

Bees of Australia: A Photographic Exploration

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Book Review

Dorey J. 2018. *Bees of Australia: A Photographic Exploration*. CSIRO Publishing, Clayton South, Victoria, Australia. 207 pp. ISBN 978-1-48-630849-1. US \$39.95 (paperback).

“*Bees of Australia: A Photographic Exploration*” provides the reader exactly what is promised. James Dorey has prepared a large, beautiful book that serves any reader with high-quality photographs exemplifying the bee diversity of Australia.

The stated aim of the author is to deliver enjoyment to “people of any age or interest.” This goal is met primarily through the pairing of stunning photos with sparse text and practically no scientific jargon. It is a true photo book where the physical features of Australia’s bees are the focal point of each section. This is both the largest strength and the greatest weakness of the book. The accessibility and attractiveness give it a high potential to encourage interest and curiosity in those who know very little about the subject matter. However, the overall organization and lack of text prevents this book from delivering a higher level of knowledge to readers who may already be familiar with the subject, or those interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the material within.

After a very brief introduction, the book begins with an overview of bee species in the eastern state of New South Wales. Notably, the author omits the addition of an overview section that clarifies bee morphology and behavior. Sections such as this often are included in similar texts such as “*Bees in Your Backyard*.” Instead, the book jumps into the first description of *Amegila (Asaropoda) bombiformis*, the “teddy bear bee.” The very short description accompanying the photos of this bee focuses on its geography and interesting color morphology, making the description digestible to a broad audience. It is apparent from the accompanying photos why the “teddy bear bee” is the common name for this organism, but no key characters for its identification are discussed. Failure to describe key characters for identifying bee species is a drawback that continues throughout the book. Bees can be tricky to identify correctly to the species level, and some are impossible to identify without a microscope. This is likely why these characters are not mentioned. However, not describing key characters seems like a missed opportunity for the book’s utility, given that high-quality photos are included throughout that may already reflect some key characters.

The book continues through the other Australian states—each of which are represented as distinct sections in the book—with the final section highlighting some of the more spectacular specimens held in multiple Australian state museums. Bees are thus organized by locality rather than by taxonomy, although an appendix organized by taxonomy is included. For a novice bee enthusiast from Australia, the state organization is likely ideal and encourages readers to jump to the state section most pertinent to them. Given the author’s stated goal of providing enjoyment, this organization strategy has merit, but it also prevents readers from easily gaining an understanding of biological and ecological traits associated with specific groups of bees. Organizing the

book by Australian state also may limit the use of this book to readers not from the country.

The major sections are bookended by brief textual summaries on topics such as “How to find native bees” and “Australian bees as crop pollinators.” The author and other scientists in the field contribute these pieces, which provide concise information on common questions that individuals new to the study of bees may have. Although short, these inserts do a wonderful job of supplementing the photos and their accompanying descriptions with information regarding the general biology and conservation of bees.

The book closes with a glossary, appendix of species by family, suggested further reading, and an index. The further reading section focuses primarily on Australian texts and includes only 5 suggestions, but gives a brief overview of each. Given the choice of the author to not directly reference other texts throughout, it would be useful if the section on further readings were expanded.

“*Bees of Australia*” is a pleasant and lovely book to peruse, and may be of great interest to those living in Australia who are new to the world of bees. The photography is stunning, and the author most certainly achieved what he set out to do. There are places in the text that could have been expanded to allow this book to better serve the advanced reader and provide a more in-depth understanding of the fascinating lives of bees. Given this, the book is more comparable to books such as “*Microsculpture*,” which are dedicated to visually exploring diversity, than to those set on conveying practical or scientific knowledge about bees. There is room for some expansion of this text to provide more in-depth information, but as a “photographic exploration,” this book absolutely succeeds.

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