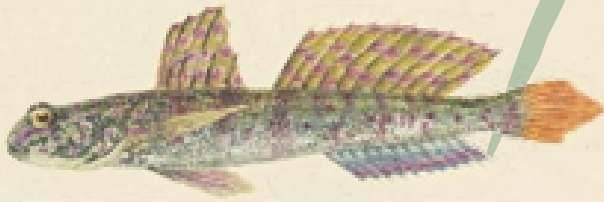


FERDINAND BAUER'S colourful fish



JENNIFER MORAN DISCUSSES THE BEAUTY OF ARTIST FERDINAND BAUER'S FISH DRAWINGS AND THEIR SCIENTIFIC VALUE

ABOVE
Ferdinand Bauer (1760–1826)
Goby (*Favonigobius* sp.)
reproduced from Ferdinand
Bauer's *Natural History
Drawings: Taken from the
Zoological Specimens Collected
on the First Circumnavigation
of Australia* by Matthew
Flinders, Commander, HMS
Investigator, 1801–1803
(London: Alecoto Historical
Editions in association with
the Natural History Museum,
1997)
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-vn404104
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Museum
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RIGHT
Ferdinand Bauer (1760–1826)
Boxfish (*Anoplocapros
inermis*)
reproduced from Ferdinand
Bauer's *Natural History
Drawings*
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-an14062405
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THE FISH LYING ON ICE AT THE MARKET might shimmer silver or sport a dull red but a fish hauled from the cool ocean loses most of its colour—its washes of yellow or its blue stripes—about ten minutes after it has gasped in the searing air.

Fish not only give up their colour when they die, but in life they also switch it on and off in various parts of their body in some kind of communication, the intricacies of which we have yet to unravel. A fish can change its spots right before your eyes, creating a dilemma for an artist, particularly one used to the exactitude of botanical drawing.

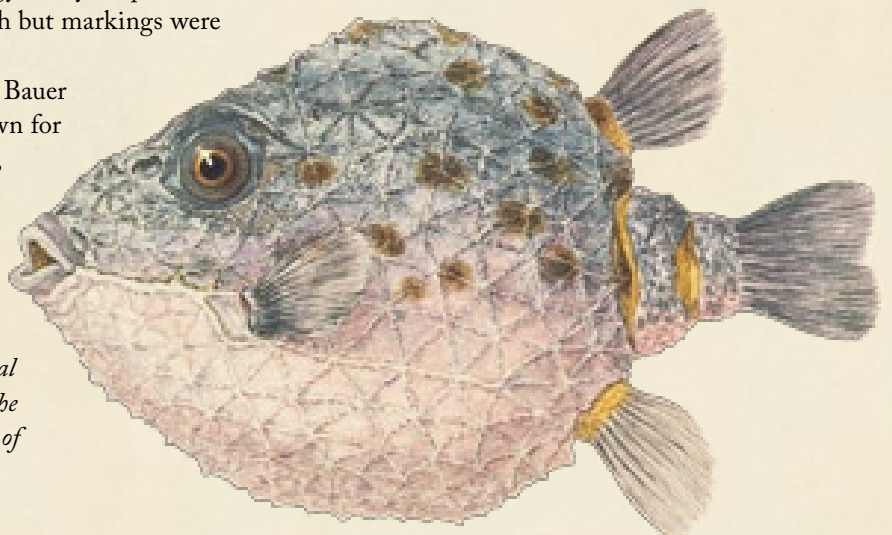
The click of digital photography or whirr of film can make these changes and particulars apparent but, at the start of the nineteenth century, an artist wishing to paint a fish had to rely on an eye for colour, a good memory and meticulous methodology. Body shape could be preserved after death but markings were another matter.

