

**THE AUSTRALASIAN SOCIETY
FOR THE STUDY OF
ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR**

**NEWSLETTER
FEBRUARY, 2000**

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The objectives of the Society are

- (i) to promote the scientific study of animal behaviour
- (ii) to provide opportunities for discussion and the dissemination of information among its members by any appropriate means, including meetings and publications.

Membership is open to all those with an interest in the study of behaviour and may be admitted to the society at the discretion of the Council

The Society may invite as an Honorary Member any professional scientist or any scientifically-interested amateur. Honorary Members shall not be required to pay any entrance fee or subscription.

Student membership is encouraged and students receive a discounted annual subscription. Students may also apply for financial support to attend the Annual Conference or any other behaviour-related conference, either in Australia or overseas.

**THE
AUSTRALASIAN SOCIETY
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Newsletter

**From the President's
desk ...**

Paradise and too many gadgets

Greetings from the Iron Ranges, Cape York Peninsula. We (Sarah Legge and I) have been up here since September documenting the protracted breeding efforts of eclectus parrots. I am sitting in our humpy, a tin shed with a raised wooden floor and only two walls. It is covered in passion fruit vines and surrounded by paw-paw and banana trees.

It is hot, very hot, and we keep scanning the skies hoping for the tell-tale build-up of storm clouds that signal relief is on the way. It's been raining plenty in the last month or so, and this little window of blue skies and unbearable heat will be a short-lived anomaly before the rainy season returns. Rain is a two-edged sword up here - although cooling, when it really

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comes down the roads get blocked, the creeks all become torrents, and we cannot

get to our far-flung nest trees. There are only two seasons up here, wet and dry. Something in between would be nice...

As I am not really sure what is expected of me in these columns, I thought I would share a thought or two about field work in the new millennium. Technology, as in all walks of life, is proliferating in modern field work, enhancing scientific progress, but at the cost of attendant logistical nightmares. Upon packing up to leave the ANU, someone said to me "ah, I envy you, life in the bush must be so blissfully simple". I didn't think much of it at the time, but later it dawned on me "What bollocks!" Up here we are surrounded by gadgetry, some of it inconceivable a decade or two ago, and most of it completely unserviceable from a remote location. Hence our latest catch-cry "Too many damned gadgets?"

To start with, our biggest coup (or so we

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thought at the time) was to get the phone connected. This was a miracle because the phone line only comes 8km out of Lockhart River (the nearby Aboriginal community), and by some fluke we managed to build our humpy just at the very end of it. Imagine our shock when two guys in a Telstra van turned up from Weipa (5 hours drive away) and offered to put the phone on. So we can contact folks any time, which is very nice for keeping in touch or for ordering supplies, but the flip side is of course that they can also contact us.

And with the phone goes a modem and email, which is how I am managing to send this message to Bob (note added later: modem corrupted by mould and not working, not sure how I'll get this to Bob?). Computers and printers need power, for which we need extra car batteries, inverters etc., but the car won't start when we've over-stretched our power supply, batteries go bung, and inverters blow up with monotonous regularity?.

For our molecular work, we collect blood samples. Blood would not last five minutes in this heat, so of course we need a fridge. I'm not complaining about that for a moment because a fridge means cold beer. But with no electricity it had to be gas, which we ship in by barge from Cairns. Now gas fridges are a lot more civilised than kerosene ones, but still require maintenance. It's nervous times when inexplicably they lose their cool, and blessed relief when removal of a singed

wasp nest from the chimney solves the problem.

To get the blood we must catch our birds. To do this we string mist nets very high in the rainforest canopy, and to get the eclectus' attention we play recordings. Enter one professional walkman and speakers, not to mention the microphones etc for recording their calls initially.

Now, the odd reverse dichromatism of eclectus parrots (bright red females and green males) demands that we study their colour. Thanks to very recent technology this is now entirely possible - all you need is a field portable spectro-radiometer. "Portable" in this case means a sturdy laptop computer (in our case, a second computer as the software wasn't written for our Macintosh!), the spectro-radiometer itself, a light source, and a fairly hefty 12 volt battery, enough gear to fill a backpack. None of this gear can be bumped, rough-handled or especially, GET WET. Field portable, huh? So whenever the spectro gadget gets paraded through the rainforest, so does our makeshift tent, and groundsheet, and umbrella? (such cossetting is more than worthwhile because the nearest technical support is in Florida!).

