

Birds and Animals of Australia's Top End: Darwin, Kakadu, Katherine, and Kununurra

By Nick Leseberg, and Iain Campbell. 2015. Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, NJ, USA, 08540-5237. 272 pages, 27.95 USD, Paper.

This latest book by Leseberg and Campbell is specifically aimed at the species you are likely to see in the coastal region of the Northern Territory. This area they call the Top End and they give introductions to the weather and geology. They describe seven specific habitats and give basic hints on how to watch and where to find wildlife.

The bird (birds are chordate animals too) portion of the book does not follow taxonomic order, but is divided by habitat. There are sections on wetlands and beaches, raptors, forests and open areas. The book covers over 200 species out of Australia's current list of 898 – an amazing quarter of the total in only ten percent of the country's area. The authors do not give a description of each species, nor do they point out identifying features. The text describes something of the bird's biology and where it is most common.

The mammal section focuses on the larger species. For example bats are represented by two large flying foxes and three small species (out of about three dozen species for the area). Similarly the rodent section has photos of three rat species and the text covers only six. As the book's stated purpose is "to cover species likely to be seen by the average wildlife watcher" this focus makes good sense. This year, of the dozen types of "mice" in Ontario, I have seen only three (Deer Mouse, Meadow and Red-backed Voles) and I am actively looking. The authors instead have concentrated on the visible wallabies and other cat-sized marsupials.

The reptile and amphibians are headed by Australia's iconic salty and freshy – the Estuarine and Freshwater Crocodiles. Turtles and an assortment of lizards follow. The snakes include several pythons (the oddly named Children's Python is named for zoologist John Children) and some of the most venomous snakes in the

world. The book concludes with 15 cute native frogs and the infamous, introduced Cane Toad.

The book is well illustrated throughout, starting with some clear maps and habitat photos. Each species is illustrated by at least one large photo of the animal in habitat. Many have additional flight photos. The quality of all these images is excellent as the authors selected the best photos from a large pool of photographers. Another feature I really like is the "Where to find" boxes for every species. So if you really want to see a gorgeous Gouldian Finch then try "the road to Edith Falls or the airfield at Timber Creek".

Now I wonder about the book's purpose. There are week-long tours that cover only this region, but most take in other areas as well. For a North American or European why fly to Australia for a short, limited tour as it is impractical. Our choice was two back-to-back, two-week tours that covered eastern and western Australia. I can see Australians buying this book, but it is limited for the foreign visitor.

These authors have produced two other books – the *Wildlife of Australia* (By Iain Campbell and Sam Woods. 2013. Princeton University Press) and a *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia – A Photographic Guide*. (By Iain Campbell, Sam Woods and Nick Leseberg. 2014. Princeton University Press). These are both similar in style and, to an extent, in content. I liked the *Wildlife of Australia* as an addition and back up to a conventional bird guide. The photographic bird guide thrilled me less. This newest book is even more limited. I think I would borrow it, make notes of some key items, but would not carry it with me in my precious baggage allowance.

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