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MABUIAG ISLAND FISH SURVEY

by Glynn Aland

In March 2008 I attended a reunion with my siblings, Bram (adopted brother), Kieran and Dione (natural brother and sister) to commemorate the passing of our deceased mother. We decided to re-visit the Torres Straits with a brief stop off at a number of islands, one of which was Mabuia Island, where Bram's natural families' ancestral roots were based.

Mabuia Island is sited mid-way between Cape York and Papua New Guinea. It is a dry island and traditionally water during drought times was found by digging wells (*Repu pers comms 2008*). Mabuia is historically important to the indigenous history of the Torres Straits, with the location giving the residents arguably the best access to the shallow reefs and richest turtle and dugong feeding grounds. The abundant marine food reserves appear to have given the past residents "the edge" – they were feared for their raids from the tip of Cape York to the Fly River area of Papua New Guinea. This warlike history was curtailed with the settlement of the Torres Straits by missionaries and obviously the introduction of big guns, cannon and modern sail boats (1800's era). Residents of the nearby islands of Moa and Badu can directly trace their ancestry back to Mabuia and the family ties are strong via oral and written history. The current residents are renowned for their cultural ties and revered for their dance, song, stories and indigenous art and traditional artifacts. The strong ancestral ties produced a number of traits which were obvious in Bram's mannerisms and sports endeavours and make for an endearing race of people.

Mabuia Island as viewed from plane window

G.A.



Airport with dam (containing saltwater crocodile) on left.

G.A.

Afternoon view to the south of the island – local boys enjoying time on raft.

G.A.





Bram Aland-Warrior at Cemetery viewing family headstones.

G.A.

For me personally, I experienced a deep spiritual connection both on Mabuiag and again on nearby Moa Island where I felt a “connection to land”. My godmother and younger brother Bram’s grandmother, who was our nanny as babies/toddlers was born on Mabuiag, and gave us a taste of culture with island lullaby songs in language, and Bram’s natural mother/godmother visits to the farm strengthened our connection to the Torres Straits as we were growing. Coupled with being born in the Torres Straits, the visit certainly awakened a coming home or sense of belonging. Even walking off the plane to the small shed terminal on Mabuiag, I saw a Wongai plum welcoming me home, the sea smell and humidity – bliss (one of the beliefs in the Straits is to eat a Wongai plum means that a person will return to the Torres Straits however far away the person travels). I later spoke with Bram who also remembers looking to the north as a child with longing – we were raised near Cairns.

For the duration of our time on Mabuiag Island the community/family had organized a cousin, Cygnet Repu, to meet us and to walk/talk us through the island and family history. During the time spent with Cygnet I came to view him as much closer than cousin/uncle and view him as Bala (brother) and it seems we have experienced similar lives. Cygnet works for the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS), with roles ranging from surveillance of illegal immigrants, smuggling of contraband south and north and monitoring of the migrating birds for possible diseases such as birds flu. He is renowned as a composer and traditional dancer and his songs have a following from Australia to the Solomon Islands. He also teaches and organizes the children and community members who travel with their dance and songs, many



Pacific Blue-eye (male) – field tank photograph.

G.A.

of which were composed by Bram’s great grandfather Obediah Warria. I found the welcoming nature of extended family a humbling experience and felt great empathy, tolerance and respect for our journey was shown by residents. From what I understand, relatives who are still residing in the Torres Straits are very welcoming of family who due to circumstances are living on the Australian mainland, and in many cases this separation is generations old, and to be part of Bram’s journey was an honor.

Threadfin mangrove goby – field tank photograph.

G.A.





Pacific Blue-eye specimens (top: female and male) euthanized before pickling for Qld. Museum. G.A.

Given the late stage of the Wet Season, the timing of our visit was ideal in terms of freshwater fish surveying, it was also the peak time for the crayfish industry the main source of income for the Island, unfortunately we didn't get to do a reef dive or to do any boat fishing during the trip, as many of the Island's residents were hard at work diving for painted crayfish and most of the dories were out at sea.



Above: Adult male freshwater crab from island. G.A.

