

IMPRESSIONS ON THE 1997 ANGFA NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Bruce Hansen

ANGFA (NSW) is the fastest growing regional group in Australia and with a fresh young team of enthusiasts at the helm we were all looking forward to the Sydney Conference. I can tell you, and I have been to them all - it was a beauty! Well up to the usual standard of excellence in education and entertainment. There was a strong component of subject matter on allied topics to the keeping of native fishes and this added an extra dimension. Unfortunate last minute withdrawals by speakers left organisers with more grey hair but for us “consumers” the calibre of the replacements was outstanding. Anyone disappointed would be very hard to please indeed.

The venue, the Oxford Koala Hotel, although ageing was clean, comfortable and convenient – about as central as one could hope to find in the urban sprawl that is Sydney. I was pleasantly surprised by the \$9 return trip from the Airport to the street outside. The proximity to all the attractions of Sydney central was a bonus to all (especially accompanying spouses) who wished to venture out as access to bus, ferry, rail and monorail was only a short walk away. For people-watchers there was no need to go further than the street corner outside the hotel. Refreshments, both liquid and solid were available in-house or nearby in great variety so a good time was had by all. The special rates obtained by the organising committee made it a good value for money venue as well. The conference facilities themselves were more than adequate and allowed us the luxury of plenty of room for all the activities and the exhibitors without any bottlenecks during the breaks.

The customary Friday evening AGM was devoid of fireworks and returned the current committee with the only change being the replacement of Graeme Finsen by Steve Baines. Andrew Lo’s regional report for NSW brought plenty of smiles of appreciation and it was pleasing to see most regionals going well. Of major importance was the offer and acceptance of ACT as the venue for the 1999 Conference and with Andy Wattam and his team organising you can be sure that it will be a winner. The finances are in good order with the association being about \$13000 in the black. Several matters of general business were discussed and further steps towards decentralisation of the committee taken with the appointment of at least

one member from each regional and affiliate group as an e-mail liaison officer to speed up communication and regional involvement in committee decisions.

Registration went ahead quite smoothly and the attractive cloth sample bags with shoulder straps were full of useful samples and brochures as well as an accompanying poster from the Murray-Darling Commission. The Convention book was unique – attractive, easy to read and informative. Certainly sponsors will be proud to be featured in this document. Some difficulties with the digital equipment delayed the start of proceedings but the acclaimed introductory clip from the Melbourne conference last year with some local content put everyone in the right mood.

Mal Davidson, from Victorian Aquatic Worms, gave an informative and thought-provoking talk on this aquatic relative of the earthworm and showed us how successful he has been in producing them in large numbers for sale around the country as live food for aquarium fish. Also he was able to reassure us on their disease-free status and nutritional value.

George “Buzz” Wilson, from the Australian Museum, gave us a fascinating look at some of the more unusual crustacean invertebrates especially the freshwater isopods including some species from all over Australia and their Gondwana relatives overseas. Cameron Bee showed us his short video clip of the as – yet undescribed species that he recently discovered in the Kimberley.

David Wilson, from the Aquarium at the Territory Wildlife Park in Darwin, was next and showed us many examples of the beautiful and interesting native aquatic plants of the Northern Territory that have aquarium potential. David is one of the few aquarists to be actively developing expertise on the cultivation of these plants. For those of us who like to plan biotopical aquascapes for our native fish displays it was a valuable insight into what is possible.

Alex Ritchie, Palaeontologist from the Australian Museum, had the unenviable task of making fossil fish appealing to live fish enthusiasts. He did it with one hand behind his back and then some. His

(Continued on page 7)

Impressions on the 1997 ANGFA national Conference ...

(Continued from page 6)

undoubted expertise, his boundless enthusiasm for his subject and the wealth of material that has recently been found in Australia made this segment one of the highlights of the day. Alex is currently working on establishing a fossil museum at Canowindra.

Aarn Whitehouse, from Macquarie University, gave 2 addresses, the first was a brief look at his recent trip to Gabon, in Africa and some of the Cyprinodonts he collected there. Then he detailed some work he is doing on the biology of some of the smaller fishes of the Upper Orara River in NSW. Finally he mentioned an interesting project he is planning on a possible biological control agent for *Gambusia*.

After lunch Kenichiro Komori, from Macquarie University, talked on the systematics of Glassfishes and showed why this group is so difficult to identify accurately in the field.

Steve Pyecroft, the Fishician from Aquatic Diagnostic Veterinary Services, was next and despite a lack of supporting images proceeded to make the principles of aquarium fish health simple for most of us in his own inimical laidback style. Steve is always good value and this talk was no exception.

The final presentation for the afternoon was another gem of a slide show from Neil Armstrong - this time on Gudgeons and Gobies often the forgotten brigade of native aquarium fishes. Neil's superb shots captured a surprising array of these fascinating fishes and I'm sure will encourage more aquarists to try their hand at keeping them.

