

2023 BirdLife Australia Honorary Life Member CITATION

Honorary Life Membership is awarded to someone for making a distinguished contribution to the objects of BirdLife Australia and its predecessor organisations. It is the highest award to recognise our members for their distinguished contribution to the organisation.

Sheena Gillman

Introduction

Sheena Gillman joined the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union in 1991, and has been the Chair of BirdLife Southern Queensland's Conservation subcommittee, and its predecessor organisation, since 2011. She is recognised as a tireless, fearless and outspoken advocate for bird conservation causes and issues throughout Queensland. She has an exceptional capacity to liaise with members of the public, private land holders, BirdLife Australia volunteers, local communities, Traditional Owners and First Nations peoples.

Sheena's networking capacity is remarkable. She is adept at fostering longstanding community partnerships, and relationships with landholders, coupled with her outstanding ability to move organisations from talking about doing something to taking actions that make a fundamental difference to conservation outcomes. She achieves this through remarkable generosity of spirit and unparalleled energy.

Sheena delivers outcomes by willingly working within communities, government departments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), writing authoritative submissions, active lobbying, saying what she means and meaning what she says, doing what she says, and just never giving up! She epitomizes the saying 'when the going gets tough, the tough get going'. Her tenacity is the more remarkable because, in the face of health adversities that would lead to a quiet retirement for most. Sheena has never missed a beat. Never missed an important meeting. Never stopped working to improve conservation outcomes in Queensland. This citation touches only on some of her achievements.

Conservation Commitment to the Northern Subspecies of the Eastern Bristlebird

Sheena has played a significant leadership role in the recovery of the northern subspecies of the eastern bristlebird, which is now one of BirdLife Australia's Preventing Extinctions flagship species. Since 1998, Sheena has coordinated the effort of volunteers for this species in Queensland, resulting in greater outreach to bird watchers and land holders. She has continued as a member of the Northern Working Group collaborating with landholders, researchers, NGOs and governments collaborating on Eastern Bristlebird conservation. Whilst she no longer tramps up and down Mt Gipps her role has not diminished. In 2019 she accompanied two volunteers to retrieve suitable grasses and habitat for the captive breeding program of Eastern Bristlebird in Queensland and personally planted out the aviaries with the retrieved vegetation. The recent acoustic recording of an Eastern Bristlebird on a Queensland property – the first confirmed record of this species in Queensland for several years - has its genesis in her relationships with local landholders and mentoring BirdLife Australia's Preventing Extinctions Project Officer, working on acoustic monitoring for this species in Queensland.

As a direct result of her commitment to this species, BirdLife Southern Queensland has contributed significant funds to this program over many years which has leveraged additional funding for research and on-ground action.

Protect the Bush Alliance: A 'whole of nature' response to saving habitat.

Sheena is a committed citizen scientist and actively uses her birding expertise to progress conservation impacts, but her understanding of habitat loss as the biggest conservation threat *as a whole* is one of her greatest strengths. While surveys may not always find listed birds, they may find threatened plants, plant communities, amphibians or reptiles. To this end, in 2012, Sheena created an umbrella conservation organisation with a broad conservation NGO membership. Initially run under the auspices of both the National Parks Association of Queensland and BirdLife Southern Queensland, Protect the Bush Alliance was incorporated in 2017. Sheena is now Chair of Protect the Bush Alliance which includes over 30 NGOs and community groups in Queensland representing over 30,000 people. One of its objectives is to undertake survey work in areas of high conservation value with the aim of providing evidence to support sites for inclusion in the protected area estate. Apart from her survey coordination and active survey participation, Sheena is the driving force behind recruiting and retaining a faithful team of multidisciplinary experts, including birders, botanists, ecologists and herpetologists.

Whilst many worry about the impacts of fossil fuels on climate change, Sheena takes action, and her campaigning and advocacy in this arena has been significant. In response to a request from the Kingaroy Concerned Citizens Group, Sheena coordinated a survey of a proposed mine site with an expert botanist. In addition to an extensive bird list, that survey found seven koala, one endangered Regional Ecosystem, one vulnerable Regional Ecosystem, and 15 rare plants, three of which were endangered. None of these findings were noted in the EA surveys for the site. Approval for the mine was rescinded as a result of these findings, and the associated community actions.

