

BOOK REVIEW

The Complete Field Guide to Stick and Leaf Insects of Australia

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Australia has a range of 150 to 200 species of phasmids, (stick and leaf insects). They are well known for being one of the longest insects in the world, coupled with their cryptic appearance and ability to be easily bred they are fascinating creatures but even today little is known about their habitats and biology.

This is the first field guide for phasmids that lists all known species and will be an invaluable addition to professional and amateurs alike. As a textbook, the sections on classification, keys to genera, index to common and scientific names, check-list of species, glossary and extensive references to scientific papers are priceless! The format is straightforward with the Introduction covering amazing phasmid facts such as the longest recorded phasmid having an overall length of 615mm and the re-discovery in 2001 of one of the world's rarest insects, the Lord Howe Island phasmid, *Dryococelus australis*.

The chapter on Habitat and Ecology contains excellent photographs showing the classic camouflage achieved by phasmids and covers the range of plants eaten. More than 60% of species recorded are from Queensland but land clearing, urbanisation, fire and tourism could play a role in their reduction. Most phasmids are food for birds, spiders and other insects but there is a very small number of pest species that can defoliate forests. The next chapter, Collecting, Preserving, Photographing and Rearing gives a brief history of the phasmid collections, and those who described and collected material for various museums in Australia. Phasmids are increasingly being kept as pets and are quite popular in schools. To address this trend the authors provide details on the equipment needed and how to collect phasmids as well as notes on rearing, life-cycle and photography. They provide clear colour photographs and line drawings to complement text which describes key morphological features and gives detailed descriptions of the eggs (which the authors strongly suggest can be used for species identification). The chapter, Guide to Species, is the crux of the book. Firstly an outline of the Family and Sub-Family groupings is given with numbers of Australian species listed together with direction to specific pages where details for each species may be found. Species are arranged alphabetically by Sub-Family with a wealth of information. Distribution maps are particularly useful as are details of body length, distinguishing features and habitat. For some species the authors have included additional notes with photographs of males and females and where possible also photographs of the eggs showing clear morphological characters.

As with a number of insect groups that are not a pest or of economic value, phasmids have often been forgotten! This book will go a long way in rejuvenating interest in these fascinating insects. This book will not only interest those who love insects but also anyone interested in the biodiversity of the Australian fauna.



Stephen Fellenberg

Insektus

President of "Friends of the long lost Phasmid Inc."

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