

Rod Bloss

A voice for south-east Queensland

“You never know from one day to the next what you are going to find”

Although a member of only a few years’ standing, Rod Bloss has been instrumental in setting up one of BOCA’s busiest branches.

The Brisbane branch, Brisboca, took off immediately and, because of Rod’s background in national parks and environmental organisations in south-east Queensland (SEQ), quickly became active in habitat conservation in its home region.

Rod’s main work after initiating the branch was to give it a platform or base from which to work and progress. “The branch needed to establish itself and someone had to take it on.”

Enthusiasm and a belief in what he was doing spurred him on as, with the group, he set out to educate the community towards protecting wildlife, its birds and their habitat.

He praises the efforts of fellow workers like Trixie Benbroek, Les Cooper and David Taylor, as well as Marion Coxon, Marg Felder, and Jeff Elder, with Gary Eggins as the group’s south coast representative and John Maling acting on the north coast.

With its own photographer and projects and education officers as well its ‘flagship’ newsletter (‘The Pelican’) and its own website, Brisboca is now well established. A programme entailing school talks and the group’s first ‘Stickybeaks’ project are also taking off.

Rod’s special interest areas are education and conservation of habitat. He enjoys the activities involved with running his group, especially displays and surveys.

He has acted as Secretary or President/Secretary of the branch since its formation in 2001. Organising activity calendars, helping with newsletters, initiating new ideas, answering correspondence and getting members to take on special activities are all part of his working day, as are forming contact with government and non-government organisations.

In 2003 as President/Secretary, Rod brought his organisational skills into play, taking conservation issues to politicians and local councils. He believes knowledge of political workings and attitudes to conservation and the channels the group needed to take to make its message heard were important to the club at the time.

This concerted effort has brought Brisboca recognition at a political level, and also local authority involvement in survey work and inclusion on a conservation forum, Rod said.

Previously secretary of the National Parks Association of Queensland for three years, he wanted to do something that would be acceptable to Brisboca members and attract their abilities. This came about in the preservation of the Eagleby Wetlands, now in its first stage with three more to go. Brisboca is setting up a special website for these wetlands,

“I love birding and was a member of three birding organisations. I am always one hundred percent into whatever I take on. I had never been involved in publicity/media liaison or education prior to taking on this branch.”

Rod had past experience, however, in youth clubs, soccer clubs, and even a competition darts association, "You name it, I've been there. It's in the blood," he said.

Becoming recognised as a 'key stakeholder' in SEQ has been important to the club, Rod says. Townsville's Jo Weineke told him about BOCA and Rob (and Elaine) joined in 2000. He was further motivated by what he calls the 'blinkered' bird observance and conservation issues in other clubs and societies.

Appreciating the pleasant and helpful attitude he encountered at BOCA Rob aimed to establish a branch in SEQ where club members could come and take part, and for the branch to have a voice in what happened in its region. "I want it to be welcoming and enthusiastic with new members introduced to all facets of our aims and objects."

He pays tribute to BOCA's Zoe Wilson, Jill Plowright and Trish Teesdale for their interest and guidance and for helping him out "when things went pear-shaped".

After suffering a nervous breakdown in 1968 Rob introduced himself to birdwatching. "I was always self-motivated. I have learned much from all the field guides, newsletters, ornithological writings such as Australian Field Ornithology and many other publications."

Looking for new species first fired his enthusiasm, and his interest extended to behaviour and conservation. Early on, he carried out his own research, and did surveys with Eagleby Wetlands. "I now get involved with many matters regarding conservation through (organisations like) Wildlife Preservation Society and Albert River Catchment Authority."

Citing his experience with Eagleby Wetlands, Rod says the numbers of birds and species present in an area depends on seasons and weather conditions, flood and drought. "Going over my records, the majority of species are still permanent or migratory in much the same numbers. The floods have spread the species out from narrow areas of suitable habitat so they are found in many areas of the wetlands now. With the beginning of 'the wet' many of the rarer bird species have 'gone home' but you never know from one day to the next what you are going to find in the area."

Rod's birding began in England where common birds were plentiful. "The rarer ones hid in full foliage trees or massive reed beds. Talking was a no-no and wearing 'the right' clothing was important. Nowadays there are far more birds to watch and members converse all the time."

Some birders, he finds, are competitive, others just enjoy watching and recording birds or behaviour. "To be a 'twitcher' you have to be able to afford the journeys to find the new birds."

Seeing nine birds of prey in about five minutes all in the same area made a big impression for this enthusiast. "A Wedge-tailed Eagle was being attacked by a Hobby and a White-bellied Sea Eagle. Brahminy Kite and Whistling Kite were overhead, Brown Falcon and Swamp Harrier on the ground and a Little Eagle and Black-shouldered Kite perched in trees!" Not surprisingly, raptors are among his favourite species with wrens running close.

Written by Leonie Robbins 5 May 2004 from his notes