Sheena coordinated another survey with two expert botanists on the site of a proposed coal mine at Avondale, north of Bundaberg. In addition to an extensive bird list, the four seasonal surveys undertaken at 43 locations within the mine footprint identified 966 plant species and 13 endangered and 9 'of concern' plant communities, demonstrating the remarkable biodiversity of the site. The information was provided to the Bundaberg Regional Council. Sheena received correspondence from the Mayor of Bundaberg Regional Council thanking her and the other volunteers for their work. Approval for this mine has also been rescinded.

Queensland-wide conservation work

Sheena's reach and influence extends well beyond the boundaries of BirdLife Southern Queensland's region. With the support of grants received from the Australian BirdLife Environment Foundation (ABEF), Sheena has coordinated the following projects:

1. *Eungella Bird Week:* In 2019, Protect the Bush Alliance successfully applied for a grant to coordinate the Eungella Bird Week. In addition to the social side of bird week events, with the aid of key volunteers and BirdLife Mackay, Sheena coordinated the event which focused on targeted surveys of the eungella honeyeater (EUHO).

During 15-18 October 2019, 35 surveys were conducted using a systematic survey method to determine the presence/absence and abundance of the threatened eungella honeyeater in woodland and rainforest in and around Eungella National Park, Queensland. This species, which is listed as 'of least concern', is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The surveys found that the species had disappeared from woodland sites that contained suitable habitat for the species. The findings indicated that severe drought and climate change was affecting nectar availability and hence habitat suitability¹

2. *Painted Honeyeater Project:* Little is known of the distribution of this enigmatic species in western Queensland. Furthermore, as most of the land is on private estates and cattle leases, there are significant gaps in the recorded distribution for many bird species for that region. BirdLife Southern Queensland received two ABEF (2019 and 2022²) grants to run workshops with landholders and local communities in western Queensland. Using her extensive rural networks, Sheena gained unprecedented access large land holdings where Birddata gaps exist in western Queensland.

Sheena and another BirdLife Southern Queensland volunteer were invited onto Gracevale Station which has been transferred through the Indigenous Land Council to a group of traditional owners who are working with the Land Regeneration Group to restore freshwater springs, protect extensive rock art and artefacts and to establish eco-tourism.

¹ Julien, P., Moran, A., & Gillman, S. 2019, *Eungella Survey Report 2019*. Protect the Bush Alliance, Brisbane.

² Timing of project impacted by COVID-19 pandemic.

Birddata was introduced to two enthusiastic Indigenous Rangers from Mt Isa and an Ethnobotanist from the Queensland Herbarium. Sheena has, of course, maintained this relationship.

In 2019, a total of 51 surveys were undertaken on private land. Whilst no painted honeyeaters were recorded, many birds recorded triggered 'out of range' notices in Birddata.

3. *Bimblebox Alliance*: Sheena has been an active member of the Bimblebox Alliance for many years. Apart from undertaking surveys on the property, she has been to every court hearing associated with this campaign, and has been a remarkable advocate for that successful campaign.
4. *Ramsar Sites*: Sheena is a champion of the Toondah campaign, but her passion to protect Ramsar sites goes above and beyond Toondah.
5. She is a vocal champion against gas exploration and fracking in Kati Thanda (Lake Eyre Basin), including the Coongie Lakes Ramsar site, which has gas exploration licences. At a local level, she also strongly advocated against the Colton Mine at Maryborough, which would have released contaminated wastewater into the Mary and Susan Rivers that flow into the Great Sandy Straits.

The Biennial Queensland Ornithological Conference (QOC).

BirdLife Southern Queensland and Birds Queensland recognise Sheena's immense organising contribution for the biennial Queensland Ornithological Conference. Using her extensive networks to secure high quality speakers and sponsors for the program, Sheena has played a significant role in establishing this event as a nationally important conservation conference.

Women's Environmental Leadership Australia

The Women's Environmental Leadership Australia program is open to 20 Australian women each year. In recognition of her contribution to conservation, Sheena received a full scholarship, and completed this prestigious program in 2020. She continues to mentor women in the environmental sector.

In conclusion, Sheena is an outstanding candidate for recognition of her contribution to birds, BirdLife Australia, and the environment.