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Peer reviewed

Review: Conservation of Australia's Forest Fauna (Second Edition)
By Daniel Lunney (Ed.)

Reviewed by Elery Hamilton-Smith
Charles Sturt University, Australia

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Daniel Lunney (ed.) *Conservation of Australia's Forest Fauna* (2 nd edition).
Sydney, Australia: Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales. 2004.
1070pp. ISBN 0 9586085 8 X. RRP \$AU75, plus packaging and postage.

This remarkable book encompasses 62 separate papers, yet provides an integrated overview of Australian forest fauna. Further, much of the story which it presents is more-or-less true of most modernising nations, and the quality of contributions is such that the book provides a model which would be of interest and value to scholars and forest stakeholders throughout the world. As in every country, there are significant gaps in knowledge, many of which are, in this collection, at least outlined in beginning studies of often-neglected areas.

The book commences with a review of the social, political and cultural context within which forest management takes place and identifies many of the central issues. One of the refreshing and valuable aspects of the book as a whole is particularly evident here, where professionals employed by state forest management agencies discuss the shortcomings and even failures of policy, legislation and management practice. Such open discussion is particularly welcome in this age of globalize acceptance of dominant hegemony with its general lack of critical assessment. It may still not be critical enough for some stakeholders, but at least it provides an informed and in-house perspective on the problems. Another invaluable perspective is Lunney's recognition of cultural contexts, and the attention given to both our first people and to the very different traditions of neighbouring Papua New Guinea.

The book's beginning is followed by two further sections: one reviewing forest regions as a whole, and the other focussing on either single key species or groups of species. These sections not only give a state-of-the-art review of current research, but also provide the essential historical dimension that must underlie any sound examination of conservation issues. This historical dimension is particularly well covered in discussions of changing public perceptions, changing public policies, legislation and conservation practice, and the changing structural character of the timber industry. Finally comes a group of papers dealing with the application of scientific knowledge to forest management, and a closing overview of what

has or has not been achieved.

The massive impacts of modern forest harvesting with clear felling and “waste” utilisation have inevitably received due attention but this book gives equally due attention to the many other peripheral impacts of habitat fragmentation, grazing exploitation, arbitrary land tenure boundaries which fail to recognise ecological boundaries, inappropriate changes in fire regimes, invasive species, sedimentation and pollution.

As in virtually all conservation discourse, fur, feathers and flowers symbolise the dominant debates. Yet Lunney has managed to pay attention to reptiles, amphibians and even some invertebrates. But, of course, Australia and most of the world pay inadequate attention to microbiota, even though they play a fundamental role in the maintenance of soil quality, and we can increasingly see the results of their decline. Truly holistic forest ecology can only develop if they are also given attention.

I strongly commend this book to forest professionals, and the span of environmental studies teachers and scholars in virtually any country. I regret that space and time really do not allow a detailed discussion of the content; there is just too much that would have to be covered to provide a just account. There are always jokes about how one might judge books or reports by their weight. Heavy as this one is, the quality is not weakened by inclusion of excess verbiage or sub-standard work.

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