

BOOK REVIEW

A Guide to Stag Beetles of Australia

George Hangay and Roger de Keyzer

CSIRO Publishing 2017, ISBN 9781486302086, 245 pages, 215 x 148 mm.
RRP A\$49.95 (paperback).

This book offers a detailed and very easy-to-read overview of the Australian Lucanidae, which includes some large colourful species, the males of which usually bear enlarged mandibles. While these insects are impressive in themselves, the enthusiasm and practical experience of the authors permeates the text making it a pleasure to read.

Some ninety species, belonging to four subfamilies, are illustrated with at least one colour photo. Notes are provided on key morphological characters to assist with their identification in the field. Key morphological characters are explained and illustrated and a glossary to terms provided. The information on known habitat and distribution of each species and anecdotal stories of their discovery bring the names to life. Evidence for the biogeographical affinities of the subfamilies ties the fauna in to the rest of the world.

As a taxonomist, but one who knows little about beetles, I enjoyed reading the comments on the challenges of determining the correct name and identity of some species. Challenges such as recognising the true type material of species, especially those described more than 100 years ago, and of finding the natural habitat of a species when the locality data recorded on the label may simply be “Queensland” are dealt with in a simple style that I could easily relate to. The taxonomic history of the Australian Lucanidae is summarised in a way that touched on the human side to such study.

The Lucanidae are a group of insects of interest to breeders and collectors around the world. The authors give notes on methods for their collection and preservation, considering not just material destined for display in collections but also those whose DNA is to be sequenced or when collected live for breeding. Practical advice to minimise environmental damage while collecting is offered, and the importance of obtaining collection permits stressed.

This book is a valuable addition to the CSIRO “A guide to . . .” series and one written in a very easy reading style.

Graeme Smith



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