

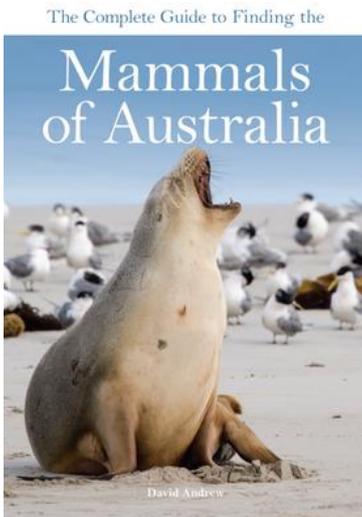
**Some Recent Natural History Publications #22  
July 2016**

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***The Complete Guide to Finding the Mammals of Australia***

David Andrews

CSIRO Publishing. 448 pages. RRP \$49.95

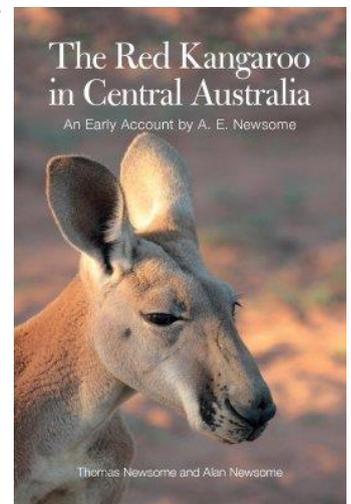


We are accustomed to the idea of 'where to find birds' guides, in Australia and beyond, but I am unaware of any other attempts to provide such a guide for mammals. Canberran David Andrews is just the person for the job. He worked on the revision of Thomas and Thomas' classic *Complete Guide to Finding the Birds of Australia*, and has studied Giant Pandas and Antarctic whales in the wild and tracked Snow Leopards. One of the secondary benefits of such a guide is in taking us to places we might not otherwise have visited, which always turn out to be of intrinsic interest (the only proviso being that we must never forget that these are not the *only* places worth visiting!). The book is very logically designed so that you can use it either to keep an eye out for specialties in the course of an already-planned trip or visit, or to target particular species and set out to find them. States and territories (including external island territories) are divided by means of clear simple sketch maps; some 210 sites are discussed in detail, but a 'site' may be as big as the Kimberley or south-west Queensland. The rest of the book comprises a comprehensively annotated list of all Australian mammal species and where you might encounter them. We need to bear in mind that most mammal watching is harder than birding (it generally takes place at night for a start), and more than half are either bats or small rodents! However with a good torch, patience and this book you might be surprised at what you find.

***The Red Kangaroo in Central Australia; an early account by A.E. Newsome***

Thomas Newsome and Alan Newsome  
CSIRO Publishing. 148 pages. RRP \$39.95

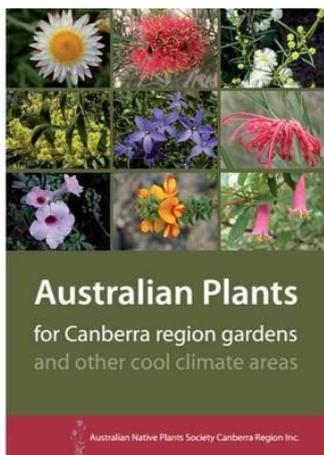
When I was a shy young teenager growing up in a housing trust suburb of Adelaide, a most interesting family moved next door for a while. He was a tall dark-haired quietly spoken young biologist doing a PhD at Adelaide University; even then I was fascinated by the natural world and he was a natural hero for me. His name was Alan Newsome, and in later years I followed his zoological career with interest. You may recall that he came to temporary prominence as the CSIRO dingo expert at the Lindy Chamberlain trial, but he deserves to be remembered for much more than that. He was one of the greats in a line of Australian desert zoologists, which includes such names as Hedley Finlayson, Francis Ratcliffe, Tim Ealey, Graham Caughley and Geoff Sharman. In particular he was instrumental in unravelling many secrets of the Red Kangaroo and the Dingo over decades of complex and diligent work in central Australia, working closely with pastoralists and indigenous communities. This is an interesting and historically highly significant book, published by his son Thomas (himself a professional ecologist) from notes he found in the Canberra family garage after Alan died in 2007. It was an account of the results of his years of desert research into the Red Kangaroo, its ecology and its interactions with the pastoral industry, and was supposed to be published at the time – Thomas found letters from the publisher asking that it be completed – but it never was. Cannily, Thomas finishes the book with a reprint of a paper Alan published in 1980, on 'Eco-mythology' – a comparison of indigenous stories and modern ecology, in which he found that the stories made perfect sense when seen through the lens of ecology. This was one of Alan's most important achievements. I am personally delighted that this book has been published, and in the broader world it fully deserves an honoured place in the Australian zoological literature.



