NOTICE OF MEETING

The next meeting of the Branch will be held on the 16th of February at the Melbourne Camera Club Building, South Melbourne, cnr. Dorcas & Ferrars Sts. This will be a Member’s Night and hopefully there will be some worthwhile visits to relate and exhibits to show at the meeting.

Raffles as per usual.

The March meeting will be on the 15th. The speaker will be Julie Gough, Curator of Indigenous Art at the National Gallery of Victoria. This is a timely talk as it coincides with the issue of a stamp, featuring a necklace made by Tasmanian aboriginal women. The stamp commemorates the February 1804 settlement of Hobart town.

Meeting Dates for 2004
February 16th
March 15th
April 19th
May 17th
June 21st

Office Bearers for 2004
Chairman Fred Bunyard
Sec. Treasurer Edna Tenner
Assist. Sec. Treasurer Michael Lyons
Bulletin Editor Val Cram
Meeting Reporter Don Cram
Bulletin Despatch Chris Bunyard
Librarians Norm Cryer & Alena Bubenciek

Committee
M. Lyons
Don Cram
Val Cram
Branch Correspondence for ASN Geoff Macaulay
Branch Tutor Robert Burn

Subscriptions are now due for 2004. Please fill in the form from your ASN.

Reminder to Interstate Members receiving the Branch Bulletin. The annual cost is $5.00, so a book of 10 stamps is an easy way to remit dues. Please notify us if you no longer wish to receive our newsletter, as postage is an expensive item.

Members Collecting Permits for 2004 are enclosed with this Bulletin. N.B. the expiry date is on the 30th November 2004. Before an excursion notify Fisheries Officer (Dept. of Primary Industries). For Port Phillip Bay – paging No. 9283 4283, Cowes – 5952 2509 (David Cass), Warrnambool 5561 9959 (Ian Westhorpe).

Secretary Edna Tenner Tel. No. 94781284
Chairman Fred Bunyard Tel. No. 94392147
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR 2003.

Over the past year we have had an average attendance of 14 people at our monthly meeting at the Camera Club premises in South Melbourne. I seem to recall that this is the figure that applies to most years, at least the recent ones here at the Camera Club, and whilst it is of concern that the numbers are not increasing, it is gratifying that they are not decreasing.

This is, of course, only those members who attend the monthly meetings. As a branch we have experienced a slight drop in membership numbers since the subscription increase. Some would be as a direct result of this increase and others for a variety of reasons. To me, the new CSIRO published Journal seems to have changed little, except for it's frequency of publication. I would welcome any comments from members as to their thoughts on the Journal and we could perhaps publish them in the Branch Bulletin. Maybe a "Letters to the Editor" column [Don & Val are always looking for items to be published in the Bulletin] indeed why restrict your comments to the Journal? How is the Branch Bulletin? Have you any news to pass on to others? Have you any shell news? Comments from members are always most welcome and can add an interesting insight into the activities around our State.

During the year we have had a number of speakers at our meetings both from within and from outside the Branch and I would like to thank all of them for the time and trouble they took in preparing and presenting their talk. I would now like to thank the committee who have looked after our Branch for the past year: Firstly, our ever reliable Secretary, Edna Tenner who looked after our books and us all year and Michael Lyon, our Assistant Secretary, who actually had to stand in for Edna when she took sick leave for a hip operation. Then our Meeting reporter and Bulletin Editor in Don & Val Crum, they keep our branch Bulletin both entertaining and informative. Alena Bubenicek and Norm Cryer, our Librarians, who keep our other books in order. Chris Bunyard for the Despatching of the Bulletin each month, and finally to our Tutor, Mentor, and all-round Guru, Robert Burn. Robert can be relied upon each meeting to provide us with interesting information and is so adept in "off the cuff answers" to any question that may arise.

Finally, I would like to extend to all members, best wishes for Christmas and a healthy, prosperous and safe New Year.

Fred Bunyard Chairman

Landsnail Conservation Workshop
Australian Museum Sydney
October 2003

This seminar was attended by over 30 specialists and amateurs. The conference looked at ways of fast tracking databases, identification of undescribed taxa and identifying taxa or groups at higher risk for conservation. Extensive museum collections exist in all states and require further work, with the need for a national database system to be created with internet access. The need to raise public awareness about landsnails was also considered.

Some interesting facts about landsnail conservation in Australia were raised, 99% of our fauna is endemic. Estimates of the number of Australian taxa ranged from 1500 – 2268, only approximately 500+ are yet scientifically described.

The average Australian land snail range is only about 1000 square km. Many species have significantly smaller ranges and can be seriously threatened by minor or major habitat disturbance. In Australia 58 species are officially listed as threatened at a state level. The IUCN lists 164 species for Australia. This indicates the lack of general awareness of the group in this country. The highest diversity quoted for one site was 38 species. Land snail diversity at a particular site is a good indicator of overall species richness for that site. Worldwide 43% of recorded species extinctions are Molluscs (292sp). The vast majority of these are non-marine species.

