

Bulletin



MOVING SNAKES
prefer the suburbs

RISKS OF BANNING
people & parties

IN THIS ISSUE

| | |
|--|----|
| Darebin La Trobe Art award winners | 2 |
| Going global with new scholarships | 3 |
| Millis Science Lecture and <i>Dictyostelium</i> conference | 4 |
| La Trobe at Melbourne International Genetics Congress | 5 |
| Mike Moore global trade lecture | 6 |
| Research in Action | |
| Travelling snake seeks suburban home | 7 |
| Campaign to save sea lions | 8 |
| Hazards of banning people and parties | 10 |
| Law at your fingertips | 11 |
| Health dilemma: Obesity or Bulimia? | 12 |
| Adjunct Professorship for Morag Fraser | 13 |
| Retraining for aged-care nursing careers | 14 |
| Highlights in off-shore education | 15 |
| Success on wings of a butterfly | 16 |



Cover: La Trobe University zoology student, Heath Butler, and research subject. Tracking the movement of relocated snakes has thrown up some interesting findings, see *Research in Action*, Page 7

Photo: Rita Fraser, PDI (LTU COMET).

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Photographs scoop pool in Darebin La Trobe Art Prize



Winning artists with their works on opening night – Naomie Sunner, left, and Siri Hayes, below.

Two young women artists – both graduates from the Victorian College of the Arts – have won this year's Darebin La Trobe Acquisitive Art Prize, worth a total of \$8,000.

Naomie Sunner, from North Fitzroy, won the 'Best Work by an Emerging Artist' award worth \$3,000, acquired for the La Trobe University Art Collection. Siri Hayes, from Northcote, took out the \$5,000 prize for the overall 'Best Work on Show' acquired for the City of Darebin Art Collection.

They were among 50 finalists in the fourth Darebin La Trobe Acquisitive Art Prize, which is on show at the Bundoora Homestead Art Centre until 28 September 2003. The biennial awards are presented by the City of Darebin and La Trobe University.

Ms Sunner's work relates to issues of biotechnology, consumer society and corporate control. Her prize was for a light-jet photographic print on perspex titled *Agreed 2002*. It shows four people – a cast of multiple self-portraits created with digital technology – at a conference table. The work deals with power and status, expressed through dress and the imbalance in the number of people at the table.

Ms Hayes' prize was for a photograph entitled *Lyric Theatre at Merri Creek 2003*, part of a series of works concentrating on an inner city creek near her home. Sourcing art history and the

paintings of Bruegel, she has placed people within the landscape to suggest narrative and heighten intrigue.

La Trobe Vice-Chancellor, Professor Michael Osborne, said with its ability to challenge attitudes and values, communicate ideas and encourage further inquiry, art is an important element of education. La Trobe teaches art at its Bendigo and Mildura campuses, and art history at the main Melbourne campus at Bundoora.

The judging panel comprised Max Delany, Director, Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces; Simon Klose, Director, Benalla Art Gallery; and artist and arts educator, Wilma Tabacco.

Bundoora Homestead Art Centre is at 7-27 Snake Gully Drive, Bundoora. Gallery hours are Wed-Sun 12 noon to 5pm. Admission is free. For enquiries Tel. 9466 9628 ■



Correction: The La Trobe University Industry Cadet identified as Tracey Saliba on page 2 of the July issue was, in fact, Rebecca Coonan.

Going global with new scholarships

La Trobe University students are part of an ambitious scheme to encourage more Australian undergraduate students to expand their horizons – by doing at least a semester of their undergraduate degree in another country.

Fifteen International Network of Universities (INU) travelling scholarships were awarded by La Trobe University this year, following an inaugural 13 scholarships last year. Both groups of students met recently at a function hosted by Vice-Chancellor, Professor Michael Osborne, who is President of the INU and one of the architects of the scholarship scheme.

Nine of the second and third year students will go to the University of Leicester in the UK, five to Malmö University in Sweden, and one to Budapest University of Technology and Economics in Hungary.

Congratulating the new winners – and thanking those who had returned for having been such good ambassadors for Australia – Professor Osborne said it was important for Australia to encourage more students to experience life in other countries.

He said there was a need to redress the imbalance in the numbers of students coming to study in Australia from overseas and the numbers of Australian students going abroad. The INU scholarships were a step in that direction, and the government



had agreed to offer loans as part of HECS for students who want to spend a semester overseas.

Apart from personal and academic development, Professor Osborne said study abroad often improves students' employment prospects – and there were benefits from the experience to the nation as a whole.

Professor Osborne said that unlike domestic scholarships, travel scholarships were more complex to set up. He thanked those who laid the groundwork for what he believed would become an increasingly important component of Australian higher education in the years to come.

La Trobe University also offers ten Vice-Chancellor's International Exchange Scheme Scholarships annually for language students. ■

The winners and their destination universities

Leicester – Adam Bottomley, Social Work; Patrick Boyd, Law-Arts; Ana Margarida Da Silva, Science-Commerce; Andrea Frank, Law-Media Studies; Stefan Mauer, Electrical and Biomedical Engineering; Philippa Miller, Commerce; Victoria Poyser, Law; Meredith Spence, Tourism Management; and Judith U'Ren, Viticultural Science.

Malmö – Maria Cameron, Arts-Science; Perri Chambers, Melanie Cook, Nursing; and Elaine Coyne, Rebecca Plummer, Social Work.

Budapest – Richard Campbell, Computer Science.

La Trobe University
open day 2003

Sundays in August
www.latrobe.edu.au

1300 135 045



Bendigo
3 August
Shepparton, Mildura
10 August
Albury-Wodonga, Mt Buller
17 August
Melbourne (Bundoora)
24 August

Geneticist delivers Millis Science Lecture



World famous, geneticist, Professor Miroslav Radman, above, recently delivered the annual Nancy Millis Lecture at the La Trobe University Melbourne, Bundoora, campus.

