



NEWSLETTER



FEBRUARY 2010



WESTERN AUSTRALIAN INSECT STUDY SOCIETY INC.

COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT 2009-2010

President: Otto Mueller (9312 1123)

Secretary: Terry Houston (w/hrs 9212 3742, Terry.Houston@museum.wa.gov.au)

Treasurer: Peter Langlands (a/hrs 9279 1808)

Councillors: David Knowles (9247 3727)

Eric McCrum (9295 3344)

Peter Ray (9298 8145)

Jan Taylor (9384 1475)

Julia Taylor

Membership: All enquiries regarding membership and any subscriptions should be forwarded to the Secretary (w/hrs 9212 3742, Terry.Houston@museum.wa.gov.au).

Newsletter: All contributions and enquiries should be directed to the Editor, Jan Taylor (telephone 9384 1475; e-mail jmtay5@bigpond.net.au).

Web-site: <http://www.insectsocietywa.org.au>

**Contributions to the Newsletter by members are welcome:
tell us about your entomological activities, observations, or concerns**

The Society gratefully acknowledges the support
of the Western Australian Museum

Cover illustration: Brightly coloured katydid or bush-cricket from Kalamunda identified as *Metholce nigratarsis* (Tettigoniidae) by David Rentz. Photo: Dave Tyler.

Coming Events

NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 10 February 2010
commencing 7.30 pm
Kings Park Administration Centre

Main feature:

“Ants, Moths and Molecules: Insect Mimicry by
Australian Spiders”

By Dr Michael Rix who has recently completed
a Ph.D. on spider systematics and is now a post-
doctoral fellow based at the WA Museum.

Insect in focus:

“Needlebugs – Nephidae” by Otto Mueller

Excursion: No excursion is planned for
February, but members are invited to join the
following:

(1) Darling Range Branch of the Naturalists
Club on an excursion to Lake Leschenaultia on
Sunday 21 February. Meet at 10 am, but time
may be changed if it is going to be hot.
Contact: Kevn Griffiths on 92551965.

(2) Junior members and their parents are
invited to the Junior Naturalists Excursion
detailed below (Terry Houston will be
assisting):

Sunday 28 February

Topic: Nocturnal Insects with Ben Fitzpatrick
Venue: Henderson Environmental Centre (Star
Swamp) Groat St, North Beach (UBD 226:B3,
Streetsmart 310:D2)

Time: Picnic tea 6pm; activities 7pm till 9pm
Activities: Learn about insects, classify light-
attracted insects

Bring: Picnic tea, notebook, pen, camera,
covered shoes, glass jar with lid, magnifier,
head torch.

Note: Hot water, tea, coffee, Milo, cordial &
cups provided

Cost: \$5 per family for hire of venue

Report on the December Meeting

Main Feature:

“Twentieth Anniversary Celebration”
reported by Margaret Owen

As one event to celebrate the twentieth
anniversary of the Insect Study Society, we
had been asked to wear an insect hat. Perhaps
the executive had imagined that a few would
respond but it was obvious that our
imaginings had been fired. Everyone except
for a visitor to this December meeting came
with an insect hat. It really was a remarkable
scene.

Our esteemed President opened the meeting
with the statement “For those who don’t know
me, I am a fly.” He was indeed Lord, and was
the most stylish insect there with his bow tie
and top hat.

We welcomed nine-year-old Florian and his
father. Florian is passionate about insects and
described his favourite insects as he showed us
his collection.



Jenny Cunningham with her 1st prize-winning
Melaleuca and Jezebel creation. Photo: Terry Houston

Our fly Lord is a brilliant teacher and
motivator. He explained that we had to parade

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individually at the front, expressing the character of our insect and that votes would be taken to decide the winners.

No longer were we individuals in the genus '*Homo*', but we were transformed as we minced, fluttered, flittered, chirped and chirruped across our habitat.



