

Jack Hyett

Teacher, writer, raconteur

Jack Hyett's feat of 60-plus years of active service in BOCA provides a challenge for any comers. From 1915 to 2001 the broader nature world was a better place for the presence of this dedicated birder, writer and nature observer.

Hyett has also the distinction of being arguably BOCA's only television star. Already widely known as a writer on nature topics and yarn spinner extraordinary Jack appeared in an early Melbourne television children's show as 'Jack-'o-the-Bush'.

Many BOCA members today have used his '*Australian Mammals*' field guide for New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania, published in 1980, as a valued resource, but this was only one example of a vast number of papers, articles and books produced by this committed naturalist.

His weekly natural history columns in a Lilydale (Vic) newspaper were syndicated to other district papers; his two books of 'Bushman's' anecdotes and reminiscences were published in 1959 and 1961. For some time he wrote under the pseudonym 'Pedionomus'.

Hyett lectured extensively on radio and television, while his 16 years of natural history lectures brought many to pursue their own interest in his favourite field, either through BOCA or field naturalists' clubs.

Foundation president of Ringwood (Vic) Field Naturalists Club in 1961, he was elected a Life Member of this organisation ten years later and became the first chairman of the Victorian Ornithological Research Group (VORG). He was a longtime member of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union (RAOU, now Birds Australia) and edited its publication *The Emu* from 1965-68.

Jack Hyett did much excellent work with BOCA. During the 1950s he was a member of the 'Survey Cassidix' team whose renowned research into the Helmeted Honeyeater pointed up the possible extinction of the bird which is now Victoria's avian emblem. He thus played a part in the declaration of Yellingbo State Fauna Reserve in 1965.

Trained as a primary school teacher, Jack was seconded in 1963 to Burwood Teachers College to lecture in nature study, organising and leading tours to central and northern Australia for the college from 1964-73.

Wilson's Promontory in southern Victoria came under the Hyett influence as he worked with Roy P Cooper on a bird survey that lasted from 1967-74 and conducted a mammal survey of this extensive area from 1973-76.

Jack was elected an Honorary Life Member of BOCA in 1989, having served the club over the years as committee man, and relieving and later assistant editor of the *Australian Bird Watcher* (now *Australian Field Ornithology*) and also as its indexer.

In 1963 he inaugurated the BOCA Historic Photographic Collection and was its custodian until 1995.

This talented observer and nature specialist led overseas tours, often for commercial operators, to Africa, the Galapagos Islands, South America, India and Sri Lanka. He was awarded an Honorary Life Membership of the Field Ornithology Group of Sri Lanka in 1980.

Another honour came his way in 1985 when he was awarded the coveted Australian Natural History Medallion in the category of Natural History (Ornithology).

The receipt of the Medal of the Order of Australia was a highlight of 1997 for Jack Hyett. The Australian press paid tribute to this, citing "service to conservation and the environment as an active member of the Bird Observers Club of Australia for 60 years and as the author of numerous publications on native fauna."

Written by Leonie Robbins from an obituary in The Bird Observer Vol 10 (4) December 2001 by Ken Simpson.