

by Bruce Hansen. ANGFA (Qld)

After two excellent conferences in Sydney organised by our hard working Victorian ANGFA friends, it was time for the 'deep north' to turn it on - and turn it on we did - but not without some last minute anxieties from the weather, Heiko Blaher's schedule and Mr Hawks election.

The initial spade-work and general format was setup by Steve Hume and painstakingly fine-tuned by Greg Ure, with the input & help along the way by many others. Thanks to their efforts the conference was an outstanding success with favourable comments from local, interstate and international attendees.

The bonus with this year's Conference Wallet and goodies from our sponsors was a Plant Food Test Kit (with ANGFA Conference labeling) and an impressive Conference Book, complete with great artwork by local members. We also had available our new ANGFA Club Shirts with Honey Blue-Eye motif and a range of books including the Australian release of Dr Gerry Allen's latest on the 'Freshwater Fishes of Australia' plus static displays by D.P.I.

Here's a rundown on the lecturers:

1. Chris Barlow. (Fisheries D.P.I.) began the serious part of the weekend with a background and update on the M.eachamensis programme. Some 3000 have been released back into Lake Eacham as a trial, but where do we go from here? Another question at present is whether M.eachamensis represents a valid species. Other sites for establishing populations have been considered (such as lake Euramo) but effects on the existing populations have to be assessed first. Certainly M.eachamensis is not 'out of the fire' yet.

Our experts in the audience contributed actively to the question time and once again this disaster was cited as a perfect example of the dangers of translocations.

2. Jasper Trendall. (Aquaculture Consultant) guided us through the theory and practical aspects of the genetics involved in assessing re-stocking programs with his colourful slides of 'Dotfish' populations. He certainly me come to grips with electrophoresis, Founder effect, random drift etc. and left us with the clear message that preserving genetic variation is important to maintain the adaptability of a stock or population. Questions followed and Rolly McKays comments were prominent.

3. Mike Pearce. (Veterinary Officer with D.P.I. Fisheries N.T.) delivered an up to date authoritative talk on the Epizootic Ulcerative Syndrome that has caused epidemics of massive fish losses in various areas of S.E.Asia, Papua New Guinea and Australia since 1972. The answer is still not clear - perhaps an infectious viral agent initially, followed secondary fungus? Some helpful facts emerged - population resistance is developing gradually; quarantine fish for at least 4 weeks; affected fish should be sacrificed to a Pathologist for a definite diagnosis. We look forward to further results from his research.

4. Rolly McKay. (Senior Curator of Fishes, Queensland Museum) chose a topic that everyone of us is concerned about - the world wide problem of Conservation V Economic Growth and how this will influence the future for Australian Freshwater Fishes. In a wide ranging discussion involving everything from toxic chemicals and groundwater contamination, through soil degradation, sewage disposal, rainforest destruction to smuggling and translocation of fishes. he showed us his grasp and passion for the subject.

Rolly concluded by suggesting some positive conservation ideas and a role for ANGFA in future conservation for Australian native fishes.

5. Chris Barlow. has international experience in evaluation of fish stocking programs to enhance recreational and commercial fisheries. he illustrated his talk with slides taken last year in Texas and Japan while he was there on a Churchill Fellowship. Many fascinating facts came to light, including use of sterile hybrids; "scale" monitoring; hatchery techniques (including a simple biological filter); pollution in Japan's Inland Sea; fingerling marking by fin removal and acoustic training.

6. Bradley Pusey. (Griffith University) talked on the ecology of fishes in temporary waters of South-western Australia. Although he covered all 6 species involved, he made most detailed references to the fascinating but little-known aestivating species - Lepidogalaxias salamandroides. It was a masterly exposition and left us amazed at the uniqueness of this 'living fossil' and the wonderful diversity of the biology of our native fishes.

7. Jasper Trendall's second stint was an eye-opener. His slides of Lake Malawi and its fish were superb, his commentary concerned the 3 major habitats, breeding and survival especially of the many and varied cichlid species of this rift lake. His work there for the World Wildlife Fund contributed to the production of a guidebook which was on sale at the Conference.

8. Gunther Schmida. Our world renowned wildlife photographer, completed the first afternoons presentations with a series of slides from 20 years experience of fish photography. He even kidded us along by showing a few selected 'poor' shots, just to make us feel good about our own efforts. ((I wish my good shots were as good as Gunthers 'rejects' Ed.)) During the hour or so, we saw his perspective of the families of Australian fishes and finished up with our beautiful colourful Rainbowfishes. All this accompanied by a commentary rich in experience of collecting, keeping and photographing.

9. Auction. The Saturday night auction was a monster. About 300 items in all including fish and plants. For such a huge auction things went very smoothly and bidding was brisk. For many it was a golden opportunity to acquire new stock or new fish and to renew old acquaintances.