The view from the planes approach showed that the most likely areas to survey on Mabuiag Island were the freshwater dam adjacent to the airport and the swamp adjacent to the township. The rest of the island did not appear to have any freshwater habitat capable of holding freshwater fish. After checking with Cygnet if it would be okay to survey fish and possibly collect some to take back, he indicated the affirmative (I had already arranged an AQIS inspection/permit on our



Above: Adult female freshwater crab (field tank image) from Island. G.A.

Below: *Aponogeton* sp. plant – in situ. G.A.



departure date at Horn Island). After checking the possible collecting sites I found that there was a rather large saltwater croc residing in the dam, which was found by some local teenagers during a fishing trip and brought back and released in the dam. It appears to be the offal disposal for meat waste when hunters return from kills, and also takes the occasional dog. Over the next three days I saw the croc many times, though didn't dip net the dam as a result of the croc's size, well over 3 metres long.

After settling in to the Council mining-donga type accommodation adjacent to the airstrip, we were to meet up later in the afternoon where Cygnet would take us for a tour of the Island. This took us out to the cemetery where we spent time at the graves of Bram's great and great-great grandfather. This also showed us the links to other family members via headstone surnames and we could place connections. After the tour, we freshened up for Kai Kai (dinner), including fresh crayfish tails, reef fish, stew, rice and turtle. This was a great opportunity to meet more of the extended family, and learn more of the Torres Straits culture.

After the meal we returned to the donga. On the way I shone the head lamp into the drain leading out of the swamp and saw what looked to be large, dark coloured Blue-eyes and immediately I thought that they could have been either *Pseudomugil majusculus* Cape Blue-eye or *Pseudomugil signifer* Pacific Blue-eye. At that time the most northern Pacific Blue-eyes I knew of were from the Herbert and Peters collection at Cape Flattery in 1994 (Herbert 1994

Swamp habitat where gobies and Blue-eyes were caught.

G.A.



View looking north at the island from dingy as we departed.

G.A.

pers comms). This was an exciting find, and I literally ran back to our accommodation to gather the dip net and aquarium bags. On my return I collected a small number of the Blue-eyes and two gobies, no other fish were sighted. I later found that the Blue-eyes were Pacific Blue-eyes which were identified by both Peter Johnson of the Queensland Museum, and by DNA sequencing by Peter Unmack. The goby was identified as *Mugilogobius filifer*, Threadfin mangrove goby by both Helen Larson and Peter Johnson.

After collecting the swamp fish I also walked over to the airport dam and shone my head light into the water and saw oxeye herring *Megalops cyprinoides*, and a species of short-finned eel most likely *Anguilla bicolor*, and the red eye shine of the resident croc, no small fish were seen, due to the croc I didn't attempt to collect either species.

The next morning I woke to the sound of plovers, and saw the airport landing strip covered with migratory birds such as sandpipers. I estimated that the migratory birds numbered in excess of 5,000 individuals. It was refreshing starting the morning with a view of a bird lover's paradise. After a quick chat with Cygnet who was checking the airport for possibly diseased migratory birds, I went for a stroll over to the island boat ramp where we had a view to the east of the island. Then went back to the accommodation where I field-tank photographed the Blue-eyes and gobies, before euthanizing, tagging and pickling them for future lodgment at the Queensland Museum. After catching up on the family, we walked into the township to look at the art works that Bram's natural brother Andrew had completed when he lived on the Island some years previously and which were displayed at the Council building entrance. Dione and Bram caught up with some of the cousins while Kieran and I took a walk into the swamp to

see what we could find. Near the saltwater interface of the swamp outflow I could see *Terapon jarbua*, striped grunter bream, juvenile mullet and glass perchlets. We walked upstream where there were some pools, with only glass perchlets and juvenile freshwater crabs *Austrohelpusia* sp. found. Further upstream the pandanus swamp opened up with very shallow water, tussocks of native grasses and occasional *Aponogeton* sp., Queensland lace plants. Apart from the lace plants the vegetation suggested that the swamp would only be seasonally inundated, so it would be unlikely to find any true freshwater species. Due to the quarantine restrictions and the protected status of the lace plants no material was collected to determine identification.

After a brief lunch, we went over to the boat ramp to fish for billa (tuskfish/parrotfish) which I knew were an island delicacy, and hoped to contribute to the evening Kai Kai. With Kieran, Dione and Bram helping we caught enough rock crabs for bait and proceeded to fish. Unfortunately we weren't too successful but enjoyed each other's company; this was a highlight of the trip watching Bram fish "in country" and enjoying being part of his history and heritage. Before long it was time to prepare for Kai Kai again and another night of learning culture.

