

Department's (AFCD) Dragonfly Working Group (DWG). I must acknowledge their significant input into the publication of this field guide. The DWG, comprised of TW Tam, Boris SP Kwan, Karrie KY Wu, Bryan SF Wong and Joyce K Wong, surveyed many areas not previously covered by dragonfly surveys resulting in considerable updating of distribution and conservation status of HK's dragonflies. In addition the DWG was responsible for the discovery of two species not previously recorded from Hong Kong, the discovery of a new gomphid species (*Fukienogomphus* sp.), editing both the English and Chinese texts, and reviewing the keys, drawings and photos. The field guide was very much a collaborative effort with AFCD's DWG rather than 'the result of one man's efforts.' I would also like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the contribution of T.K. Woo & W.L. Hui who both work in the country parks branch of AFCD. They provided new information on the distribution of Hong Kong's dragonflies and were responsible for the discovery of *Cephalaeschna klotsi* Asahina.

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All about James True – a new Post-doc at SWIMS

by James True

The sea has always been special to me. I grew up in the wide brown lands of inland Australia; in towns where wheat, sheep and cattle were the basis and the focus of almost everyone's existence. The world changed for me when I learnt about SCUBA diving at the famous surfing beach of Cronulla. My brief glimpses of the sea as a child had not prepared me for the sudden fascination I discovered for the underwater world. Slowly the idea dawned on me that there must be a way to combine my fascination with the sea and some sort of career. At age 24, I hitched 2000 km up the east coast of Australia to North Queensland, where James Cook University was happily juxtaposed among vast mango orchards, a thriving fishery and the Great Barrier Reef.

Now I was in my element! I threw myself into tropical marine science and university life with a passion – working nights as a kitchen hand to pay my fees and volunteering for any researcher who needed a diver. Despite having no background in biology at school (apart from that which comes naturally with agriculture), I managed quite well; I achieved a First Class honours in marine science with a secondary major in computer science and a minor in biometrics. In the typically laid back way of North Queensland, I felt no hurry to get into post-graduate study straight after my degree – I logged nearly 200 diving hours per year up and down the Great Barrier Reef (mostly volunteering for research projects), had a small catering business, and kept my IT skills alive by managing the collection databases for the Museum of Tropical Queensland. While there, I learned from old-school museum people and curated animals from almost every group found in the tropics. During the 'quiet' months I was a dory fisherman in the (then) just-started artisanal live coral trout fishery, catching beautiful

fat coral trout (*Plectropomus leopardus*) with hook and line for live export to Hong Kong. Eventually, however, I was confronted with the harsh reality that I would either have to undertake some post-graduate study, or get a real job.

As a fisherman, I was encouraged by many to undertake a fisheries-based degree. More fascinating, however, was what lies beneath – the corals that form the structures where the fish live. James Cook University has been a centre of coral research for more than twenty years, and I was, by this stage, regularly working or volunteering for some of the most prominent coral reef scientists on the planet. I had become involved with AUSCORE – the Australian Coral Records working group – comprising geologists and climatologists and the very occasional biologist working to reconstruct environmental histories based on coral skeletons. An opportunity to work at the nexus between the living animal and the permanent record of its struggle through life was exactly what I was looking for. As an added bonus, the heavy underwater drilling rigs used to extract the long cores preferred in paleoclimatology research required me to undertake some serious industrial diving training.

My first major experiment coincided with the largest mass-bleaching event ever recorded. This later provided me with many valuable insights, but at that stage merely delayed any possible physiological experimentation for 18 months – until the confounding effect had dissipated. My project changed to a more descriptive study examining spatial patterns in coral growth. I still had my extensive commercial diver training to fall back on, so I was often called on by the department head to chaperone new graduate students through their first few field trips. My industrial diving training led me to be invited on many amazing field trips, often as far afield as the Hermit Isles, off the north coast of New Guinea (a place so remote it was last visited by Jacques Cousteau). I was also involved in a survey of North Queensland ports targeting invasive species brought in ships' ballast waters. This survey often involved diving under the piers of tropical ports, chipping off fouling organisms from pylons in pitch-blackness while imagining that the large crocodile one just saw sunning itself on the mud bank nearby might come for a closer look.

During the same period, the Museum of Tropical Queensland received a substantial facelift, investing heavily in new display and collection technology – and, coincidentally, someone to drive it all. I spent the next three years as a computer systems administrator for the museum, doing my PhD research part-time, and spending my weekends and holidays doing lab experiments or traveling to laboratories in different parts of the country to analyze my samples.