10. Rick Datodi. Led off on Sunday morning. His experience with Pet & Aquarium Industries Pty Ltd over many years was obvious in his talk, which was oriented towards the practical. He covered water quality and chemistry (including the practical measurement of these parameters); filtration (briefly including trickle systems) and on to diseases.

He recommends that every serious aquarist have a basic dissection kit for such procedures as gill samples and autopsies. All in all it was a wide ranging practical talk with very little padding and lots of good advice.

11. Walter Ivantsoff. (Macquarie University.) has made several major collecting trips around Australia and to New Guinea, collecting and looking at hardyheads, Blue-Eyes and Rainbowfishes. he is interested in the relationships of these fishes to each other and to the geological changes of the past.

He showed us slides not only of the fishes and habitats, but also some of the hazards of collecting, with special reference to Hardyheads - many of which he has described for the first time. It was a most enjoyable stroll through the known species and trying to relate them to the geological events.

12. Gilbert Maebe. (I.R.G.) For many was the highlight of the Conference. His delightful slide show with very professional titles and accompanying audio comment drew the loudest and longest applause of any presentation. His fish and photographs were excellent and he was the best possible advertisement for ANGFA and the egg shipment program. Gilbert's friend Franz Proost drew the delightful cartoons that accompanied the slides and we thank them for travelling all the way from Belgium to show us the current situation with Rainbowfish in Europe.

13. Algela Arthington. (Griffith University) Was finally able to be present for ANGFA and showed some very interesting information on the diets and food relationships of many common local species and how they share the food resources of their habitats. There were quite a few minor surprises to most of us - eg. the large amount of surface insects in the diet of Mogurnda sp. She concluded with an appeal to ANGFA to act as a lobby group by demanding basic research and education for the public on biology and ecology of our waterways.

14. Heiko Bleher. (Aquarium Rio) Almost didn't make it, but he is a man of his word as well as a world renowned collector, photographer and adventurer. His slide shows and personal commentary really 'take you there' and what better finale to the Convention than an afternoon with Heiko.

His first talk involved a journey of 5000 km in 10 days in northern New Guinea and included the legendary Lake Kutubu (home of M.lacustris), Popandetta, the Ramu Valley (home of 8 different species of Rainbowfish) and many other areas. We saw dozens of slides of fish, people, vegetation, habitats, the lot - and all while Heiko's knowledge, experience, humour and his own love of it all is being shared with us.

The second talk depicted a trip to Indonesia where he collected from several lakes and districts that had been largely neglected in the past. Contrasts abounded - rainforest and paddy fields; the riches of nature and the poverty of human settlements; the beautiful native fish and the introduced tilapia, gambusia and their ilk. Many images were vintage Heiko - the excitement of anticipating something new; appreciation of local people and customs; a pervading enjoyment of the beauty of nature and finally the sadness at the rapidity and totality of man's despoilation of our environment. The accomplishment of Heiko backpacking through rugged terrain for two weeks, feeding the last 5 remaining fry of a special fish with egg-yolk infusion, and succeeding in bringing them back alive to Germany says it all.

Once again, from all your old friends in ANGFA, "thank you Heiko for your special touch of magic"!!!

15. ANGFA National Report. After a hectic weekend for some, this was an anticlimax, but because of the distances involved, these national Conferences are invaluable opportunities to finalise the many items that are not purely local in nature. I recommend each member obtain a copy. The next Conference will be in Melbourne, Victoria in October 1991.

The future of ANGFA lies in our membership, both financially and in quality, so we need your input in ideas and dollars.

16. Monday Field Trip. By special arrangement between Ray Leggett and Brisbane Forest Park Authority, we were treated to a preview inspection of the soon to be opened display aquaria featuring the freshwater fishes of the parks waterways. This display sets new standards of excellence in combining the needs of public education; aesthetic appeal, technical innovation and 'naturalness' and everyone was impressed.

Thence by convoy, we collected at a couple of sites on branches of the Coochin Creek system headwaters, a typical wallum habitat members and visitors alike enjoyed the thrills of Club collecting - anticipation, enthusiasm, satisfaction and fellowship. Species collected included Rainbowfish (M.duboulayi), Sunfish (R.ornatus), Honey Blue-Eyes (P.mellis), Pygmy perch (Nanoperca oxleyana), and several gudgeon species.

We next stopped at Delaney's Creek, near D'Aigular, unfortunately swollen and discoloured by floods. However a couple of local members braved the stream with a seine net to demonstrate that there really were fish in there before heading back. We finally finished the day with a quick look at the fishrooms of Adrian Dawson and Bruce Hansen before dispersing in our various directions untill next time.

17. Summary. Overall this, our third conference, was the most successful yet, with over 100 attendees, and was notable for the general quality of the presentation, the friendliness and fellowship throughout and the enthusiastic support of all concerned. What's more, we even made a profit.

Remember the next Conference is planned for October 19/20th 1991, and the venue will be Melbourne, Victoria.

8. SEE YOU THERE.!!!