The following day was spent pursuing our interests. I managed to find a number of adult freshwater crabs, which were photographed and kept for museum lodgment. The remainder of the time spent on Mabuiag was a time of bonding, learning and enjoying a step back into our past.

In regard to freshwater aquatic critters, the island produced the best Pacific Blue-eye form I have ever encountered, and the find has extended the known range, with Mabuiag Island being the most northern extent of the species' range. Unfortunately the captive fish have since died out and appear to need hard or saline water to breed successfully. The freshwater crab found on the island differs greatly in colour to all other forms and species of freshwater crab I have previously encountered, with the carapace on adult males being black. Hopefully the specimens lodged will increase scientific knowledge of this understudied crustacean group. For such a small island I was surprised at what I came across.

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THE NAMES YOU KNOW, THE PEOPLE YOU DON'T: JAMES DOUGLAS OGILBY

Derek P. S. Tustin*

We all know the common names of fish that we keep, and those dedicated to the hobby usually are aware of and use the proper binomial name. We know that the first part of the binomial name refers to the genus and the second to the species. Most also know that the species name is presented in Greek or Latin, or is "Latinized". We also know that the genus and species names are often derived from one of three sources; it can describe (*Melanotaenia* – Black Striped [melano = Latin "black" + taenia = Latin "striped"]), it can provide the source (*oktediensis* – From the Ok Tedi River [Ok Tedi + ensis = Latin "from"]) or it can be an honourific of a person. It is this last category that I think we often ignore. Naming a fish (or other life form) in honour of someone conveys a form of immortality upon that person. But what use is immortality if we forget about the person? We use the names, so we should remember the person...

In Ireland...

On February 16th, 1853 in Belfast, Ireland, William Ogilby and his wife Adelaide (nee Douglas) celebrated the arrival of their second son, James Douglas Ogilby.

Now the Ogilbys were an extremely well respected family in Ireland, and indeed the entire United Kingdom. William was by trade a barrister, but by inclination he was a naturalist. In fact, the best demonstration of the lofty company he kept may be to share an excerpt from the February 11th, 1842 minutes of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. It reads;

Resolved – That (with a view of securing early attention to the following subject) a Committee consisting of Mr. C. Darwin, Prof. Henslow, Rev. L. Jenyns, Mr. W. Ogilby, Mr. J. Phillips, Dr. Richardson, Mr. H.E. Strickland (reported), Mr. J.O. Westwood, be appointed to consider of the rules by which the Nomenclature of Zoology be established on a uniform and permanent basis.

While this resolution is important in and of itself for being one of the first attempts to standardize zoological nomenclature, I would direct your attention instead to the list of names of the individuals participating to the proposed committee.

"Mr. C. Darwin" was of course Charles Darwin.

"Prof. Henslow" was Professor John Stevens Henslow, a clergyman, professor at Cambridge University, noted botanist, geologist, and the mentor of Charles Darwin who was responsible for the latter's presence on the HMS Beagle.

"Rev. L. Jenyns" was a reverend and a naturalist. He had also recommended that Charles Darwin be accepted into the crew of the HMS Beagle.

"Mr. J. Phillips" was John Phillips, a noted geologist, professor at Oxford University, and a Fellow of the Royal Society.

"Dr. Richardson" was Sir John Richardson, a naturalist, arctic explorer and author on arctic fish.

"Mr. H.E. Strickland" was Hugh Edwin Strickland, a noted geologist, ornithologist, naturalist, and the author of "Strickland's Code", a set of 22 rules intended to provide guidance in the formulation of zoological names.

“Mr. J.O. Westwood” was John Obadiah Westwood, an entomologist (who served as the president of the Entomological Society of London at one time), and an archaeologist.

Amongst this august company we find William Ogilby. He was successful in his chosen career as a barrister and successful in his chosen hobby of being a naturalist. As noted, at the time of James Douglas’s birth, the family was living in Belfast, Ireland. Soon thereafter, they moved to a location between Dunnamanagh and Ballyneaner, south of the town of Londonderry, in County Tyrone, Northern Ireland. There, William undertook the construction of a family castle.

