

INSECTS AND ART BLEND TOGETHER

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Many readers of this journal would recognize the name of the eminent entomologist, Dr. George Bornemissza, who not only conceived of, but also carried out, the introduction of dung beetles into Australia in the 1960s. This task took him to many of the hotter regions in Africa, Europe and Asia. He also worked in many of the hotter areas of Australia. Upon his retirement from CSIRO in the 1970s, George moved his family to the cooler climes of Tasmania.



George and his dung beetles



In my ful, "Scientific Regalia" :
Tie of Alexander von Humboldt -
Foundation, 1960/61; large, solid
gold medal awarded by the Britta-
nice Society in science sectn for
"His application of Ecology to hu-
man benefit" ; OAM medal w. ribbon
for scientific studies and intro-
duction of dung beetles to AUSTR-
LIA. - I am standing in front of
our "Family Shrine of Achievements"
on 5th October 2001

Photo of George and his notes on his awards

It was there, in Hobart, that he decided he wanted to share his love of beetles with the general population, by producing a dazzling display of insects presented in a way that would not only be scientifically accurate but also pleasing to the eye. By the 1980s he completed a set of 60 display boxes which were exhibited at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG) for three months. Subsequently they were donated to the CSIRO Division of Entomology at Black Mountain in Canberra, where they still reside today.

Shortly after this, George decided that if Canberra should have a set of boxes to display, then his home area of Hobart should likewise. So began what George was to call his "Forest Beauties of the World" collection. In order to gather material from overseas dealers, George either bought specimens from overseas or traded Tasmanian specimens (mainly Lucanids) with other collectors elsewhere.

A few years after his first wife Pat died in 1990, George met me, Mike Bouffard. Originally from Vermont (USA), I moved to Tasmania in 1972 where I was a secondary Science teacher at Geeveston, in the Huon Valley. At the University of Vermont I received some entomological training from Dr. Ross. T. Bell and put this to good use in my new home of Geeveston as an avid lover of the Tasmanian bush and a keen amateur insect collector. George and I found that we had a lot in common and went on numerous excursions to collect Lucanids from all over the state.

In the meantime, George remarried Jocelyn McIntyre, a retired art teacher and artist. George's enthusiasm for his collection saw his display expand to more than 90 boxes, which covered the Austro-Pacific region together with other zoogeographic regions - the Afrotropics, Neotropics and Oriental regions. Unfortunately, George was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and work on the collection stopped. George passed away in 2014, leaving his vast residue of beetles to me. He therefore did not get to complete the Palaearctic and Nearctic regions but more on that later.

Jocelyn and I then decided to team up together to finish George's display. I had the entomological knowledge and skill, while Jocelyn, a competent artist in her own right, brought an artistic flair to the project. Together, we decided that, while keeping to George's general plan, we wanted to stamp our own individuality on our creations.

While George specialized in presenting the beetles in circles, fans and combinations of the two, Jocelyn and I established a number of free-flowing patterns that included coils, starbursts, multi-layered waves and one that showed beetles (mostly endemic) from Tasmania, in a map of the state, comprising beetles found in their appropriate locales. All up, 8 boxes were produced for the first zoogeographic region, the Austro-pacific region.

Jocelyn used her artistic training to suggest where the beetles should be placed in the boxes, in order to show them to their maximum effect. Once the boxes were finished (at approximately 50 hours of work each), Jocelyn then proceeded to draw every beetle as it was presented in each box. This took her approximately 50-70 hours for each box and was executed in pencil on Fabriano watercolour paper. A trip to Melbourne then followed for Jocelyn, as she sought the expertise of a former student, Simon Barnard. Simon has four outstanding books now to his name and is now-established authority on Van Diemen's Land convict history. Simon numbered each insect in each drawing digitally, so that it could be used in the cross-referencing of the third part of our project.

As both Jo and myself are former educators we also wanted the general public to have some relevant information on the beetles included in the displays. Every beetle in the Austro-Pacific boxes was researched, so that once identified on the drawing, its scientific name, common name and individual characteristics could be described. This task took another 300 hours or more.

All of this material has been donated to the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, of which, under the kind supervision of Dr. Simon Grove, Senior Curator of Invertebrate Zoology, four of the boxes have been put on a semi-permanent display in the National History foyer. Due to financial and spatial limitation, Jocelyn's artwork and general notes have been put in storage until a suitable means of display can be determined.

Jocelyn and I have now moved onto the next section of the general collection – the Palaearctic. Aware that the region brought to mind cold winters, we have produced 5 boxes with the theme of a snowflake in each one. Not only have we used the material that George had amassed, but we were also kindly given a quantity of prime specimens by the respected entomologist, taxidermist, artist and writer, Dr. George Hangay, who, like George Bornemissza, came originally from Hungary.

Having finished the basic set-up for the Palaearctic, we are now in the planning stages for the final zoogeographic section – the Nearctic, which, due to time constraints and to the fact that we have limited material available, we are envisaging completing only three boxes. This should complete the collection, which George started, which is also our tribute to him.



Display boxes with the corresponding drawings by Jo Bornemissza



Display boxes featuring various beetle groups and artistic designs