After I handed in my thesis, I spent a year in that peculiar limbo that PhD candidates occupy – waiting for the examiners' reports, writing addenda and elucidations to the thesis and helping my wife with her PhD fieldwork in the Gulf of Thailand. Subsequently, I spent more time in Thailand, becoming involved in several post-tsunami surveys and in some of the increasingly progressive ecological research being undertaken by Thai academics.

My position at SWIMS is my first time in China. I am excited by the possibilities to do science here – the reefs of the South

China Sea are subject to unique stresses and offer unique opportunities to study the resilience of corals and coral communities. My previous work has mostly been about how corals respond to stress and the telltale signs that stress events leave in coral skeletons. I hope to continue that work and expand into investigating the behaviour of corals in sub-optimal environments. There are many potential collaborations here as well with researchers who are doing fine work teasing apart different components of the ecological web.

Nature is too complex for the broad ecological questions being addressed in this millennium to be undertaken by a researcher working alone. A willingness to collaborate and a broad experience base are, I believe, two of the most important characteristics of successful ecological researchers. Theoretical knowledge is fundamental to learning, but the more exposure one has to a diverse range of research, the easier it is to understand those ecological webs. The ability to think laterally is seldom apparent in researchers who never leave their comfort zone. In my experience, the more exposure a student has to real research during their degree, the easier it is for them to become a good researcher in the future. My advice to anyone who wants more out of university than just a pass degree and a job at McDonalds? Get out there, get qualified and volunteer!



New *Planaeschna* record from Hong Kong (Odonata: Aeshnidae)

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During late October 2005 I undertook a crepuscular survey of dragonflies at Wu Kau Tang. In the 10-20 minute feeding frenzy which takes place just before dusk, I captured a total of seven aeshnid specimens using a net. Six of the seven specimens were identified as *Gynacantha japonica* Barteneff and the remaining specimen belongs to the genus *Planaeschna* McLachlan. It may represent an undescribed species. No previous species of *Planaeschna* has been recorded from Hong Kong.

The genus *Planaeschna* is mainly confined to Indo-China with outliers occurring in South China, Thailand, Burma, India (Assam) and Japan. Seven species of *Planaeschna* have been described from China, which are *P. celia* Wilson & Reels, 2001 (Hainan), *P. gressitti* Karube, 2002 (Guangdong),

P. maolanensis Zhou & Bao, 2002 (Guizhou), *P. risi* Asahina, 1964 (Japan & Taiwan), *P. shanxiensis* Zhu & Zhang (Shanxi), *P. suichangensis* Zhou & Wei, 1980 (Guangdong, Guangxi & Zhejiang), *P. taiwana* Asahina, 1951 (Taiwan). In addition, a further five species of *Planaeschna* have been described from Vietnam. A total of 17 species have been described to date with nine of these named in the last 10 years.

The Hong Kong female *Planaeschna* does not belong to *suichangensis*, which is the most widespread and abundant *Planaeschna* species recorded from Guangdong. Currently the female *gressitti* is unknown but the abdomen does not have yellow spots, adjacent to the transverse carina, which are linked to basal, ventral yellow spots to form a yellow median from S3-8. This ringed pattern is possessed by male *gressitti* (Karube, 2002) and in all other *Planaeschna* species the feature is exhibited by both males and females. The Hong Kong female does not have this feature so is most unlikely to belong to *gressitti*. Two new species of *Planaeschna* from central and north Guangdong await description but the Hong Kong female does not belong to either of these new species. It is closest to *risi* but further specimens are nevertheless required, especially a male, before a clear placement of the Hong Kong *Planaeschna* can be made. *Planaeschna risi* was recorded from Guangxi by Wilson (2005) but evaluation of further material from Guangxi and Guangdong indicates this material does not in fact belong to *risi*, which is endemic to Taiwan and the Ryukyu islands.

The Hong Kong female *Planaeschna* was collected over abandoned marshy agricultural land at San Uk Ha, Wu Kau Tang on the evening of 30 October 2005. *Planaeschna* larvae dwell in flowing streams usually in montane, forested areas. Most species are known from altitudes exceeding 500 m. Only one species, described from North Vietnam, *Planaeschna cucphuongensis* Karube, is known from lowland forest (Karube, 1999). The new *Planaeschna* species is likely to breed in montane forested tributary streams in the country park surrounding Wu Kau Tang but its larvae may utilize the tributaries or main stream flowing through the Wu Kau Tang basin i.e. the area covered by the Wu Kau Tang Outline Zoning Plan.

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