The family castle, today referred to as “Ogilby’s Castle”, was known at the time as Atnacree Castle, Altinaghree Castle or Lisclon House. It was built sometime before 1860 and constructed entirely out of cut fresh stone from nearby Dungiven. It was a large home, furnished in a lavish style that was reported to be unequaled in the local area, and over the years it played host to various dignitaries from across the United Kingdom. William built it for his family, and it was intended to have been the family home for James Douglas’s future family as well. (The ruins of the castle still stand, having been abandoned sometime before the turn of the last century, although there is no record of why.)

Following in his father’s footsteps, James Douglas (now preferring to be called Douglas) was provided with an excellent education, first studying at Winchester College (one of the oldest public schools in England, having been in existence for over 600 years) from 1866 to 1869 (ages 13–16), and then at Trinity College (Ireland’s oldest university, founded in 1592) from 1870 to 1872 (ages 17–19). He was noted as excelling in athletics and as being a neat and precise student.

After he completed his studies he sought and obtained a position with the British Museum in London. Sharing his knowledge of Ireland, he contributed notes on native fish and birds of Ireland which were published in the *Zoologist* (a respected publication for naturalists in the United Kingdom) over the period of 1874 to 1876.

But the most important aspect of the time in James Douglas’ life is that he met and fell in love with Mary Jane Jamieson, a seamstress working in a factory.

As the story is told, one day James Douglas was driving a horse-drawn buggy from the family castle into Derry when he overtook a fetching woman carrying a bundle. He pulled up beside her and offered her a ride. Now James Douglas was from the gentry, and they were landlords of their surrounding property where tenant farmers worked the land. Mary Jane’s family was one of the tenant farmer families in the local area (although apparently not on the Ogilby’s land) and there was a natural inclination for one class to not trust the other. So from the outset



James Douglas Ogilby.
Photographer: © Australian Museum.



Melanotaenia ogilbyi from the Timika River, tank acclimated, shortly after capture. Jerry Allen

Mary Jane was reluctant to speak with the well off man driving a buggy. But James Douglas was persistent. Although Mary Jane initially refused to get into the buggy for the proffered ride, he drove along beside her and they talked. Eventually James Douglas convinced her to get in and before they reached Derry they were on the path to love.

Adelaide Ogilby, James Douglas’ mother, found out about the budding romance and, not happy with her son being involved with a lady of a lower class, forbade him to see her. James Douglas ignored his mother’s wishes, and he and Mary Jane continued their romance.

Soon thereafter Adelaide planned a banquet at Atnacree Castle, inviting nobility from the surrounding area to come with their eligible daughters. She was bound and determined that she would find her son a wife from the suitable class. So James Douglas attended the banquet, but he brought Mary Jane as well, introducing her to all as his future wife.

As can be imagined, this did not go over well with Adelaide, and she arranged for James Douglas to go and live in Texas.

Not much is known about his time in America, but it is known that he was not happy, still pining for his Mary Jane. He continued in his interest in nature (eventually having a paper, Catalogue of the Birds Obtained in Navarro County, Texas published in the *Scientific Transactions of the Royal Dublin Society* in 1883), but his love for Mary Jane was still strong. They had been corresponding during his exile, but mail service then was rather slow. He returned from America in 1884 without Mary Jane’s advance knowledge, and surprised her, asking that she become his wife. They had planned on eloping, but Mary Jane’s family insisted on a church marriage. So on November 24th of that year, at age 31, James Douglas married the 20 year old Mary Jane at the parish church in Donaghane, County Tyrone, Ireland.



Melanotaenia ogilbyi from the Timika River, tank acclimated, shortly after capture. Jerry Allen

James Douglas knew that he and his bride were unaccepted and would remain so by his family and shortly after their marriage in Ireland, they emigrated to Australia, arriving sometime before the end of 1884.

He was quickly hired by the Australian Museum in Sydney as a “*Scientific Assistant (Zoology)*” and began work on February 14th, 1885 for an annual salary of £250. By all accounts he was an enthusiastic and energetic worker, contributing reports, notes and papers primarily on fishes, but also on reptiles and mammals. In fact, in his first two years with the Australian Museum, he published 21 papers.

In 1887, at the age of 34, he was elected as a Fellow of the Linnean Society of London.

