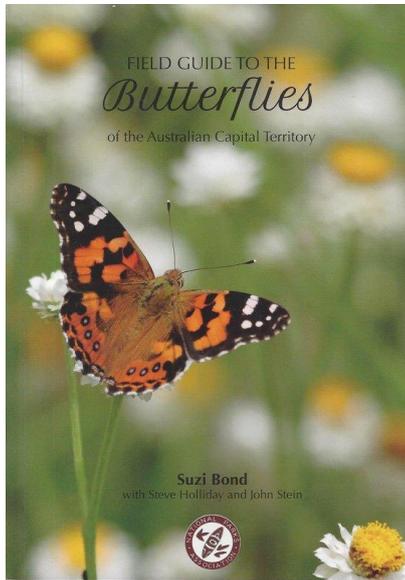


**Some Recent Natural History Publications #23
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Field Guide to the Butterflies of the Australian Capital Territory

Suzi Bond; with Steve Holliday and John Stein
National Parks Association, ACT. 229 pages. RRP \$30



The ACT is surely the best-served jurisdiction in Australia per head of population for natural history field guides, not just in number – I can think of at least eight now, across the board – but in quality. The most recent two, Meredith Cosgrove's recent plant guide* and now this lovely book, have set standards which authors of future guides will need to plan and work hard to emulate. It is a superb situation for local naturalists to be in, and doubtless the envy of our friends and colleagues interstate. Suzi Bond is a zoologist who divides her professional time between the Australian National University and the Australian Bureau of Statistics, where she works on biodiversity accounting – who knew?! She is a rarity in these days of specialisation, with interest and expertise in butterflies, birds, orchids and reptiles. Holliday is one of the very best field naturalists in Canberra, and Stein is an ecologist with CSIRO.

As usual the tiny size of the territory (0.03% of Australia's land area) belies its biological significance; the 87 butterfly species recorded here so far represent 20% of the Australian total, and for temperate Australia the proportion would be much higher. Each of those 87 species is treated comprehensively in a two-page spread. As one would expect in a modern field guide, for each species we are offered information on behaviour

(including how it flies), a description targetted to its salient characters, similar species, local distribution, preferred habitat and food plants and life cycle details, all served up cleared and succinctly.

The facing page offers typically 5-10 photos, of the butterfly from top and bottom, male and female if appropriate, eggs, larva and pupa where possible, plus a map with not only record locations but 'inferred habitat' – ie an analysis of known requirements of the species against habitat types, nuanced into 'core', 'intermediae' and 'marginal', to enable us to both focus a search for a species, and gauge the likelihood of our identification if we're uncertain. (And unless we're experts we should always be uncertain!). As a bonus at the back of the book are six pages of 'selected moths', the ones (groups mostly) we're most likely to come across. This too I've already found to be of use.

I'm still learning how to use the guide and am trying to get used to a whole unfamiliar group of animals, a humbling experience – as for those bewildering Browns, well with the help of the book I'm sure I'll get there eventually! (Acknowledging the challenges of that group the authors have also offered a double page with all of them set out together for comparison.)

Days are cooling and the butterfly season is coming to an end, but that gives you plenty of time to get the book, and get a head-start for next spring! It could well augment your life.

* see here: <http://www.botanicalbookshop.com.au/user/files/Ian%20Fraser%202020.pdf>

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 ran the educational Environment Tours nature-based tours program from 1984 to 2015 and was been the voice of natural history on local ABC radio for 24 years. 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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