

Laurie Jones

Strong voice for birds and birding

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Laurie Jones is modest about his achievements in the BOCA organisation, yet his involvement as camp organiser and leader, BOCA council and conservation committee member and SunBOCA committee member and local newsletter editor clearly demonstrates his dedication to birding and club matters.

The former Victorian Country Roads Board (now Vic Roads) civil engineer and Chief General Manager, Operations joined the club in 1965, citing his mother as the one who sparked his early interest in birdwatching.

Later, Laurie and his wife Hazel were inspired to learn more about birds through Brigadier Officer's book of Australian honeyeaters. “When we found it was published by the Bird Observers Club we contacted its publication secretary (Miss Ritchie) whose name and address was in the book. She introduced us to the club.”

“My wife has been a major influence on my birding life and has joined me in travelling and enjoying birdwatching all over Australia. Others too have helped with identification and locations, particularly Howard Jarman, Keith Richards, Rex Buckingham and Eric Stricklen.

“Birders who joined us on extended trips included Erle Wood, Snow and Dorothy Perry, Barry and Roberta McLean and Ken and Marilyn Rix.”

As well being the driving force in BOCA Christmas camps at Balmoral (Vic) in 1972, 1978 and 1983 and its spring camp of 1997 Laurie organised and led the 2002 Tagalong to the Cairns region.

Now living in the Sunraysia district Laurie started up SunBOCA's quarterly newsletter 'The Rainbow Bird' in 1993 and it is still under his editorship. “I saw the need for this publication and volunteered for the job.”

Laurie sees the Tagalong concept as an opportunity to share birding with others. “The 1972 camp at Balmoral, a site new to BOCA, was my idea and the Cairns Tagalong was also mine. I also volunteered to run other camps in response from requests from others responsible for organising BOCA's general activity programs.”

When he and Hazel first joined the club they were 'two or three weeks a year birders'. With teenage children and a demanding career Laurie found little time for birding except for brief periods during annual leave.

In the early 1970s, he says, BOCA ran few camps, perhaps only at Christmas and Easter. “These were attended by more people than today. We had 128 at the 1972 Balmoral camp. Helen Aston was among those there and she was the one who found the Painted Snipe. We saw 174 species at that camp and it was the best birding we have ever seen at Balmoral.

“We used to see more birds and more species in this area 20 to 30 years ago than we have in the last three or four years; the area has been affected by the continuing drought.”

During his many decades of birding Laurie concedes that there are more national and state parks with better access and facilities but says the loss of worthwhile bird habitat, through increased clearing of natural bush and restricted access, has markedly reduced birdwatching opportunities

Positive changes he has seen emerge are better field guides, improved binoculars and the introduction of telescopes.

Today's birders, he says, are much more mobile than in earlier years and can range further to increase their species numbers. "Although many birdos today have seen more than 600 species - myself included - a substantial proportion have never applied to join the 600 club or even have considered it.

"If there is a competitive element to it at all then I think that for most people it is mainly just to compete with themselves. I like to go to new places and even to the same places to see new species but I won't organise my life to do so. I am not a twitcher."

Laurie has had some impressive sightings over the years including a Rufous-bellied Kookaburra on Saab Island in Torres Strait in 2002 and a flock of about ten Bustards in Roma Queensland.

He was thrilled by his first sighting of a Lyre-bird dancing in Sherbrooke Forest (V), his first Gouldian and Blue-faced Finches in North Queensland and the Palm Cockatoo he saw at Iron Range.

Laurie was convinced he saw a Temminck's Stint near Malanda in 1995 but the sighting was not officially ratified. His favourite birds include the strikingly gold and black male Regent Bower-bird.

Among those who Laurie considers to have made major contributions to the club are Roy Wheeler, Rex Buckingham, Reg Johnson and Frank Stevens. He says believes Barbara Longmuir should be credited for her role in steering the club from its then Victorian base to become a pre-eminent Australian club.

Birding he says has motivated him to travel to many new and remote new places such as Cape York, Iron Range and Broome.

"I want to help people enjoy birdwatching and to increase BOCA membership and to foster community interest in birds and conservation generally."

Written by Trevor Robbins from questionnaire 1 May 2004.