Florian with his cicada hat won second prize.
Photo: Paul Welch

Jonica had actual lace attached to her lace wings, Florian, as a cicada had tennis ball eyes and Jenny had a beautiful melaleuca garden on her head with a colourful jezebel butterfly, hand coloured, enjoying the nectar



Fourth prize winner – Brian Heterick.
Photo: Paul Welch

Spineless Wonders director, David Knowles, had a tree trunk growing from the top of his head covered in Spanish moss, (the trunk not the head). An insect from strange and exotic parts was somehow emerging from the tree trunk. As the trunk paraded at the front, bits of moss detached and wafted about the room.

Jiri Lochman had donated a copy of his new book "Wildlife of Australia" as a prize and this beautiful book became first prize, won by Jenny Cunningham. Florian won second prize, a \$50 voucher from the WA Museum bookshop and there were also third, fourth and fifth prizes.



Third prize winner – Julia Taylor. Photo: Paul Welch

Bone china mugs

The Committee had organised some beautiful bone china mugs, printed with three insects. These were for sale at \$12 each and were snapped up quickly. (See announcement below)

Slides and asides

Eric showed some slides of Central Australia and also some Singapore butterflies. The Australian Beak Butterfly from tropical areas looks like it has only four legs as the front pair of legs are so short, they do not extend out of the hairs on its body.

Robert Powell showed slides of a wooden pole in his garden into which he had drilled some holes. The holes are used by native bees, spiders, flies and by hyperparasites.

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We also saw some very beautiful Luna Moths from Eastern Canada.

Jiri Lochman made some observations on nuptial gifts provided by male insects. Jiri also had his book, *Wildlife of Australia*, for sale.

Otto described how the case moth walks up the side of the glass case. It makes a little silken ladder with about 5mm gaps between the rungs.

WA Insect Study Society in retrospect

By the President, Otto Mueller

It was 1989 and there had been a successful butterfly display (Jewels of the Rain forest) at the WA Museum. The museum phone was ringing more than usual about anybody knowing a group of citizens interested in learning more about insects. "Well not really, but there was the WA Naturalists' Club" was the usual answer. Some overtures were made to that organisation, which then was under the presidency of Tanja Thiess and secretary Claudia Mueller. But the budding and expert creepy crawly people did not want to be the fifth wheel on the naturalists' bandwagon. So our current secretary and WA Museum Curator for Entomology called some interested people together on Dec. 18, 1998 to set up a so-called steering committee. On January 6, 1990 the latter worked out some basic rules to advertise, meet and run a formal session in rooms provided by the WA Museum. The members were Magnus Peterson, Maureen Keady, Tony Oliver, Terry Houston, John van Schagen and Eric McCrum. Already at that stage those assembled discussed incorporation, meeting locations, fee structures (\$5 for singles, plus one more dollar for each family member). A stamp was needed, a meeting format to be agreed upon and a bank account for the fees. The founders were pleased to hear that two government agencies had tentatively agreed to provide rooms for us to meet. They were the WA Museum and Kings Park Authority. A summary of decisions made, was to be printed and mailed out with the

assistance of the WA Museum to enquirers and institutions. We were on, a roll

On February 14, 1990, 15 members gathered in this room and introduced one another with a five-minute commentary about their respective interests. Already then some exhibits were brought along for discussion including a blue New Guinea Emperor, an ant reference collection, an argentine ant poster, a cricket, slides of grasshoppers, dragonflies and a bee fly. We were told that already 59 members had signed up and wondered whether the steering committee's time had come to disband. It is pleasing to note that even today some seven of those early birds are still in this room. There were no constitution or office bearers then. In those days accountants were not yet all powerful, so this room was given free to us by Dr. Paul Wycherley, from the old guard. He merely suggested that we liven up his 1990 Flower Show a bit by putting up some insect displays in that big white marquee. On April 1, 1990 a Mr Graham Hall from CALM spoke about leaf beetles. By then a newsletter format had been tried which stood us in good stead for many years. The pink April 1990 cover sheet featured our name, a sandgroper in the centre and the date of publishing below (there was no logo yet). There were two black and white illustrations of leaf beetle larvae, no excursions planned and newcomers P. McMillan, Ian Dadour and Robert Powell were welcomed. A questionnaire told us what members expected for their money.

