

14th Biennial Conference: “Preserving the Humboldt Tradition of Scholarship in Australasia”

The 14th Biennial Conference entitled “Preserving the Humboldt Tradition of Scholarship in Australasia”, encompassing the 14th Biennial meeting of the Australian Association of von Humboldt Fellows was held from Friday, 30th September until Sunday, 2nd October, 2011 at Neuroscience Research Australia, Sydney, Australia. The meeting brought together 100 attendees, including 47 Humboldtianer from Australia and New Zealand and 27 DAAD alumni. The scientific meeting included 17 oral presentations from Humboldtianer over four areas of scholarly investigation, including History, Medicine, Physical Sciences and Earth Sciences.

The Friday evening session was held in the Scientia Building at the University of New South Wales. Association President, Professor Rob Robson, welcomed a number of special guests including the newly appointed Ambassador for the Federal Republic of Germany, Dr. Christoph Müller, who officially opened the conference. In his opening remarks, Dr. Müller highlighted the increasing importance of German-Australian academic and scientific relations. Two Invited Lectures then followed. The first entitled “Green Urbanisation: Transforming Australian Cities towards Sustainability” was given by Dr. Steffen Lehmann, Professor of Sustainable Design and Director of the Research Centre for Sustainable Design and Behaviour at the University of South



AvH Regional Officer, Dr. Katrin Amian (right) at the Friday night reception with Prof. Dr. Joachim Brand (Massey University) (left) and Dr. Thomas Baumgartl (University of Queensland).

Australia, as well as being the holder of the UNESCO Chair in Sustainable Urban Development for Asia and the Pacific. Professor Lehmann, also a DAAD alumnus, was the invited DAAD presenter. The second lecture, in the area of health and preventative medicine and entitled “Non-infectious Chronic Disease: The Major Challenge for the 21st Century”, was given by Professor Ian Frazer, the 2006 Australian of the Year and the inventor of the vaccine against cervical cancer. Professor Frazer spoke about the development of new preventive approaches in chronic, non-infectious disorders such as cancer. A brief reception followed the lecture presentations.

On the Saturday morning, the conference moved to the weekend venue at Neuroscience Research Australia. The morning opened with an informative presentation entitled “The Influence of Alexander von Humboldt in Australia”, in which Professor Gabrielle McMullen (Australian Catholic University) outlined the contributions to Australia’s development during the 19th century by a number of “Humboldt disciples”, such as Ferdinand Mueller, Founding Director of the Melbourne Botanic Gardens, Georg Neumeyer, creator of the Melbourne Meteorological Observatory, *et al.* Associate Professor Alexander Davies (Massey and James Cook Universities) discussed the contributions of artists to biological exploration; Professor Jeff Malpas (University of Tasmania) presented the topic “Heidigger, Place, and Contemporary Philosophy”; and Professor Andrew Cheetham (University of Western Sydney) discussed the current approach to the measurement



Ambassador Dr. Christoph Müller addressing the opening session of the Conference



A display of local flora “brightened” the lecture room at Neuroscience Research Australia.

of research outputs in Australia under the title “Excellence in Research in Australia: The Curate’s Egg”.

In the second session, topics were in the area of medicine: “Time out of Mind: Encephalitis Lethargica from the Inside”, presented by Dr. Paul Foley (Neuroscience Research Australia); “Neutrition Research for Health and Quality of Life”, Professor Bernhard Breier (Massey University); “Can Viruses be Beneficial to their Hosts?” Associate Professor Ralf Dietzgen (University of Queensland); “From Gestures to Words: Verbal Labelling of Sequential Hand Movements Reduces Activation of the Inferior Frontal Gyrus”, Dr. Motohide Miyahara (University of Otago); and “The Search for Diagnostic Agents for the Study of Early Onset Dementia”, Associate Professor Roger Read (University of New South Wales).



Discussions continue during a conference lunch break, at Neuroscience Research Australia.

