

BOOK REVIEW

A Guide to the Cockroaches of Australia

David Rentz (2014)

Published by CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia
ISSN: 9780643103207, 318pp. RRP \$49.95 (Paperback)

This book is the latest in the CSIRO Publishing's "Guide" series detailing the groups of Australian insects likely to be of interest to the natural world enthusiast. Like its predecessors, this book sets a very high standard with superb photographs of many of the 550 described species as well providing interesting information on their biology, distribution and identification.

For many people, even the mention of cockroaches can make them feel uneasy, but the sheer number of very attractive species illustrated in this book, might hopefully change their mind about these much maligned insects.

There is a short introductory chapter giving some background on the group as well as some hints on how to best use the guide. This is followed by a chapter on the entomologists responsible for much of the knowledge of our fauna, the biology of cockroaches, their habitats and ecology, their economic importance, as well as collection and preservation and even how to keep them in captivity.

The bulk of the book is however devoted to identifying cockroaches. A short section details some of the important morphological characters followed by a key to the families. This then leads into page after page of beautiful photographs and distribution maps along with useful comments on the biology and identification of each species.

I often come across cockroaches in my search for silverfish as they share similar habitats. I will appreciate having this book with me on field trips to allow me to get a better understanding of the cockroaches I find.

As always, the more you learn about something the more you want to know. I found some parts of the introduction and biology chapters leaving me with the feeling that more could have been said. I was also a little frustrated that cockroach size was not given for all species illustrated and I was unsure when looking at some photos as to whether this was a tiny or medium species. Nevertheless these minor issues do not detract from the value of this book.

Anyone interested in identifying the cockroaches they find in the Australian bush will get a lot of benefit from this publication.

Graeme Smith
Entomology Department
Australian Museum,
6 College St, Sydney, 2010