On our 10th Anniversary, December 1999, colour photographs were introduced to the cover of the Newsletter for the first time.

Ladies and gentlemen, this constitutes the end of my review of the life of this society. OM

News, Notes & Announcements

New Members

Welcome to the following new members (location and interests are noted in parenthesis):

Robert Horler (Albany; interests general)
Michelle Barnes (Albany: interest general and butterflies)
Pholin Holthouse (family member with David Holthouse)

Total Membership

WAISS membership now stands at 146.

Subscriptions reminder

Membership renewals fell due on 1 January. They remain at the discounted price of \$10 until 31 March. Late payments revert to \$15 after that. At the last count 57 members had not so far renewed their membership.

Commemorative Bone China Coffee Mugs

As mentioned in the summary of the meeting, most of the original 48 mugs were sold on the night. More can be ordered from the manufacturer, but we will need to know numbers before going ahead. Would members please let the secretary know if they are interested in purchasing the mugs (at \$12 each) and how many. (Note: they would need to be collected at a future meeting).



The WAISS mug.

Obituary:

Robert Peter McMillan 1921 - 2009

Robert Peter McMillan died on 28 October 2009. Peter had a life long interest in entomology. The son of a farmer at Spencer's Brook, WA, his interest in insects was stimulated by finding insect larvae in the trees he split for use as posts and railings. Many of these were kept until they metamorphosed into adult insects. Through Ludwig Glauert, then the Director of the Western Australian Museum, he had an early association with Horace Brown who influenced his growing interest in buprestid (jewel) beetles. Peter continued collecting during his teen-age years and when he left Guildford Grammar School where he had been a boarder he began employment at Elder Smiths. He also joined the Cameron Highlanders of W.A. which was to become the 16th Battalion. Some time after the declaration of World War II, Peter transferred to the RAAF and after training was seconded to the RAF's Desert Air Force in which he served with distinction as a tail gunner in twin-engined, 4-man crew, medium bombers both in the Western Desert and Italian campaigns. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

On return to Australia after the war, his entomological interests were rekindled while farming. Not only did he collect insects but he also photographed them and developed into a brilliant natural history photographer. He won awards for photography in competitions run by the Western Australian Naturalists Club of which he was a long-standing member. He also published a number of articles on insects in *The Western Australian Naturalist*. In the mid-1950's Peter attended the University of Western Australia as a science student. He gained a B.Sc. majoring in Botany and Zoology and after working for several years at the Western Australian Museum he commenced teaching biological science at Guildford Grammar School where he became a resident housemaster. After a distinguished teaching career, he progressed to Lecturer at the Claremont campus of the Western

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Australian College of Advanced Education. Peter became involved in local conservation issues and his work was recognized in 1980 with the award of the Medal of Australia for his efforts. He also enrolled as a part-time student at the UWA, eventually gaining an M.Sc. for research on the Stick-nest Ant, *Iridomyrmex conifer*. After retirement, he was hired by mining company RGC to advise on the planting of native plants for the rehabilitation of mining sites.