## **Australian Plants for Canberra Region Gardens and other cool climate areas**

Australian Native Plants Society Canberra Region Inc.

366 pages. RRP \$30



The Australian Native Plants Society (ANPS) – formerly the Society for Growing Australian Plants – have long been champions of growing indigenous species, especially local ones, for their hardiness, their water-thrift, their value to wildlife and their unique nature. Way back in 1973 they produced the first edition of *Australian Plants for Canberra Gardens*, which was one of the first books I bought when I arrived here a few years later. It has evolved steadily since then, but the most recent (fourth) edition appeared 14 years ago, so this new and enlarged version is very welcome, especially with its broader base, noted by the addition of the word 'region' to the title, and the extended title 'and other cool climate areas'. It is focused on our needs and problems, and a great deal of thought has gone into it. There is a concise but comprehensive introduction to designing your garden, choosing your plants, including a critical pre-purchase examination, how to prepare soils, maintain plants through the year and deal with garden threats. The bulk of the book comprises a well-

annotated list of nearly a thousand plant species, each one illustrated and cunningly coded to describe its needs with regard to light, soil, frost and drought hardiness, flowering time, bird attraction and size. Frankly I don't see how a cold climate gardener could be without it.

## **Birdscaping Australian Gardens**

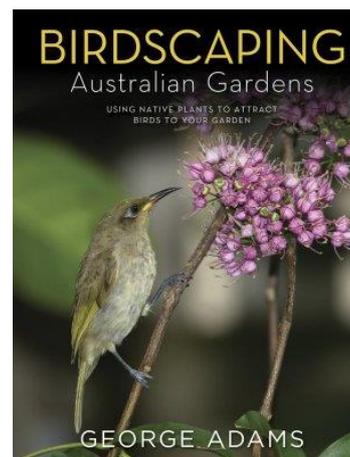
George Adams

Penguin. 358 pages. RRP \$60

I have a strong attachment to this book, as I still have the now-battered 1980 first edition of *Birdscaping Your Garden*, containing the birthday card from my parents which accompanied it. However, as the new edition is produced by a different publisher, this history has been ignored and it is presented as a new work. Indeed the current edition has two and a half times the number of pages of the original, and they are larger, so clearly there is a lot more information. However...

Fortunately the key information from the older edition has been retained – what birds need from a garden and how to provide it, in terms of shelter, food and water in particular, including how to build and install nest boxes. Adams has built upon the original, with brief but welcome sections on grasses and flowering herbs, attracting butterflies, and encouragement to think 'Beyond Your Backyard' into local parks and streetscapes. So far, so very good, though this important section is still not much longer than it was in the 1980 version.

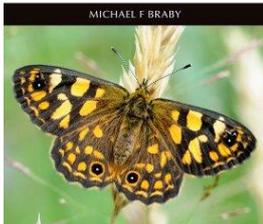
There is now an added 117-page Bird Directory with a two-page spread on each of 55 common and mostly larger birds from across the country. Aside from the questionable value of it – anyone interested enough to plan a garden for birds will already have one or more of the excellent field guides available – the problem is in the breadth of the approach. It is strongly Sydney-oriented and only around half of these species are likely to occur in a garden elsewhere. And finally there is an annotated and illustrated list of 300-odd plant species with bird-attracting potential – which of course most plants have. The obvious problem however is that the majority of them would not grow in Canberra, or indeed in any one given place in Australia. My personal preference would have been to see Adams apply his undoubted skills and experience to enlarging the first general section on designing wildlife-friendly gardens, and directing readers to more regional-specific plant guides, such as the previous title.