After lunch, attention turned to talks in the Physical Sciences area. Dr. Michael Wormit, a visiting Lynen Fellow at Massey University outlined his theoretical research concerned with colour in plants; Professor Robert Robson (James Cook University) told us why “antimatter” matters, using positron emission tomography (PET) as his practical example; Dr. Peter Jarvis (University of Tasmania) connected quantum

physics to biology under the title “Can you Smell the Shape of a Molecule?”; and Dr. Harvey Holmes (University of New South Wales) presented the topic “A New Theory of Hearing Including Neural Feedback.”

The afternoon of presentations ended with an outline of the current research support schemes of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation by Frau Dr. Katrin Amian, AvHF Regional Officer for the Global Region of which Australia and New Zealand are parts. This presentation proved of interest not only to the attending Humboldtianer but also attracted several additional “early career” researchers who came specifically to hear Dr. Amian speak.

The Saturday evening conference dinner took the form of a Harbour cruise aboard *Sydney Showboat*. The evening provided an excellent opportunity for social mixing and gave Humboldtianer and those DAAD alumni present the opportunity to talk informally with



Vice-President, Prof. Gabrielle McMullen and President, Prof. Rob Robson announce Dr. Kathy Andrews (right) as the winner of the inaugural Young Researcher Award which was presented to her by Past-President, Prof. Peter Schwerdtfeger (second from right).

Dr. Christoph Müller, the newly arrived NSW Consulate General, Dr. Hans-Dieter Steinbach and his wife Frau Ulrike Steinbach, as well as Herr Hubertus Klink from the Department of Culture, Education, Science and Research at the German Embassy in Canberra and Dr. Amian.



Dr. Christoph Müller and A/Prof. Murray Hamilton enjoying a meal during the 14th Biennial Conference..

The evening also included the presentation of the inaugural Peter Schwerdtfeger Award, a new award from the Association to acknowledge excellence in research by a young member of the AAvHF. The award was presented by Professor Peter Schwerdtfeger, the first President of the AAvHF, to Dr. Kathy Andrews (Griffith University and Queensland Institute for Medical Research). In addition,

the first of the recognitions of “Distinguished Members”, as agreed upon in principle at the previous Biennial Meeting and for which criteria had been resolved by the National Executive Committee since that time, were announced. These were to Dr. George Bornemissza OAM (University of Tasmania) and Dr. David Teakle (University of Queensland). Throughout the evening we were entertained with pleasant *Tafelmusik* from the Carinya Strings Ensemble and an amusing and entertaining after-dinner presentation was given by Associate Professor Trevor Finlayson in which he addressed the question, “Could Alexander von Humboldt Have Played Cricket?”



The Carinya Strings Ensemble providing most pleasant *Tafelmusik* during the Harbour cruise aboard *Sydney Showboat*.

Sunday began with the separate Biennial Business Meetings for both the AAvHF and the NZAvHF. The conference concluded with a session entitled Earth, Water and Fire: Associate Professor Uwe Ring (University of Canterbury) outlined aspects of the Christchurch Earthquakes; Dr. Gert Lube (Massey University) presented the topic “Open-system Behaviour Explains the Long-range Destructiveness of Violent Volcanic Lehrs;” Associate Professor Murray Hamilton summarized his recent research into measuring atmospheric water; and in a final and most entertaining lecture, Professor Bernd Lottermoser (University of Tasmania) convinced us that there was plenty of gold left for the future under the title, “Earth Audit: The World’s Sources of Gold for the 21st Century.”



Prof. Bernd Lottermoser delivers the final presentation, “Earth Audit: The World’s Sources of Gold for the 21st Century.”

An invitation had been issued to all presenters at the Conference to prepare and submit a manuscript. Following peer-review, such manuscripts accepted as the result of this review process, will be published in a “hard-copy” booklet which will be distributed to all conference registrants.