Just over two years later in 1890, and after many warnings about being drunk while at work, James Douglas was dismissed from his position at the Australian Museum due to an “*extreme and indiscriminating affinity for alcohol*”.

The following years were not kind to James Douglas. While he continued to publish professional papers, he was only able to obtain work on a contract basis. Then, in 1894, Mary Jane Ogilby died at the age of 29. The marriage had produced no children, and James Douglas would remain a bachelor for the rest of his life.

He continued to publish, but let his membership in the Linnean Society of London lapse in 1896.

In 1901 he began to work for the Queensland Museum on a contract basis and moved to Brisbane permanently in 1903 where he became the ichthyologist for the museum.

Queensland seemed to agree with James Douglas. He joined the Royal Society of Queensland and became the honorary Museum Curator for the Amateur Fishermen’s Association of Queensland (AFAQ). He apparently was very involved with the AFAQ, assisting in the labeling of specimens for their museum, and donating some of his writing on fish to the organization. In return, they conferred a Life Membership on James Douglas in 1915.

James Douglas continued to study and publish on various aspects of ichthyology until his death at Diamantina Hospital in Brisbane on August 11th, 1925 at the age of 72. He apparently had been ill for quite some time, having been hospitalized for the 6 years preceding his passing. He was interred in the Church of England section of Toowong Cemetery, also in Brisbane.

He left behind a lasting legacy. His published works included 181 papers, and he was involved in the description of 154 new species of fish.

Some of his more notable published works include:

- Description of a New Australian Tortoise (1890)
- Catalogue of Australasian Mammals (1892)
- Edible Fishes and Crustaceans of New South Wales (1893)
- The Commercial Fishes and Fisheries of Queensland: An Essay (1915)

The Amateur Fisherman’s Association of Queensland erected a cottage for use by their members on Bribie Island, the Australian National Park just off the coast of Brisbane, and named it the J. Douglas Ogilby Cottage in his memory and honour. The cottage still stands today and is the headquarters of the AFAQ.

In addition, many fish (mostly marine species) and some other creatures were named in his honour. They include;

The Fish:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>Callionymus ogilbyi</i> | (Rayfined Fish [Marine]) |
| <i>Calliurichthys ogilbyi</i> | (Ogilby’s Stinkfish [Marine]) |
| <i>Cynoglossus ogilbyi</i> | (Tongue Sole [Marine]) |
| <i>Cypsilurus ogilbyi</i> | (Ogilby’s Flyingfish [Marine]) |
| <i>Hydrolagus ogilbyi</i> | (Ogilby’s Ghostshark [Marine]) |
| <i>Hoplichthys ogilbyi</i> | (Ogilby’s Ghost Flathead [Marine]) |
| <i>Melanotaenia ogilbyi</i> | (Ogilby’s Rainbowfish) |
| <i>Nebrodes concolor ogilbyi</i> | (Tawny Nurse Shark [Marine]) |
| <i>Orectolobus ogilbyi</i> | (Ogilby’s Carpet Shark [Marine]) |
| <i>Pranesus ogilbyi</i> | (Common Hardyhead) |
| <i>Scortum ogilbyi</i> | (Gulf Grunter [Marine]) |

The “Others:”

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Cephalophus ogilbyi</i> | (Ogilby’s Duiker [Antelope]) |
| <i>Chimaericola ogilbyi</i> | (Flatworm) |
| <i>Rheotanytarsus ogilbyi</i> | (Ogilby’s Midge [insect]) |

While the majority of the fish named in honour of James Douglas Ogilby are from a marine environment, there is one rainbowfish, *Melanotaenia ogilbyi*, in the group. This species was

first collected by Dr. Hendrikus Albertus Lorentz in tributaries of the Lorentz River (known at the time as the Noord-Fluss and later renamed the Lorentz River) and in streams north of Timika during an expedition to West Papua in 1907. They were also collected by Dr. Gerald Allen near Timika in 1985.

Very few individuals have been known to keep *Melanotaenia ogilbyi*, although interest in them seems to have been making a resurgence within the hobby with a collection of wild-caught fish (apparently again being found in the vicinity of Timika) having been exported to both Europe and North America in mid to late 2011.

So should you have a chance to keep or even see this underappreciated species of rainbowfish, remember the story of the love scarred immigrant to Australia for whom they are named in honour.

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