

**OPENING REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE PETER
UNDERWOOD AC, GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA TO OPEN THE
COMBINED CONFERENCE OF THE AUSTRALASIAN
ENTOMOLOGY SOCIETY AND THE AUSTRALASIAN
ARACHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY MONDAY 26TH NOVEMBER
2012**

It is a great pleasure for me as the Governor of Tasmania to welcome you all to Hobart and to the 43rd Annual General Meeting and Scientific Conference of the Australian Entomological Society and the 2012 Australasian Arachnological Society. I hope that all the visitors to Tasmania will be able to find a little extra time to have a look around our island State which is always particularly beautiful at this time of the year.

Now, when I open a conference I like to say something that is relevant to the papers being presented at the conference. I looked at your programme and briefly toyed with giving you the benefit of my views upon such topics as “Landscape assessment of transgenic cotton refuges, as a requirement for resistance management” and “Ground spider diversity and phenology in a cotton agroecosystem under two different tillage management systems” but in the end found that the only events in the programme that I really understood were Morning and Afternoon tea, Lunch and the reception at Government House.

I then thought that as my background is the law that you would be interested to listen to my 3 - hour dissertation on the development of the law of trusts and the abolition of the impact

today of the Statute of Frauds passed in 1677. However, my wife talked me out of that saying that she didn't think that would be a good idea

However, I do note that is quite appropriate that you are holding your joint national conference here in Hobart because it shares an interesting link with one of the greatest naturalists and entomologists of all time, Charles Darwin. Some of you may be aware that Charles Darwin visited Hobart in February 1836 on his way home during the voyage of the HMS Beagle.

Whilst it is generally reported that the idea of evolution did not form in his mind until some time after the journey was complete, I think it is not unreasonable to speculate that he may have formed some preliminary ideas about it during the voyage. So it is possible to imagine that one night whilst sitting in his dimly lit room here in Davey Street back in 1836 ruminating on the enormous diversity of the species he had observed during his journey, or perhaps whilst out observing the unique fauna and flora of Tasmania that he may have had an epiphany about evolution.

During his brief stay of 12 days he managed to collect 119 different kinds of insects including "dung beetles, leaf beetles, ladybird beetles, weevils, ptinid beetles, parasitic wasps, water scavenger beetle, a spider beetle and a new bee.

Historians frequently remark that great events in human history so often depend on a specific set of events or the making of a particular decision and Darwin's visit to Hobart is no exception. During his stay he killed a tiger snake with a stick, mistakenly assuming that snakes were like those in Europe and that long thin snakes were harmless. But as we know all too well Tiger snakes are amongst the most venomous in the world and if it had bitten him, the history of the theory of evolution would have been quite different and no-one would ever have heard of Charles Darwin.

I'm not sure if it is a coincidence, or a deliberate decision on the part of the conference conveners but you have actually chosen a very auspicious date by holding the conference in November because Darwin's influential book "On the origin of the Species" which first outlined the theory of evolution, was published on the 22nd of this month 1859, 153 years ago.

Darwin was an avid collector of a wide range of specimens, not just of insects but also plants, shells, rocks and fossils. He once expressed the great joy that can be experienced by collectors when he wrote;

"No poet ever felt more delighted at seeing his first poem published than I did at seeing in Stephen's *Illustrations of British Insects*" the magic words - Captured by C. Darwin Esq." I imagine that you can readily relate to that sense of pleasure if you have been

fortunate enough to discover a rare, or even perhaps an entirely new species of insect, or spider.

Of course there are many different types of collectors and at the other end of the spectrum was the avid collector of birds, the respected British ornithologist Richard Meinertzhagen. He led a very unusual and interesting life which included a military career and exaggerated stories of his life. He faithfully attended the British Natural History Museum over many years and after he died his estate bequeathed his personal collection to the museum. It was not until the early nineteen nineties that curators first began to realise that a very large number of his specimens were taken (that is stolen) from other collections and even more disturbingly it included some of theirs. Apparently this explained his habit of wearing a large overcoat even during warm weather but I don't see any large overcoats here today!

This is a significant conference with over 200 delegates attending from all Australian states and territories and with overseas delegates from New Zealand, Finland, South Korea, Malaysia, Spain and the USA. The conference agenda is extensive and interesting and I think that if Darwin were still alive today he would be very envious at the opportunities you will have to listen to many eminent scientists and to meet with learned colleagues and share current knowledge and research. As a naturalist Darwin would certainly applaud your decision to co-host a scientific meeting of the two disciplines and

hopefully encourage interaction across the disciplines and bring forth new synergies for future research.

Of course modern scientific study is conducted for more reasons than mere scientific curiosity. There is often also a commercial, or public health need that drives scientific study and research, to enable a full understanding of the facts and ensure that public policy decisions are properly informed and do not have unforeseen consequences. There is no better example of that risk than the unfortunate introduction into Australia of the cane toad. The decision to do that graphically demonstrates what happens when well-meaning people make decisions without reference to scientific study or evidence and how the consequences can be quite devastating for the environment. Tasmania is no stranger to the problem of invasive species with the accidental introduction of the European Wasp, Argentine Ant and more recently the Bumble Bee.

An evidenced based approach to pest management is particularly important for Tasmania's economy which places a significant emphasis on the clean green image of our produce. I understand that the application of natural pest management methods and the conservation of key invertebrate biodiversity are areas of key of interest for the conference. The symposia on fruit fly management and threats will no doubt be of particular interest to the Tasmanian delegates. Of course, pest management is now an international issue with invasive types of fauna and flora inadvertently making their

way to all parts of the globe on ships, planes and shipping containers. Without natural predators they are able to rapidly take over their new environment often to the detriment of the indigenous species and can cause a serious imbalance in the local ecosystem.

I note that you held a film festival on insect/spider fear, at MONA yesterday afternoon. I think that is an admirable idea; not only to help the general community acquire a better understanding of insects and spiders and possibly encourage new students to consider a career in entomology or arachnology, but also to help people reduce their anxiety through education and better understanding. Although I must say that having a healthy fear of spiders seems to me like a perfectly sensible thing to have!

And so it is with pleasure that I open the Australasian Entomology and Arachnological Conference.