Geoff Macaulay
One becomes three: local littorinid name changes

A molecular phylogeny based on sequence data from two nuclear and two mitochondrial genes of Southern Ocean members of the subfamily Littorininae has recently been published by Williams, Reid and Littlewood (2003) of the Natural History Museum, London. All of Victoria’s littorinids belong to this subfamily. One consequence of this study is a revised classification at genus level, with a break-up of the formerly widely-used genus Nodilittorina.

Genus Nodilittorina von Martens, 1897

This genus is now restricted to one species only, the type species *pyramidalis* Quoy & Gaimard, 1833. Its range in Victoria is restricted to the far east coastline.

Genus Austrolittorina Rosewater, 1970

The type species of this genus is *Littorina unifasciata*, Gray, 1826, the only Australian species. There are four other species assigned to the genus from New Zealand (*antipodum, cineta*) and South America (*araucana, fernandezensis*).

Genus Afrolittorina Williams, Reid & Littlewood, 2003

The South African *Littorina africana* Krauss, 1847 is the type species of this new genus. One other South African species, *knysnaensis* and two south-eastern Australian species, *acutispira* (E.A. Smith, 1892) and *praetermissa* (May, 1909) are also assigned to Afrolittorina.

Ponder & Rosewater (1979) treat both *A. praetermissa* and *A. acutispira*. They state that *A. praetermissa* lives sympatrically with *A. unifasciata* in Tasmania, Victoria and South Australia. It does not occur in NSW. *A. acutispira* is found in southern Queensland, NSW, and easternmost Victoria. It too lives sympatrically with *A. unifasciata*. Coastal Invertebrates of Victoria (1984) indicates a few records of *A. praetermissa* from east of Lakes Entrance. These should be reviewed as it is possible that some, if not all, represent *A. acutispira*. As the species name implies, *A. acutispira* has a taller more acutely conical shell than other south-eastern Australian littorinids. Its colour pattern is similar to that of *A. praetermissa*, but often the pattern of wavy lines is broken into wavy series of squarish or oblong spots. The globular body whorl and short spire of *A. praetermissa* set it apart from *A. acutispira*.

All other species (50 in number) regarded in recent years as belonging to the genus Nodilittorina, are now reassigned to the genus Echnolittorina Habe, 1956. In this genus, the shell can be nodulose, granulose, smooth or spirally striate, with nodules or granules axially aligned. In Nodilittorina, the nodules are not axially aligned.

Robert Burn

September Meeting Report This was a Members night at which 5 speakers contributed to the programme.

Dr Brian Smith, Curator of Zoology Launceston Queen Victoria Museum, exhibited a specimen of *Velesunio ambigaus* (Phillipi,1847) taken from a small dam near Baccus Marsh which were deformed, resulting from stress, due probably to drought conditions and poor water quality. A second specimen from Melton Reservoir of *Althyria jacksoni* (Iredale, 1934) was very large and also deformed in shape.

Robert Burn reported that a species of Nodilittorina had been named from DNA information. Geoff Macaulay exhibited a tray of land snails newly acquired. Edna Tenner showed some difficulty to indentify Vexillidae from Victorian waters due their many forms.

Don Cram showed *Cypraea labrilineata* (Gaskoin,1849) collected on his first trip to-Long Reef NSW in 1968, and his first cowry. He explained how through successive workers the shell had been confused with *C. flaveola* (Linnaeus, 1758) *helenae* and *nashi*. However Dr Barry Wilson correctly named *C. flaveola* as a valid species which was obvious to J.E.Gray in 1825.

Edna Tenner
Report of 20th October 2003 Meeting

We were privileged to have Dr Mark Norman of the Museum of Victorian Science Department speak to us about his experiences on joining an expedition of discovery to explore the deep sea mounts of the Tasman Sea trench. With the aid of video and slides he gave a lively account of the 2 weeks he spent on board the New Zealand research vessel "Tangaro", which had been hired for 4 weeks in May and June, 2003. This expedition which was a collaborative venture, costing $1.000.000 and funded three ways between Australia, New Zealand and California, with 34 scientists representing 8 to 10 institutions. The area of research covered the triangle between New Zealand, Lord Howe Island and Norfolk Island. The vessel "Tangaro" was essentially equipped for fisheries purposes and capable of dredging at a depth of 2 kilometres, with 15 crew members to operate the ships equipment. To accommodate the number of scientists wishing to participate in this venture it was decided to divide the area under research into 2 zones, of a southern and northern area, so that there were 24 scientists on board for each of the two weeks. Dr Norman joined the ship on the second half of the 4 weeks which worked the zone encompassing the area south of Lord Howe Island and between Norfolk Island and New Zealand.

