## Linux down under at Linux.conf.au 2008

# PENGUIN'S BIG DAY OUT

**T**he irreverent Australian spirit shone through at this year's Linux.conf.au (LCA). One of the world's most high-profile, volunteer-run open source events, LCA continues to offer a seriously technical conference with a seriously low-key vibe.

Co-chair of the conference paper committee (and outgoing Linux Australia president) Rusty Russell describes LCA as a talkfest where attendees can get as much out of conversations and hackfests during breaks as they get from official presentations. "Over 10% of attendees are also speakers – and the speakers don't hide out in the speakers room like they do at a lot of other conferences. Everyone mingles."

The entire conference was run by a team of more than 60 volunteers, and the community vibe was felt throughout the week. A young volunteer getting introduced to Linus Torvalds refuses to believe it is really him until he gets out his drivers license and shows it to her. A gaggle of geeks gathers in the central courtyard to explore the networking capabilities of the conference accessory du jour – the OLPC's little green XO laptop.

Two days of mini-confs preceded the conference – 16 focused streams on distros, security, education, virtualization, gaming, system administration, and more. The conference kicked into gear with keynote speaker and security guru Bruce Schneier's keynote on "reconceptualizing security." Speaking to a packed auditorium, Schneier stuck to his usual theme of ripping away the pretense of "security theater" and trying to inject some truth serum into the way we speak and act on security matters. Schneier's

Melbourne, Australia played host to the 8th annual Linux.conf.au conference at the end of January, drawing a capacity crowd of open source professional developers, enthusiasts and students from around the globe. **BY SARAH STOKELY**



**Figure 1: The gaggle of XO laptops.**

talk focused more on the damage that has been done to public notions of security since the September 11 attacks and barely touched on open source at all.

OpenLogic's Stormy Peters' keynote addressed questions that often vex businesses considering the motivations of those who work in open source. Anthony Baxter, release manager for Python and senior engineer at Google Australia, offered a developer's view of the progress the Python community is making on Python 3, as well as the parallel development on 2.6, which will be released at around the same time.

The keynotes are just the tip of the iceberg of any conference, and while LCA continued its ratio of two generalist keynotes to one technical one, much of the technical meat of the conference was in the regular presentations. Highlights included Dave Airlie's "Bringing Kittens Back to Life," an update on getting hardware vendors to open up their driver documentation, and Jason White's "By Sound and By Touch," which showed off a braille-updated display and voice syn-

thesis technology. Another hit was "Tux's Angels," a presentation on Incident Response using open source, presented by Vanessa Tomah, Amelia Charlton, and Kate McInnes from the Australian Department of Defense.

### Final Moments

The conference closed in enthusiastic style with the traditional session of three-minute "lighting talks." The audience-favorite award went to Paul Fenwick for his presentation on his Greasemonkey user script called "MySpace for Unsocial Fascist Bastards."

LCA 2009 will be held for the first time on Australia's southern island state of Tasmania [1]. Meanwhile, readers who missed out on LCA 2008 can catch the presentation online [2] ∎

**THE AUTHOR**

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Sarah publishes an open source news and blog website called The Open Source Report, *http://www.theopensourcereport.com.*

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| [1] LCA 2009: *http://marchsouth.org/* |
| [2] LCA video and audio archive: *http://linux.conf.au/programme/ presentations* |