Professor Radman, from the *Université René Descartes-Paris V*, was in Australia for the Melbourne International Genetics Conference. He spoke on: *Evolution of Human and Microbial Genomes and the Future of Public Health*.

He is the fourth scientist of world renown to deliver the lecture, established in 1999 to celebrate the contribution to microbiology of La Trobe's current Chancellor, Professor Nancy Millis, an eminent microbiologist.

Previous lecturers have been Professors Peter Doherty, Sir Gustav Nossal, John Shine and Adrienne Clarke.

After obtaining his first degree at the University of Zagreb, Professor Radman obtained a Doctor of Science from the Brussels Free University and has since held a number of top academic and research positions in Belgium, France and the United States.

Professor Radman's research is centred on the molecular mechanisms of DNA repair and their role in the appearance of cancers. ■

DICTY DOWN UNDER

Leading role for La Trobe in international microbiology conference

La Trobe University microbiologists played a leading role in organising 'Dicty2003' – the International Dictyostelium Conference – held recently in Lorne.

With an extremely low public profile outside the laboratory, 'Dicty' – also called a social amoeba or cellular slime mould – is a vital tool in cell biology research, says La Trobe microbiologist, Dr Paul Fisher, one of the conference organisers.

Dictyostelium discoideum, is a 'model' organism, used by scientists around the world to study fundamental biological processes. It is used to study how cells eat, move, grow, multiply and change into the various cell types found in a multicellular organism. Amazingly enough, it is also being studied to understand the evolution of social behaviour in communal organisms.

Dicty2003 was a satellite conference of the International Congress of Genetics held in Melbourne during July. Leading microbiologists from 10 countries were among the 85 delegates and speakers – 70 of them from overseas. Says Dr Fisher: 'One only has to look down the list of Nobel Prizes in physiology and medicine to realise that most of the major



fundamental discoveries in biomedicine have been made using model organisms.'

Dr Fisher was one of three conference organisers, with Dr Christian Barth, also of La Trobe's Department of Microbiology and Dr Peter Beech of Deakin University.

'The subject of the conference may sound esoteric to outsiders, but the research involved generates fundamental knowledge that has very practical every day applications,' says Dr Fisher who gave a paper on mitochondrial disease, both to this conference and the main genetics congress.

Other papers discussed the use of *Dictyostelium discoideum* to study drugs used to treat psychiatric disorders such as manic depression, the spread of cancer cells, infectious diseases, wound healing and tissue regeneration. ■

Amazing genetics – and more to come!

'It was an amazing opportunity for the public of Melbourne to sit at the feet of some of the best minds of the century,' said La Trobe biochemist, Dr Marilyn Anderson, who with La Trobe geneticist, Dr Paul Sunnucks, served on the organising committee of Melbourne's Genetics Congress.

She said the congress brought home to participants and the public alike that 'medicine as we know it will change out of sight in the next 20 years.'



Dr Anderson, left, an Associate Professor and specialist in the insect resistance of plants, praised the work of Congress Chair, Dr Phil Batterham, who secured the Melbourne bid for the

Continued page 11

Rare window to the world of genetics

The chance to rub shoulders with large numbers of world leaders in your discipline is a rare thing for young scientists – but Melbourne's much-publicised International Congress of Genetics enabled La Trobe postgraduate students to do just that.

Five of them demonstrated their work to an audience including six Nobel Prize winners, 300 speakers and several thousand delegates from more than sixty countries.

The congress, titled *Genomes: The Linkage to Life* and billed as the 'Olympics of Genetics', was held in July to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Watson and Crick's discovery of the DNA helix.

The La Trobe research students gave poster presentations on aspects of DNA identification, genetic variation and species distribution relating to evolutionary biology. They were Lea Rako, David Sharley, Michelle Schiffer, Ryan Garrick and Marina Telonis. Some 500 students from around Australia attended the congress.

La Trobe biochemist, Dr Marilyn Anderson, and geneticist, Dr Paul

Sunnucks, were on the congress organising committee. Staff from the departments of Genetics, Microbiology, Biochemistry and the Centre for Environmental Stress and Adaptation Research (CESAR), were delegates to the congress.

Professor Ary Hoffmann, Director of CESAR, gave a paper on ground-breaking La Trobe research that was published recently in the prestigious US journal *Science* and featured recently on the ABC radio *Science Show*. The research revealed that a species of experimental fruit flies, bred for three years through 30 generations, was unable to adapt to climate change.

'Such a total lack of adaptive response has never been found,' said Professor Hoffmann. 'It caught us by complete surprise and has important implications for some of our assumptions relating to conservation and species extinction.' (See last month's issue of the *La Trobe University Bulletin*.)

Professor Hoffmann also organised a symposium at the congress dealing with life history genetics. Microbiologist, Dr Paul Fisher, led a symposium at the congress dealing with the molecular



Lea Rako gave her presentation at the congress

genetics involved in passing signals between living cells, using as his biological laboratory model a form of slime mould. He also spoke at a session dealing with mitochondrial diseases in animals and plants.

Other La Trobe scientists at the congress included Dr Yvonne Parsons, Dr Neil Murray, Dr John Mitchell. ■

Post-congress workshop at La Trobe

Following the International Congress of Genetics, La Trobe hosted a series of two-and-a-half-day satellite workshops on statistical analysis in modern genetics on its main Melbourne campus at Bundoora.

The workshops provided Australian scientists and students with access to statisticians and researchers at the forefront

of genetic research in forensics, human disease, agriculture and conservation. They were organised by Dr Yvonne Parsons, a specialist in quantitative genetics. She said the workshops were a shortened version of an annual 'Summer Institute' normally conducted by at the North Carolina State University in the US.

