

2022 Annual General Meeting

Questions & Answers

- Q. Why can't BirdLife Australia hold the Annual General Meeting (AGM) as normal?**
- A. Even though many restrictions related to COVID-19 have been lifted, there is still a potential for further restrictions on gatherings and travel to occur at the time of the scheduled AGM. Please help us by emailing your proxy forms and questions and registering for the meeting so we can plan for contingencies.
- Q. Why can't the BirdLife Australia AGM simply be postponed?**
- A. BirdLife Australia has a financial year ending on 31 December, and a legal obligation under the *Corporations Act 2001* to hold its AGM by 31 May 2022. The BirdLife Australia Constitution also requires the AGM to be held by the end of May.
- Q. Will an AGM by proxy be legal?**
- A. Yes. Under our Constitution, the BirdLife Australia AGM can be validly held with the President in the Chair, provided there are at least 39 proxies to meet the quorum of 40 members. (Proxies are counted in the quorum.)
- Q. Why can't the AGM be conducted using technology?**
- A. The BirdLife Australia Constitution currently prohibits an AGM to be held fully online. It does not prohibit a meeting using some technology, but it does not expressly permit it either. BirdLife will livestream the AGM which will allow members to follow the proceedings of the meeting remotely. BirdLife Australia will continue to explore enabling technologies / opportunities to support our future AGMs.
- Q. Joining the AGM being livestreamed via a Zoom webinar?**
- A. Members can register to attend via the AGM page on the BirdLife Australia website. However, members participating remotely will not be able to vote or ask questions via the Zoom webinar; these should be submitted via the proxy forms. The AGM will be recorded and uploaded to the AGM section of the BirdLife website after the meeting.
- Q. Is the BirdLife Australia Board confident that proxy votes are an effective way for members to participate?**
- A. Yes. Last year the 2021 AGM was held by proxy only with a very positive response from members. Our membership is familiar with the concept of proxy participation which has always been a key element of our AGMs and always features prominently in our AGM documentation. In the five years prior to the first AGM by proxy in 2021, at least 80% of membership participation in our AGMs was by proxy.

Q. If members can't attend the AGM, how will members know how the organisation is going?

A. The full documentation normally available for any AGM will still be provided to members through the BirdLife Australia's website, well before they need to cast their proxy votes. This includes:

- Minutes of the 2021 Annual General Meeting held on 29 May 2021
- 2021 Annual Report and 2021 Financial Report
- Candidate Statements for the election of Directors
- Fellow and Honorary Life Member Awards Citations

A special AGM page has been established on the BirdLife Australia website, including Q&As. Members can email or post their own questions related to the business of the AGM via their proxy form, including questions to the External Auditor, the Board or senior management. Answers will be provided on the website for members to see after the AGM.

The CEO report, which is a highlight of AGMs, will also be available on our website before the AGM.

Q. How did BirdLife Australia perform in the year under review?

A. BirdLife Australia performed well in 2021 despite the significant pandemic response and restrictions imposed. The Annual Report notes significant conservation achievements and a positive financial performance. Total Revenue increased by \$3.3m compared to 2020, due significant by 'Gifts In Wills' and a gain in the value of investments held.

Expenditure increased by \$2m compared to 2020. This is in part due to resources required to deliver conservation projects and programs, and also the start of the Digital Engagement Project.

Q. How has the COVID-19 crisis impacted BirdLife Australia?

A. BirdLife Australia has a strong balance sheet. Our COVID-19 Business Response Plan focused on managing our costs, while investing in the future. The longer-term economic impacts of the pandemic are unknown, however we are optimistic of future growth of our bird conservation programs.

. Has BirdLife Australia continued to fight for Australia's birds during the COVID-19 crisis?

A. Our staff and volunteers have not lost our focus on the birds. As public health restrictions eased in 2021, BirdLife's staff and volunteers returned to fieldwork under strict and safe working protocols within public health restrictions and guidelines. As far as is practically possible, our conservation work has continued – as highlighted in our Annual Report.

Member Questions & Answers

Set out below are general comments and responses to a range of questions submitted by members on the AGM proxy forms.

Annual and Financial Reports

Q. BirdLife receives bequests and donations could a report on how these funds are allocated be included in the annual report?

A. BirdLife applies a blended finance model where donations, grants and other diverse sources of income fund the programs described in the annual report. BirdLife's statutory Gift Fund Committee has oversight of how public donations are spent to ensure they implement our strategy, comply with government regulations and respect donor wishes. BirdLife is listed on the Register of Environmental Organisations and reports on the allocation of public donations to the Australian Government and Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC). The presentation of financial information is continually reviewed and we will consider further improvements for our annual report.

