

ANGFA CONVENTION - 1999

Rydges Eagle Hawk Hill Resort - ACT

- Bruce Hansen

Once again the ANGFA National Convention proved why it is the premier attraction each year for those interested in the welfare and husbandry of the native fishes of Australia and New Guinea. The event took place over the October 22 – 24 weekend at the Eagle Hawk resort complex, A.C.T. which lends itself admirably to such events. The organisers arranged a well-balanced program to cater to all tastes and there was still sufficient time for attending enthusiasts to socialise and network which for many is a major purpose of such meetings. Attendees obtained good value for their subscription dollar, both in the quality of the food and venue and accompanying spouses were also accommodated with alternative activities around town.



Organisers of the ACT Convention (from left to right)
Scott Hunt and Andy Wattam

From the traditional AGM on the Friday evening, through the program on Saturday and Sunday, as well as at the Saturday evening banquet and subsequent “monster” auction, there was obviously keen interest and involvement displayed by attendees who came from all states (yes, every single one including the ACT and NT). The trade room offered a wide range of club merchandise ranging from the latest books and posters on native fishes to conference shirts as well as material from several of the many sponsors who help support the event. The attractive Convention booklet that comes with the “sample bag” offered to each attendee is well worth keeping to remind members who to support reciprocally. To anyone interested in native fish, I urge you to seriously consider attending these annual events. The next one will be held in Melbourne next year and planning is underway so don’t miss out! I will try to briefly summarise the program in order of appearance.

The opening slide show on Saturday morning, presented the ACT in a series of spectacular highlights followed by some equally spectacular views of various ANGFA members (both prominent and more obscure) selected from many sources and captured candidly in the field. Sometimes the scenes depicted involved activities totally unexpected from the individuals concerned. It was altogether a memorable introduction to the program.

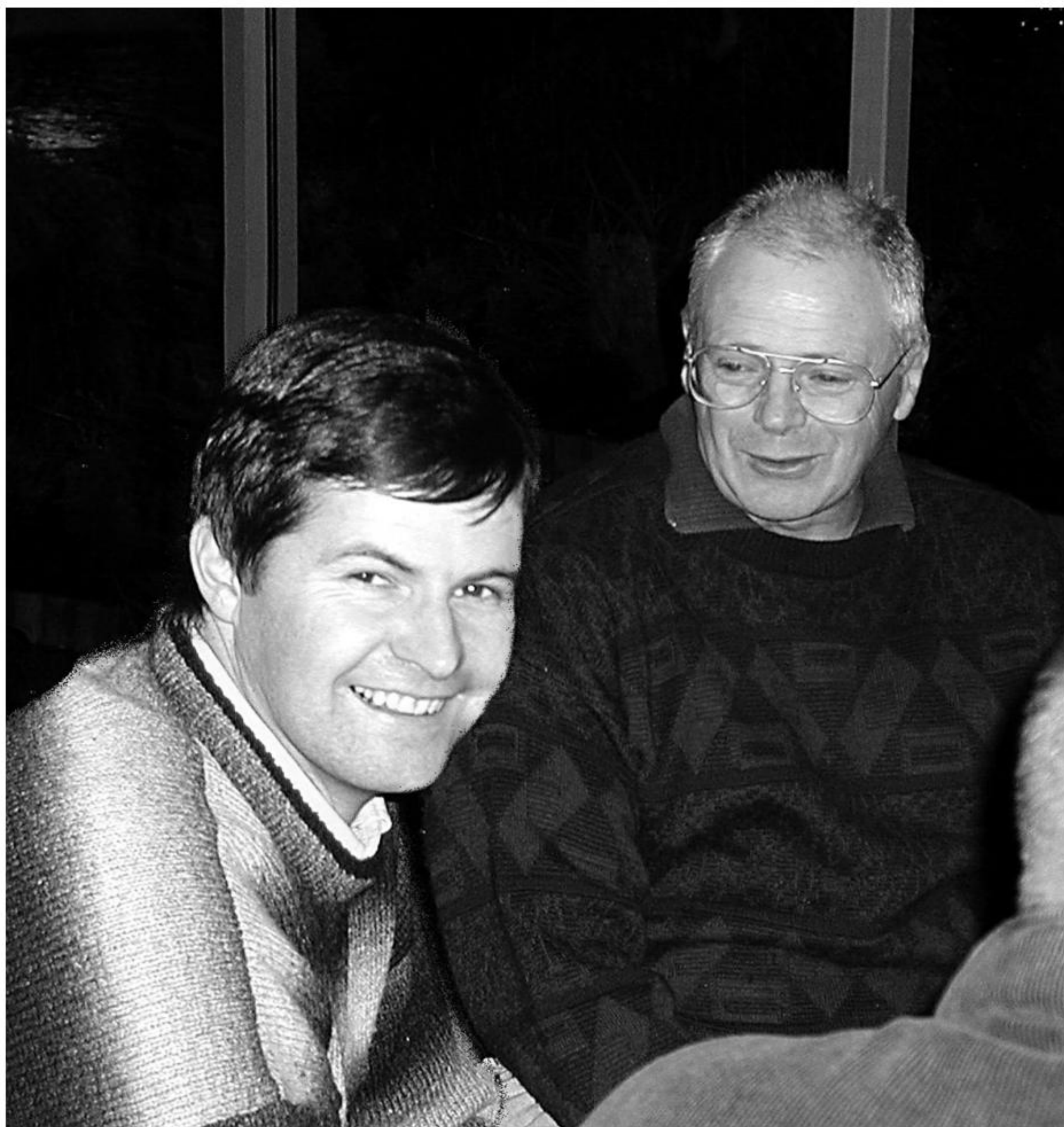
Dr. Gerald Allen, the foremost authority on rainbowfishes in the world, opened with his first talk on his “1999 Expedition to Misool Island and the nearby Raja Ampat Ialands, Irian Jaya”. He was able to clarify that the “Batanta” rainbowfish of the aquarium hobby is not the true “misoolensis” and held us spellbound with the scenery and fascination of the subject material as well as his superb slides.

