

Wildlife of Australia

By Iain Campbell and Sam Woods. 2013. Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, NJ, USA, 08540-5237. 288 pages, 19.95 USD, Paper.

The authors state the book is designed for travellers so they have restricted the species presented as those that people will likely see on a typical visit. This is a good concept.

They state they cover 70 mammals (out of a possible 379), but it was clear this was not correct. I counted 40 species and maybe could stretch it to a few more for mammals that were mentioned in the text. The same applied to the other animals. As I thumbed through I saw that two birds (page 192) were incorrectly identified. I decided to check a few other species and used the index. I soon realized the index has serious problems. Most entries that identify pages for plates (in bold) are 11 pages too low. Pages in non-bold are correct for the text. I checked several entries at random and two were correct (Mangroves and Coastline on page 6). The rest had errors. The worst was the Brown Booby which is on page 76 not on 74 or 66 as given in the index. While Mangroves and Coastline are in the index other habitats are not (Karri Forest, Tropical Savannah etc.)

Ignoring these technical glitches, how well does the book work? For the mammals it makes sense to limit the guide to the big, obvious beasts. There are only three species of bat covered out of a possible 57. These are the large flying foxes. The same is true for the 12 snakes – out of about 60 species. Similarly they have chosen 11 species of native frog and 1 introduced species, the infamous Cane Toad (out of 230). For the birds they have been more generous illustrating not the 350 claimed but 320 species. This is about 40 % of Australia's total.

The book is in typical field guide format – a brief text on the left and illustrations on the right. The text discusses identifying features, habits and habitats, and where it is found. In some instances a similar species is discussed, but not illustrated. The ranges are given using codes that are not explained until you reach the abbreviations page at the back of the book. As there are only seven states and territories it is simple to work out these codes.

The text is well written and informative giving salient points of identification and range. The photos are good quality portraits taken by 16 photographers. There is only one illustration per species, generally the male. Therefore you need to check the text for sexually dimorphic birds. For example, the Eastern Koel is a nice picture of a brown, speckled female. You need to read that the male is “all glossy black with a blood red eye.”

The book starts with a vegetation map of Australia, showing ten zones. Then the authors describe 23 habitats, but these do not correlate with the map. For the new visitor these descriptions are useful and include the keynote species that live there.

This is a book of good intentions that does not quite make it, due to some poor organization and editing. It could be used in the field and its size and the limited number of species are good features for the travelling naturalist. I think I would still take at least a copy of the *Birds of Australia: (Princeton Field Guides)* by Ken Simpson and Nicolas Day so I have access to ranges, multiple plumages and regional variations.

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