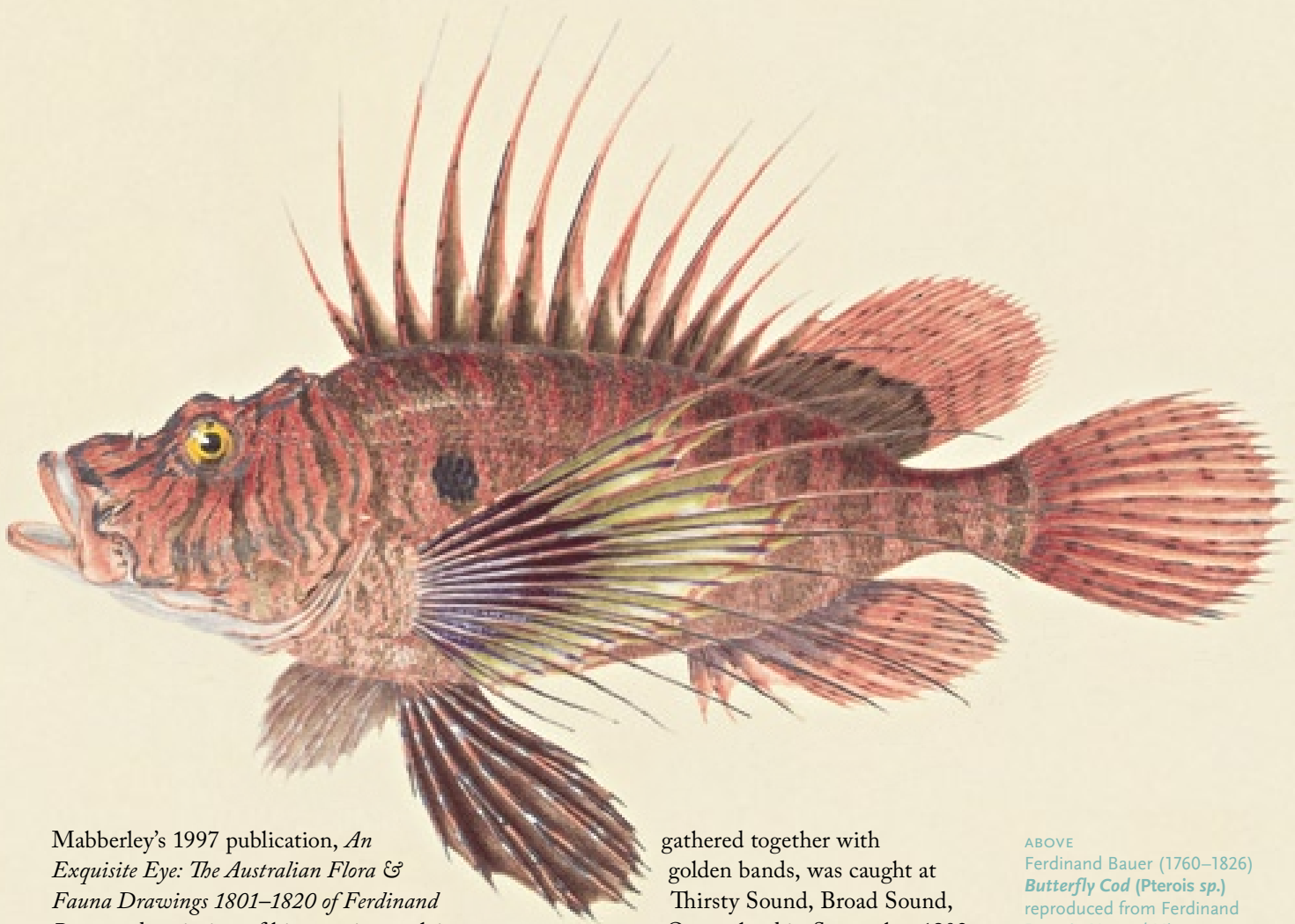
The artist Ferdinand Bauer (1760–1826), best known for his botanical drawings, drew and painted many fish. Some of these are collected in his *Natural History Drawings Taken from the Zoological Specimens Collected on the First Circumnavigation of*

Australia by Matthew Flinders, Commander HMS Investigator 1801–1803, a collection of 52 drawings of fauna of which the marine creatures comprise 22. The National Library of Australia has in its collection the fourth of 50 copies of a luxurious facsimile edition, published in 1997 by Alecoto Historical Editions in association with the Natural History Museum, London.