John Cann, the renowned “turtle-ologist”, was next and virtually stole the show. He was superb – with his humour and super slides it wasn’t long before many of the audience were starting to believe his assertion that fish were essentially only good for “turtle food”. He showed us many of the unique freshwater animals and habitats he has encountered in his obsessive thirst for understanding about these poorly studied native animals.

Professor Jean Joss gave us “An insight into the Lungfish Research Facility at Macquarie University”. She has been breeding lungfish there for many years and described and illustrated the facility as well as several of the research projects underway there. It was a tribute to her expertise that she was able to make complex topics such as vertebrate evolution, phylogeny and endocrinology seem so relevant to our “living fossil”.

Dr John Merrick (of blue and orange book fame to native fishkeepers) presented “The humble crayfish – why is it so important?” He overviewed the diversity of the Australian crayfish fauna which is the second most extensive in the world, and concentrated on the spiny crays (genus *Euastacus*) and their importance as an indicator species of the ecological health of a waterway.

Louise Backhouse, from Environment ACT, outlined some of the important habitat degradation problems facing fish populations in the ACT and especially in the Murrumbidgee River. As well she described projects underway to involve government organisations and the community in rehabilitating the natural pool/riffle sequences so essential to some species.



Glenn Briggs and Don Olney
ANGFA Victoria

Barry Meiklejohn, unsuspected aerobics instructor extraordinaire, powerpointed us on “Keeping Natives Outdoors”. His talk featured his very successful garden pond/pool honey blue-eye population as well as many personal insights into the advantages of keeping native fish species outdoors in suitable climes. Certainly the colour exhibited by his “honeys” were proof positive of the benefits.

Bruce Sambell, who always seems to be able to extract the maximum enjoyment from each ANGFA convention, presented “A Year as a Fish Farmer” as a personal romp through the year on his property where he breeds aquarium fish as well as table species. He included aspects from some of his expeditions to collect broodstock and all done with his own brand of comedy and good humour.

Sunday morning began with Barry Crockford who recently went to Lake Wanam again to help with the restoration project for the Lake Wanam rainbowfish that involved co-operation between ANGFA, the Melbourne Zoo and the Rainforest Habitat in Lae, PNG. He made us aware of the trials and tribulations that abound in such endeavours and showed us some great views of the scenery of the lake and the freshly caught specimens.

Next Dr Gerald Allen showed us some highlights of a trip he made to the Kimberley region with his son Mark in 1998. The spectacular scenery of unique landforms and waterways was only rivalled by excellent

slides of several endemic species that probably have not been photographed live before. We were treated to shots of such rarities as the Barnett River and Mitchell gudgeons as well as Greenaway’s, Kimberley and Drysdale grunters and of course the equally unique habitats.

Glynn Aland showed us the “Atherton Tablelands: Fish from my Backyard” and the diversity of fish species and other aquatic life was impressive. He has collected many of the crustacean species, especially the crabs, crays and shrimp of the surrounding watersheds and some of these were indeed spectacular as was a beautiful local form of *Melanotaenia eachamensis*. Glynn also obviously enjoyed extolling the culinary qualities of each subject as he “zapped” through his presentation.

Shane Willis focussed our attention on “Indoor Commercial Production of Rainbows and other Native Fish”. He shared his experiences at the family hatchery in Tasmania using recirculation technology in an old meatworks coldroom facility to combat the ambient temperatures. He was generous enough to include many practical cost and labour-saving hints.

Neil Armstrong enthralled us with another of his superb slideshows on “Small Fishes of Sahul” selected from his wonderful portfolio of species and excursions to many parts of Australia. Throughout Neil’s narration enhanced the images with anecdotes and information about the subjects. The range of species covered and the quality of the slides and information was first class.

Glenn Briggs covered “Victorian Fishes for the Home Aquarium” and presented information on the care and suitability of a range of temperate species from southern Australia. He showed us that there is more to the hobby than an array of “boring” rainbows and blue-eyes from the north.

Dr Bryan Pratt presented the “Fishes in the Canberra Region” mainly from an angler’s perspective and used the historical approach. He illustrated his talk in a novel way by passing around a series of laminated photos from the archives to complement an appealing and low-key approach.

The final presentation was from Aaron Jenkins who showed us some superb video footage from Lake Kutubu in PNG entitled “The endemic fishes of lake Kutubu with particular reference to gudgeons of the genus *Mogurnda*: a mini species flock”. He drew fascinating parallels for this group with the rift lake cichlids of Africa.