The "Tangaro" was well set up for commercial fishing, so as to provide accuracy of operations in siting and dredging of suitable substrate with trawl nets and a drop-digital camera with flash was automated to work with each haul. The camera can take about 700 exposures for a period of one to two hours. The images are relayed to a video on board, while computerised mapping of the sea floor is made at the same time. The crew operated trawls continuously around the clock, while scientists worked 24 hour shifts to make the most of the opportunity with the enormous amount of material brought up with each haul. One hundred and sixty stations were visited during the four weeks.

The three methods of trawling consisted of firstly the "Rat Catcher", a deep sea net designed to catch fish such as the Orange Roughy or Boar fish, to ascertain the likelihood of finding them in commercial quantities, but in these waters were found to be insufficient in numbers. The second net of finer mesh, called a 'beam' net was used for sediment sampling and for traversing rough terrain. The 'Shermann' dredge, so nicknamed as it resembled the war tank of that name was very heavy and brought up such items as hard corals, tree-like sponges almost three feet high. With each haul spilling onto the deck there was a frantic sorting by scientists of species, to be given further sorting and labelling later and finally in the laboratory on board, of taking tissue samples for DNA records. Fish had their fins spread and pinned to polystyrene boards and bathed in formalin, for preservation ready for dispatch to Institutions, there to expedite their identification and receive further attention. In having to cope with non-stop hauls, the scientists took 6 hours to check six hundred invertebrates. On one occasion, there were twenty fish bins of brittle stars. Large rubbery sea spiders were seen, 30 cms in diameter and many kinds of echinoderms. One strange echinoderm was inflated with water and exuded a purple stain from poisonous sacs, its test was soft, not of the usual calcareous material. Crustaceans also showed great variety in shapes. One species of stone crab was related to the hermit crab, others seen were blind lobsters, an adaptation to the darkness at such depths.

Dr Norman showed many varieties of transparent cuttlefish with visible light organs. Large squids were brought up with their tissues full of ammonia, this gives them buoyancy at great depths. The very swift swimming squid had bullet-shaped bodies. Flying squid can make aerial flights, as an escape trick I presume. We were very interested to see Spirula spirula which has a light organ facing upwards at its tail-end while maintaining a vertical position in the water. Stalked crinoids were seen living in great densities. Other oddities seen, were many strangely shaped fish, which have adapted to life in these dark depths. Some have soggy flesh and or light organs. Angler fish have a glowing lure suspended above their heads to catch prey; there were bat-fish related to pipe fish. Some fish had beaked noses, a ghost fish we learned had a metal detector in its head. A dog-shark was black and covered with prickly projections.

From deep water south of New Caledonia, Dr Norman reported that fishermen had taken fish which revealed stomach contents of the teeth of Megalodon fossil shark, two to three times the size of the white pointers, with teeth of 8 to 20 centimetres long and sought after by Collectors. Because of his special interest, Dr Norman was hoping to find a deep-sea octopus. One had been found on a previous expedition, but he was disappointed on this trip. He explained that very few of the common fish are found at greater depths due to the poor nutrient content and the reduced amount of calcium carbonate, which is necessary for bony structure, resulting in few molluscs and the gelatinous and transparent fish with huge eyes and light fluourescing organs. Others have no eyes. Strange to say, at 1500 metres, shells of Janthina janthina and pterid oysters were found after they had
died and sunk. Only micro shells were dredged in a slimy sediment. A sample of this material was sent to Dr Bruce Marshall of Auckland Museum and from this he reported finding over 200 species. Some of the deep-sea creatures we saw, are pictured in the book co-authored by Dr Norman titled "Guide to Octopuses & Squid in Australian Waters". There is a copy in our branch library.

There were 7 Australian Invertebrate specialists on this expedition.

Their names and particular interests; are as follows:-
Dr Mark Norman, M.V. -- Octopus & squid
Dr Tim O'Hara, M.V. -- Molluscs & brittle stars
Dr Robin Wilson, M.V. -- Polychaete worms
Dr Karen Miller, M.Tas. -- Hard corals
Dr Phillip Alderslade, -- M.Nthn. Territory --Soft corals
Dr Peter Davies, Qld M. -- Crustaceans
Dr Penelope Berntz, A.M. -- Isosponds

Two French scientists (father & daughter) --Sharks, general invertebrates & sponges
Scientists from University of California --fish
24 New Zealand scientists -- fish

For further details of this expedition visit website:-- www.oceans.gov.au.norfanz

Dr Norman mentioned that Dr Julian Finn MV.is studying world-wide Argonauta species, four of which being found in Australian waters. Dr Finn asks to be notified of findings of live Argonauta, to record the time and place, and to put the specimen in a container in the freezer in preparation for dispatch to him at Museum Victoria.

