

11TH AUSTRALASIAN BAT CONFERENCE

- Dianne Vavryn and Mary McCabe

Dianne Vavryn, David Gee in his expedition attire and Mary McCabe (These three were the organisers of the 8th Australasian Bat Conference – Ed.)



There is no better way to get batty but to be with a bunch of bats. Thus we attended the recent biennial Australasian Bat Conference and associated workshops – in an area abundant with macro and microbats.

The 11th Australasian Bat Conference was held at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) Toowoomba, Queensland, from the 13 to 16 April 2004. The conference committee: Glen Ford – Convenor, Monika Rhodes – Registrations, Lindy Lumsden – Abstracts and Program, Lindley Agnew – Corporate Sponsorship, Peggy Ebby – Flying-fox Workshop, Terry Reardon – Quiz Master. The conference committee acknowledged organisational assistance provided by Helen Cluff (USQ Events Coordinator), Michael Ferris, Robyn Ford, Martin Rhodes, Natasha Schedvin, Bruce Thomson and Clare Hourigan.



Delegates assembling a harp trap

Preceding the conference proper a workshop on flying fox camp management was held at the Woodside Nature Centre, Ipswich, on 13 April, organised by Peggy Ebby.

A Post-conference workshop on Microbat survey standards/protocols and new technology was held at the USQ followed by a field trip using the USQ's Ravensbourne Field Station – only a short drive from Perseverance Heights National Park.

PRE CONFERENCE WORKSHOP – Tuesday 13th April

Our arrival at Woodend Nature Centre in urban Ipswich was heralded by a screaming squadron flight of *Pteropus scapulatus* (Little Red flying-fox). These bats within the camp are often considered as rogues.

They are the noisiest, most active and often seen flying within the camp vicinity during the day. They roost in huge numbers with as many as a dozen on the smallest branch, which sometimes ends up breaking from their combined weight. The squadron was a mere portion of the camp population, which is situated close to an urban, rate paying community.

There are many bat issues in New South Wales, Queensland and the Northern Territory. A major one is bats taking up residence in populated areas where they are not welcome by the residents.

In some cases these are ancestral roosting sites where suburbia has encroached upon them – in other cases due to food shortages and loss of habitat. These issues made it a very good reason for this very workshop – Managing Flying-fox Camps from Melbourne to Mataranka.

The workshop dealt with Management Policies and the South-east, the Far North and Long-term strategies. We gained insights into the plight of numerous camps such as in the Melbourne Botanical Gardens, Charters Towers and Singleton, the techniques used to relocate them, what works and what doesn't. Questions addressed included those on whether or not relocation of a camp should be attempted, should a camp ever be relocated, and if so, when during the annual cycle should it be attempted.

Never before had we the inspiring experience of spending a full day next to a camp of literally tens of thousands of bats, *Pteropus alecto* (Black Flying-fox), *Pteropus scapulatus* (Little red Flying-fox) and *Pteropus poliocephalus* (Grey-headed Flying-fox).

As with all conferences it was a wonderful reunion, meeting up with many old friends who share a love for bats and concern for their welfare.

THE CONFERENCE

After the conclusion of the workshop it was time for the drive from Ipswich to Toowoomba. On arrival at the University Greg Ford, who directed us to the Registration Desk, warmly greeted us. After registering and receiving our conference pack we settled into our on-campus accommodation, later to join in the welcoming BBQ dinner and a further opportunity to meet up with other friends.

Wednesday 14th. The day saw the start of the three days of conference papers and three evenings of batty fun. The papers came from a variety of people such as academics, students, project officers, wildlife carers and bat loving people.

The subjects covered Anabat techniques and analysis, ethics, survey standards tongue morphology, bats in agriculture, photography, structure and placement of bat boxes, and harp trap design – to name a few. Each session had a topic and the papers were on various aspects of each topic.

The day started off with a welcome and opening remarks, followed by the *keynote address* delivered by Professor Gary McCracken (co-authors: John Westbrook, Ya-Fu Lee, and Erin Gillam), from the University of Tennessee, Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, titled: 'On the agricultural and economic services of insect-eating bats: the case of Brazilian free-tailed bats and cotton bollworms'.

Gary et al. *"investigated feeding on insects pests by Brazilian free-tailed bats in an agricultural region in South Texas USA., that is inhabited by millions of Brazilian free-tailed bats (Tadarida brasiliensis). Using radiomicrophone bat detectors attached to helium balloons and kites, we documented high levels of feeding activity by these bats at altitudes of up to 1000m above ground level.*

"Dietary analysis of bat faeces demonstrates a two to three-fold increase in moth consumption that correlates with the annual migration schedules and availability to the bats of migratory populations of adult bollworms."

Greg Ford chaired the first session of the day and all papers were on Bats in agricultural landscapes. The following two sessions, chaired by Kerryn Parry-Jones and Gemma O'Brian, covered many aspects of flying-foxes, and was followed by a poster session.

The paper by Peggy Ebby et al., during this session, brought tears: 'The impact of high ambient temperatures on a maternity roost on Grey-headed flying-foxes *Pteropus poliocephalus*'. The deaths of thousands of bats were documented at the Bellingen Island Roost:

"This study flags the potential for reproductive output in GHFF to be moderated by the increasing incidence of extreme temperature predicted in current models of climate change."

