

REPORT

on the

FIRST NATIONAL ANGFA CONFERENCE

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I write this report after a 13 hour drive back from the first ANGFA National Conference, with positive thoughts filling my mind keeping me on a high just as though that third State of Origin match has just been relived. Yes, the conference was positive and friendly and, above all, the variety of lecturers and lectures provided an interesting framework for the proceedings to build upon.

The NSW Aquarium Society provided its hall within the Sydney Showgrounds as the venue, and an impressive and most valuable location this is. About 55 people were present at the start of the conference with members from WA, SA, Vic., NSW and Qld. The entire conference was videotaped for future use and revenue raising. Andy Wattam, an amazing chap with endless enthusiasm, was chiefly responsible for the initial idea of a conference and followed this up with getting his thoughts into reality.

As conference participants registered, they each received a professionally produced folder of information and "goodies" accompanied by a "sample bag". Newly Ron Bowman-designed badges, sweatshirts and T-shirts were on sale and looked great.

Following is a brief resume of the conference to give those of you who were unable to attend an idea of what you missed out on:

1. *JOHN WEST* (Curator of Taronga Park Zoo's Aquarium) gave a slide talk on the history behind the current displays, with an indication that displays of more native fish will be incorporated into the new building.
2. *Dr GERRY ALLEN* (Author of "Rainbowfishes of Australia and Papua New Guinea") held all members enthralled with his stories of adventure in searching out new rainbowfish in PNG. The accompanying slides made us all quite envious of his exploits and drove home the picture of the extremes trail-blazers in their field often subject themselves to, attempting to find that elusive new species. Dr Allen has now made seven trips to PNG and added about 40 new species to the fish list of that region! Presently he is working on a new book, "Field Guide to Fishes of New Guinea", which has been partially funded by the PNG Biological Foundation as well as part-sponsoring four or five of his trips.

Now some of the highlights of his talk...

- * 12 gudgeon species are found in Lake Kutubu alone.
 - * A few new species of Blue-eye have received names, e.g. *P. paskai* (after the Mr Paska who helped catch the first specimens) which resembles *P. gertrudae*.
 - * Some areas visited and shown on slide were Tabulbul (Ok Tedi R.), Madang, Lake Wanam, Lake Tebera, Irian Jaya, Lake Sentani (home of *Glossolepis incisus* and 4.5 metre long freshwater sawfish).
 - * Some of the new rainbows were shown: *Mel. ajamaruewnsis*, *Mel. maylandi*, *Mel. lacustris*, *Mel. irian jaya*, *Chil. bleheri*.
 - * His tales of the plane flights with an inexperienced pilot and Heiko Bleher, although giving us a chuckle, also highlighted the inherent dangers of this largely-unexplored mountainous region.
 - * He showed sites of future collections he hopes to make.
 - * He uses tetracycline and a sulphur drug to help live fish being transported.
3. **RODNEY RALPH** gave an interesting talk on fish depicted world-wide on postage stamps. Some stamp packages were provided in the sample bags also.
4. **RON BOWMAN** talked about his involvement with the journal "Fishes of Sahul", now printed in full colour if you hadn't already noticed, and the egg-mailing program.
He also tackled the problem of fry-loss and adult fish deformities, and provided his solutions. He feels shell grit should be added to the water to provide calcium, and small doses of epsom salts to provide magnesium. Bruce Hansen added Vitamin C to this list as well.
5. **BOB GRAY** talked on using plants in aquaria and the benefits, especially for the fish. He recommends full-spectrum lighting and not using sub-gravel filters, unless only with light aeration.
6. **RAY LEGGETT** gave a slide-talk prepared by Bruce Hansen on Fraser Island and its fishes and its other fauna.
7. **JOHN MERRICK** gave a brief but interesting talk on the not-so- popular native fish suitable for aqua-culture which he labelled 'out-fish' as opposed to the rainbows and blue-eyes which he calls 'in-fish'. John's message was give your local 'out-fish' a go - the archerfish, scats, catfish, galaxias, ambassids, gobies, grunters, gudgeons, hardyheads, monos, smelt and flagtails.
For keeping grunters successfully, John recommends groups of six upwards.
8. **ALEX CAUGHEY** chaired a meeting discussing the rainbowfish, *Mel. eachamensis*, which has the dubious honour of being declared the first extinct native fish species in the wild. At least four species of native fish not originally occurring in Lake Eacham on the Atherton Tableland have been discovered there over the last few years in increasing numbers while *Mel. eachamensis* has rapidly declined in numbers until over 12 months ago when the last specimen was sighted after extensive surveys. It is now presumed extinct in the wild.

This is where ANGFA can become involved. Members have small captive populations from which to rebuild a viable population although it is recognised that the gene pool is extremely restricted. Some Queensland members and Victorian members have specimens to build stocks from.

Alternative courses of action were discussed:

- (a) providing stock to the Walkamin Research Station at Atherton to commence a breeding program.
- (b) establishing a captive and self-maintaining population at Taronga Zoo.
- (c) establishing a population in another fish-less lake on the Atherton Tableland.
- (d) commencing a breeding and exchange program amongst ANGFA members to increase *Mel. eachamensis* numbers.