Bauer's leatherjackets and mudskippers, his blue swimmer crabs and butterfly cod sport their colours as though they were swimming around as he drew them. We do know, however, that he worked from specimens caught on the *Investigator* voyage.

Bauer's illustration from the field, or the beach or boat in the case of his fish, was a triumph of organisation and art. In Peter Watts, Jo Anne Pomfrett and David





Mabberley's 1997 publication, *An Exquisite Eye: The Australian Flora & Fauna Drawings 1801–1820 of Ferdinand Bauer*, a description of his practice explains how he was able to reproduce his subjects so accurately under trying circumstances.

Bauer made life-size pencil sketches of the habit and parts of the plants and animals and numbered them according to a code of colour shades from a chart which he carried with him, a method he had used in the Mediterranean when working for [Professor John] Sibthorp. Such codes had been in use for a long time but it was Bauer who perfected the technique. The whereabouts of the code he used on the Investigator is not known. However, one of his earlier codes is preserved in the Real Jardin Botánico in Madrid. It has 7 rows of 20 numbered rectangular coloured strips. His later codes must have been much more elaborate because the Sibthorp drawings have numbers up to 250, and the Australian ones have from 1–999 plus added letters. Despite the speed with which these drawings must have often been executed and annotated with the code, only rarely are there mistakes in his colouring.

And what colours!

Bauer's boxfish (*Anoplocapros inermis*), a funeral-rose mauve and grey confection

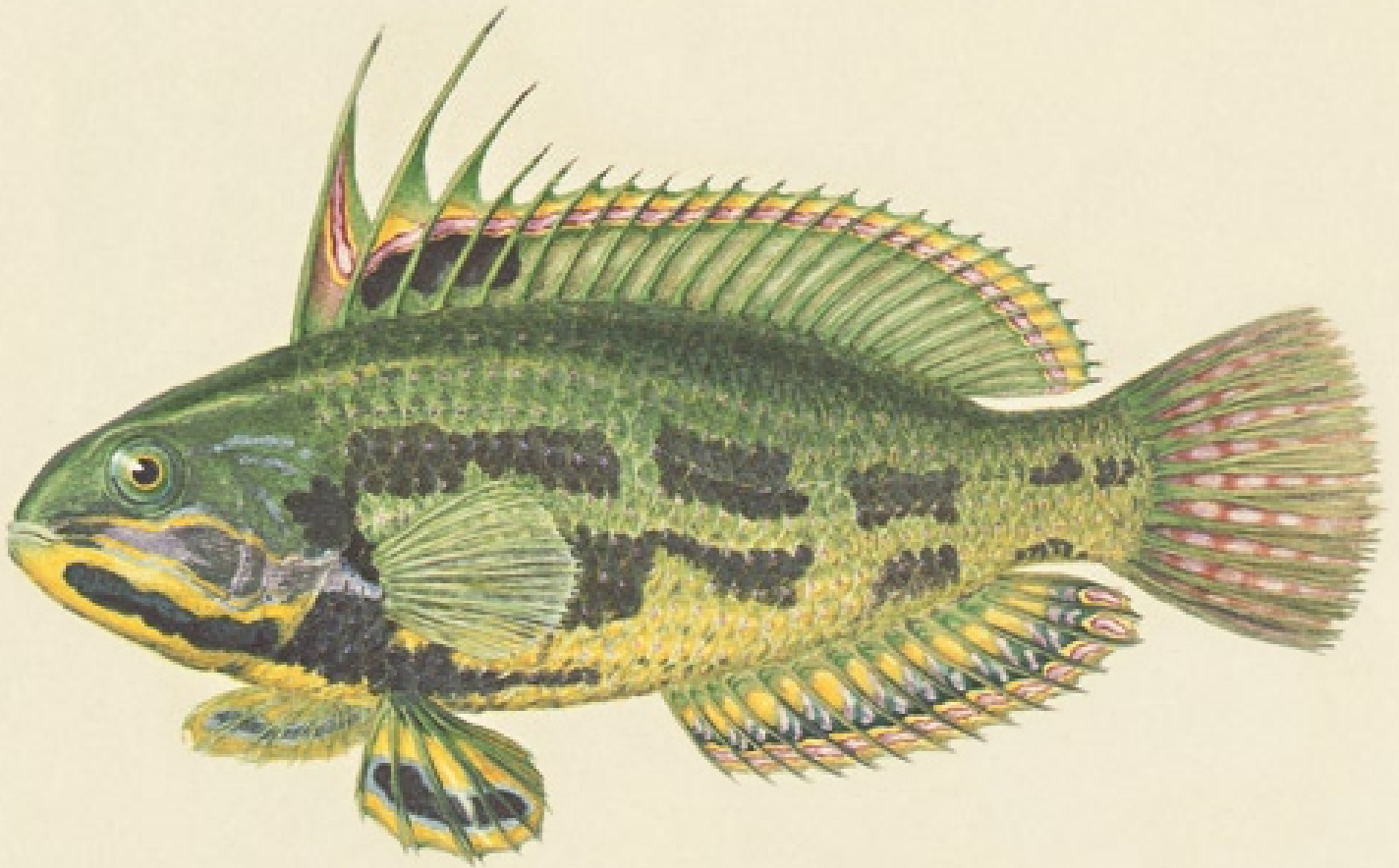
gathered together with golden bands, was caught at Thirsty Sound, Broad Sound, Queensland in September 1802.

