

Created in the image of God

Beetles of Australia

by Trevor Hawkeswood, Angus & Robertson, pp 248, A\$17.95

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Ingram Pinn

This balance in the representativeness of the book is upset by one obvious, but totally understandable, bias. There is a well-known (because it appears to be mandatory whenever people mention beetles), possibly apocryphal, anecdote from J. B. S. Haldane. He is supposed

to have said that from a study of God's creation he deduced that the Creator had an inordinate fondness for beetles.

In a similar (but far less profound) way, I deduce, from a study of his book, that Hawkeswood has an inordinate fondness for jewel beetles. While 28

of the families have about 1 per cent of their Australian number presented in the book, the extremely photogenic jewel beetles have 4 per cent.

The photographs—the efforts from several photographers—appear, for the most part, to have been taken in the field rather than staged in a studio. Perhaps as a consequence of this, they are not of uniform quality. Many are excellent, not only in the colour balance but also in the contrast with the background. Others are less good.

Beetles of Australia, which took eight years to put together, sets out to provide the lay reader with an insight into the variety and environmental importance of the beetles that inhabit Australia. As a taster for the beauty and variety of Australian beetles, it achieves its aims. But it is not comprehensive, either geographically or taxonomically, and as a field guide it is useless.

I am left wondering who will buy the book, because it falls between several stools; insufficient coverage for a field guide, too little information to be a scientific text and physically too small for the coffee-table market! □

ABOVE ALL, this is an extremely attractive little book. It describes about 190 Australian beetles and illustrates them all with colour photographs. A short piece of text accompanies the photographs of each species, and this provides a very brief colour description (surely unnecessary with colour plates), notes on its life history (where known) and details of habitat, distribution and where the photographs were taken.

Beetles of Australia is a book organised taxonomically. Trevor Hawkeswood has grouped beetles into families. In the general introductions to each beetle family, he gives an approximate figure for the number of Australian representatives. Some idea of the selection Hawkeswood had to make can be seen from the fact that he depicts only 190 species from 29 families out of some 20 000 species of beetle in 110 families known from Australia.

However the coverage, such as it is, is quite representative. For each of the 29 families Hawkeswood covers, there is a range of examples in reasonable relation to the total numbers of Australian species in that family.