Edna Tenner

Yeppoon Shell Show, July 2003

For years now, in fact after every Mal. Soc. meeting at which I have heard other members give good reports of the event, I have told myself I should take a winter holiday and visit the Yeppoon Shell show. This was the year I actually did it. We (ie self and wife) drove up to Yeppoon, arriving on the Friday afternoon immediately before the show opened. I was able to get a preview of the show by dropping in to the hall on the Friday afternoon and watching displays being set up and dealers arriving and unloading their stock.

The show officially opened on the Saturday morning (12th July). There was a hall full of competition entries (though I didn’t count how many) the standard of exhibits was high and I spent a happy couple of hours wandering round the exhibits. There were plenty of other lookers too, though I am not sure how many were local club members and how many were general public who just wandered in off the streets attracted by the prospect of a shell display. I was by no means the only Victorian at the show. Chris and Fred Bunyard were there too, as well as one or two other Victorian collectors whom I know. Besides meeting up with the Victorian contingent, the visit also provided an opportunity to meet again various interstate collectors with whom I have corresponded and traded over the years.

While there were always a few people looking around the exhibits, there was always a crowd around the dealers’ tables. I am sure that a fairly high proportion of collectors visiting the show (and I am certainly one of them) scan the dealers tables first, to grab that extra special bargain before someone else walks off with it, before they look at the exhibits. There were some beautiful shells for sale, but those I really wanted were way beyond my price range. Still I was able to hold for a few minutes a Cyprea broderipii ($5,000) and a Cyprea leucodon ($700 – mmm, maybe I should have bought this one!).

On the Saturday evening we attended the shell show dinner. I hadn’t realised that a feature of the dinner is a somewhat extended raffle. We came away with two prizes. Chris and Fred, also at our table, came away with two or three prizes (perhaps more – ask them) and the remainder of the table managed to bag a swag of prizes too. Ironically, one of the prizes we chose had been donated by Chris and Fred. As Chris said, if only they had known we were going to win it, they could have given it to us at one of our monthly meetings and saved themselves the trouble of transporting it to Queensland.
On the Sunday morning there was a sell, trade and swap session for collectors. I had taken some shells with me and participated in this. However, on the Friday Chris had introduced me to some other collectors stopping at the same motel and I did much better trading with them, in their motel room, than I did trading at the actual show (which is just how Chris had said it would be). A shell collecting trip had been organised for the Monday. When I had originally been sent details of the show I was told the trip would probably be to one of the islands in Keppel Bay. By the time we got to the show the venue had been changed to Turkey Beach. I decided not to go on this trip because Turkey Beach was 2 – 3 hours drive south of Yeppoon. We would be driving south ourselves in a couple of days and I didn’t fancy covering the same ground twice. When I saw the very slender takings of some of the collectors who had gone (a few Cypraea xanthodon, some Cardita and a few small Murex), I felt I had made the right choice in spending the day sight-seeing in the country around Yeppoon.

On our way south, after we left Yeppoon, we had lunch with Alwyn and Bev Hedikke, collectors who have visited and judged at the Melbourne shell shows. I had expected to see one or other of them at the Yeppoon show. However, the sugar cane harvest was in progress and was keeping Alwyn busy and a visit by some grandchildren had kept Bev busy. In conversation with them I mentioned the rather poor shell collecting at Turkey Beach. They told me that over the years they have collected some beautiful material there, but one can never guarantee just what species will be present at any particular time. Some of their collecting trips had been good, others not so good and it is just a matter of going regularly to see what is around. So, if, on the basis of the previous paragraph, you have crossed Turkey Beach off your list of collecting localities, put it back. Even if you can only pay a single visit it might be on a day when something special or exciting (to you at least) is there.

Further south still, we paid a visit to the new shell museum and gift shop in Hervey Bay. The museum was brought out to Australia and opened a couple of years ago by Michael and Dawn Meyer from South Africa. I have corresponded and exchanged shells with Michael for years, and on our first trip back to the UK, 26 years ago, had travelled via South Africa and met Michael and done some collecting around the Durban area. At that time he had neither a wife nor a shell museum but went on to acquire both. Deteriorating business and social conditions over the last few years made them decide to move to Australia, where his brother already lived. I am pleased to say that I was able to provide him with help in moving by answering various queries and providing him with information that he requested. It was good to see Michael in person again after all these years, to meet his wife and to see the museum. The museum display is excellent, and includes a large and interesting display of items crafted from mother-of-pearl. It is well worth a visit although Michael’s comment was that it is only one in ten of the people visiting the gift shop who will pay to visit the museum.

Noel Coleman.