Two of the instructors at the La Trobe workshops, Professor Trudy Mackay and Professor Bruce Weir from North Carolina, had been invited speakers at the International Congress of Genetics.

Dr Parsons said the workshops were attended by more than 100 people, from forensic scientists, evolutionary biologists and population geneticists to DNA profiling staff working for seed companies and wildlife protection agencies.

Providing an overview of the emerging field of genomic science, the workshops covered the content and organisation of genome projects from humans to microbes.

Subjects included sequencing strategies, how to determine gene function, quantitative trait models, response to selection, the effects of mutation, and the analysis of 'pedigree data' – identifying genes by descent and genetic linkage. ■



Dr Parsons right, with Professors Weir and Mackay.

Marginalisation, not globalisation, is the greatest threat

Global communication is an act of enormous liberation. Open societies and open economies have lifted millions of people from poverty during the past 50 years, through advances in science, technology and trade. And – despite bleak predictions – *we* are watching Big Brother rather than the other way around.

This is the upside of globalisation according to La Trobe's new Adjunct Professor of Law, and former Director General of the World Trade Organisation, Mike Moore.

Professor Moore was speaking at a public lecture at the University titled *Great Schisms in Trade* which discussed the gap between developed and developing countries and the failure to integrate many Islamic and Pacific countries more fully into world trade.

'The greatest threat for nations is marginalisation – not globalisation,' he said.

Professor Moore is a vigorous proponent of a free and fair global trading system. He led the WTO from 1999 until 2002 during a time of momentous change in the global economy and multilateral trading system, introducing significant changes to the way the WTO operates.

Some of these changes, while maintaining the focus on the core business of trade liberalisation, were designed to help poor countries participate effectively in the multilateral trading system.

Author of *A World without Walls*, Professor Moore, served as New Zealand Trade Minister and Foreign Minister before briefly becoming Prime Minister in 1990.

Professor Moore said: 'There are those who make a living saying "life is getting worse". Well it's not! Life has never been better than in the past fifty years.' And globalisation, he added, is not new. It has

been a fact of life since man ventured beyond his cave. China had great international trade centuries before Columbus.

Turning to shortcomings in the world trading system, he said these were particularly pronounced for small and poor nations, such as many Muslim countries and Pacific nations – the Solomon Islands being a notable example.

'The fact that we have failed in our own neighbourhood is a source of great shame for all of us.'

The major problems, he said, included tariff systems that discriminated against poor countries, the paternalism of rich NGOs telling poor countries what was good for them, and the costs to small nations of setting up missions and

own internal institutions right'. Accession to the WTO and the global business community required people to have confidence in the stability and freedom of their fundamental institutions, such as government, law, police and the media, he concluded.

'The world is not a fair place – but I think we are making it a better place.'

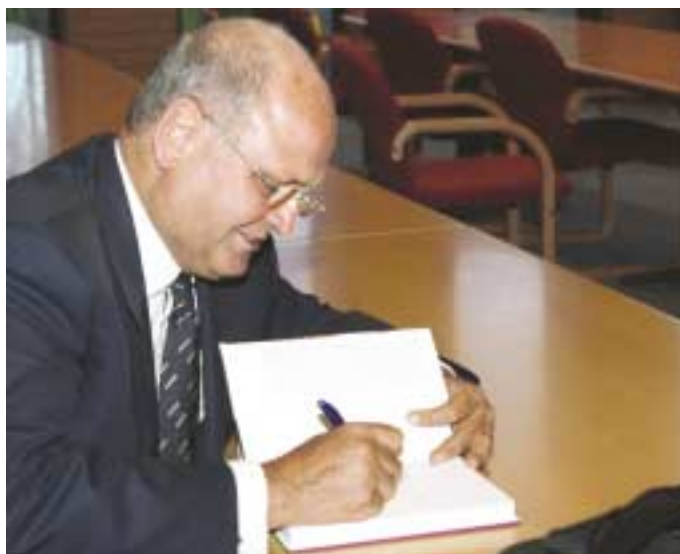
La Trobe University Professor of Commercial Law, Dr Gordon Walker – who hosted the lecture – said Professor Moore is widely credited with restoring confidence in the world trading system following the setback of the 3rd WTO Ministerial Conference in 1999.

'He was the driving force behind the decision to launch a new round of multilateral trade negotiations at the 4th WTO Ministerial Conference in 2001. This saw the accession to the WTO of China, Chinese Taipei and a group of smaller nations, bringing the majority of the world's population within the rules-based trading system during his term of office.'

Professor Moore also played a leading role in launching the Uruguay Round of GATT negotiations and last year became a Special Advisor to the China Institute for Reform and Development WTO Reference Centre.

The La Trobe lecture was part of a special course on International Trade Law in the University's LLM in Global Business Law program taught by Visiting Professor, Raj Bhala, Rice Distinguished Professor at the University of Kansas School of Law.

A specialist in international trade law, Professor Bhala – who chaired the lecture and discussion that followed – has worked in 15 countries and as consultant to the IMF and the World Bank. ■



Professor Moore signs a copy of his book for a student after his public lecture.

participating in the WTO.

Professor Moore said while at the WTO he sought to broaden representation through a number of measures. These included tariff reform, recruitment of interns from poorer countries, encouraging more events and activities in locations other than at Geneva headquarters, and better access to, and promotion of, WTO activities on the world-wide web.

But a key issue was for these nations to 'drive up their own standards... to get their

Travelling snake seeks suburban home



You can take the snake out of the backyard, but you can't take the backyard out of the snake.

Some snakes appear to have a distinct preference for living in suburbia – and are skilled at disguising their presence among us.

Research by a La Trobe University zoology student has revealed these unexpected findings, and other unusual facts about Melbourne's Tiger Snakes.