His mudskipper (*Periophthalmus* sp.), a maudlin-looking fish, large mouthed and with protruberant eyes perched atop its head, was probably collected at Connor Creek, Keppel Bay in Queensland a month earlier. On that same day, a goby (*Favonigobius* sp.) was collected which Bauer rendered in basic silver with purple body spots and purplish banding. Rainbow colours adorn its fins.

What is believed to be a butterfly cod (*Pterois* sp.), though it cannot be positively identified because the finray counts on the body do not correspond with the count of either of the two fishes it closely resembles, was probably collected at Strong Tide Passage, Queensland in August 1802. A beautiful salmon pink with brown, wavy, vertical stripes, the fish sports large dorsal fin spines, which can inflict painful wounds, and other showy, oversized fins that it uses to shepherd and manipulate its prey. It is one of very few Bauer drawings to show an anomaly in anatomy.

The beauty of Bauer's drawings is complemented by their value to science. Weedy seadragons (*Phyllopteryx taeniolatus*) were caught at King George Sound in Western Australia in December 1801 and Bauer's image of them shows a natural oddity—the male carrying a clutch of eggs under his tail. The drawings

ABOVE
Ferdinand Bauer (1760–1826)
Butterfly Cod (*Pterois* sp.)
reproduced from Ferdinand
Bauer's *Natural History
Drawings*
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ABOVE
 Ferdinand Bauer (1760–1826)
Parrotfish (*Odax ocroptilus*)
 reproduced from Ferdinand
 Bauer's *Natural History*
Drawings
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BELOW
 Ferdinand Bauer (1760–1826)
Mudskipper (*Periophthalmus sp.*)
 reproduced from Ferdinand
 Bauer's *Natural History Drawing*
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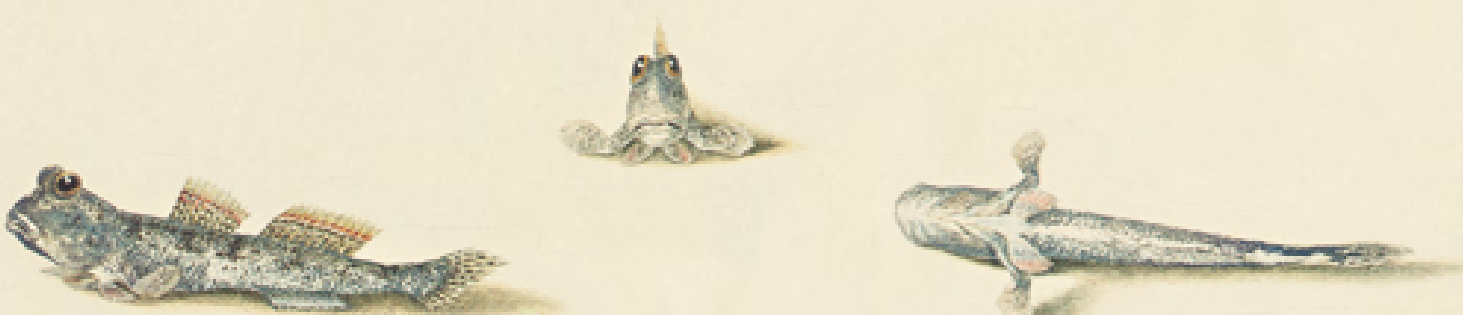
include not just the beautifully coloured whole fishes but detailed depictions of various parts of a fish or crab. They were meticulous records of species when no preserved specimen was available. Sir John Richardson, for example, based the first scientific description of the parrotfish (*Odax acroptilus*) on Bauer's drawing. No record exists of where Bauer obtained his subject but today it is commonly found on the southern coasts of Australia.