Saturday evening brought the Conference dinner and a stunning array of dishes from Sunny Chuang and his enthusiastic band of helpers. There are some notorious "fang merchants" within the ANGFA ranks but all of them were stumped by the volume and variety. Then came the masterstroke – the entertainment in the form of a delightful belly dancer. The crafty committee (especially David Crass I suspect) had set it up so that each of the regional presidents as well as yours truly were coerced into getting up and adding to the entertainment for everyone else. All I can say is I have seen People with Parkinson's Disease that shook less! The final event of the evening was the giant auction and as usual a terrific array of goods

and livestock went under the auctioneer's hammer. Prominent on the podium was Steve Baines who demonstrated a previously unsuspected flair for shouting (away from the bar of course).

Sunday morning saw fewer clear heads than the day before but the first session was one of the best of the conference. ANGFA (Vic) brought out the 'big guns' with a panel discussion in which each of 4 speakers delivered a short address and then there was a combined question time at the end. It worked very well with Glen Briggs on collecting techniques, Ron Bowman on breeding & fry raising, Eddie Tootell on aquatic plants and Neil Armstrong on fish photography.

Trevor Pontifrex, a lecturer in aquaculture for the TAFE system, showed us the results of the work he has been doing with Mick and Michael Gilbert at Dorrigo on the threatened East Coast Cod. They have successfully developed production techniques for this fish and were able to release many fish back into the wild. It was rather disappointing to hear how little encouragement and support they got from government agencies. I liked Trevor's motto – "Protect your cods!"

Jean Joss, evolutionary biologist from Macquarie University, was another highlight for many. She has a captive population of Lungfish in Sydney that has been breeding regularly. Her talk on the place of this fish in our understanding of vertebrate evolution was a revelation and shone with her enthusiasm for the subject.

Norbert Grunwald, one of our overseas visitors and representative of the IRG, was a surprise speaker and gave a humorous address amongst other things on the differences between *Homo sapiens normalicus* and *Homo sapiens aquaticus*. Norbert is obviously a keen observer of human nature as well as a regular reviewer of international examples of coffee, beer and tobacco products.

Harold Clapham, is probably one of the few people in Australia that has done more than talk about the "Carp Problem" in our inland waterways. His FourSeas company is producing a plant fertiliser called "Charlie Carp" that is made solely from European carp harvested from the wild. Unfortunately he too is having trouble getting support and co-operation from officialdom.

(Continued on page 8)

Impressions on the 1997 ANGFA national Conference ...

(Continued from page 7)

Andrew Lo, one of our last minute replacements was a revelation! An economics lecturer by profession, but an accomplished artist in his own right and an entertainer to boot with his many caps. For many years Andrew has kept track of the various populations of *Galaxias brevipinnis* around Sydney and has been involved in several campaigns to save some of these populations from extinction by development projects. He was an inspiration to us all!

Matt Jacobs gave a brief presentation on Barramundi aquaculture - from the hormone induction of spawning, through fry raising to the sea-cage grow-out stage.

The next item on the program was an open discussion on the problem of aquarium fish smuggling and especially an aspect dear to ANGFA members – the problem of PNG species of Rainbowfishes coming in illegally and avoiding quarantine. There were many points raised and valuable contributions from our patron Rick Datodi. An unequivocal statement that ANGFA does not condone smuggling was issued and those present also determined that all legal avenues should be pursued to try to get imports of PNG species allowed. The vexed issue of whether ANGFA should permit auction or sale of species that came in after the ban was also discussed. Apparently legal opinion has been obtained that offspring of illegally imported fish are not illegal and can be traded in. A survey of the members present resulted in approximately a 10:1 majority in favour of permitting them to be traded at ANGFA meetings. A summary of these discussions will be presented in the Bulletin separately.

The final presentation was a delightful session on native frogs by Lothar Voigt who regaled us with stories of his involvement with “Frog Watch” and stowaways on bunches of bananas from Queensland. He reinforced my impression that although there are a few eccentrics keeping fish, there are more amongst the frog people.

Then suddenly it was all but over for another year - and the tired and “frazzled” steering committee can start to relax a bit and start steeling themselves for the multiple but minor criticisms that come from the many who promised to help but didn’t. All I can say is that they did a great job that the 10 Th

anniversary conference back in Sydney where the first one was held was extremely enjoyable and successful. My congratulations to Derek and Lorraine Girkin, David Crass, Cameron Bee, Sunny Chuang, Jennifer Palmer, Stewart Amos, Sebastian and Connie Ferrari, Andrew Lo and anyone else I have missed. I certainly hope that their success will encourage them to try again in the future.

Finally, remember the next one will be in October 1998 in Brisbane and we hope to see you all there!

A new species of rainbowfish (*Melanotaenia*: *Melanotaeniidae*), from the Lakekamu Basin, Papua New Guinea.

A new species of melanotaeniid rainbowfish was collected by Gerald R. Allen during a 1996 Conservation International survey of the Upper Lakekamu Basin in Papua New Guinea.

Melanotaenia sylvatica, sp. Nov. is described from 26 specimens, 31.7 - 55.0 mm SL, collected in forest creek and open riverine habitats at elevations between 35 and 120 m above sea level. It belongs to the “maccullochi group” of *Melanotaenia*, and appears to be most closely related to *M. ogilbyi* and *M. caerulea*. It differs from the other members on the basis of live colour pattern. It is most similar to *M. caerulea* and *M. ogilbyi*, but differs in the modal number of soft dorsal, anal, and pectoral rays.

Gerald R. Allen (1997)