## **The Complete Guide to Butterflies of Australia. Second Edition.**

Michael Braby

CSIRO Publishing. 400 pages. RRP \$49.95



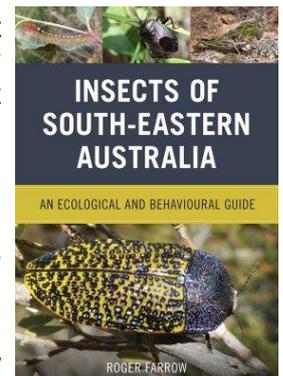
In the last couple of decades or so we have made good progress on redressing the imbalance between numbers of field guides devoted to vertebrates – mammals, birds, reptiles and frogs – and those to the vast predominance of life forms which comprise all the rest. Mind you, there are good reasons for authors to have been reticent about tackling the problem – there are five times as many known species of weevils in the world (ie just one family of one order of the class insects) as there are of the entire class of birds. The only time we can expect a comprehensive field guide to invertebrates is when it addresses a relatively limited group or sub-group – which means ‘not beetles’! Braby was one of the pioneers of this field in Australia when he produced the first edition of this book 12 years ago. At the time I reviewed it in just the second in this series of reviews, saying that it “looks very well designed and user friendly indeed. Each page deals with three species, with illustrations on the facing page – male and female, top and bottom, variations where relevant. The text page includes a detailed map, and information on similar species, behaviour, habitat, status and larval food plants. The introductory pages also mean that I have absolutely no excuse for continued ignorance of basic structure, habitat, behaviour and classification of Australian butterflies.” This solid functional structure has been retained, but Braby has entirely revised it to take account of changing taxonomies and other areas of improved information. If you don’t have the old edition, now’s the time; if you do, this one has changed enough to at least consider upgrading – you paid \$10 less for it back then, so you’ve had your money’s worth!

## **Insects of South-eastern Australia; an ecological and behavioural guide**

Roger Farrow

CSIRO Publishing. 288 pages. RRP \$45

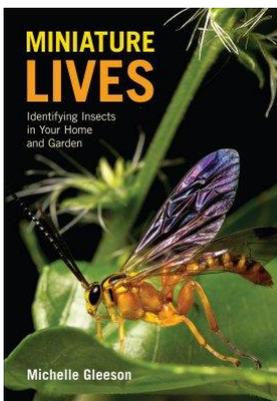
This title and the next look at the bigger insect picture, but both very sensibly don’t try to be anything like comprehensive, and both have come up with interestingly new ways of approaching their subject – and I love it when a field guide thinks about what’s been done in the past, and how it could be done differently. Farrow works from the basis of what the insect is doing, and especially what, where and how it’s eating. It’s a neat idea, and I reckon it works, though if you’re looking for a more conventional guide, working through the orders in an agreed taxonomic order, you’re likely to be frustrated. He uses his own excellent photographs, and the captions are refreshingly full of their own information. I always like it when I can find material in the captions that is not just lifted from the text. He is also very interested in native plants, so the plants in the photos are identified, as are the locations of each – all excellent! Farrow spent six years researching locusts in Mali (and surely there’s a book in that too!), before working for 25 years as a CSIRO entomologist. In his retirement he lives in the bush south of Canberra, still studying insects. Worth having.



## **Miniature Lives; identifying insects in your home and garden**

Michelle Gleeson

CSIRO Publishing. 344 pages. RRP \$39.95



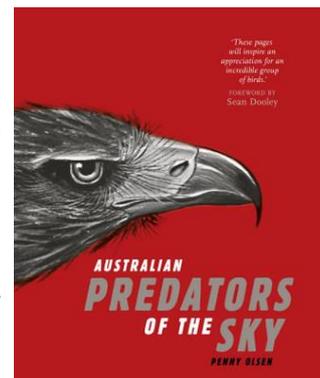
Gleeson is from Brisbane, where she works at educating the population about insects, partly through a company called Bugs Ed., and partly through a fellowship at the Queensland University. Her goals are not that dissimilar from Farrow’s, in producing a guide to insect groups we’re likely to encounter (though her geographical field is more ambitious than Farrow’s) and in doing it in an imaginative way. In her case this involves starting with the insect’s habitat. Unlike Farrow she does end with a general guide to the main orders of insects, and starts with a nicely thought-out key to the basic groups. In between she does some unexpected things, including generously directing us to other people’s books where they have more information than we can get from her on a given topic, and I love her hints throughout as to what to type into an online search engine to get interesting and dramatic information and videos (for instance, try ‘5 praying mantis species that will blow your mind!’). I also like regular headings like ‘Don’t confuse XXX with:’ and ‘Fascinating Facts’ lists (including the claim that the total weight of ants on earth is approximately the same as that of humans!) Fun and informative – what more could you ask? Another one worth owning.