A Long-eared bat



In the early evening the buses picked up the delegates for wine tasting and a bit of fun, followed by a BBQ dinner at the Preston Park winery.

Thursday 15th. The first five papers on this day, chaired by Terry Reardon, were on Microbat Foraging, followed by five papers on Bats and Forests, chaired by Brad Laws, with the last four papers of the day on urban bats and bat boxes. After afternoon tea the AGM was held with the election of new officers.

That evening the conference dinner was held. It was located in the Panorama Room, Picnic Point, Toowoomba. It has become traditional at the Bat Conferences for a 'Batty Quiz' to be held, conducted by the very talented Quiz Master, Terry Reardon. It was accompanied by a lot of fun and laughter, great food and much conversation.

Friday 16th. The first six papers of the day were on Microbat roosting ecology, chaired by Mark Brigham. During this session Glen Hoye (co-authors: Andy Spate and Andrew Steed) delivered a paper entitled: 'A census of major maternity roosts of the Large Bent-wing Bat *Miniopterus schreibersii oceanensis* within New South Wales'.

The paper entitled 'Abandoned mine gating: An attempt at Large Bentwing Bat (*Miniopterus schreibersii*) and Eastern Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus megaphyllus*) roosting habitat conservation, in southern NSW' (Chris Slade, Brad Law and Peter Jarman) is one we felt every manager dealing with the conservation of cave and mine roosting bats should get a copy of.

This paper won the *Bat Conservation International* award for the best conservation paper given at the conference.

After morning tea the next five papers, chaired by Monika Rhodes, dealt with surveys and techniques. It was at this session that our mate David Gee delivered his very humorous presentation, entitled "Lukin rika stap long Tetepare Island" (Looking for bats on Tetepare Island), winning him the award for the most humorous presentation.

The Conference delegates



Tetepare Island is in the Solomon's and as David stated it has a unique history of cannibalism and head hunting – to the complete abandonment of the island. Dave was dressed in his expedition attire giving everyone a hearty laugh, shown in the at the beginning of this article.

After lunch the session chaired by Dan Lunney was on standards for surveys. The first paper, by Rob Gration, was entitled: 'Industry Training Packages: do they have a role to play in the accreditation of bat researchers?' As with accreditation issues, familiar in caving and cave management cycles, this paper caused a lively debate.

Terry Reardon then presented *Draft National Survey Standards for Threatened Bats*. Terry needs to be congratulated for the hours of work on this much-needed document. It is an excellent starting point and hopefully when it is finalised it will go along way towards more thorough surveys.

After the presentation of the awards the conference came to a close. The third award was for the paper by Patrick Prevett and Bronwyn Stratman entitled 'Vegetation structure and assessment of microbat habitat: an experimental approach'.

The bar opened at 5.30 pm at Concannon College followed by the "Friday Night Bash" – international tucker and lots of fun.



A golden-tipped bat

MICROBAT WORKSHOP

The papers and discussions at the workshop were on three topics – National Standards, Survey Methods and lastly Population Monitoring for Conservation. There was a continuation of National survey standards – review of draft and "where to from here?"

FIELD TRIP

After lunch we said our goodbyes to our friends who were not going on the field trip and headed for the bush. The USQ's Ravensbourne Field Station is about 35 minutes drive from Toowoomba and not far from Ravensbourne and Perseverance Heights National Parks.

After arriving at the Field Station those who had camping gear erected their tents while the others got a mattress and found a space on the floor of the old school house.

When we had settled in it was off to the National Park to set up the harp traps – returning just after dark to a delicious meal of Indian food. Around midnight, and with great anticipation, it was off again to check the harp traps. It was a long walk through the damp rainforest checking each trap but alas all those in this section of forest were empty. Thus we went back to our cars to wait the return of the other group. They did a little better, but caught two species: Eastern Horseshoe-bat (*Rhinolophus megaphyllus*) and a Long-eared bat (*Nyctophilus sp.*)

Terry gave a demonstration on in-flight photography made easy with a digital camera before the bats were released and we returned for some needed sleep. At daybreak that morning it was back out to check and disassemble the traps. The same species as earlier that morning was caught and also a Golden-tipped bat (*Kerivoula papuensis*). *K.papuensis* is Australia's only bat species to be a specialist feeder on small web-building spiders.

As written by Greg Richards in the 'Australian Museum Complete Book of Australian Mammals' edited by Ronald Strahan – "Until its capture in the Cairns hinterland in September 1981, there was reasonable grounds for believing that the Golden-tipped bat was extinct in Australia.

"First described from Port Moresby, PNG, it was known in Australia only from five specimen taken near Rockhampton in 1884 and three from Cape York in 1897."

In recent times its range has been extended to southern New South Wales close to the Victorian border. As this was a rare event and only a few had seen this species before there was much jostling of onlookers, and many photos taken, of this tiny 7.5 gram bat.

After a late breakfast and packing up it was time to say our goodbyes and start our journey for home.

