

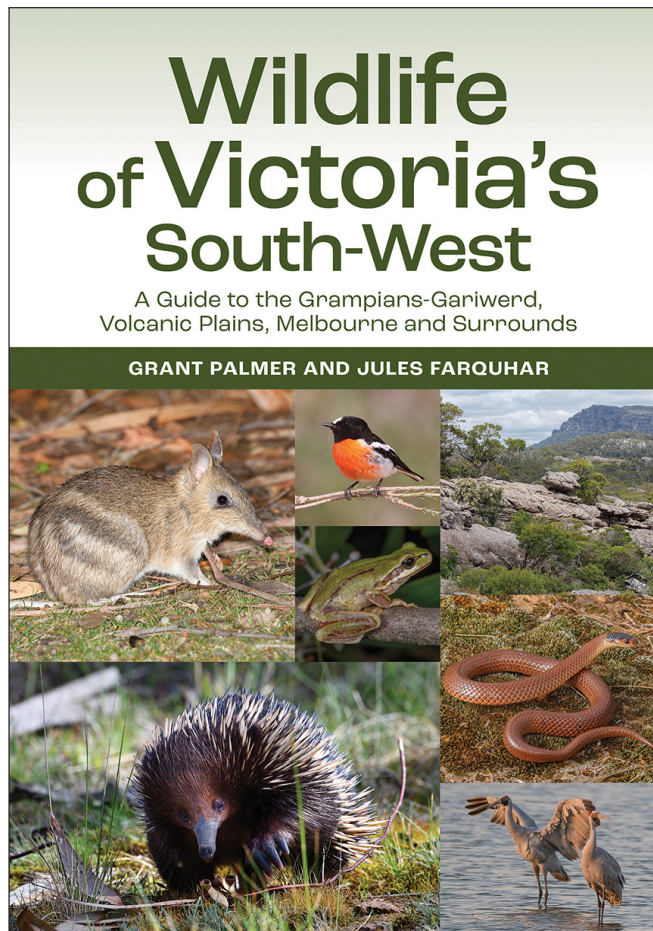
Book Review

Wildlife of Victoria's South-West: A Guide to the Grampians-Gariwerd, Volcanic Plains, Melbourne and Surrounds

by Grant Palmer and Jules Farquhar

CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne, 2024. Paperback, 416 pp., numerous maps and colour photographs.

RRP \$49.99. ISBN 9781486313051.



This book provides a very impressive compilation of knowledge about the mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians of part of south-western Victoria. I say part because a large and biodiverse chunk of the south-west is left out, having been covered in Palmer's earlier book on the wildlife of the Otway Ranges and adjacent coast (Palmer 2019). The boundaries of 'south-west Victoria' adopted for the book under review take some effort to understand. Understanding the area covered is, of course, essential to assessing the relevance of a wildlife guide to one's individual interests. In this case, the northern and southern boundaries comprise the boundaries of seven biogeographic regions or sub-regions plus relevant coastal waters, including all of Port Phillip but not Western Port. The western boundary is the Victorian–South Australian border, and the eastern boundary is an arbitrary line east of Melbourne that slices through the Mornington

Peninsula. Thus, it is a very complex polygon, the eastern portion of which requires a broad definition of south-west Victoria to justify its inclusion. One wonders whether the decision to include Melbourne and Port Phillip was driven by commercial factors rather than biogeography.

This book is the third of its kind published by CSIRO Publishing, the first being Chris Tzaros' pioneering book on the wildlife of Victoria's box–ironbark forests (Tzaros 2005). That work (revised edition published in 2021: Tzaros 2021) established the successful format essentially followed by Palmer (2019) and now by Palmer & Farquhar, except that the first two in the series each covered a narrower range of bioregions and habitat types, making them feel, to this reviewer at least, clearer and more satisfying entities. The area covered by the book under review does not quite gel as a biogeographical entity in the way that the first two do.

That, however, is a rather esoteric concern which is unlikely to bother most potential users for whom the book will function very well as a guide to the identification, status and distribution of the tetrapod animals (i.e. vertebrates excluding fish) residing in the region. The bulk of the book (224 pages) presents 432 species accounts which include a colour photograph and distribution map, with text covering external appearance, range and status, habitat, ecology, and potential viewing locations. Earlier chapters provide excellent summaries of the major habitats of the region, in the form of broad vegetation communities, and the major fauna conservation and wildlife management issues. A final chapter describes 19 'key wildlife viewing spots' across the region. These are actually broad areas rather than spots, such as entire national parks and even 'Melbourne', a sprawling city of over 5 million people. Nevertheless, the authors are clearly familiar with each of these areas and the information on access, facilities, 'feature' wildlife and specific places worth visiting make this a valuable component of the book. Appendices provide useful summaries of rare and vagrant species to the area, a checklist of all species covered and their conservation status, and notes on how to contribute sightings to the various wildlife databases.

My two major concerns with the book relate to the distribution maps: They are presented at column width (65 mm) which, for such a broad region, is too small for this reviewer's ageing eyes. It is difficult to read place names and to discern the small green dots representing individual records. Of greater concern is that there seems to be no historical cutoff point for records to be included on the maps, resulting in misleading impressions of current

distributions for species that have declined in recent decades. For example, the numerous records of Regent Honeyeater are all decades old – the species no longer occurs in the region covered. The same is true for records of Eastern Ground Parrot and Southern Emu-wren in the bayside suburbs of Melbourne. Some of these likely date from the 19th or early 20th centuries. Therefore, it is critical to read the text for distribution and status to obtain a more accurate understanding of the current situation. For many species, particularly birds, the concentration of records in the greater Melbourne area highlights the variation in survey effort across the region.

Apart from the maps, I found little to question — the photograph for the Swamp Harrier appears to be a juvenile Spotted Harrier and I am not convinced that the photograph for Bush Rat actually depicts that species. The New Zealand (Antipodean) Albatross seems to have been left out; mammal taxonomy has been updated for the Sugar Glider complex but not for Dusky Antechinuses. In a work of the size and complexity of this book, it is inevitable that reviewers will find something to quibble over but, overall, the authors have produced an excellent and detailed compilation of information on the occurrence of tetrapods in south-western Victoria. It provides a splendid, single

source of information for all who are interested in Victoria's wildlife, covering as it does about 20% of Victoria's area.

When combined with Tzaros (2005, 2021) and Palmer (2019), we are privileged to have detailed books on the wildlife of much of lowland Victoria outside the semi-arid mallee region. I wonder if anybody will take up the challenge to produce equivalent works for the Wimmera–Mallee, Victorian eastern highlands, and South and East Gippsland.

References

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Tzaros, C. (2021). *Wildlife of the Box–Ironbark Country*. 2nd edn. CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne.

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