## Australian Predators of the Sky

Penny Olsen

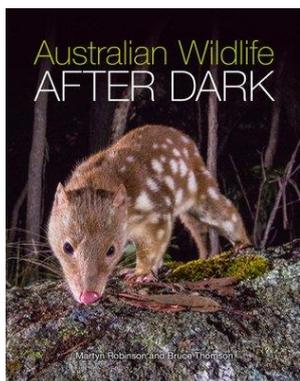
National Library of Australia. 208 pages. RRP \$40

This book has actually been out for a while now – it appeared just after my last offering. It also sadly marks the end of an era, as the NLA has gone out of the publishing business, in the course of which Olsen has collaborated with them on 14 books, by my count, featuring the treasures of their collection. In this volume however she has come back to her first passion, and the one for which she is internationally renowned as a researcher – raptors, or birds of prey. She works through all 34 species of Australian eagles, hawks, falcons and owls, illustrating each richly with up to six paintings by different artists, with at least one full-page size work. Some of the earliest ones, often by unknown colonial artists, are quaint to the modern eye. Others, including those by John Gould and his artists – notably Elizabeth Gould and Henry Richter – are superb in any era. Olsen's deep knowledge of the birds and interest in our biological history is evident in the concise text that accompanies each species, including the history of its European discovery and a little about the bird's life. For me one of the most interesting aspects is the introductory essay on *Discovering Australia's Birds of Prey*, which is to a large extent about the scientific discovery of Australian birds in general. It is followed by a general piece on the birds of prey themselves, which she is most eminently qualified to write – her now 20 year old *Australian Birds of Prey* is still the most comprehensive work on diurnal raptors. Even if you're pretty much full bottle on Australian raptors you'll almost certainly come across paintings you've not seen before, full of beauty and historical interest. This book is, like her earlier ones, a window into the NLA storage rooms – a window that is now sadly curtained.



## Australian Wildlife After Dark

Martyn Robinson and Bruce Thomson  
CSIRO Publishing. 148 pages. RRP \$35



At first impression this is a book based on an array of quite nice photos of nocturnal and partly nocturnal Australian animals, more or less randomly selected and providing a framework for text. There is however a bit more to it than that, though it's hard to find an overall coherence. The first chapter for instance, entitled *Evening and Dawn*, jumps from Mareeba Rock Wallaby to Rufous Bettong to Narrow-banded Sand Swimmer (a desert lizard) to Loggerhead Turtle to Crested Terns and Brown Boobies (not sure why they're there) to Bladder Cicadas. The information on each is fairly basic but perfectly sound. (Elsewhere I'm not always convinced, for instance by the assertion that a sense of smell is "non-existent in most birds".) In other chapters however there is good background information scattered about, such as the basics of night vision and a few boxes such as "How did the small mammals get to Australia?". I think this book would be an appropriate

'encyclopaedia' type present for an enquiring young reader, and perhaps a relatively portable souvenir for overseas visitors.

*Ian Fraser is a Canberra-based professional naturalist and writer (viz, he doesn't make much money!) who is the author of eight books on local natural history, most recently Australian Bird Names, a complete guide, CSIRO Publishing 2013, with Jeannie Gray. He has run the educational Environment Tours nature-based tours program since 1984 and has been the voice of natural history on local ABC radio since 1992. The ABC in 2004 produced a four-CD set of his 'Around the Bush Capital' series. In 2001 he won the Australian Plants Award, Australian Native Plants Association, professional category and in 2006 he was awarded the Australian Natural History Medallion. In 2012 he launched the natural history blog 'Ian Fraser, Talking Naturally', at <http://ianfrasertalkingnaturally.blogspot.com.au/> He claims no expertise and has no natural history favourites – except for birds and orchids...*

*This periodic review is emailed free on request, in order to help anyone interested in Australian natural history to keep up with the burgeoning literature.*

*Previous issues available at*

<http://www.botanicalbookshop.com.au/page/ianfraserreviews.aspx>

*for which my thanks to Tom Butts of the Botanical Bookshop.*

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