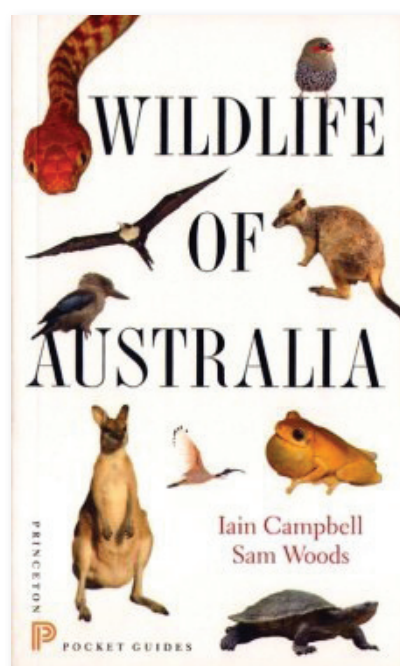


## Book Review



### Wildlife of Australia (Princeton pocket guides).

Iain Campbell and Sam Woods. 2013. Princeton University Press. Paperback, 438 colour photographs, 286 pp. ISBN 9780691153537. RRP \$19.95

*Wildlife of Australia* is a photographic pocket guide to the most widely seen birds (350 species), mammals (70), reptiles (30) and amphibians (16) of Australia. The aim of the guide is to assist people visiting popular tourist destinations, such as Kakadu National Park, the Great Barrier Reef and the Blue Mountains, to identify the animals that they are most likely to encounter.

The pocket guide begins with a map of Australia indicating the approximate distribution of vegetation “associations” (which are really vegetation formations) such as heathlands, rainforest, mallee and mulga. The very small scale map, necessarily, means that map units are very generalised and, somewhat annoyingly, one of the 11 “associations” (the light blue one) is missing in the map key. Presumably this map unit, which stretches from Broome, to around Darwin and Cairns, refers to tropical woodland. Such a lack of attention to detail detracts from the credibility of the book. Written description of 23 habitats, each with a colour photo, follow and provide a better idea of the diversity of fauna habitats to be found in Australia. The photos and the mention of typical fauna to be found in each habitat should inspire the tourist with an interest in natural history to go looking. The habitat descriptions are very brief and aimed at the interested lay person, but again should whet a tourist’s appetite. The scientific names of only three plant species are provided, which is perhaps just as well as each is incorrectly spelled: *Banksia eriquofolia*, *Banksia serrate* and *Banksia intergefolia* for *B. ericifolia*, *B. serrata* and *B. integrifolia*. On the subject of names, I find that the substitution of “gray” for “grey”, as

in Eastern “Gray” Kangaroo and “Gray” Butcherbird, grates, but it also re-inforces that the target audience for the book is tourists.

Each of the over 400 species is illustrated with a colour photograph. On the whole, photographs are clear and sufficient to allow identification but a few, such as the Estuarine Crocodile and Australian Raven, have been cropped rather carelessly, and others, such as the Eastern Brown Snake, Burton’s Snake Lizard, White-winged Chough and Cockatiel, are unclear or provide inadequate glimpses of only parts of the animals.

Photographs are supplemented by brief written accounts for each species. Sizes are provided in both metric and imperial units (handy for those not accustomed to metric units). Each species account includes a description of the appearance of the animal, some with identification tips, bits and pieces about behaviour, information as to geographic regions in which the animal is likely to be found, and its preferred habitats. The written accounts tend to be chatty, with some interesting asides, and seem designed to keep the visiting amateur naturalists informed but not taxed. While a number of the species accounts suggest a lack of true familiarity with the species, they are probably sufficient for the lay tourist who wants a quick, interesting introduction to our fauna. A small map showing distribution might have been easier to understand than the written descriptions of distributions provided. Suggestions provided as to where to spot the fauna described appear useful and could easily be made more comprehensive.

The guide is a handy size for carting about in a day pack, fairly light and with seemingly robust binding. An index is provided but why it includes bold faced numbers which supposedly indicate plates when the plates are not numbered is beyond me.

I have recently “test run” the pocket guide with a visiting Swiss tourist with a keen lay interest in fauna and a good grasp of spoken English. She was impressed by the multitude of photos and, coming from a non-English speaking background, much preferred this guide to another with fewer photos but more written information. The accuracy of any information provided was not an issue for her. Her one wish was for a German language version. After my “test run” I would recommend this book for tourists with an interest in fauna, as it provides a good and easy introduction to the wonderful variety of our fauna. I would be less inclined to recommend this book for the more experienced visiting naturalist. One of the many very good standard field guides available would be a far better option for the serious naturalist.

While the book is obviously designed for tourists, (while reading it I at times felt as if I was aboard a coach tour), it may well also appeal and be useful to local beginner naturalists or children with an interest in fauna.

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