There is no known portrait of Bauer and he seems to have left no diary of his journeys in Australia. His letters were few—only about ten are known to exist. But we do know something of the life of this artist who remained a bachelor all his life.

Bauer was born in Feldsberg, a town then in Austria, which in history's rearrangement of Europe has become Valtice in the Czech Republic. His father, Lucas Bauer, was a botanical artist and a gallery

curator in the court of Prince Wenzel of Liechtenstein. Ferdinand was one of seven Bauer children, just an infant when Lucas died. The family's court connections protected them and Dr Norbert Boccius, a priest and scholar at the court, took an interest in the education of the orphaned children, particularly in art practice. He gave Bauer a commission to paint flower studies when he was only 15. By the time Bauer was 20, he was working with his brother Franz on the illustrations for Baron Nikolaus von Jacquin's *Icones Plantarum Rariorum* (1781–1793). This was followed by an appointment as natural history painter for Professor John Sibthorp of Oxford with whom Bauer travelled in the Mediterranean and England, producing drawings for the publication *Flora Graeca* (1806–1840).

By the time the Flinders expedition was mooted, Bauer had long experience and Sir Joseph Banks suggested he should be



appointed botanical artist. Bauer was 41, much older than most of his fellow travellers: Flinders was 27, as was the botanist Robert Brown, with whom Bauer was to work closely. Nevertheless Bauer was indefatigable, and drew and painted an extraordinary number of plants and animals on the voyage. Flinders honoured Bauer's contribution by naming Cape Bauer in South Australia after the painter, and there are, fittingly, many plants named for him.

When Flinders set off for England to get a replacement boat in 1803, the *Investigator* having proved unsuited to its task and unsound, Bauer and Brown stayed at Port Jackson to work on material while waiting for Flinders' return. Bauer travelled to the Hunter Valley and to Norfolk Island and continued to draw and paint the fauna and flora of the colony. Flinders, meanwhile, was imprisoned in Mauritius where he was to remain for several years until his return to England in 1810. Once it became clear that the Flinders expedition was over, Bauer and Brown returned to England in 1805 aboard the repaired *Investigator*. They carried with them many specimens to aid their work back in England.

Bauer spent the next few years working with Brown on illustrations for the Admiralty and

also on his own illustrations, readying them for publication. But interest in the Flinders voyage had faded and, of Bauer's more than 2000 drawings from the *Investigator* passage, only about two dozen were published in his lifetime.

Disillusioned, Bauer returned to Austria where he died in 1826. His work passed through several hands before ending up in museum and gallery collections. The illustrations published in the Alecto facsimile are in the Natural History Museum in London.

The Alecto Historical Editions website (www.alectouk.com) now showcases some of Bauer's illustrations and, though Bauer's drawings of fish were not annotated, the website includes notes about each illustration compiled from various sources, including *An Exquisite Eye* and Alwyne Wheeler and D.T. Moore's 'The Animal Drawings of Ferdinand Bauer in the Natural History Museum, London', *Archives of Natural History*, volume 1, 1994.

BELOW
Ferdinand Bauer (1760–1826)
Weedy Seadragon
(*Phyllopteryx taeniolatus*)
reproduced from Ferdinand
Bauer's *Natural History
Drawings*
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JENNIFER MORAN is a writer and editor for
several newspapers and journals

