

BOOK REVIEW

Reviewed by Nick Romanowski

TITLE: **FIELD GUIDE TO THE FRESHWATER FISHES OF AUSTRALIA.**
AUTHORS: G.R. Allen, S.H. Midgley, M. Allen.
EDITION: 2002.
ISBN: 0-7307-5486-3.
PUBLISHER: Western Australian Museum.
PAGES: 394.
SIZE: 16 x 24 cm approx.
PRICE: RRP. \$45. (Australian).
COVER: Soft.

COMMENTS: It won't surprise anyone to learn that this is the most comprehensive and up-to-date guide to our freshwater fishes, but it is also a first in many other ways. With close to 400 high-quality photos of freshwater and estuarine fishes by Neil Armstrong, Rudie Kuitert, Jerry Allen, Gunther Schmida and many others, this book shows virtually the full known range of variation of most species in a single volume. Another 30 colour plates show species for which there are no good photos, as yet.

The fishes are arranged in families, with nearly 60 habitat shots showing representative environments around Australia. Both fish and habitat photos are grouped together on the same pages, so there is no need to search for photos on color plates in other parts of the book – the old TFH format which is a continual source of annoyance to anyone who owns any number of their books. This book would be a bargain for the photography alone, but the information is also well presented and concise, each entry for relatively poorly known species fitted tidily into a single page, with longer entries for more widespread or better studied species.

The new fishes shown are a revelation, ranging from new gobies and gudgeons to an intriguing freshwater moray eel.

After this praise, it is a relief to report that this book lacks a bibliography, but this would have added substantially to the size of the volume and reduced its usefulness as a field guide. The bibliographies of other recommended books at the back of this volume will cover most of this lack, and most people with a serious interest in native fishes will have these on their shelves, anyway.

There is also a minor new fragment of apparent misinformation. I don't believe it would be possible to use a weather loach (*Misgurnus*) as live bait, which is suggested as a reason for their rapid spread in some river systems, particularly the Murray-Darling. It wouldn't be very alive by the time it was on the hook, and I seriously doubt that these very slimy fishes are attractive bait anyway! Weather loach are probably spreading under their own steam, and my experiments with them suggest they may become a further stress on native fishes as they appear to be extremely efficient predators on eggs.

But these criticisms are trivial. In terms of price, photography, content and overall readability and usefulness, this is the best book on our freshwater fishes which has appeared to date. If I was only allowed to keep one book on this subject, I would be hard pressed to choose between this and *Freshwater Fishes of South-Eastern Australia*, which covers my home ground, and therefore has more general relevance to my everyday interests in wetlands and their conservation.