We routinely climb trees to get at the growing chicks, so the other backpack contains a 60 metre rope, harnesses, and all the bird handling paraphernalia (measuring gear, banding gear, blood sampling kit, camera, torches, soup ladles?). When my father, a recently-retired zoologist, saw us

about to go into the field bent double with bulging backpacks, he commented "What happened to the good old days when ornithology was done with a pair of binoculars and a notebook?"

I could go on and complain about the trials of keeping the four-wheel drive going when repeatedly submerged in the Claudie River (starter motors hate water!), about how the water pump broke down this morning (damned rats chewed the wiring), or even about the troubles we've had in getting the GPS to download to the computer (I don't really want to transfer over 500 locations by hand). Not to mention how every piece of equipment despises the humidity, so much so that the only way to keep electrical gadgets functioning is to give them regular 'holidays' in an air-tight drum filled with silica gel. But I won't, because really it isn't that bad. In fact we love it up here! Simple it is not, but challenging it is.

My real comment is that so much more is possible these days when studying animals in the field. Whether it be in DNA-fingerprinting for genetic relationships, video surveillance, radio-telemetry, or even just computer-based management of data, we students of animal behaviour are expected to take on and master more and more technological skills. Mastering newer and better technology (and maintaining the gadgets) will continue to eat into our time-budgets, but so too will the scientific rewards increase exponentially. Assuming enough species avoid extinction for long enough to be studied, and that the research

grant itself doesn't go extinct, ethologists and behavioural ecologists are in for exciting times in the new millennium. Long may the cry of "Too many damned gadgets..." ring through the bush.

Wresting my thoughts from life in the deep north, it's time to look ahead (somewhat apprehensively) to re-entering civilisation in a couple of weeks. Office work, bureaucracy, analysis, and writing all beckon to me from that far off citadel, the ANU. With the mixed feelings that brings, I do look forward with genuine pleasure and anticipation to the next ASSAB conference in April. After the unqualified success of Armidale - huge congratulations to Jan and team - I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at ASSAB 2000 at Macquarie University.

*Rob Heinsohn
President*

Media skills workshops & presentation skills

workshops (for scientists and others involved in science).

The following has come from FASTS (Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies).

1. Presentation skills workshop

'Learn how to make a talk work for you and the audience'

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- structuring and preparing an effective presentation - overcoming nerves, and handling questions

- making best use of audio-visual aids

2000 Dates:

Melbourne: February 21-22

Sydney: April 10-11

Canberra: June 19-20

Perth: July 31-August 1

Brisbane: September 4-5

Hobart: October 9-10

2. Media skills workshop

'Learn how to make the media work for you'

- work with the media with confidence
- practice your interview technique with working journalists - get your message out as accurately as possible

2000 Dates:

Adelaide: March 6-7

Sydney: April 13-14

Melbourne: May 1-2

Canberra: June 22-23

Perth: August 3-4

Brisbane: September 7-8

Hobart: October 12-13

Presenters Toss Gascoigne and Jenni Metcalfe have backgrounds in journalism,

science communication and education.

They work in daily contact with scientists and journalists, and have been running Workshops for seven years.

Cost: \$595 per participant (plus GST after June 30) per workshop. Numbers are limited to 10 participants each, and special workshops can be arranged if the above dates and locations do not suit.

CONTACT: ECONNECT - environmental and science communication, 07-3846-7111 (fax: 07-3846-7144, admin@econnect.com.au) or our WWW page <http://www.econnect.com.au> for more information

FASTS "Ten Top Issues" for 2000

Early this month, FASTS released its Top Ten for 2000 (Those marked with an asterisk also appeared in 1999). President Professor Sue Serjeantson of the Australian National University used the release to invite the Australian government to determine the extent of the continuing brain drain of scientists away from Australia. She said that anecdotal evidence exists for this drain and that job insecurity and funding uncertainty are two main drivers. The Top Ten are ...

