

BOOK REVIEW

The Complete Field Guide to Dragonflies of Australia

Günther Theischinger and John Hawking (2006)

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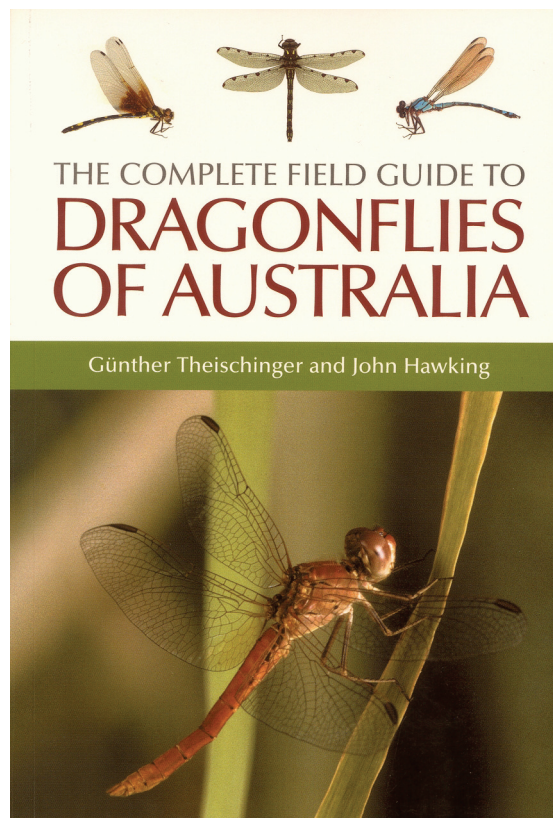
Dragonflies are an important and spectacular part of the wetland ecosystem and their presence is often cited as an indicator of wetland health. Perhaps more importantly, dragonflies are an obvious link between the environment and community with both adults and children alike fascinated by these large and often brightly coloured insects.

While the wetland conservation and rehabilitation projects will look to encourage dragonfly populations, it is important to note that some species are also protected by legislation. A number of Australian dragonflies have even been listed as endangered or vulnerable (eg. Sydney Hawk Dragonfly (*Austrocordulia leonardi*)) making correct identification of dragonflies and the habitats they're associated with important.

'The Complete Field Guide to Dragonflies of Australia' by Theischinger and Hawking represents an important resource for both professionals and amateurs alike as it clearly presents a guide covering over 300 species of dragonflies and damselflies, highlighting both the diversity and complexity of these insects and their habitats that can range from freshwater (and slightly brackish) still water wetlands and slow to rapid flowing streams from coastal to alpine environments.

The immature stages of dragonflies and damselflies are conspicuous macro-invertebrates but while separating them into the two suborders based on their strikingly different morphological characteristics may be straightforward, the identification of species is often more challenging and the inclusion of an illustrated key (as well as a detailed illustrated glossary) to immature stages makes the process a little easier.

The book is divided into three main sections, an introduction, a species guide and taxonomic keys and resources. The introduction briefly covers a range of topics including life cycle, ecology, habitat associations and issues of conservation. While these sections provide an informative overview, it is the species guide and taxonomic keys that provides the most valuable information here.



Within the species guide, an overview of the 30 families and 110 genera is provided with morphological descriptions, aspects of ecology (eg. habitat associations, feeding strategies) and known distribution (according to 16 predetermined regions within Australia) for each species. Importantly, notes are also provided for some species listing altitudinal distribution and countries of known occurrence outside Australia. Coupled with the taxonomic key to adults and larvae, for each species there are illustrations of key morphological characteristics for the adult and/or larvae of the species to assist identification.

The abundance of taxonomic detail is of great benefit to wetland scientists but the inclusion of colour photographs of adults and, for some species, larvae, will be of interest for professionals and enthusiastic amateurs alike. There are some stunning photographs of both live and pinned specimens. The differences in the aspect of some photographs may make their use for taxonomic purposes difficult but that is a small drawback given the arduous task of collecting photographs of all species listed in this book.

This field guide should find a place in the library of all wetland ecologists and enthusiasts and is sure to assist greatly in assisting the complex task of identifying, understanding and conserving Australia's dragonfly fauna and their habitats.

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