Tracking translocated Tiger Snakes implanted with transmitters, Bachelor of Science (Conservation Biology and Ecology) Honours student, Heath Butler, found that some prefer suburban to rural life.

Four of eight snakes tracked after translocation from suburban backyards to a regional park between August last year and March this year headed straight out of the park into other suburban backyards about a kilometre away.

And when taken from their new backyard home back to the park, they again turned up in the same backyard.

All snakes are protected in Victoria. Under Department of Sustainability and Environment policy, snakes captured in

'inappropriate' locations are translocated to a suitable habitat within five kilometres of their capture point, or euthanased.

'It seems that snakes were so used to the good life in suburbia – with readily-available water and food – that they headed straight back into a similar environment when relocated into the unfamiliar landscape of parkland,' Mr Butler said.

There was another surprising result. By monitoring the snakes' daily habits, Mr Butler believes he may have debunked the old idea that snakes are active only in very hot weather. 'The Eastern Tiger Snakes (*Notechis scutatus*) I worked with appear more likely to be active on relatively cool, sunny days. They disappear, at least between 12 noon and



2pm, on days when the temperature exceeds 30°C,' he says.

Curious about snakes since his adolescent years at Port Fairy, Mr Butler conducted his research, sponsored by three interested parties – Parks Victoria, Australian Geographic and the Melbourne Zoo.

He worked initially with several of the 45 Victorians licensed to catch snakes in 'inappropriate' – read urban or suburban – areas and to release them on public land.

Melbourne Zoo veterinarians surgically inserted tiny transmitters into eight snakes captured in suburban backyards within five kilometres of Westerfolds Park, Templestowe.

Continued page 9

Snakes alive... it's better that way

Mr Butler makes the following points about snakes:

- Snakes live with us in Victoria's urban areas but pose very little threat to us. They are protected wildlife, like the platypus or koala. They play a vital role in the ecosystem – for example, if we didn't have brown snakes, we'd be over-run by mice.
- Ninety-five per cent of people are bitten because they are trying to catch or kill snakes. If people find a snake in their yard and want it removed, they should call their local council.
- If left alone, snakes will move on, especially through well kept backyards. They search, instead for yards with ponds, woodpiles and overgrown garden beds. They particularly like yards with aviaries or chooks where the grain attracts rats and mice – great food for snakes.
- This is the first research on translocation of snakes in Australia and the first to provide data on our current management of snakes in urban areas. There are only three other similar studies worldwide.

CAMPAIGN TO SAVE SEA LIONS

La Trobe University is conducting the most intensive campaign in Australian history to save sea lions from entanglement in marine debris.

Nobody knows how many seals – and in particular sea lions – die a lonely death entangled in discarded nylon fishing nets or plastic strapping from cardboard bait boxes in the ocean depths off southern Australia.

Two La Trobe University PhD candidates in zoology, Brad Page and Jane McKenzie, believe so many sea lions die in this way that the population has remained static at around 9,000 for at least the last 15 years, while other seal species have increased significantly.

After receiving funding from 11 organisations, the researchers disseminated 10,000 brochures to every commercial fisherman from Sydney to Perth advising them of the hazards to marine life of debris they leave behind in the sea.

In addition they sent 8,000 posters to schools, zoos, aquariums, parks and wildlife information centres, fishing shops and other centres and conducted a series of interactive talks to schools and other groups describing the problems and how to prevent it.

Their research on sea lions will be the basis of a major chapter entitled 'A comparison of entanglement rates before and after the introduction of Fishery Bypass Policy' in their combined PhD thesis which deals mainly with the interaction of the fishing industry with fur seals.

They say that sea lions – which come ashore to about 20 colonies, mostly in South Australia and a smaller number in Western Australia – seem to be more susceptible than other seals to death by entanglement in marine debris.

One reason is that sea lion pups and juveniles appear to be more inquisitive than other species and are more likely to investigate plastic or nylon debris.

More importantly, sea lions' main food is 'benthic' – bottom-dwelling species like crayfish, octopus and certain kinds of finfish like leatherjacket which feed on the seabed.

'This feeding zone is where much marine debris finishes up – so young sea lions are particularly vulnerable,' say Mr Page and Ms McKenzie, who will submit their PhD theses in mid 2004.

are often found. And only a fraction of those entangled would make it ashore from their feeding grounds up to 100 km offshore.'

Much of the field work is carried out at a sea lion colony on the east coast of Kangaroo Island called Seal Slide near Cape Gantheaume, part of a Conservation National Park where they monitor the population – and occasionally disentangle from debris an exhausted but still living sea lion.

It can be exciting, exacting – and occasionally dangerous – work. Last year they spotted a pup with nylon fishing line around its neck. When they manoeuvred themselves between the pup and its 150 kg mother and the water, the mother rushed at Mr Page. For an hour and a half the mother charged as they attempted unsuccessfully to free the pup.

Two weeks later they returned with reinforcements – and with three helpers managed to hold off the mother while Mr Page cut the nylon from the pup.

'We hope that our research and our campaign will lead to an increase in the sea lion population,' say Mr Page and Ms McKenzie. 'Like most other species of seals around the Australian coast, sea lions were virtually wiped out by sealers 200 years ago. Since sealing was banned about a century ago, other species of seals, particularly fur seals, have come back in increasing numbers. Sea lions are the exception.'

'We hope that the segment of our PhD on sea lions – and our campaign to inform fishermen and others about the problem and its possible solution – will lead to even stronger government-sponsored campaigns to encourage fishermen to adopt better waste disposal practices.' ■



Also, sea lion feeding grounds largely coincide with shark fishing areas. Gill netting used in the shark fishery is set on the bottom. Sea lions can become caught in this, particularly when gill netting becomes caught on the bottom and the fishermen cut it free.

