baits on birds. Each week we have a phone link-up to discuss our work and how best to tackle the many threats to our birdlife. We've stopped thinking of BOCA and Birds Australia as separate entities and look forward to the day when we have everything in place to launch **our** new organisation, BirdLife Australia.

A spirit of cooperation and renewal pervades all that we do together. BOCA staff have been warmly welcomed to the Birds Australia's office in Carlton, which will become the national office of BirdLife Australia. In fact, the most common question I've had from Birds Australia staff is a very eager 'How soon can you move here?' While the thought of bringing our collective 200+ years of 'stuff' together is daunting, I eagerly await the day when we can call 60 Leicester Street, Carlton (60L) the 'home' of BirdLife Australia.

Jenny Lau
Conservation Officer

On Sunday, 5 June, I became the president of MGBOCA. It was then that I discovered that one of my first official duties would be to attend the merger consultation meeting for Birds Australia (BA) and BOCA groups and branches. Before this, my involvement in the merger had been via the club magazines, emails and newsletters and the articles received by all members of BA and BOCA.

At the consultation meeting, I was very impressed to find reps from branches and observatories of BA and BOCA from all over Australia, providing tangible evidence of the level of commitment to a successful merger from all sectors of both organisations.

Being a Branch of BOCA which enjoys monthly outings, our members were generally keen to know that the character and activities of their club would be preserved. It is important that we retain our local identity through local ownership of activities and our local newsletter, and that the social aspects of membership such as camps and weekend outings are not impeded. One of the key issues in members' minds was the development of the new logo and it was comforting to see the level of professional input which has already gone into developing the brand for the new organisation.

Our main hope is that the merger brings together the research and negotiating power of BA and BOCA without losing sight of the social aspects and friendliness of the old club atmosphere. I think the benefits for local members and my community will be an even more professional front to the organisation. On a national level I think BirdLife Australia will be a louder voice for birds. For me, this is what the merger means: a strong, unified voice in dealing with issues at both State and Federal level to ultimately benefit Australia's birds.

Mike Kerr
Branch President, Murray Goulburn BOCA



International Year of Forests Team
 United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat
 1 UN Plaza, DC 1 - 1244, New York, NY 10017, USA
 Tel: +1 212 963 3401 Fax: +1 917 367 3186
 Email: forests@un.org Web: www.un.org/forests

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OWLS AND RAVENS IN SUBURBAN MELBOURNE – AFO

Study of birds in urban areas can provide interesting and significant observations. The June issue of *Australian Field Ornithology* has articles that throw light on how two bird species are adapting to living and breeding in suburban Melbourne: the Powerful Owl and the Little Raven. In the latter case, data from the Birds Australia Nest Record scheme are analysed. Further afield, a captive male Musk Duck has been studied to see how the lobe attached to the base of its bill varies in size seasonally. And even further afield, an instance of Brown Goshawks successfully raising two broods in a season in Darwin is recorded. Another paper reports on the review of Thick-billed Grasswren specimens from Central Australia to try to account for all the specimens alleged to have been collected in the 19th century. The issue concludes with a review of a book, *Bird Migration and Global Change*, which should be of interest to anyone who is grappling with the problem of climate change and how it might affect our native fauna.

Please support BOCA by subscribing to our quarterly journal *Australian Field Ornithology* (\$32 pa or \$40 pa overseas airmail).

Julia Hurley

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