

BOOK REVIEW.

by Alex Caughey

Freshwater Fishes of South-Eastern Australia. (1996 Revised edition)

Edited by Robert McDowall.

Published by Reed Books Australia.

When asked to review this book I thought “could it be better?” You see this is a book that I’m very familiar with ... or at least I’m very familiar with the “original” which must be at least 15 years old.

So the first thing I did was pull my faithful original from the bookshelf and flick through it yet again. Being a bibliophile I start by judging a book by how it feels, and the original, all 208 pages in hardback, sits comfortably in the hand and sits open nicely in the left palm as I flick my way through it. It’s well laid out and contains a wealth of information on the freshwater fishes of south eastern Australia (an area which this book interprets as including the whole Murray Darling Basin and a slice of Australia stretching from above Brisbane through to South Australia.) My only complaint about this first edition was that it had no colour throughout the book, but instead had all its colour plates in one block.

Could the “revised” edition compare with old faithful?

At first glance I noticed that it was about the same size ... but soft covered ... surely a sign that it would not sit comfortably in the hand.

Well, surprisingly it does sit fairly well in the hand (though not as well as the original). It runs to 247 pages, slightly longer than the original, and has colour photographs throughout the book. A good sign for a “user friendly” book.

To more important things, content, content and content! Ultimately a book is not judged by its cover but by what’s between them. So here goes.

I thought I’d tackle the problem of content by searching out changes that have taken place in the last 15 years and see if the book had kept up with them.

Rainbowfish. Now in the last 15 years the Murray Darling rainbow and the south east Queensland rainbowfishes have gone from separate species to the same species (as recorded in the “original” and back to separate species. Yes! The “revised” edition has kept up with the changes.

Galaxias fuscus, ANGFA Victoria’s logo species has undergone some serious investigation and much debate about its classification. Well it’s noted under *Galaxias olidus* as a junior name with the note that it’s thought by some to be a separate species but nothing’s conclusive. Not quite how we see it in Victoria and I don’t think a fair call on its current status.

Trout cod. Now this is a species which was barely described when the “original” came out. The “revised” edition has it very well covered, including quite a bit on its current status and the recovery plan. Well done!

Pygmy Perches. Again a group of fish which has undergone dramatic change in status in the last 15 years. (Including a new species) ... and yes, well covered.

... and finally **Weatherloach**, a species which wasn’t recorded in the wild in Australia till about 10 years ago. And yes ... an excellent coverage. Good detail, and photo’s.

As I’ve flicked through this new edition I’ve been pleasantly surprised at the quantity of new information (“revised” editions are often nothing more than the old book in a new cover) but this is definitely not the case here. Lots of new information, lots of new photographs, a superior layout ... all in all a substantial improvement in what was already a great book.

Criticisms?? Well yes, but just two, and they’re minor. First, I’d have preferred a hard cover, I use this book regularly and I know that a hard cover will wear better. And secondly, the book has not kept up with Victoria’s Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act.

References in the book to degree of endangerment are referenced to the Australian Society of Fish Biology Threatened Species List (An excellent dynamic and important national document) but fails to credit the excellent work being done to protect species under the FFG Act.

Would I recommend it? Definitely yes!. If you are looking for a good book on the freshwater fish of south east Australia you need it. If your old copy has served you faithfully for 15 years, given you much pleasure and a ton of excellent information, then it’s time to put it out to pasture in the bookshelf with the other classics and update to the “revised” edition.

REGIONAL GROUPS

Canberra:

Andy Wattam, 13 Fellows Street,
Latham, ACT 2615.

Telephone: (06) 254 3273

South Australia:

Keith Hand (08) 337 0416

Western Australia:

Ken Shaw: (09) 377 1097

Northern Territory:

Dave Wilson: (089) 83 1483

ANGFA Queensland Inc:

Brisbane: Meets every 2nd Friday
on every 2nd month.

Secretary: Joan Michels:
(074) 96 1784

OVERSEAS CONTACTS

USA: Rainbowfish Study Group

Contact: Gary Lange (314) 837
6181 or
Scott Buckell (313) 426 5758

Germany: IRG

Harro Hieronimus
PO Box 170209, D-42624,
Solingen, West Germany.
Telephone 0212-819878

Russian Regional Group:

Sergey Makarenko
Arbuzova St., 89 ‘G’/62, Nazarova
City, Krasnoyarsk Region, 66 2200,
Russia

PLASTIC MONEY

ANGFA Vic. can now accept Bankcard, Mastercard and VISA. This arrangement is currently for card transactions so we can accept the above cards for all forms of payment at meetings, etc. We are also looking to extend this service to allow phone payments (for conference fees, etc.). More details as they come to hand.