Peter was a brilliant observer with a general interest in natural history as well as his specialized interest in insects. Late in life, he received the Zoo Le Souef Award from the Entomological Society of Victoria in recognition of his contribution to amateur entomology in Australia. Peter is survived by his wife, Millicent, five children, thirteen grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Shelley Barker

New Publications

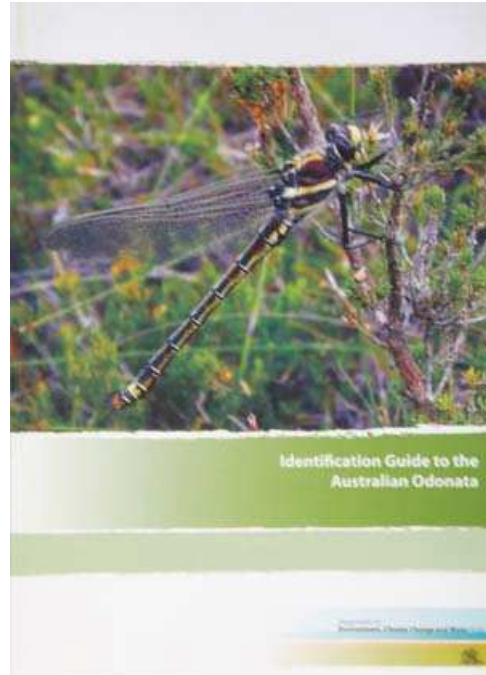
Identification Guide to the Australian Odonata by Gunther Theischinger and Ian Endersby. Published by the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water NSW.

This major work provides keys to the identification of the adults of all 325 Australian dragonfly and damselfly species and to their larvae as far as known and diagnosable. Detailed distribution maps are also provided to aid confidence in identification. The keys are easy to use, with drawings of the determining features provided for each couplet. About 20 colour photographs are also provided in an appendix.

It will form an invaluable contribution for people working on aquatic ecosystems.

The book is freely available as a pdf file and can be downloaded from:

<http://npws.nsw.gov.au/publications/09730AustOdonata.pdf>



Front cover of the guide.

Only a few hard copies have been printed. These are also free to deserving cases (my words). They can be obtained by emailing the senior author, Gunther Theischinger.

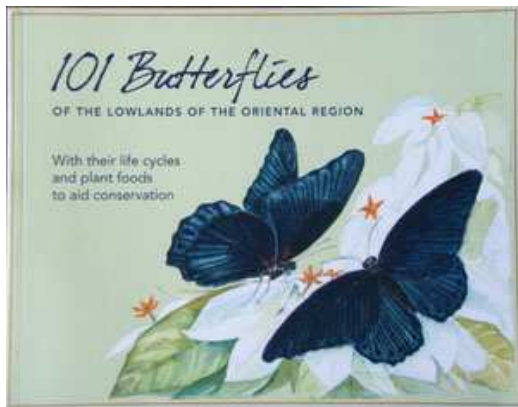
Jan Taylor

Wildlife of Australia, Louise Egerton and Jiri Lochman, 2009 (Allen & Unwin; Crows Nest, NSW). Hard cover, 448 pp, RRP \$59.99.

This is a superbly illustrated book as one might expect, given that renowned WA nature photographer Jiri Lochman had a large hand in its production. The book covers all groups of animals, not just the furry and feathered kinds, though less than one quarter of the book's 448 pages are devoted to invertebrates. Invertebrates featured include worms, snails, slugs, crustaceans, centipedes and millipedes, arachnids and insects. Scientific names of pictured animals are omitted from the captions but are listed at the end of the book. On skimming through the text concerning insects I found it was generally accurate (though I did note the perpetuation of a misconception about the habits of geotrupid beetles).

Terry Houston

101 Butterflies of the Lowlands of the Oriental Region by Meryl Wilson.



This book provides a valuable guide to the common butterflies encountered in Indonesia and Malaysia. It is extensively illustrated with the author's artwork and provides details of life histories, food plants and where the butterflies are likely to be found. It is published by Yellow Dot Publishing at a cost of 350,000rp (about \$40), and can be obtained by contacting:

butterflies@ecolodgesindonesia.com

Jan Taylor

'Perth's Bushland' birthday calendar.

