

David Kinloch

Dedicated conservationist

“We must look put welfare of the bird first in every way.”

David Kinloch’s lifelong interest in bird watching began in 1958, awakened by the Latin master at his school in Kent, UK. This far-sighted man organised a Nature Study group as a weekend extra-curricular activity. Its influence on the young David was profound and had long-range effects

These culminated in his arrival in Australia and subsequent joining of the (then) Bird Observers Club in 1977 after being introduced to it by Mrs Jill Godwin, wife of a business associate.

His interest in conservation came to a head in 1988 with the purchase of the property at Clunes, a small town in central Victoria, which he shares with his wife Barbara - and which now has Land for Wildlife status.

“At the time of purchase we saw the property as an important wildlife corridor between the Mount Beckworth Reserve and the Clunes State Forest.

“It is now an important over-wintering area for the endangered Swift Parrot. Since 1988 we have recorded 110 bird species on or over it, including Swift Parrots in numbers up to 140 and for periods of up to six months continuous presence.

“The parrots reappeared in good numbers after the understorey of wattles regenerated, having being cleared by the previous owner for the sale.”

An interest in wildflowers, particularly native orchids, has developed for both Kinlochs since they decided to live permanently at Clunes.

Along with his work for the BOCA property at Yellingbo, Victoria, David rates his Clunes activities highly on his personal conservation success scale.

Previously an automotive sales consultant with a diploma in Commerce and Business Administration, he has held several positions with BOCA since his retirement, bringing to the club welcome skills in statistical analysis.

As Vice-President (1980-81/1984-85), David chaired council and monthly meetings whenever the president of the time was unavailable.

He was a council member from 1980-85, serving on membership and tours/camps/outings committees.

“The council identified the problem of stagnating membership in the early '80s after a period of successful growth in the '70s. (there was) a high dropout rate of first year members.

“The importance of *The Bird Observer* newsletter as the main point of contact for members, especially those outside Greater Melbourne, was emphasised. Steps were taken to brighten its appearance and make it more readable.

“The idea of having area representatives to welcome new members led to the establishment of branches. I had the time available to analyse membership by postcode to show which areas had sufficient base membership to establish a branch.”

The survival of the Helmeted Honeyeater had become a focus for conservation movements within BOCA and David acted as Yellingbo leader from 1979-87. He chaired the advisory committee comprising representatives from government (natural resources) departments, the Society for Growing Native Plants and BOCA, and led monthly walks at Yellingbo every first Sunday (an ongoing tradition).

He has also acted as leader at various camps and outings from 1979 until the present and, during the 1970s and '80s gave numerous talks to groups, and to schools, with valued support from BOCA slide library. “I believe the children had a better insight into (the pleasures of) bird watching by the end of the talk.”

“In the early years my interest was in learning about birding and Australian birdlife in particular and I took part in many of the activities organised by the club, especially outings and camps.”

In 2000 David published (through the Friends of Mount Beckworth group) an updated birdlist for that close-to-Clunes area, sending a copy to BOCA. Various articles by him have appeared in *The Bird Observer*.

He pays special tribute to BOCA life member Reg Johnson who, he says, acted as his mentor and influenced his birding from those earliest membership days.

As many others have done, he has shown high esteem for longtime BOCA personality Ellen McCulloch. “The sheer volume of hours she put into BOCA, from pre-1977 right up to the 1990s, (was astonishing). (Ellen) acted in several roles, including Hon. Secretary and Publicity Officer. (She wrote) many articles and pamphlets and was mentor to many fledgling birders.”

David has a special place in his heart for pelicans. “It is wondrous to see these birds, so ungainly when waddling along the ground, soaring effortlessly in a thermal”.

Despite this, he retains a special interest in honeyeaters and the specialisation of bill types within this family which allows exploitation of different plant types.

It was a promised sighting of a Helmeted Honeyeater that brought David to his first club outing - a beginners' walk at Yellingbo in 1977. “The promise was fulfilled with excellent views of a pair feeding low down a large Red Gum.

This outing was organised, he says, by Rex and Lilla Buckingham, with participants making their own way and with no fees to be paid. “Geoff Deason was there, and Frank Stephens. Colin Barraclough was a regular (at Yellingbo) along with many others.

Early days saw more men attending than women, he recalls, and more younger people too. “The Annual Report for 1976 details a total membership of 2639 at 31 December. This included 198 junior and 148 pensioners. It would be interesting to compare figures for today.”

He believes birding could be more competitive today. “There are certainly more birders, more eyes to observe the odd vagrant to add to the Australian species list. People today are more aware of the plight of threatened and vulnerable species.

“There are many more branch activities, maybe a lower attendance at camps, but more outings (like) weekdays, mid-week beginners and better field guides, better communication of unusual sightings.”

Neither he nor Barbara aspire to membership of the ‘600 Club’ and they do not count themselves as ‘twitchers’. “Our only ‘twitch’ was to view the Spotted Redshank at the SE Purification Plant about 15 or so years ago.” Their most impressive sighting was two Letter-winged Kites at Cotswolds, near Clunes, in 2002.

Of his years of involvement with BOCA, David says: “You only get out in proportion to what you put in.”

He is a firm believer in the importance of BOCA. “It brings together people with a common interest within a friendly environment that allows social interchange. My aims for the club are encompassed in its logo: ‘Appreciation, Education and Conservation’. We must put the welfare of the bird first in every way.”

Written by Leonie Robbins from notes from David 8 April 2004