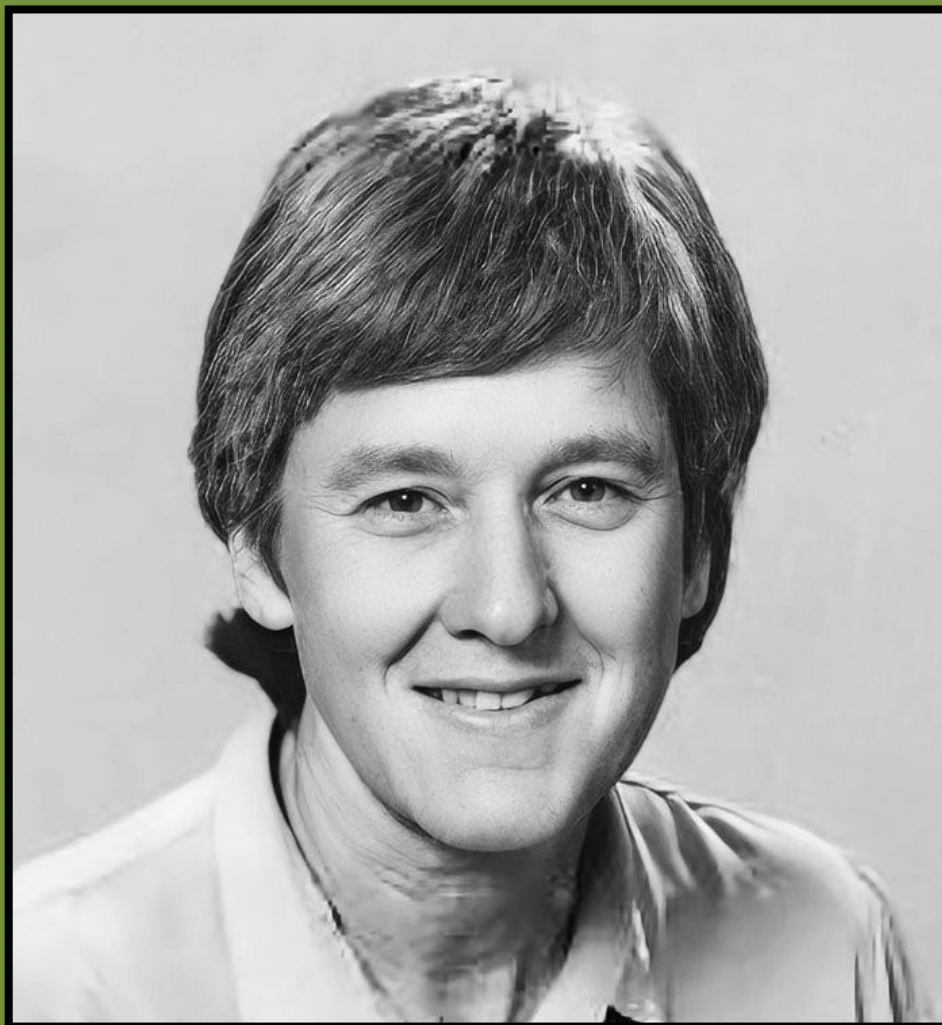


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Chief Editor

Richard Noske

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The aims of Birds Queensland are to promote awareness and appreciation, as well as conservation and scientific study of birds, with particular emphasis on the birds of Queensland. The society holds a general meeting and several field excursions each month. All members receive a monthly newsletter.

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<https://birdsqueensland.org.au>
secretary@birdsqueensland.org.au

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Front Cover: Margaret Cameron at Deakin University in 1990, when she was Pro Vice-Chancellor (Photo: Deakin University Archives)

Obituary: Margaret Cameron AM (1937-2023)

Born in Ipswich on 10 September 1937, Margaret Alison Cameron passed away on 29 September 2023, aged 86, after two years at the Memory Support Unit at Fairview, Pinjarra Hills, not far from the town of her birth, to which she had returned 17 years earlier. With her passing, Australian ornithology has lost one of its greatest champions.



Margaret relaxing during Black-throated Finch surveys, April 2012.

Photo: Maggie Overend

Early life in Queensland

The eldest daughter of Des and Margot Cameron, Margaret was fascinated with nature from the start, growing up on a small dairy farm near Tamborine Village and later another farm at Beechmont. Her interest in nature was encouraged by her father who had returned from war service in North Africa and New Guinea. As she was thought too young to ride to school, Meg's early education was by distance education, through the Queensland Primary Correspondence School. Later she and her younger sister, Jan, rode double-back on their horse, Paddy, to the one-room one-teacher Tamborine State School of 24 children. Paddy used to bolt home - the girls falling off from time to time and bumping and squashing the

sugar bags of meat and groceries it was their job to bring home. Margaret described their life as that of very marginal dairy farmers - milking fewer than 30 Jersey cows by hand, selling the cream, feeding pigs skim milk, keeping a few chickens for eggs and growing vegetables, some for the Brisbane markets.

Margaret went on to Saint Margaret's Anglican Girls' School in Ascot, Brisbane. Along with all the other core subjects, she took Latin and French and for good measure, was taught extracurricular German and Ancient Greek by the Nuns. From there, she went to the University of Queensland, attending Women's College and gaining her BA, with honours in English. She subsequently pursued a career in academic librarianship, first serving in the State Library in Queensland and the University of Queensland, and later, Flinders University (S.A.) and Macquarie University (NSW). She was also librarian at the Australian Reference Library at the Australian Consulate in New York during 1962 and 1963. Ten years later she returned to the USA and also went to the UK having been awarded a Fulbright University Administrator Grant and as a British Council Cultural Visitor. While at Macquarie University library (1969-1977), she became involved with the running of several societies, including the Ornithology Section of the Royal Zoological Society of NSW and the NSW Field Ornithologists Club.

