

ANGFA 2000 NATIONAL CONVENTION

For everyone who missed it, the millenium convention held over the October 20-22 weekend in Melbourne at Cilom's Airport Lodge was a beauty. Even the weather Gods were kind to us and Melbourne's notoriously fickle meteorological manifestations were continuously pleasant. The venue was convenient to transport, quite modern and staff and facilities complemented each other to provide smooth sailing for both organisers and participants. I would especially like to congratulate Ken Smales and his ANGFA Vic. organising committee on the catering – rarely does one see better value in both quality and quantity at similar functions. Another big plus was the extended availability of bar service for a convivial drink and discussion, especially in the evenings after the “official business” was over.

Friday evening brought the AGM and the usual officers reports followed by regional reports and then a discussion on the publications survey we conducted after last year's AGM. As both the management committee and the publications sub-committee had declined to stand again, the election of the new more decentralised committee was a pleasant surprise to most attendees. It is intended that communication by email, fax and phone will facilitate discussions between this widespread group. I will list the new committee later. Both Ken Smales and Neil Armstrong were proposed and accepted as life members and join Ron Bowman as the only members so honoured. SANFA's proposal to host next year's convention in Adelaide was confirmed and possible future conventions in Perth and Port Macquarie were discussed. After a relatively amiable meeting closed, members convened to the bar for further more informal “discussions”.

The new association office bearers are –

President – Mark Chettle

Vice-president – Bruce Hansen

Treasurer – Glenn Briggs

Secretary – Tony Mather

Membership Officer – Damian Walsh

Public Officer – Neil Travis

Regional Liaison – Robert Marshall (S.A.); Syd Adams (W.A.); David Crass (NSW);
Andy Wattam (ACT); Dave Wilson (NT).

Editor – Rudie Kuitert.

The convention proper got underway on Saturday morning after final registration with the welcoming audio-visual presentation featuring a superb selection of Neil Armstrong's habitat and wildlife images to complement the background theme music, “I still call Australia - home”. From then on, for the next two days, we were treated to a feast of first-class fare from local, interstate and international presenters – some we have been fortunate enough to have heard before, but several new faces too.

First cab off the rank was Phillip Littlejohn, who has over 20 years of experience handling fish for Australia's largest importer of aquarium fish. Phil showed us an array of fascinating aquatic organisms (including crustacea, snails, leeches, sponges etc as well as fish) that he has collected and had identified over the years and shared his experiences in trying to maintain them in aquaria, I hope he also writes this experience down somewhere and allows access to a wider range of enthusiasts. Included in his slide show was an unusual colour form of *Galaxiella pusilla* that is waiting further evaluation.

Gunther Schmida was next with a presentation entitled “Have Camera – Do Travel”. Gunther has been photographing Australian wildlife, both in the field and under captive conditions for over 35 years and has a special interest in “the cold-blooded Australians”. His photographic skills are second to none and we were treated to a wide range of habitats and their reptiles, amphibians and fishes as well as the flora and other fauna encountered in his many and varied travels. The slides were accompanied by Gunther's expert comments on each which included size, range, rarity, diet etc.

After an excellent morning tea in the trade room with its extensive range of merchandise available to attendees we returned to Franz-Peter Mullenholz and “Australia for Aliens and Beginners”. With his wife Ulli, he has been to Australia 7 times and he has recorded his experiences with a huge number of slides. However this was not just a simple slide show – this was a superb audiovisual presentation. This

included the story woven around the places, the people they met along the way, the landscapes, the creatures and their appreciation of their experiences – all narrated by Ulli and all with the human touch, as well as a wry sense of humour. The 3 pairs of carousels accompanied by carefully selected background music were over all too soon and I for one can hardly wait for the chance to experience another of Franz-Peter's masterpieces.

The Buffet lunch stopped even the heartiest of well-known ANGFA appetites with both quality and quantity of hot and cold selections. The first afternoon session started with Tarmo Raadik, who is the Senior Biologist (Freshwater Ecology) at the Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research. Tarmo's presentation was on "Fish of Cardross Lakes, Their Significance and Management". With the aid of slides and overheads we were given an insight into the history of how the lakes and their hydrology have changes since settlement and agricultural development and the current threat to them and their inhabitants by current implications from the local Salinity Management Plan. The survey has revealed a high diversity of native fish species (10), including 4 listed as threatened. This list also included a population of the Southern Purple-spotted Gudgeon. Consequently conservation measures have had to be implemented which will parallel the other management priorities for the region.

Next came Bob McDowall with "Around the World with Galaxiids". For me Bob was the "find" of the whole convention – he grabbed the audience with his passion for the subject, entertained them with anecdotes, hints and humour and impressed them with the totality of his grasp. He is the leading authority in the world on this group and it was wonderful to have him there sharing his knowledge and enthusiasm. According to Bob, the most amazing freshwater fish in the world *Lepidogalaxias salamandroides* and he should know !

After the afternoon tea break (again excellent fare) we were invited to fasten our seat-belts and go adventuring with Heiko Bleher once more. Heiko has been the star of many an ANGFA convention, with his almost obsessional worldwide quests for rare and unusual fishes. If he hears about a new habitat or a new fish he has to go there and if he is unable to bring home the fish the first time then he will return again and again, irrespective of obstacle, until he "brings them back alive". This presentation, the first of his two over the weekend, concerned his 3 trips to New Guinea to collect the legendary *Melanotaenia angfa*, finally culminating in success last year. After holding us spell-bound, with the beauty of the region and its inhabitants, the diversity of his interests and his descriptions of the events surrounding the trips and the images – the master story-teller gave us a glimpse of the new fish species aquarists of the world are about to embrace.