'The problem is not obvious to tourists who visit sea lion colonies at Seal Bay on Kangaroo Island or Point Labbatt on Eyre Peninsula where fit sea lions snooze on the beach looking fat and healthy. When one comes ashore entangled in fishing net wildlife officers quickly free it.

'But the situation is different at the other colonies on inaccessible parts of the coast where dead sea lions entangled in debris



Snakes in the suburbs

continued from page 7

These snakes were then released in the park. Six snakes resident in the park were also implanted with transmitters then re-released at their site of capture. Mr Butler then electronically monitored their movements and other activities.

'Translocation had such significant effects on the behaviour of the snakes that the relevant authorities may wish to re-examine its success as a strategy to reduce human-snake conflict,' he said.

'The two groups of snakes – residents of the park and those translocated – behave differently. Although the health of

translocated snakes remained similar to the local snakes, they exhibited home ranges about six times that of the locals and half the translocated snakes headed off to suburban backyards within a kilometre or so of the park.

'It seems that they are quite happy in suburbia, probably because of well-watered gardens and sufficient food, possibly frogs. Most people were unaware of a snake in their backyard until I informed them.'

Over the eight months he captured snakes on 70 occasions, noting their location and monitoring their condition. His catching method was simple. Locate the snake with his tracking equipment,

seize it by the tail – with bare hands as gloves are too cumbersome – and drop it into a bag.

Mr Butler was bitten only once, on the hand, but recovered fully after an uncomfortable few hours following an anti-venom injection. He says his research findings may have been influenced by the drought, which could have made well-watered suburban backyards unusually attractive as snake habitats.

But the season would have had little effect on some other findings, such as the bigger the snake, the better it was at concealment. Some of the snakes he handled were up to 1.2 metres long. ■

Political justice

Risks of banning people and parties



Current moves to ban Hezbollah resonate with the problems Australian governments have traditionally faced when attempting to proscribe individuals or organisations they dislike.

The legal difficulties such attempts pose is a major research theme of La Trobe University senior lecturer in Law and Legal Studies, Dr Roger Douglas.

While his political justice research has covered a spectrum of people and organisations since Federation, his research has focused primarily on government responses to communism in Australia and those who advocated it.

He says it is ironic that time and international events finally did more to make communism and communists a spent force in Australia than three major government attempts – and a host of minor moves – to eradicate or lessen its influence during the 20th century.

The Federal Government is planning to strengthen its powers to declare certain organisations to be terrorist and therefore to ban them. But the history of such attempts has been fraught with legal and political problems.

In four years of researching the political justice of moves to ban individuals and organisations in Australia, Dr Douglas has written five major papers and is in the process of writing a major book of the history of legal trials involving the Communist Party.

‘My interest is in the circumstances in which governments resort to political repression and the ways in which the objects of their attention resist repression,’ Dr Douglas says. ‘Inevitably my research became concentrated on the Communist Party as no other organisation has been subject to so much attempted repression.’

At times, the party and individual communists have had considerable influence. In 1945 the party had 23,000 members, had a representative in the Queensland Parliament from 1944 to 1950, controlled the Kearsley Shire Council in the northern NSW coalfields in the mid-1940s, had members in other municipal councils in NSW and WA, and had control or influence in a large number of trade unions.

All this happened in the face of either political opposition or legal restraints stemming back to the first attempt to curb them in 1926.

The first of three major Commonwealth Governments attempts to ban the Communist Party occurred in 1926 when the Federal Attorney General, John Latham, introduced a Bill to amend the Crimes Act to declare unlawful any organisation advocating certain principles – including the violent overthrow of a government.

The Communist Party was not named – but there was no question as to the group at which the Bill was aimed. That Bill was passed and the amendments are still on the books. Under this Act an attempt was made to ban the Communist Party in 1932 but failed on technical grounds. In 1935 the issue arose again when the Post Office attempted to use the legislation to stop an organisation called ‘Friends of the Soviet Union’ from mailing its literature. That ended in stalemate with an out-of-court settlement.

The second major attempt was during World War II when National Security (Subversive Organisations) Regulations permitted the Governor-General to declare an organisation to be subversive. The Communist Party and local branches of the Italian Fascist Party were immediately named and banned.

Action against the communists suddenly ceased when the German-Russian non-aggression pact fell apart and the Soviet Union became an ally of the Western powers. An interesting sideline was that Jehovah Witnesses were banned because they were opposed to war. Had this ban survived constitutional challenge it would have had the odd – and totally unanticipated – effect of making the practice of Christianity in Australia an offence under the regulations.

The closest the government came to succeeding was the passage of the Communist Party Dissolution Bill in 1950. The following year the High Court declared that the Act was unconstitutional. A referendum to change the Constitution to enable the Bill to be re-introduced was defeated only by a narrow margin.

The most successful government attempts to curb party activity was between the two world wars when censorship laws were used to ban most communist literature. In the 1950s after the failure of the referendum, the government used administrative powers to sideline public servants suspected of communist sympathies. Secret ballots legislation helped achieve the government’s aim of weakening communist power in the union movement.

Communism lost influence – but not through government repression. The party lost much of the support it had enjoyed from intellectuals after the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. It continued to play an influential and militant role in the union movement, but it never came close to recovering the influence it had once enjoyed, and went into terminal decline as splits and faction disputes whittled away its support base. ■

La Trobe academic helps place

LAW AT YOUR FINGERTIPS



La Trobe University senior lecturer in Law and Legal Studies, Mr Jeffrey Barnes, has played a major role in a pioneering step to make the law easier to find and understand.

Mr Barnes was a consultant to the Parliamentary Counsel's Office of the Australian Capital Territory during the second stage of the its Public Access to Legislation Program.