1. Invest in the future

Australian scientists are starved of research money, and the Government's White Paper contains no new funding. Government

funding for research should be increased in the same way funding for medical research was boosted in 1999.

2. Science for the bush*

Coordinate Australian science to create jobs, improve existing industries, solve environmental problems and improve digital communication in regional and rural Australia.

3. More science and maths teachers*

Science and mathematics teachers take home less money than other teachers because they have a higher HECS debt to repay. Removing the inequity would help overcome the shortfall of qualified science and mathematics teachers.

4. Brain drain becomes express train

Job insecurity, lack of career paths and low salaries are driving good young scientists away from jobs in research. Australia is in danger of losing a generation of scientists and technologists, to jobs overseas or to other professions.

5. Keeping Australia in touch

Australia is losing touch with international science as the price of scientific journals rise and libraries cancel subscriptions. We need a national arrangement to buy electronic academic publications, to enable all Australian researchers access to the latest scientific ideas.

6. Establish the future of the crc program

Cooperative Research Centres help industry and researchers work more closely on key national issues. The CRC Program should be on a regular footing, with an annual schedule to consider proposals for funding new centres.

7. Bringing the boys (and girls) back home

Introduce a scheme of fellowships and stipends to enable Australian scientists working overseas to return for short and medium-term research activities, to bring their knowledge back and take Australian ideas overseas.

8. A national map and compass

Does Australia know where it is going in a rapidly-changing world? Setting national goals and national priorities, and identifying where S&T fit in is a key job for the Prime Minister's Science Council. Mechanisms to coordinate science and promote a whole-of-Government approach need strengthening.

9. Reversing the decline: industry investment in R&D*

Industry investment in research continues to slump. Australia needs a range of incentives to encourage investment in R&D, including tax deductibility at

internationally-competitive rates and a tax credit system. The Ralph Review reforms are just a start.

10. Changing the culture through science awareness

Australians are proud of their science, but know little about its value. A vigorous program of science and mathematics awareness targeted at the business community would help the nation appreciate the central role S&T play in invigorating existing businesses and generating new industries.

Eureka Prizes, 2000

The Australian Museum is proud to announce the launch of the 2000 Eureka Prizes, winners of which will be announced at a ceremony during National Science Week 2000.

From their modest beginning in 1990, when three prizes were awarded, the prestigious Eureka Prizes have grown into Australia's leading national science awards. In 1999, eleven prizes worth \$100,000 were awarded.

The Eureka Prizes are a unique cooperative venture between the federal government, the NSW state government, educational institutions and a range of high profile private sector companies and organisations. The Prizes raise the profile of science in the community by

acknowledging and rewarding outstanding achievements in Australian scientific and environmental research, science communication and journalism, and the promotion of science.

While the final lineup of the 2000 Eureka Prizes is still being finalised, the prospects are for a record number of prizes in this, the tenth anniversary series.

Entries and nominations are now invited for:

- * The \$10,000 Allen Strom Eureka Prize for Environmental Education Program
- * The Australian Museum Eureka Prize for Industry
- * The \$10,000 Australian Skeptics Eureka Prize For Critical Thinking
- * The \$10,000 Environment Australia Peter Hunt Eureka Prize for Environmental Journalism
- * The \$10,000 POL Eureka Prize for Environmental Research
- * The \$11,000 University of Sydney Eureka Schools Prize for Biological Sciences.

Entries for all prizes (other than the Eureka Schools Prize) close on 11 February 2000. Candidates can either enter themselves or be nominated by others.

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Entry forms and full details of the 2000 Eureka Prizes are available at the Museum's webpage at <http://www.austmus.gov.au/eureka> or from Roger Muller on 02 9320 6230.

Other meetings ...

ISAE 34th International Congress: To be held in Florianópolis, Brazil from the 17th to the 20th October, 2000.