Ron Bowman provided five vials of ten eggs each to persons interested in becoming involved in this last program. Our SEQANGFA member, Rod Campbell, took 20 eggs to get us going on the project.

9. **AUCTION.** Vigorous bidding yielded high prices for such goodies as *Mel. boesmannii*, *Mel. lacustris* (1st release), rare plants (e.g. crypts), Rhads, Rainbows, Ambassadors, and *P. signifer* (courtesy Bruce Hansen and Ray Leggett), *Mel. exquisita*, *Mel. trifasciata*, *Glossolepis incisus*, *G. wanamensis*, and some photographs by Neil Armstrong.
10. **GRAHAM ROWE** gave a detailed and interesting show-and-tell on aquarium books, magazines and journals. His collection is truly staggering in its size with some very old publications being shown.
11. **RAY LEGGETT** returned to the microphone for an excellent slide-talk on his recent trip to the Kimberlies where he discovered a new species of gudgeon.
12. **BASIM SAID** provided a bit of excitement with a detailed explanation of his recent revision of the Blue-eye genus *Pseudomugil*, making it a not-so-close relative of the rainbows now. Dr Gerald Allen has also reclassified the *Popandetta* genus to *Popandichthys*. According to Basim Said, the common Blue-eye should be *Pseudomugil pseudomugil signifer* while a *Popandetta* becomes *Pseudomugil popandichthys furcata*.
Some other new developments are:
 - (a) *Pseudomugil inconspicuus* has now been collected from a stream close to Darwin and looks very much like the brackish-water Broome Blue-eye (*P. cyanodorsalis*).
 - (b) *Pseudomugil reticulatus* (a new one) is found in the same habitat as *Mel. boesmanni*.
 - (c) Another newbie, *P. majesalis*, from Irian Jaya, looks a little like an *Iriatherina* at a glance.
 - (d) *P. paskai* (mentioned earlier in this report) was the one pictured some time ago as a new species in a TFH magazine.

Basim is going to move on to the other Melanotaeniidae groups next, starting with *Chilatherina*, so watch out folks! Just when you thought you were coming to grips with some of those latin names, the whole lot could be turned upside down. Oh, well - as Malcolm Fraser (with pants on) once said, "Life wasn't..."
13. **KEN SMALES**, national ANGFA president, spoke about the club, some of its problems and thanked those who have worked so diligently to get "Fishes of Sahul" out each time.
14. **ALEX CAUGHEY** spoke about the new ANGFA sponsorship to be awarded to a student working on native fish. The annual award will be called the John Lake Award.

15. *NEIL ARMSTRONG* gave a superb and mind-boggling slide-talk on fish along the coastline from SA, through Vic., NSW, Qld, NT, across to WA. Some highlights:
- (a) a new species of pgymy perch (*Nannaperca variegata*) was shown.
 - (b) a 9-inch (23 cm) galaxias was shown!
 - (c) spectacular shots of a desert goby and a variety of colour forms of *Mel. trifasciata*.
 - (d) some beautiful habitat shots interspersed with slides of butterflies, birds and plants.
 - (e) a nice slide of the new *P. paskai*.
 - (f) a spectacular tiny red goby from Vanuatu.

16. *TARONGA ZOO*. At 3.30 pm we adjourned to Taronga Zoo to have a look behind the scenes at the Aquarium complex. We all stood amazed at the complex of tubes, pipes, taps and workings at the rear of each display tank. Sea water is pumped from Sydney Harbour to the tanks, filtered, treated and reticulated as it goes.

Nearby Fairy Penguins and Seals frolicked in the cool waters of two large pools, showing off their antics to their captive audience.

After looking at the rear workings of the large marine tanks, we went inside the public viewing area and wandered at our leisure, noticing the tank of rainbows (some had been sent down by SEQANGFA members, you might recall), a realistic mangrove setting complete with inquisitive Archer Fishes, mudskippers, large galaxias, blue crayfish, sole and flathead with only their eyes exposed in the sandy bottom, young turtles and sharks.

Afterwards, we wandered briefly through other animal displays, all wishing we had more time.

17. *NOSH-UP*. From Taronga, we returned to the conference centre and were treated to a fine Chinese nosh-up and a talk to other ANGFA members.

18. *FINALLY*. As we parted our ways, we vowed to make sure there would be a second annual conference as this weekend which we had just experienced was a truly worthwhile undertaking.

And now the nine SEQANGFA members who attended can put faces to the well-known names of Neil Armstrong, Alex and June Caughey, Andy Wattam, Ken Smales, Gerald Allen, John Merrick and so on.

SEQANGFA members who attended were: Bruce (and Lee) Hansen, Ray (and Niecey) Leggett, Rod (and Carol) Campbell, John Moss, Bill (and Sue) Smith, Theo Kleiberg, Steve Hume, Des Hill, and Glenn Leiper.