

## Project: Anathema

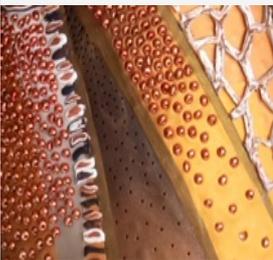
In late 2013 as Vice President of Wildlife and Botanical Artists Inc, I organised the first artists' visit to the Australian National Insect Collection (ANIC). The aim of this and follow-up visits was to acquaint artists with insect specimens both as a source of inspiration and opportunity to increase awareness of ANIC research. I give a more detailed account of the visit and its context in WABA's November 2013 newsletter.



Whilst touring the ANIC collection, current ANIC Director Dr David Yeates, retrieved a drawer of very large moths. Among the delicately pinned and largely faded specimens was one exquisitely vibrant moth. I loved to see Dr Yeates' eyes lit up as he shared the tale of its discovery and rarity and its importance to the collection.



As I listened to him conjure his collecting excursion and the source tree and his excitement at the time, I was awe-struck by the beauty of the moth's markings.



My eyes must have lit up with a cascade of impressions- the sheen on the wings- even under fluorescent lighting was like that of sunlight on water. The ochres and sky blue palette was clean, harmonised, wanting for nothing. The intricate tribal-like patterns were so familiarly Australian, ancient and mysterious.



I later learned that the species bears characteristics of the earliest fossil moths such as short antenna. Swift Moth adults do not feed at all. Having only vestigial mouthparts, they live only long enough to reproduce and it is the females who find the males.

At work in my studio, with myriad moths congregating under the spotlights at my back door, I reflected that artistic sensibilities might easily offend or at least be utterly irrelevant to scientific enquiry.



Bentwing Swift Moth (*Zelotypia stacyi*)  
Photo by Natalie Maras

Equally, questions of vital taxonomic importance such as veining on wings, seemed to me of minimal artistic interest! Regardless, enthusiasts love enthusiasts and perhaps all is required is some delicacy in tolerating each other's schooled fixations (anathemas).



© Natalie Maras <http://findiflooshki.com>