Established by the ACT's Legislation Act 2001, the first stage of the program set up Australia's first official electronic statute book – the ACT Legislation Register – an internet publication providing free public access to authorised versions of ACT legislation and other legislative material.

The second stage involved restating the law on statutory interpretation in a simplified, updated and enhanced form. This was achieved by amendments to the Legislation Act, the final part of which was completed in April 2003.

The amendments were the first legislative restatement of the basic principles of the law of statutory interpretation in Australia since important changes to the common law occurred in the previous decade.

'It is important not to ignore the role the law of interpretation plays in affecting access to the law,' says Mr Barnes, a leading researcher in the field of statutory interpretation.

'The amendments to the Legislation Act make it easier for interpreters to know how to read Acts and subordinate legislation.'

He says the reforms have practical aspects in many fields – including the contentious area of how the Federal Government's signing of an international treaty has bearing on Australian law.

Formerly a legislative drafter with the NSW Parliamentary Counsel's Office, Mr Barnes also worked as Associate to Mr Justice Kirby – now a High Court Judge – when he was with the Australian Law Reform Commission.

Mr Barnes says his work illustrates how law academics can benefit law reform by, among other things, providing commentary

from an informed but non-government point of view.

Mr Barnes has received high praise for his work. Presenting the proposed revised law on statutory interpretation to the Legislative Assembly, the ACT Chief Minister and Attorney General, Mr Jon Stanhope, acknowledged 'the significant assistance' provided by Mr Barnes. ■

Amazing Genetics

Continued from page 4

congress seven years ago and has worked tirelessly towards it ever since. 'My three years on the organising committee involved regular meetings to discuss matters such as budgets, venues, the website, publicity and the scientific program, chaired by Professor David Smyth, which brought together the best group of international stars I have ever seen at any congress.

'I was also pleased with the emphasis on raising funds that allowed us to bring delegates from developing countries, and its public participation program.'

Dr Anderson said it was the only conference she had been to that involved all her family. 'I attended the scientific sessions during the day and then ferried my daughter and friends to the public functions in the evening.

The 50 year anniversary of the discovery of the structure of DNA (by Watson and Crick) provided an ideal opportunity to cover the history of the genetics revolution – as well as the most up-to-date and exciting discoveries that have arisen from the human genome project,' Dr Anderson said.

She and her husband worked at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory in New York in the late 70s early 80s when James Watson was its director. Her husband was one of Watson's post-doctoral researchers.

While much of Australia's scientific establishment is now recovering from the demands of the conference, Dr Anderson will soon go back for a reunion of Cold Spring Harbor alumni, for their more personal celebration of Watson's achievement – as well as his 75th birthday. ■



From left, Professor Paxton, Professor Neumark-Sztainer and Dr Wertheim

A good look at ourselves

As former colonies of major European powers, but now sovereign nations, Australia and its fellow Southern Hemisphere nations of South America have many similarities.

They include common problems and dilemmas – not the least being the question of quantifying our identity and place in the post-colonial world.

The subjects of identity, place and memory were major themes of the second University of Barcelona-La Trobe University Conference, held at the Melbourne, Bundoora, campus in July.

La Trobe has close ties with the University of Barcelona including exchanges of students and staff in a number of disciplines, including Spanish, in which La Trobe has a major specialisation. More than 30 overseas delegates, up to a third of them from the University of Barcelona, were among the 150 delegates.

Plenary speakers were the noted Argentinean writer, Luisa Valenzuela, the distinguished American hispanist and critic, Professor John Kronik, the Australian writer Jackie Huggins, who specialises in subjects pertaining to her Aboriginal heritage, and Australian historian, Peter Read.

Other delegates came from Australasia, other parts of South America, the UK and Europe. ■



Dr Adriana Diomedi, a concert of early music – by pianist Dr David Krum, Director of Opera at the Victorian College of the Arts, and counter tenor Samuel Krum – as well as an exhibition of sculptures representing scenes from the *Divina Commedia*. ■

OBESITY or BULIMIA

Can we solve this dilemma of adolescent health?

How can we prevent obesity among young people without encouraging other severe eating disorders? That's the critical dilemma facing workers in the field of adolescent health and nutrition.

One of the world's leading public health researchers into obesity and eating disorder prevention recently discussed these issues at a special seminar conducted by La Trobe University's Institute for Advanced Study and School of Psychological Science

She is Professor Dianne Neumark-Sztainer, Chair of Public Health Nutrition at the University of Minnesota, and Fellow of the US Academy of Eating Disorders.

Professor Neumark-Sztainer is working with La Trobe University's Professor Susan Paxton and Associate Professor Eleanor Wertheim, two of Australia's leading psychological researchers into the prevention of body image problems and

disordered eating, such as bulimia nervosa.

She is also consulting with two other La Trobe researchers, Dr Lynnette Evans and Dr Helen Skouteris, specialists in eating disorders and body image.

Professor Paxton says achieving the right balance between preventing obesity but not promoting eating disorders is the 'holy grail' for those working in this field – from clinicians who deal with the day-to-day problems to public health policy makers grappling with the wider social and economic implications.

'Workers in our field are acutely aware that if you start people dieting in order to reduce obesity and to achieve a healthy weight, there is a serious risk of pushing them too far the other way – towards health problems associated with poor body image and eating disorders such as bulimia,' Professor Paxton said. ■

Dante – the divine conference

La Trobe University's Italian Program and the Dante Alighieri Society recently co-hosted a three-day International Dante Conference at the La Trobe city campus.

Keynote speakers were Professor George Ferzoco from Leicester University, UK, and Professor John Scott from WA, author of many works on the *divino poeta*.