Contact: Dr Luiz Carlos Pinheiro Machado F^o.
E-mail: ISAE2000@cca.ufsc.br
Website: <http://www.cca.ufsc.br/ISAE2000>

ISAZ2000: To be held in Amsterdam on 25th April, 2000 and will be a satellite meeting of the World Small Animal Veterinary Association Congress. The theme of the ISAZ meeting will be "Issues in companion animal welfare" and contributed papers are welcome. Included in the Small Animal Congress is a one-day symposium on human-animal interactions.

Contact: Dr Nienke Endenberg, University of Utrecht.
E-mail: N.Endenberg@pobox.ruu.nl

Consciousness, Cognition and Animal Welfare: The Meeting Rooms, The Zoological Society of London, Regent's Park, London, 11th-12th May, 2000.

Includes an introduction to consciousness, its function and evolution, the kind of brain needed to support consciousness, interspecies variation and the distribution of pleasure and suffering throughout the animal kingdom, future approaches to the study of consciousness.

Contact: Dr Stephen Wickens, Universities' Federation for Animal Welfare.
E-mail: swickens@ufaw.org.uk

Measuring Behaviour 2000: Nijmegen, 15th - 18th August, 2000.

Contact:
E-mail mb2000@noldus.nl
Website:
<http://www.noldus.com/events/mb2000>

2nd Southern Hemisphere Ornithological Congress (SHOC): 27th June to 2nd July in Brisbane, Australia. The program of symposia encompasses many of the most important and exciting fields of avian ecology, biology, evolution and conservation.

This is the first large wide-ranging ornithological congress to be held in Australasia in the past 4 years, and with the next International Ornithological Congress happening in China and not until 2002, SHOC is the only easily accessible conference to Australasian researchers in the immediate future. Students are eligible for a substantially reduced registration rate

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(with a copy of a current ID and letter from their supervisor.

Cut-off for Early Bird registrations is 28 February, so now is the time to act!

Further information and registration forms are available on the SHOC website [<http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au/shoc>] or from the Congress Secretariat [shoc2000@convqld.org.au].

ASSAB 2000 - THE 27TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE -

The 27th annual conference will be held at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia from Thursday April 27th to Sunday April 30th. The local host is Chris Evans. I have sent a brochure with conference details with this newsletter. However, if you want to give it to someone else or stick it on your notice board some details are also included below.

The conference website is http://galliform.bhs.mq.edu.au/assab_www/ Some details can also be found on the Society's website (see below).

Call for Papers

The deadline for registration and for submission of abstracts is March 13. Full conference details, including the abstract submission and registration form

are now available for download on the website.

Abstracts should be formatted as follows

Author(s) name(s)

Affiliation and addresses

[blank line]

Text (no more than 300 words)

Abstracts and registration information can be submitted in one of three ways:

Option 1: Enclose a disk containing the abstract file with your completed registration form. Please include a hard copy, and note on the disk label the word processing program and operating system used. Mail to: Richard Peters

Dept. Psychology
Macquarie University
Sydney, NSW 2109

Option 2: Send the abstract as an email attachment. The registration form should then be posted separately.

Option 3: Complete the on-line forms. These will automatically submit both abstract and registration information.

Highlights

- Field trip to Taronga Zoo, with a behind-the-scenes tour of the exhibits.
- Three-hour cruise of Sydney harbour, including the conference dinner.

Accommodation

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The organisers have negotiated a conference rate for 80 single rooms at Robert Menzies College, which is a short walk from the lecture theatre where talks will be presented.

Students: \$ 46 per night
Non-students: \$ 50 per night.

Both rates include breakfast.

Other accommodation options are

- Stamford Hotel North Ryde
- Medina Serviced Apartments
- El Rancho Hotel Motel

Travel to Macquarie

The university is some distance north and west of the city centre. Bus and train services run from the airport into Sydney and from Central Railway station to Macquarie. See the registration form for transport details.

*Chris Evans Animal
Behaviour Research Group*

ASSAB WEB SITE.

The address is:
<http://www.massey.ac.nz/~EMinot/ASSAB/welcome.html>