In 1977, Margaret was appointed the foundation Chief Librarian at Deakin University in Geelong, Victoria, and her career blossomed both professionally and ornithologically. She was Pro Vice-Chancellor from 1986 to 1990, a period that included the interregnum between two Vice-Chancellors when she acted as Head of the University. During the interview for this

position, she was asked by the interview panel why she wanted to work there. Answer: “Because it’s the University closest to the Werribee Sewerage Farm”! In 1999, Deakin University bestowed on her an honorary degree, Doctor of the University, for her services as its Librarian and representative in many other capacities. When she retired, the Woolstores campus Library was officially named in her honour.

Margaret’s organisational prowess was recognised by many Federal and State authorities, and during her lifetime, she served on over 30 national, state or local boards and committees. She was a member of the Advisory Committee of the Australian Biological Resources Study (1984 -1991) and was its Chairman from 1987. Within Victoria, she was a member and Chairman of the Research Advisory Committee to the Minister of Conservation, Forests and Lands from 1986 onwards, and a member of the Council of the Museum of Victoria, Library Board of Victoria, Geelong Community Foundation, Geelong Regional Commission, Rotary Club of Geelong, Environmental Advisory Board of Greater Geelong, National Wool Museum Committee of Management, Geelong College Council, and Geelong Hospital Board of Management for over 10 years.

If it wasn’t obvious, Margaret loved Geelong and the Cats - both the AFL team and the real animals - but naturally kept her pets indoors. In 1987, Margaret’s professional leadership was recognised by the award of Fellow of the Library Association of Australia, and in 1990 she received the honour of becoming a Member of the Order of Australia for her services to “library services, education and to ornithology”.

Involvement with BirdLife Australia

Margaret served as a Councillor for the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union (RAOU, now BirdLife Australia) from 1980 to 1989, and was President during the last three years of that period, becoming the third woman to hold that office. Although she differed from most of her presidential predecessors in not being a professional ornithologist, she devoted much of her spare time to birds as an exuberant amateur. She was Chairman of the RAOU Library Committee from 1980 and Chairman of the Publications Committee from 1982 to 1989. From 1990 she was convenor of the Victorian Group of the RAOU. She was also a keen supporter of the Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds (HANZAB), Birds of Prey (BOP) Watch, and many other RAOU projects. In 1993, she was awarded a Fellowship of the RAOU, the highest honour bestowed by the organisation.

Margaret was an especially keen member of the Geelong Field Naturalists’ Club, and she edited their quarterly journal, the Geelong Naturalist, for eight years (1980-1987). She was also a competent bird bander and counter, taking an active role in the Victorian Wader Studies Group for many years. Margaret was also a founding member of Birding-Aus which took flight in 1994, and she worked hard to establish the online birding community. Indeed, she posted the first-ever rare bird report - a Scarlet Honeyeater in the library carpark at Deakin’s Geelong campus!

Margaret was an adventurer, visiting the remotest parts of Australia many times, driving huge distances in her tiny Subaru. But she also travelled overseas in pursuit of birds, including sub-Saharan Africa, and was one of the first Australians to join a birding tour of Papua (formerly Irian Jaya), which included a gruelling 5-day trek from the Snow Mountains to the Baliem Valley. She even survived a shipwreck in the Timor Sea at night!



Margaret in 2016 after receiving her BQ Honorary Life Membership.

Photo: Garth Kelly

Involvement with Birds Queensland

Margaret had been a member of Birds Queensland (BQ) since 1973, and after returning to the state of her birth in 2004, she became actively involved in most BQ activities. She was Meeting Speaker Coordinator for more than six years, and volunteered to lead the first Diamantina Expedition in 2013, and since then led the 2014, 2015 and 2017 expeditions, as well as an expedition to Idalia and Lochern National Parks in 2016. In addition to leading at least one BQ bird walk a year, Margaret supported BQ's involvement in the biennial Peaks to Point Festival by leading a walk at her local site, Harding's Paddock, during three such events. She also played a pivotal role in organising bird information stands, particularly for events in and around Ipswich, such as the Ipswich Plant Expo. In 2016, Margaret was awarded Honorary Life Membership of BQ.

Margaret also made an immense contribution to the work of Birdlife Southern Queensland (BSQ), for which she received a citation in 2015. She coordinated the Daly's Lagoon (South Ripley) longitudinal monthly bird survey since 2005, and was a regular, reliable participant in other bird surveys such as those at Mt Ommaney and Pooh Corner Bushland Reserves, SEQ Catchments, Galilee Basin and Ballara Park Nature Refuge, as well as Adopt a Farm (Granite Belt). She was also a keen participant in most annual Twitchathons run by both BQ and BSQ, and was successful in raising the highest amount of funds in many such events.

Passionate about instilling an interest in birds and their habitats, she took many young people and beginners 'under her wing' and often enlisted them on her Twitchathon teams. Indeed, my first memories of Margaret hail from when I was a high school student in Sydney during the early 70s, and she was Librarian at Macquarie University. Margaret was a regular participant on the early pelagic (seabird) trips outside Sydney Heads during the early 70s, and though she succeeded in coercing me to partake in several of them, she clearly suffered less from seasickness.

I believe Margaret will be remembered as a highly intelligent, kind, generous and brave person. Wherever she lived, she worked for her community and for her church, and cared for strangers, as well as her friends and loved ones. She was self-reliant, and never seemed to complain. A true non-conformist, she got on with things in her own way, immune to fads or fashion, with her characteristic limitless energy and enthusiasm. Finally, I thank Ted Ringrose, Margaret's nephew, for many facts and anecdotes about her life.

Richard Noske (Past BQ President). Email rnoske@tpg.com.au