The conference was opened by the Alighieri Society President, Mr Tom Hazell, Dr Simonetta Magnani, Director of the Italian Cultural Institute, representing the Italian government, and La Trobe's Professor John Gatt-Rutter. The conference featured a recitation of *Dante Paradiso XXXIII* by La Trobe graduate,

Morag Fraser: a new cultural connection

Throughout her high-profile career on Australia's literary and cultural scene, Morag Fraser has found universities to be fascinating places.

It's a fascination she would like to see shared more widely to improve the cultural vitality of the nation. One way of doing this, she says, is to forge closer links between universities and the wider world of politics, ideas, literature, art, music and the media.

'There is also a need to keep relationships between the institutions, which are huge resources for the community, open and dynamic.'

Recently appointed an Adjunct Professor in La Trobe University's Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Morag Fraser says Australian academics – stretched to the limit with teaching, research and the quest for additional funding – sometimes struggle to make the most of their potential for wider and more meaningful community connections.

A journalist, broadcaster, teacher and essayist, Professor Fraser is former editor of the current affairs journal, *Eureka Street*. She is also Chair of the Melbourne Writers' Festival, a member of the Adelaide Festival of Ideas, the Melbourne Autumn Music Festival, and is on the board of the *Australian Book Review*.

La Trobe, she says, has some outstanding public advocates and researchers in many important and interesting areas of the humanities and social sciences.

'I have some involvement with public activities and national patterns of literature and ideas. Through this appointment, I hope to be able to help build connections between the public sphere and the academic community of scholarship, teaching and research.'

'There are opportunities for improved communication with the public, which I think is important – and even more so if it can help allay some government and public suspicion and mistrust of universities.'

Professor Fraser also has a close relationship with the University of

Melbourne and Monash University and the ANU and says she is also very interested in the 'contentious business of communication between universities themselves – we have an environment today that is unhelpfully competitive.'

She believes academics can be both collegial and competitive, while maintaining a constant flow of ideas for the benefit of their disciplines and the country as a whole.

'It's not an impossible model. But it does mean that certain competitive imperatives have to fall away in the face of higher priorities.'

She is also interested in 'small things', like architectural and planning constraints that can affect academia. 'For example, what do you do at city campuses where parking constrains the movement and availability of staff and students?' Where has the notion of the university gone if interaction is reduced by such physical constraints?



Professor Fraser with Dean of Humanities & Social Sciences, Professor Roger Wales

'Communication between students and staff, and among staff, is crucial in a university. When there are a lot of atomised, discrete units you don't have the ideal situation. There are some concrete issues that have to do with architecture, planning and parking, that could make things better.'

Her interest in architecture also extends to public housing and planning issues that determine the nature of public and private space. Professor Fraser will work from La Trobe's main Melbourne campus at Bundoora several days a week. She is

currently writing a book on Australian domestic housing in the late 20th century.

She will also give occasional lectures in a number of areas, including in the Graduate Diploma in Professional Writing and Speech and in English and Media programs.

On a personal level, she is 'very fond' of La Trobe. 'It has served me and my family very well,' she says. With a Master of Arts degree in literature for a thesis on Chaucer's poetic language, she also holds a Diploma of Education from La Trobe.

'My husband lectured in philosophy here at the Bundoora campus in the University's second year. I came soon after that, and my daughter came here too, to study politics, and was extraordinarily well taught. I think it's rare to see an institution right through its history – and I like that aspect of my new role.'

Her publications have ranged over

Australian literature, politics, history and theology (including the Daniel Mannix entry in the *Oxford Companion to Australian History*), examinations of the role of universities, the ABC, and essays on subjects as various as *Jane Eyre*, contemporary Catholicism and Australian landscape gardening. A keen musician, Professor Fraser is also a semi-professional singer, having to her credit participation in a complete, 10-concert recital of the works of Hildegard von Bingen. ■

Retraining for aged care nursing careers

La Trobe University's Clinical School in Gerontic Nursing has introduced a new Re-entry Program for Division 1 Nurses in Aged Care. This initiative has been funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing as part of their strategy to support nurses wishing to re-enter the workforce.

Head of the program, Dr Susan Koch, says the program provides flexible learning arrangements throughout Victoria, and is aimed at nurses whose registration has lapsed.

She says the course offers a range of teaching methods – such as learning packages, seminars, clinical laboratory for skills practice and clinical experience in a variety of settings – and is being taught in Albury-Wodonga, Bairnsdale, Bendigo, Mildura, Melbourne and Warrnambool.

Dr Koch says La Trobe University leads the way in aged care nursing with a range of courses in this highly specialised, and increasingly important area.

'This new course has been designed to expose nurses to positive aged care experiences, and to help them develop knowledge and skills related to care for older people. All subjects meet the

requirements of the current and emerging health care environment.'

Dr Koch says the course follows a recent study that showed about ten percent of Australia's quarter million nurses allow their nursing registration to lapse.

The study indicated family commitments were the most common reason for leaving nursing – yet more than half the nurses who had worked in aged care said they would be interested in returning to aged care nursing.

The study found that improved shifts, increased pay, greater provision of education and training and increased staffing could encourage nurses to return to nursing.

'Re-entry courses were found to be a cost-effective strategy for restoring competency levels by updating knowledge and skills, and to allow nurses to re-enter nursing,' Dr Koch says. 'A re-entry course may cost up to \$1000 per subject. However, with Commonwealth funding, students in this program will receive their education free of charge.'

For further information from tel: 03 9495 3209. ■

BENDIGO'S NEW FRENCH CONNECTION

La Trobe University's School of Business and Technology on the Bendigo campus has signed a contract with Montpellier Business School (Sup de Co) in France, a major business school whose university degree and education programs are well regarded across Europe.

Head of Accounting and Business Management, Dr Finlay Johnston, said the French had approached the School of Business in Bendigo and were particularly interested in the expertise offered in Asia Pacific-style business programs.