The Saturday evening is always the timetable for the convention dinner, and Cilom's looked after us very well indeed. This was followed by an extensive auction - with a list of rare and unusual fish and plants as well as hobby-related goods and literature. Our auctioneers kept up a lively pace and bidding was spirited with some excellent prices realised as well as some "real bargains" obtained. Most of the offerings were donated to the association and this generosity is greatly appreciated. Some "treasures" rarely offered included Red-finned Blue-eyes, from the Australian artesian springs and an array of New Guinean rainbowfishes such as Papuaes, Monticolas, Wannamensis, Ramuensis, etc etc. Finally there was the wind-down fellowship in the bar until the wee small hours.

Sunday morning's program started with a spectacular combined audio-visual production from Gilbert Maebe from Belgium and Franz-Peter Mullenholz from Cologne entitled "Aquatic Symphony". This was produced by them for a combined show by a European federation of aquarium clubs and it was an extremely professional effort – we were entranced as superb aquascape after superb aquascape appeared on the screen all accompanied by beautiful classical music. Their photography and their skills of compilation complemented the subject aquaria beautifully.

Next up was the return of Gunther Schmida – this time with "From the Gulf to the Cape". Gunther has recently spent several weeks working in Mt Isa and on finishing there he journeyed up to the tip of Cape York before returning home to Mudgeeraba. This slide show featured the habitats and wildlife he encountered along the way and we were treated to a broad spectrum canvas of the things that caught his eye and were in turn captured by him with the lens. Especially, Gunther used this trip to obtain habitat shots for many of the fishes that he had photographed over the years at home in his photographic tanks. These specimens had been loaned to him by numerous ANGFA members and other "fish-friends", who had collected them from all over the place and raised them to adulthood. Of course his interest in

reptiles was obvious as well – and the fantastic number of goanna species to be found around Mt. Isa was a feature.

After morning tea (again impressive), we had Bob McDowall and “More Galaxiids and Freshwater Fish of New Zealand” and once again his enthusiasm and wide knowledge of the subject was evident throughout. Interestingly enough, even there in New Zealand”, new species are still being recognised and subsequently described. Of the smaller fishes more suited to aquarium care, the spectrum of “bullies” (*Gobiomorphus species*) that have evolved in that country, was fascinating. Bob certainly aroused our interest in their interesting freshwater fish fauna, several groups of which we share with this neighbouring nation.

The final presentation for the morning, was “10 Years Later” from Gilbert Maebe. Gilbert, from Belgium has been an ANGFA member for many years since he became interested in rainbowfish and was one of the first overseas recipients of mail order eggs from Ron Bowman. In those early days there was very limited access to anything more than a handful of species and reliable genetic stock from a known locality or river drainage was impossible over there. Gilbert’s show, narrated by his son Stefan, led us through the trials and tribulations of those early experiences and then his subsequent journeys to Australia and even New Guinea to see and collect his beloved rainbowfishes. The highlight of the early years was the moving selection of cartoons drawn by his friend Franz of Gilbert with his empty tanks ready, waiting for the postman to bring the eggs from Australia. Gilbert generously supports ANGFA conventions regularly with his beautiful and professional lecture-shows and this was one of his best.

The afternoon program, preceded by another lunch of similar quality, began with Ivor Stuart who informed us about “Migration: The Journeys of Fish and the People that Follow Them”. Ivor has major expertise in this field with extensive experience on several major fishway projects in Queensland and more recently in Victoria where he is studying movements and spawning patterns of carp. His fascinating presentation introduced us to the places, people, techniques and species involved. His studies not only are concerned with the major spawning runs of many species, but also with the territorial and “exploratory” movement patterns of individuals. His work and that of his colleagues will hopefully help us to reduce the impacts of development, especially dam construction, on our native fishes and their habitats and habits.

The penultimate presentation, from Neil Armstrong (ANGFAs foundation photographer), took us to a place where few people are privileged to go – “The Arafura Swamp”. Neil’s love of nature and “all things Australian”, together with his expert photographer’s eye for detail have always made his slide shows something special. We appreciated this rare glimpse of a part of Australia that is not open to most. The Arafura Swamp is a huge inland freshwater area supplied with water by the famous Goyder River and draining to the Arafura Sea via the Glyde River. The swamp is a massive aquatic paradise with a profusion of aquatic plants and animals ranging from massive estuarine crocodiles to the delicate little threadfin rainbowfish (*Iriatherina wernerii*). Nestled on the edge of this huge expanse is the isolated aboriginal community of Mirngadja trying to maintain their identity and traditions.

The finale, fittingly from Heiko Bleher, who over the years has given us so many unforgettable presentations, was an African blockbuster centred on the mysterious region of Ethiopia. Heiko has explored the area extensively looking for new fishes and collecting material for articles in his “Aqua Geographica”. Wherever he goes, Heiko is fascinated by and appreciative of not only the fauna and flora, but also the folk – as a consequence people feature strongly in his presentations. Throughout we were held spellbound as the master story teller and his images. As usual we were left entranced and wondering what could he possibly come up with next time. I for one look forward to it.

Suddenly it was all over for another year – the official part that is. There was still the informal BBQ dinner that evening and tours and visits the next day for those fortunate enough to be able to stay on. The closing down speeches and slides were a fitting finish to another great ANGFA Convention – dare I say it, in many aspects, “the best one yet”.

- Bruce Hansen.