

It's worth getting out of bed for this one - but not required

LINUX CONF AUSTRALIA 2010

Fantastic presentations were streamed live from Wellington, New Zealand. **BY EMMA JANE HOGBIN**

Within 30 minutes of having arrived in Wellington, New Zealand, for Linux Conf Australia (LCA) [1], I was informed that it was baby penguin season. Despite not seeing a real live wild penguin at the conference, the experience provided by organizers and attendees at this year's conference was more than enough to entice me back in future years.

LCA kicked off with several concurrent mini-conferences running Monday and Tuesday. Sessions ranged from government to project management to business to Arduino hacking and Libre Graphics. Although the caliber of these talks covered a wide range, it was great to see some first-time presenters talk with passion about their projects. The Haecksen mini-conf (subtitled, "Some of my best friends are unicorns") was the most enthusiastic that I attended and showcased female developers, documenters, and FOSS users [2]. At the end of the day, a dozen attendees kept the energy going and helped Brenda Wallace migrate GeekSpeakr [3] off its dying server. There's nothing like an impromptu hackfest to save the day.

Next up, a passionate user, Monty Taylor, discussed his development platform

of choice [5] for his new project, Drizzle [6]. The presentation eventually devolved into a conversation between Drizzle developer Stewart Smith and the core Launchpad developers. The dynamics between users and developers, with equal respect on both sides, is a conversation all FOSS projects need.

James Westby's talk on Ubuntu distributed development tackled this topic. He talked about the difficulties that contributors face in trying to report problems in projects that have both upstream and downstream projects. Although he doesn't have all of the answers (yet), he is interested in automating more contributor actions so that solutions can flow upstream and downstream according to the wishes of the related projects. Ubuntu has thousands of packages, and upstream projects use a suite of source control management and bug-tracking tools. The solution as to how to integrate this ecosystem will take a while, but the implications of a solution could fundamentally change the way contributor communities interact.

The Business mini-conf [4], led by Martin Michlmayr, was perhaps the biggest surprise of the event. Typically FOSS conferences focus on enterprise-level businesses; however, in this mini-conf, speakers addressed the concerns of small business and the value of micro-payments and passive income. If you have a FOSS-related business, or you are thinking about starting one, I recommend that you watch the videos of these talks.

Also of note were presentations about government adoption of Linux desktops, hardware races between USB 3 and USB 2 devices, design patterns in the kernel, acceptable behavior, adaptive interface

design, university instruction in FOSS project participation (for credit), copyright and sharing, distributed development, and web interfaces for software translation teams.

Perhaps the most popular statement of the conference was, "I was going to miss the keynote this morning. And then I remembered it was streaming live. I watched you from bed." The ideal geek office space was a bit of a running joke for the conference. In his introduction for keynote presenter and anthropologist Gabriella (Biella) Coleman (Figure 1), Andrew McMillan also referenced one of the appeals of studying the open source community, in which "'on-site' does not require her to get out of bed." In her years of studying hackers, Biella has seen an abundance of humor, language punning, and Easter eggs and enough cultural depth to assure her supervisors that we were worth studying. Her book on geek culture was available for crowd-sourced fact checking as she wrote it.

I can't recommend this conference enough. The combination of speakers, attendees, and weather is worth the time and money it takes to get down to this conference. ■

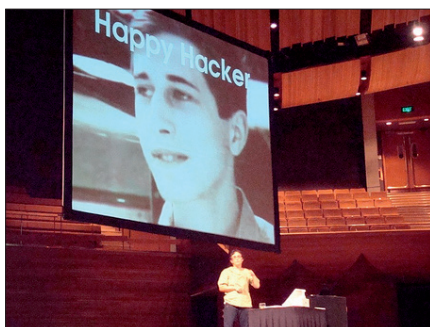


Figure 1: Biella Coleman and a young RMS. (Photo courtesy of Emma Jane Hogbin)

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- [1] Linux Conf AU, Wellington 2010: <http://www.lca2010.org.nz/>
- [2] Haecksen miniconf: <http://haecksen.org.nz>
- [3] GeekSpeakr: <http://www.geekspeaker.com>
- [4] Business miniconf: <https://fossbazaar.org/content/lca-devbiz-january-2010>
- [5] Launchpad: <http://launchpad.net>
- [6] Drizzle: <http://drizzle.org/>