The Urban Bushland Council WA, has produced a birthday calendar to promote Perth's bushland. After putting in family and friends' birth dates and important dates, you may no longer miss birthdays. The calendar is not confined to a particular year so it will last for many years. Each month has a photograph taken in one of Perth's bushland areas and a caption.

The calendar is available from the UBC, ubc@inet.net.au or PO Box 326, West Perth 6872, or from Margaret Owen, 93811287 and costs \$15 plus \$2 postage.

Entomology Course

For years the place of entomology in courses offered by Australian universities has been declining close to extinction. To counteract this the University of Queensland got together with the Universities of Adelaide, New England, Charles Sturt and Western Australia

to mount *Entomology Curriculum Australia*. This offers four specialist units to third year students enrolled in science or similar degrees anywhere in the country using comprehensive websites and downloadable lectures.

For more information check on the following website:

<http://www.entomology.edu.au/entomology-curriculum-australia-further-information>

UK Bumblebee extinction and its reintroduction from New Zealand

In early days New Zealand had problems with growing red clover because there were no insects there to pollinate the flowers, so seed had to be imported every season. Charles Darwin had discovered that only long-tongued bumblebees could pollinate red clover and as a result various attempts were made, starting from 1875 to introduce bumblebees. The people involved were not discriminating and a number of species were introduced with four becoming established. One of them, the Buff-tailed Bumblebee *Bombus terrestris*, was short-tongued and stole nectar by biting a hole at the base of the flower, so did not do the intended job of pollinating the flowers. The other species are *B. hortorum*, *B. ruderatus* and *B. subterraneus*.



Bumblebee queen (*Bombus terrestris*) Taken in UK.

Photo: Jan Taylor

In England, the home of the original stock, one species, the Short-haired Bumblebee, *B. subterraneus*, became extinct in 2000, and there are plans to reintroduce them this year to the site of their last population in Kent. Some from New Zealand stock are already being held at the London Zoo.

Bumblebees also buzz-pollinate flowers, so there is pressure to introduce them to Western Australia to pollinate various glasshouse crops, tomatoes especially. *Bombus terrestris* has already been illegally introduced into Tasmania.

Jan Taylor

Bug-Eye

(Observations of insects in the field.
Members' contributions welcomed)

Action in Underwood Avenue bushland – Margaret Owen

These robber flies were seen in Underwood Avenue Bushland on 7 January 2010. I am thinking that the one with its tail tip raised is emitting pheromones to attract a mate. It is perched on an old *Xanthorrhoea* spike.



Robber fly on *Xanthorrhoea* spike.

Photo: Margaret Owen



Mating robber flies, Asilidae, Margaret Owen

Mating raspy crickets – Jiri Lochman

The female hangs onto vegetation with two pairs of legs while the male inserts his packet of sperm into her reproductive organ, holding nothing more than the feet of her hind legs and her sword-shaped ovipositor.



Mating raspy crickets, Gryllacrididae.

Photo: Jiri Lochman

Hover mating in hoverflies – Jolanda Keeble



Hoverflies (Syrphidae) mating. Photo: Jolanda Keeble

BUGHUNTER'S CORNER
Private life of the mantis

Mating with a hungry female can be hazardous for the male. It is often reported that male mantises are progressively eaten from the head down while his body continues the mating process. Some suggest that his body actually increases the chance of him having offspring by nourishing the female so that she can produce more eggs fertilised by him. However, it is not true that all males are eaten – in the

wild most go on to mate with other females. But when confined in a jar in the laboratory the female has little choice but to eat the male. This one probably survived.



Mantids mating. Photo: Margaret Owen

Some other male insects have developed a trick to avoid being eaten by their hungry mates. Scorpion flies and dance flies (Empidae) first catch an insect and then start searching for a female while carrying this gift. When he finds a female he gives it to her (to keep her mind off him as a potential meal) while he proceeds to mate with her.



Members at the WAISS 20th Anniversary meeting December 2010. Photo: Paul Welch