

2023 BirdLife Australia Fellow

CITATION

The award of Fellow of BirdLife Australia recognises distinguished services to ornithology, particularly through BirdLife Australia and its predecessor organisations. It is the highest award available to both professionals and amateurs.

Emeritus Professor Mike Clarke

Emeritus Professor Mike Clarke has made a long, sustained and significant contribution to ornithology, nature conservation and scientific leadership, in Australia and internationally.

His early interest in ornithology was nurtured as a teenager by Ellen McCulloch, Reg Johnson and Kath Hough of the Bird Observers Club of Australia. He went on to receive a BSc (Hons) and PhD (1987) from the University of Melbourne for his research on the behavioural ecology of the Bell Miner. Subsequently, he took up a post-doctoral position at McGill University, Canada; followed by appointment as a Lecturer in Zoology at La Trobe University in 1992. La Trobe became the base for a distinguished career over the next three decades, with successive promotions to Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor and Reader, Professor, and in 2020 Emeritus Professor. Mike served as the Head of the Department of Zoology (2009-2011) and then Head of the School of Life Sciences (2011-2019).

Mike's research has made important contributions in two broad areas: the behavioural ecology and conservation of bird species, particularly the Bell Miner, Noisy Miner and endangered Black-eared Miner; and the impacts of fire on the distribution and conservation status of birds and other taxa in ecosystems ranging from mallee shrublands to foothill forests and box-ironbark woodlands. He continues a long-term (18+ years) monitoring program on the effects of fire on the avifauna of Wilsons Promontory National Park. His research typically is collaborative, undertaken in partnership with Government and other agencies, and has real-world implications for conservation and land management while also advancing conceptual understanding. In 2007, he was awarded the DL Serventy Medal for 'outstanding published work on birds in the Australasian region'.

Mike has made significant contributions to BirdLife Australia and to ornithology both nationally and internationally. He has been the coordinator of the RAOU Nest Record Scheme (1983-1989), a member of BirdLife Australia's Research & Conservation Committee (2009-2012), and for almost two decades served on Threatened Species Recovery Teams (Black-eared Miner, Regent Honeyeater, Helmeted Honeyeater). He was a member of the Executive Committee of the International Ornithological Congress from 1998-2006. In the Australasian region, he was a long-term member of the Australasian Ornithological Conference Scientific Steering Committee (2001-2014). In 2000, he served as Co-chair of the Scientific Program Committee for the 2nd Southern Hemisphere Ornithological Congress.

His scientific contributions and leadership extend beyond academic and ornithological spheres. Among many roles, Mike was Convenor of the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act Scientific Advisory Committee to the Minister for the Environment, Victoria; member of the Scientific Advisory Committee for Zoos Victoria; member of the Department of Sustainability and Environment Fire Ecology Scientific Reference Committee; and member of Parks Victoria's Scientific and Management Effectiveness Advisory Committee. Currently, he is an active member of the Board of Parks Victoria. His expert advice has frequently been sought, particularly in relation to fire ecology and management. He was an expert witness for Counsel Assisting in the 2009 Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission; provided advice to the Bushfires Royal Commission Implementation Monitor; was an invited member of the Expert Reference Group for Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning's review of the Victorian Bushfire Management Program; and advised the Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

Mike's legacy will continue through the many students he has taught or supervised. Indeed, a number have continued their careers through BirdLife Australia. He has a well-founded reputation as an excellent teacher, bringing enthusiasm and commitment to this role. He has championed field-based learning and, through his scientific curiosity and passion for the natural world, inspired a generation of conservation biology students on field courses at Wilsons Promontory and in the Mallee. The numerous Honours and PhD students he has supervised are now embedded in many agencies, organisations and Universities, advancing ornithology and nature conservation in diverse ways.

With such a sustained and distinguished career in ornithology, education, conservation and scientific leadership, including a long-term commitment to BirdLife Australia, Mike is a most worthy candidate for election as a Fellow of BirdLife Australia.