'The students, who have completed four years in the French tertiary system, will undertake third-year subjects from our Bachelor of Business degree.

They will study from France on-line and will graduate with two degrees – one French and the other from La Trobe University, Bendigo,' Dr Johnston said.

'The model for delivery is transportable to other institutions and we are seeking other tertiary education partners in Europe to grow our education export business.'

The exchange and collaboration of programs, staff and students will bring significant benefits both to the Bendigo campus and the region. ■

New course for hospitality industry at Beechworth

The first course in a new training initiative for motel, hotel and resort operators will be conducted at La Trobe University's International Hotel School on the Beechworth campus in August and November.

The course is a training initiative of La Trobe University, Best Western Australia, part of the world's largest hotel chain, and Westpac Banking Corporation.

The Professional Certificate course will provide training in accommodation and food services management, sales, marketing and profit focused financial management, for new entrants to the sector, as well as current operators.

Further details tel: 03 5720 8050. ■

Success on the wings of a butterfly

Continued from page 16

'Identifying threats to butterflies requires different methods from those applied to larger, longer-lived vertebrates. For example we need to understand the variation in butterfly numbers from year to year resulting from natural causes as opposed to human-induced disturbance,' he said.

The book deals with such emotional issues as potential conflict between the interests of protective legislation and those of field workers. It ranks butterflies at three levels, national and state where policy matters are important and municipal

– the grass roots level of much practical conservation.

'Many species have suffered from widespread clearing of native vegetation, forestry, mining, urbanisation, and other changes of land use. The book defines the urgency of conservation need and recovery actions required,' Dr New said.

The Action Plan for Australian Butterflies is available free in both hard copy and on CD-ROM from the Natural Heritage Trust. It can also be accessed from the Environment Australia website: www.ea.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/action/butterfly. ■



Highlights in off-shore education



Two events during the first half of this year highlighted La Trobe University's increasingly strong and diverse international role. Photographs of each were recently received by the University.

The events were a historic ceremony in the small Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan, where 14 people were awarded La Trobe Bachelor of Nursing degrees in the first degree course taught by an overseas university in that country – and Vice-Chancellor Michael Osborne's appointment as a Professor of Peking University, recognised as the most prestigious University in China.

Professor Osborne was presented with his certificate of appointment by the Chancellor of Peking University, Professor Wang De Bing, centre, and the University's Vice-President, Professor Hao Ping, far right, during a ceremony in Beijing.

Apart from being a significant personal honour, Professor Osborne said the

appointment reflected La Trobe's exceptionally strong links with the leading universities of China.

La Trobe University has a particularly strong relationship with Peking University and, as well as programs in Public Health, is involved in collaborative archaeological work in China. Starting early next year, Professor Osborne will teach Greek history, archaeology and epigraphy – the study of inscriptions in stone.

La Trobe's Bachelor of Nursing (Post-registration) course in Bhutan is a joint initiative of the University, the World Health Organisation and the Royal Government of Bhutan to upgrade the

qualifications of Bhutanese health workers. The photo, above, commemorates the graduation ceremony held in Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan, earlier this year.

The occasional address was delivered by Bhutan's Minister for Health and Education, Mr Sangay Ngedup, in the centre of the photo with Vice-Chancellor Osborne. A further 16 candidates have enrolled in the two-year course, currently underway.

Vice-Chancellor Osborne said La Trobe had a policy 'to extend help and assistance to countries that need them. We are only too happy to assist and develop the health sector in Bhutan.' ■



Success on the wings of a butterfly

For La Trobe zoologist, Dr Tim New, it has been a good year.

Following the acclaim after the launch of his major work, *The Action Plan for Australian Butterflies*, he received news of a major award from the Royal Entomological Society of London, the Marsh Award for Insect Conservation – a significant international tribute to his pioneering work in this discipline.

While Dr New, an Associate Professor in La Trobe's Department of Zoology, specialises mainly in other insects, he is also one of Australia's foremost experts on butterflies. The Marsh Award was for work he has carried out over many years on insect conservation.

Several of his 20

books are on insect conservation and have been 'best sellers'.

The award came with a cheque for £1,000. Inaugurated in 2002, it was awarded in its first year to entomologist, Professor Norman Moore, former head of the British Nature Conservancy Council.

'I was extremely pleased to be the second recipient after Professor Moore,

...butterflies are important as indicators to assess changes in the environment...

whom I know and respect highly,' Dr New said. *The Action Plan for Australian Butterflies* was published by the Federal Government's Environment Australia and launched by Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Dr David Kemp, at the Melbourne Zoo earlier this year.

It represented three years of hard work by Dr New and his co-author, Dr Don Sands of CSIRO Entomology, helped by scores of butterfly enthusiasts.

The book is unusual in that it is a scholarly compilation of information about a subject in which the knowledge base rests more in the hands of hobbyists than of professional scientists. 'It was a team effort with Don Sands and I relying very extensively

on information willingly supplied by enthusiastic amateur workers,' Dr New said.

The co-operation stemmed from a series of workshops for lepidopterists around Australia in which they volunteered and discussed information on butterflies in their areas.

The 380-page book details names, descriptions, habitats, diets and other information about the more than 650 recognised species and subspecies of Australian butterflies, and examines trends in their abundance, distributions and reasons for changes. It also breaks new ground in approaches to insect conservation, and thus has wide relevance beyond butterflies themselves.

Dr New said that butterflies, along with other insects, were important for monitoring biodiversity and how changes in land use affect it.

'Unlike some other insects, butterflies attract the attention of enthusiasts – and this has resulted in their coming under great scrutiny. Hence a large mass of valuable information has been built up, and we have tapped into this.'

He said butterflies were important as indicators to assess changes in the environment and as tools for the identification and conservation of areas of special significance.

Continued page 14