Q. Could you please elaborate on Note 13 (Intangible assets) to the financial statements. The derecognition of software implementation costs may have led to a variance between the website development costs and the total intangible asset value for FY2021.

A. Software Implementation assets derecognised in accordance with IFRS Interpretations Committee (IFRIC) guidance'. This is in relation to the Finance system.

Q. Why are members not informed of the amount received for specific projects for which donations are sought and what the money is actually used for?

A. See above. BirdLife regularly communicates directly with our funders - donors, grant managers and partners - regarding the activities and impact of the organisation's bird conservation programs.

Membership

Q. Membership decreased by 2,409 between 31 December 2020 and 31 December 2021. Subscriptions, which I believe include Wildbird Protector receipts, decreased by approximately \$56,000 over the same period. As a current member, I was not reminded to renew my membership by electronic, postal or other means earlier this calendar year and had to proactively renew my membership by phone. What actions is BirdLife taking to ensure ongoing, financial engagement of members with the organisation?

A. Membership subscription income reduced primarily as a result of a delay in issuing renewal reminders for memberships due as at 31 December 2021. The delays were caused by preparation for the migration of data to a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, which will significantly improve engagement with our supporters. Members continue to receive the quarterly Australian Birdlife magazine in digital and/or print form and following deployment of the new CRM the regular pattern of membership renewals communications will resume. Wildbird Protector income is included as donations in the financial accounts not the membership subscriptions line.

Q. With the member and other categories etc there seems to be less connection for Wildbird Protectors who do not come up on local area lists.

A. Network groups have traditionally engaged local members on volunteer events and activities through e-newsletters and email. CRM implementation will allow BirdLife to carefully invite supporters (who are not members) to opt-in within agreed communications and privacy protocols.

Q. In the past year, BirdLife has conducted several remarkable campaigns to engage mainstream Australians, including the release of the *Songs of Disappearance* soundtrack and the increasingly popular *Aussie Backyard Bird Count*. How have these activities translated into grassroots advocacy for protecting the future of birds in Australia?

A. Campaigns such as these are important ways for new and existing supporters to become more aware and involved in the challenges facing Australian birds. Participants in these types of campaigns are asked to directly engage in our work, either through financial support, advocacy actions and/or volunteering. Over the seven years to 2021, 12,000 advocacy actions were taken by new supporters introduced to BirdLife through the Bird Count.

Research, Science and Conservation

Q. Is or has there been any significant progress nationally on the control of feral cats and foxes?

A. Yes. National leadership on the management of feral cats was spearheaded by the Australian Government's Threatened Species Strategy in 2015 (BirdLife Australia played a significant role in the establishment of the Office of the Threatened Species Commissioner and Strategy). Since then, there has been significant investment in developing control tools for their management. A National Feral Cat Taskforce, established and chaired by the Threatened Species Commissioner, provides a forum for all governments and feral cat experts to effectively collaborate on strategies and action. National progress on feral animal control is available here: <https://www.awe.gov.au/biosecurity-trade/invasive-species/feral-animals-australia/feral-cats>

BirdLife Australia focuses on feral animal/cat control through the delivery of its programs. For example, BirdLife recently secured a grant from the Australian Government's Priority Species Grants program to continue the Western Ground Parrot translocation program. Some of those funds will support the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attraction's introduced feral predator control programs (primarily cat trapping) at both source and release sites. BirdLife's Beach-nesting Birds program also focuses on targeted predator control to improve breeding success.

Q. Late in 2020, two important proposals came before the English Names Committee (ENC).

Les Christidis spoke on behalf of the Working Group on Avian Checklists (WGAC) about progress towards a consolidated world bird list. Proposed common names will not be imposed on regional authorities but adopted or modified at their discretion. He therefore anticipated future liaison between WGAC and ENC.

Second was a request to ENC to alter certain English names that were known to be insensitive, in line with changes being made elsewhere in the world. Earlier ENC had considered a request to approve more appealing names for threatened taxa to replace current long-winded ones. The ENC's terms of reference do not facilitate these changes.

ENC chair Geoffrey Dabb prepared an informative review of the ENC in relation to the above and other matters. Its presentation to the Board was deferred and might since have been overlooked. The committee has conducted very little business since that time.

Will the Board call for the above review and provide direction for the future of the ENC?

