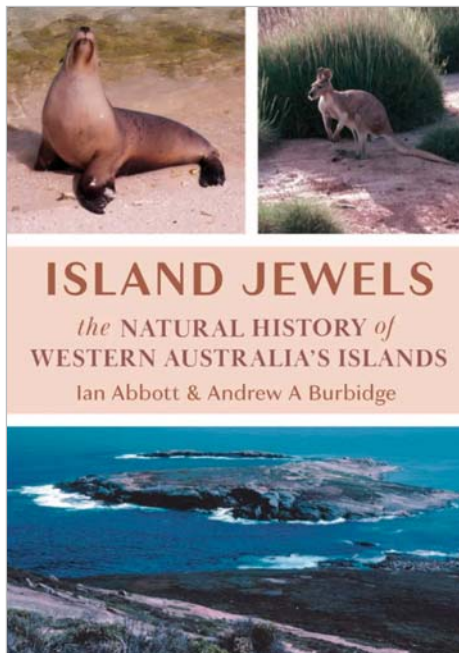


Book Review



Island Jewels: The Natural History of Western Australia's Islands. Ian Abbott and Andrew A. Burbidge 2022. Book Reality Experience, Leschenault, Western Australia. Paperback, 365 pp., colour photographs. ISBN: 9781922670649. RRP A\$ 68.00; available through various online sources.

Island Jewels is a massive undertaking. The 3,500 islands off the Western Australian coast are encapsulated in this 365-page book, supported by 25 maps, 11 sets of colour plates that cover 360 species occurring on the islands, and backed up by 24 pages of references.

The publication divides the islands into 10 regions, north to south. It is book-ended by an introductory chapter and two chapters on the similarities and differences among the regions and the potential for nature conservation on these islands. The authors give a personal introduction to islands and outline their various professional roles in island management in Western Australia (commencing in 1974 and 1968, respectively). There is also a bibliography of other publications that feature Western Australian islands.

Each regional chapter commences with a geographical description of the islands and the associated mainland. It gives the pre-European history of those islands that were recently used or suspected to be used by aboriginal groups, based on the ethnographic record of whether local First Nations groups possessed watercraft. It also covers the naming history of these islands. The physical and biological traits of the islands are explored in detail, with particular islands being featured where there is in-depth knowledge. Finally, there is a section on the factors that have led to change in the biota of the region's islands.

Throughout the book there are inset boxes that shine a light on people who have given significant time to understanding

aspects of island ecology, either within a particular region or across island groups. Each chapter finishes with a brief list of information sources for the particular topics covered in the section. The ample references at the book's end give the full details of where to find these documents.

Throughout each chapter there are summary tables providing a range of facts, such as which vertebrate species occur on the various islands within the group, the number of islands and rocks in the region classified by their areas, occasional lists of breeding seabirds and many more subjects. In the final chapters the tables are more focused on species lost from islands, successful eradications of feral animals and translocations of species for conservation purposes. Being a scientifically-based book, there is also a glossary defining words that may be unfamiliar to some readers.

With my personal interest in New South Wales (NSW) islands (I have published material on half of the NSW islands in *Corella* over the last 25 years), I found the book fascinating. The range of habitats in such a huge, isolated landmass is breathtaking. The book highlighted the large number of islands in the various regions that have little known about them beyond a list of species present. In many cases, smaller islands have yet to be named. For most islands there were no data on seabird species, beyond their presence or absence. Seabird population assessments and changes in populations over time are only known for a few accessible islands, mostly near areas of habitation. Western Australia is a BIG state; it was frustrating that, despite the large number of maps included; only a single scale bar (for approximating distance) occurred on one map and none on the more detailed maps of regions and sub-regions.

The book could have profited from a greater editorial oversight, as there are numerous spelling errors and bits of repeated text, and it often lacks clarity in structure. However, this does not detract from its real value as a reference book for those planning trips through that vast state and wanting insights into what can often be seen from the shoreline. The plates throughout consist mostly of images captured during the authors' work over the decades. The matte paper used makes high contrast images somewhat difficult to interpret, and whilst instructive they hardly meet the quality standards that we have come to expect from dedicated photographers. Some of the wildlife images by other, more professional photographers stand out in contrast. The final chapters discuss biogeography and conservation opportunities that the islands present for mainland species on the brink of extinction. They seem to have been written as separate essays additional to the core of the book and many details from the previous chapters are repeated. While distracting, this does not really detract from their value.

If you are a *Corella* reader who has enjoyed being transported to a remote offshore location through reading the journal's *Seabird Island Series*, this book is definitely for you. Dip into it from time to time or take it on a road trip. Be patient with it, and it will not disappoint.

Nicholas Carlile