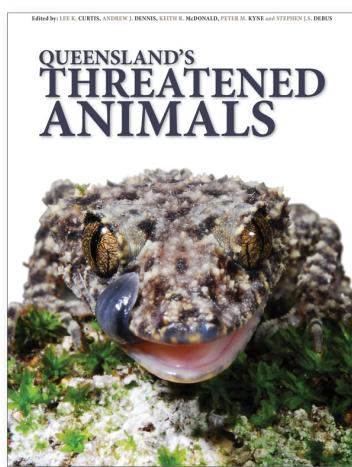


## Book Review



### Queensland's Threatened Animals

Lee K. Curtis, Andrew J. Dennis, Keith R. McDonald, Peter M. Kyne and Stephen J. S. Debus (Eds), 2012. CSIRO Publishing. Paperback, colour illustrations and photographs, 472 pp. ISBN 9780643096141. RRP \$120.

For the purposes of general information on Australian fauna species, such as basic ecology, distribution, physical characteristics, life-history and protection status, field guides of various quality abound. However, practical resources that provide a detailed yet simple reference for those wishing to participate in conservation, are much more scarce. The stated justification for producing this book was to provide a ‘...comprehensive resource guide that would offer information to guide people in finding out who was doing what, when, where, how and why with threatened animals in Queensland.’ The 449 page volume manages to achieve this as well as ticking all the right boxes as a general reference for basic species information.

Another bonus, not ordinarily found in similar texts, is a comprehensive description of the threatened species listing process. For those unacquainted with the details, the book provides a well-articulated introduction that manages to explain some complex ideas simply. It includes explanations of the various threat categories, differences between IUCN and government processes and the nuances of risk assessment and uncertainty. Importantly, this information gives context to the rest of the book that many readers will not have – what it actually means for a species to be categorised as Vulnerable, Endangered or Critically endangered.

Also included in the extensive introductory section, is an overview of the history of land management in Queensland from European settlement to the present day. This is not only interesting, but noteworthy, as the authors are forthright about the role governments have played in protecting (or not protecting) threatened fauna over the past 200 years. By highlighting the failure of governments to protect species and habitats (notably the Queensland government’s record in the 1980s), the book reminds readers of the importance of continual advocacy for strong threatened species legislation. However, it’s not all doom and gloom; the authors point out and describe some of the positive strategies currently being employed by the Queensland government, such as the *Queensland Regional Ecosystem Framework*.

The species profiles themselves are well-constructed, considering the comprehensive nature of the volume. They include the expected

information on species distribution (with an informative map), habit profile, ecology and life-history traits, as well as a photo. Where this volume comes into its own with regard to utility value, however, is the additional information included on the species’ conservation. Each profile outlines the threats to species and related management requirements, recovery efforts currently underway, and suggestions on how individuals can participate or provide support in some way. For those more academically inclined, details of research directions and potential knowledge gaps are also included. Finally, a list of suggested further reading materials is provided for interested readers wishing to follow up on a particular species.

Detailed profiles of 41 bird species are included in this volume. As an example, the profile on the species in which I have a particular interest – the Gouldian Finch (*Erythrura gouldiae*) – is both informative and generally accurate. Historical success and failures of conservation actions are outlined, as well as the current state of research. Specifically, the profile provides useful information on what individuals (especially agricultural landholders) can do with respect to minimising critical threats to this species’ viability in the wild (shift to more sustainable grazing and burning practises).

To put the profiles in the broader context of threatening processes affecting ecologically similar species, each of the different taxonomic groups is prefaced by a one page summary. These summaries help to round-out the volume, making it more than simply a collection of individual profiles, but an illustration of the pressures on Queensland’s biodiversity in various systems.

In particular, the summary section for birds is comprehensive and enlightening, highlighting important groups and threatening processes that have shaped the field of avian conservation in Queensland in recent times. In particular, the dramatic declines, critical status and/or extinction of several ecologically similar parrot species (e.g. Paradise Parrot *Psephotus pulcherrimus*, Orange-bellied Parrot *Neophema chrysogaster* and Night Parrot *Pezoporus occidentalis*). The authors relate these case studies to various landscape-scale disturbances that have played (and continue to play) a significant role in the decline of Queensland’s avian fauna. These threats include land-clearing (particularly devastating in Queensland under the Brigalow Lands Agreement, 1962), changed fire regimes, feral pigs and grazing pressure. Importantly, the authors link these processes to the potential for positive conservation outcomes when individual landholders improve land-use practises (further advice for managers of important habitat areas is included in the relevant species profiles).

This book’s real value lies in its practical applicability for anyone from those with a passing interest in helping threatened species, right through to conservation and natural resource management professionals. Two features that significantly contribute to this practicality are found in the appendices – a comprehensive list of organisations involved in threatened species recovery and instructions on how to report an animal sighting. The former lists 91 different NGOs, community groups, universities and other agencies with descriptions and contact details.

I would recommend this book to anyone wishing to participate in species recovery in Queensland or interested in finding out more about the field. One of the primary impediments to biodiversity conservation in Australia is the disparate nature of relevant people and information; this resource is a step in the right direction towards improvement.

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