A. The BirdLife Board considers scientific matters through the CEO based on the advice of its scientific advisory committee: the Research & Conservation Committee (RACC). BirdLife Australia uses our own Working List of Australian Birds, following the approach of BirdLife International, to assist us in our conservation work. BirdLife will consider the

consequences of harmonisation for existing conservation listings once the (complex) process is complete. We also acknowledge and share in public concerns about birds named after problematic colonial figures - especially birds like the Major Mitchell's Cockatoo, also known as the Pink Cockatoo. BirdLife Australia is working with RACC to establish an Advisory Working Group of diverse stakeholders, including Traditional Owners and historians, to address this issue. Currently, there are over 300 bird species, including non-breeding migrants and vagrants to Australia, that reference historic figures (either eponymously or via place names). Initially, our Advisory Working Group will be focusing on 31 high priority names of species breeding in Australia that have eponymous names that are potentially culturally insensitive – including the Major Mitchell's Cockatoo. We hope that, as this work progresses, we can come together to choose culturally appropriate and inclusive names that do birds like this beautiful cockatoo justice.

- Q. Would BirdLife Australia consider making concerted approaches to school curriculum committees to include, under relevant curriculum outcomes, across the years, understanding of and joy brought by Australian birds?**
- A. BirdLife Australia has a range of school-based resources that are delivered in many of our programs as well as our branches. Our Birds in Schools Project (<https://birdlife.org.au/projects/urban-birds/birds-in-schools-project>) has been developed with links to the national curriculum and is designed to encourage long-term learning within the school as well as giving teachers the flexibility to explore their and their student's own passions around birds. Incorporating these resources within already packed curriculums is, however, challenging.

Branch Network

- Q. Why haven't the "Western Australian Bird Notes" subscribers, 700, been consulted regarding the arbitrary decision that the publication will only be available digitally from 2023. There is support for an on-going hard copy of this long-running publication from the WA membership.**
- A. BirdLife Australia has been committed to 'digital first' as a key objective of our five-year operating plan (2017 - 2022) in order to reduce environmental impacts associated with print and postage and allowing everyone to invest their time and funds on conversation work to save Australia's birds. Network Groups have already embraced this transition. In April 2021, the WA Executive Committee was engaged on implications for WA Bird Notes of a new CRM and the 'digital first' objective and we welcome their constructive approach.
- WA Bird Notes hard copy production is being financially supported by BirdLife Australia, while the WA Committee develops a plan for moving to a fully digital model, including strategies for people who do not have access to digital technology. A free digital WA Bird Notes will reach a much wider cross section of the WA community who will learn and benefit from the wealth of bird knowledge communicated in this important publication.
- Q. What is BirdLife Australia doing to promote branches such as WA Midwest BirdLife and increase the habitats – stop housing development etc – to make sure there are hollows and habitat increase for our wildlife? BirdLife needs to communicate more with MP's and Councils to add weight to biodiversity and increase in wildlife. BirdLife Australia needs to support road verge habitats and spend money on all board and TV advertising as well as ABC radio and TV. Now.**
- A. BirdLife Australia announced at the AGM the launch of a new 10-year Bird Conservation Strategy to stop the extinction crisis and reverse bird population declines. This includes the conservation actions needed to save birds, a communications and media strategy to reach one million supporters and a participation strategy to grow and empower our amazing volunteers.

BirdLife Australia values the role of our Network in leading bird conservation, locally, from volunteer fieldwork to engaging local government representatives and writing submissions.

Partnerships

Q. I would like more information about your collaboration with Bush Heritage please. A great initiative!

A. BirdLife works closely with many nature conservation organisations to deliver our programs. A collaborative woodland birds project with Bush Heritage, Greening Australia, Trust for Nature, Zoos Victoria and Odonata is in the final planning stage.

Q. Will BirdLife Australia follow the lead of other leading conservation NGOs and develop a transparent Black, Grey and Green list of potential funding sources?

A. BirdLife Australia has a long history of working with corporate partners to deliver better outcomes for birds. All partnerships must comply with a corporate partnerships policy based on best practice. BirdLife will not enter into any agreement which impacts on our independence. Note: working with the private sector to deliver nature-friendly business practices at the scale we need is a priority within the new 10-year Bird Conservation Strategy.

Comments

The threat of dogs to birdlife, we know the terrible consequences cats have on birds, but in my birding trips I see birds constantly being disturbed by dogs, a case in point – Edwards Pt Nature Reserve in Pt Phillip Bay near St Leonards. Dogs on leash are allowed, which is absurd as it's supposed to be a nature reserve, when I've travelled there dogs are constantly off leash and often chasing birds roosting on beaches and sandspits including migratory waders. I no longer visit this place because of this.

Patricia Bingham certainly deserves recognition for her dedication to the bird world, and always ensuring that learning is a positive experience.