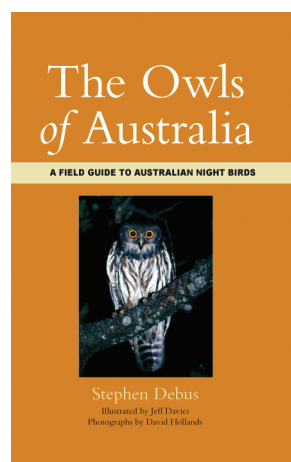


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BOOK REVIEWS



The Owls of Australia A Field Guide to Australian Night Birds

Stephen Debus 2009.
Envirobook. Paperback, 112 pp,
colour photographs and plates.
ISBN 9780858812222.
RRP \$22.95

Stephen Debus is well qualified to write a book on Australian owls. His MSc thesis was on threatened forest owls and raptors, he is an author of many papers on owls, and he was a major contributor to the entries

on *Ninox* and *Tyto* in the Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds (HANZAB). Stephen's experience as an editor – currently of *Boobook* (journal of the Australian Raptor Association) and *Australian Field Ornithology* – is reflected in the informative, clear and concise text of this book.

The book has six chapters. The first is an introduction to owls, how Australian owls fit into the world fauna and the species recognised in Australia. This chapter also covers general owl identification techniques, food and hunting, behaviour, breeding biology, handling and studying owls and finally, threats to their existence and the conservation needs of the group.

There follows a very interesting short chapter by David Johnston and Walter Boles on the global fossil record of owls.

The next two chapters cover the two owl genera found in Australia – Hawk Owls (*Ninox*) and Barn Owls (*Tyto*). The fourth chapter is on frogmouths; whilst these birds are not owls, they are also nocturnal birds and the general public often thinks of them as owls. Within these three chapters the topics discussed

in general terms in Chapter One are expanded in the accounts for each of the 13 owls and frogmouths found in Australia.

The final chapter – Threats, Conservation and the Future – covers a range of issues that affect the survival and well being of owls, such as pesticides, persecution, pest management, research, education and rehabilitation.

The book incorporates information from HANZAB but brings it up to date by including the latest research findings. The colour plates of owls and frogmouths from the Handbook and a selection of David Hollands' photographs enhance the value of the book. The bibliography includes significant books and papers on owls and frogmouths published subsequent to the publication of Volume 4 of HANZAB.

This is an excellent field guide for Australian owls and frogmouths. I particularly liked the use of the very fine Jeff Davies artwork from HANZAB because it allows them to be used in the field, a role unsuited to HANZAB. These illustrations are complemented by the usual high standard photography of David Hollands. The compact size of the book enables it to fit into a large pocket or a small shoulder bag.

The book doesn't cover all nocturnal birds; nightjars and owl-nightjars are not included nor the owl sub-species found on islands. The author's experience as an editor of many journals is highlighted by his ability to extract information from HANZAB and more recent research and succinctly present it in a very readable and interesting narrative. Hopefully the book will arouse the interest of those unfamiliar with owls and enthuse students to research this group of fascinating birds.

This book is highly recommended to all ornithologists whether amateur or professional; the extensive bibliography alone is a very valuable resource.

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